



Predicting Difficulties for Urdu-Speaking Learners of Turkish: An Inflectional Comparison

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ABSTRACT

The number of Urdu-speaking learners of Turkish appears to be growing, yet little contrastive work exists to guide teaching for this group. This study compares the inflectional morphology of standard Turkish and standard Urdu and uses the comparison to predict where Urdu-speaking learners are likely to face difficulty. The study is document-based and applies contrastive analysis, taking grammatical function as the basis of comparison across nominal inflection (number, possession, case, gender agreement) and verbal inflection (person, tense and aspect, alignment). The analysis shows that the two languages share word order and several categories but differ in their means: Turkish marks relations inside the word with regular suffixes, has no gender, and is consistently accusative; Urdu uses postpositions and auxiliaries, shows pervasive gender agreement, and is split-ergative. Specific predicted difficulties and teaching suggestions are derived and, because they come from a comparison of grammatical descriptions rather than learner data, are offered as hypotheses for empirical testing.

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Introduction

Interest in learning Turkish as a foreign language appears to have grown in Urdu-speaking regions, supported by cultural ties and by institutions that teach Turkish abroad; systematic enrolment figures to document this trend are not available, however, so the motivation here rests on observation and institutional presence rather than on a firm quantitative claim. Teachers who work with Urdu-speaking learners, in any case, have little language-specific guidance: most materials for teaching Turkish are designed for a general audience, and there is little contrastive study of Turkish and Urdu to show where these particular learners are likely to struggle. This is a

practical gap, because the difficulties a learner meets depend in large part on the distance between the learner's first language and the target language (Lado, 1957; Odlin, 1989).

In practical terms, Turkish is taught to Urdu-speaking learners in language centres, universities, and cultural institutions, often by teachers who are not themselves speakers of Urdu. In such settings, knowing in advance where learners from this background are likely to struggle helps ensure that limited class time is used well: it can go to the points that are genuinely difficult for these learners rather than to points that transfer easily from their first language. A contrastive comparison is one principled way to identify those points, even before learner data are gathered.

Turkish and Urdu share a long history of contact and a large common vocabulary through Persian, which can give the impression that the two languages are close. They belong, however, to different families: Turkish is Turkic, and Urdu is a New Indo-Aryan language of the Indo-European family (Johanson & Csató, 1998; Masica, 1991). The shared vocabulary hides a considerable distance in grammar, and it is in grammar, especially in inflection, that learners meet the deeper problems. Inflection is also the part of grammar in which a language most clearly shows its structural type, because it reveals how grammatical relations are packaged: whether they are bound to the word or expressed by separate elements, and whether categories such as gender and case are present. Comparing the two inflectional systems therefore has direct value for teaching.

This study compares the inflectional morphology of standard Turkish and standard Urdu in order to predict the difficulties that Urdu-speaking learners of Turkish are likely to face. Each system is described from standard reference grammars, the two are compared on the basis of shared grammatical function, and the differences are read as sources of possible difficulty. This is a prediction-generating study based on grammatical description, not an empirical study of learner errors; its predictions are hypotheses that require testing against learner data (Selinker, 1972; James, 1980).

Literature Review

Contrastive Analysis and Language Transfer

The method adopted here belongs to the contrastive analysis tradition, which assumes that by comparing the first language with the target language, areas of difficulty and ease can be predicted (Lado, 1957). Where the two languages are alike, positive transfer is likely to occur and learning will be facilitated, and where they are different, negative transfer or interference is likely to occur and errors are more likely (Odlin, 1989). This tradition is well known to have a limitation: learners do not always make the errors that the comparison predicts, and they also make errors that the comparison does not predict (Selinker, 1972; James, 1980). Contrastive analysis is thus best regarded as a source of hypotheses about difficulty, rather than as a description of actual outcomes. The present study takes this conservative stance.

Classical contrastive analysis has been criticised for treating difficulty in a flat way, as though difference simply equalled difficulty, since not all differences are equally hard. Two influential refinements address this. Prator (1967; as cited in Brown, 2000) proposed a Hierarchy of Difficulty that sorts contrasts into six levels by the type of mapping involved: transfer (Level 0, no difference), coalescence (Level 1, two first-language items merge into one in the target

language), underdifferentiation (Level 2, a first-language item is absent in the target language), reinterpretation (Level 3, an item takes a new form or distribution in the target language), overdifferentiation (Level 4, the target language has a new item absent in the first language), and split (Level 5, one first-language item divides into two or more). Eckman (1977), in the Markedness Differential Hypothesis, tied difficulty to typological markedness, predicting that structures more marked in the target language than in the first language are the most difficult, while movement toward the less marked is comparatively easy. A more recent framework, Processability Theory (Pienemann, 1998), relates the order in which structures can be acquired to processing constraints; however, because it is built on learner production data, it applies at the empirical stage where predictions are tested, not at the prediction stage where no such data exist. The present study uses Prator's levels to rank its predicted difficulties and cross-checks them against Eckman's model where markedness is clear, while setting Processability Theory aside as a tool for the later empirical stage.

Morphological Typology

Languages are positioned on a continuum between agglutinative, fusional and analytic types, but no language is a pure example of any one type (Comrie, 1989; Whaley, 1997). In an agglutinative language, relationships are indicated by separable affixes, each of which has one role; in a fusional language one affix may have multiple roles and may be fused with the stem; in an analytic language, relationships are indicated more by separate words and word order. Sapir (1921) believed that languages should be classified simultaneously on a number of dimensions and Greenberg (1960) operationalised the idea by using indices such as morpheme/word ratio. Hence the labels are only matters of degree and a language can have characteristics of more than one type.

Typological Profiles of Turkish and Urdu

Turkish sits near the agglutinative end of the scale. It marks grammatical relations mainly through suffixes, each usually carrying one function, with clear morpheme boundaries and regular change of form through vowel and consonant harmony; it has no grammatical gender (Göksel & Kerslake, 2005; Kornfilt, 1997; Korkmaz, 2009). Urdu is more mixed. As a New Indo-Aryan language it lost much of the older inflectional system and came to mark many relations through separate postpositions, which gives it analytic features; yet it keeps clearly fusional features such as gender, agreement of adjectives and verbs, number forms fused with gender and case, and split ergativity (Bhatia & Koul, 2000; Butt, 1995; Masica, 1991; Schmidt, 1999). Earlier descriptive work on Urdu verb morphology likewise treats Urdu as combining fusional and agglutinative characteristics and documents its rich verbal paradigms (Ansari & Mangrio, 2019). For an Urdu-speaking learner, then, Turkish marks grammatical relations in a very different way from the first language, and this is the source of most predicted difficulty.

Learner Difficulty in Turkish as a Foreign Language

Research on errors in Turkish as a foreign language shows that inflection, and case marking in particular, is a common problem area across first-language groups. Duman (2013) documented systematic errors with noun case morphemes among Kyrgyz learners of Turkish, and Boyle, Güney, and Özyalçın (2017) found that a large share of errors in B1-level learners' writing concerned grammar and affix use. These studies concern other first-language groups; there is

little published work that predicts or tests the difficulties of Urdu-speaking learners specifically. The present study addresses that gap on the prediction side. The two studies cited here are illustrative rather than exhaustive, and the evidence base in this specific area is itself still thin.

Research Questions

The study is guided by three questions. First, in which areas of inflectional morphology are Turkish and Urdu similar enough to support positive transfer for Urdu-speaking learners of Turkish? Second, in which areas do the two systems differ in ways likely to cause interference? Third, what teaching suggestions follow from these predicted areas of difficulty?

Methodology

Research Design and Data Sources

This study uses a qualitative, descriptive, and comparative design and does not involve human participants. It is based on the analysis of standard reference grammars and belongs to the tradition of document-based contrastive linguistics (James, 1980; Krzeszowski, 1990). For Turkish, the main sources are Banguoğlu (2007), Korkmaz (2009), Göksel and Kerslake (2005), Lewis (2000), and Kornfilt (1997). For Urdu, the main sources are the reference grammars of Schmidt (1999) and Masica (1991), supported by Butt (1995) and by the practical description of Bhatia and Koul (2000). Using both grammars written within local traditions and grammars written within international linguistics allows differences in terminology and classification to be checked against one another.

Analytical Procedure

The comparison follows the classic order of contrastive analysis: each system is described on its own terms, the two are set side by side, and similarities and differences are identified; the differences are then read as sources of predicted difficulty (Lado, 1957; James, 1980). The basis of comparison is grammatical function rather than form, because the two languages often use different formal means, a suffix in one and a separate postposition in the other, to carry the same function; comparing form to form would be misleading (Krzeszowski, 1990). In practice the analysis proceeded feature by feature: for each inflectional category, the Turkish and Urdu forms were collected from the grammars, matched by shared function, and compared for the means each language uses; differences were recorded as possible sources of difficulty and similarities as possible sources of positive transfer. The differences were also graded for difficulty: each was placed at a level in Prator's (1967) six-way hierarchy according to the type of mapping involved, and compared with Eckman's (1977) model where markedness could be clearly established. These levels are not precise measures but ordinal predictions of relative difficulty, and, in keeping with the study's general stance, they await empirical testing.

Limitations of the Method

The scope is limited in ways that bear directly on the strength of the predictions. The study covers only inflection, only the standard written varieties, and only grammatical description; it does not use learner production. Its predictions are therefore hypotheses derived from contrastive analysis, with the known limitation that this method both over-predicts and under-predicts real learner error (Selinker, 1972).

Analysis and Discussion

Number

Turkish marks plural with a single suffix, “-lar/-ler”, whose form depends only on vowel harmony; it applies regularly to all nouns and carries only number (Korkmaz, 2009; Göksel & Kerslake, 2005). The plural is not used after a numeral, as in “üç kitap” (three books). Urdu marks plural in a more complex way, since the form depends on gender, declension class, and case: “laṛka” (boy) becomes “laṛke”, and “laṛki” (girl) becomes “laṛkiyan” (Schmidt, 1999; Masica, 1991). Unlike Turkish, Urdu keeps the plural after a numeral, as in “tin laṛke” (three boys); pairs (1c) and (1d) set the two patterns side by side. In the numbered examples below, the Urdu form is given first and the Turkish form second.

(1) a. *laṛka ata hai.* — *Çocuk geliyor.* ‘The boy comes.’

b. *laṛke ate hain.* — *Çocuklar geliyor.* ‘The boys come.’

c. *tin laṛke* — *üç çocuk* ‘three boys’

d. *do kitaben* — *iki kitap* ‘two books’

Example (1) shows a further difference: in Urdu, plurality is echoed on the verb and the auxiliary (“ata hai” becomes “ate hain”), while in Turkish the plural is marked only on the noun. Number in Urdu is spread across the clause through agreement; in Turkish it is marked at a single point.

Predicted difficulty: Since both languages mark plural with a suffix on the noun, the basic concept should transfer positively. Two interference errors are predicted. First, because Urdu keeps the plural after numerals, learners may produce forms such as **üç kitaplar* instead of “*üç kitap*”. Second, because Urdu plural agreement extends to the verb and adjective, learners may expect similar agreement in Turkish. Teaching should make the no-plural-after-numeral rule explicit early. On Prator’s (1967) hierarchy, the plural suffix itself transfers (Level 0), while dropping the plural after a numeral gives the plural a new distribution and is a reinterpretation (Level 3), predicting difficulty of a moderate kind.

Possession

Turkish marks possession twice: the possessed noun takes a possessive suffix, as in “ev-im” (my house), and in a full phrase the possessor takes the genitive suffix while the possessed takes the possessive suffix, as in “öğretmen-in kalem-i” (the teacher’s pen) (Korkmaz, 2009; Göksel & Kerslake, 2005). Urdu marks possession only on the possessor, through the genitive postposition “ka/ke/ki”, which agrees in gender and number with the possessed noun; the possessed noun itself takes no possessive suffix (Schmidt, 1999; Bhatia & Koul, 2000).

(2) a. *laṛke ka beṭa* — *çocuğun oğlu* ‘the boy’s son’

b. *laṛke ki beṭi* — *çocuğun kızı* ‘the boy’s daughter’

c. *ustad ka qalam* — *öğretmenin kalemi* ‘the teacher’s pen’

d. *laṛke ki kitab nayi hai.* — *Çocuğun kitabı yeni.* ‘The boy’s book is new.’

In example (2) the possessor is the same, but the genitive postposition changes from “ka” to “ki” according to the gender of the possessed noun. Pairs (2c–d) extend the pattern to a further noun and to a full sentence. The direction of agreement is therefore opposite in the two languages: the Turkish possessive suffix encodes the possessor, while the Urdu genitive agrees with the possessed.

Predicted difficulty: Because Urdu marks possession only on the possessor, learners are likely to omit the possessive suffix on the possessed noun, producing **öğretmenin kalem* instead of “*öğretmenin kalemi*”. This is a high-frequency error type, since the possessive construction is common. Learners may also look for a gender distinction in the Turkish genitive, which has none. Teaching should stress that Turkish marks possession on both parts of the phrase, and a minimal pair such as “*öğretmenin kalemi*” against **öğretmenin kalem* makes the missing suffix visible. On Prator’s hierarchy this is a reinterpretation (Level 3): the possessive relation is familiar, but Turkish reshapes it with two-part marking; the predicted difficulty is moderate.

Case Marking: Suffix Versus Postposition

Case is where the two systems differ most clearly. Turkish marks case with bound suffixes; the traditional description recognises six cases, each shown by a harmonic suffix at the outer edge of the noun (Korkmaz, 2009; Kornfilt, 1997). Urdu has only three morphological forms of the noun (direct, oblique, vocative) and marks most case relations with separate postpositions, the noun taking its oblique form before the postposition (Schmidt, 1999; Butt, 1995). Table 1 summarises the correspondence by function.

Table 1: Case marking in Turkish and Urdu by grammatical function

Grammatical function	Turkish (suffix)	Urdu (postposition/form)	Example (TR / UR)
Definite object	-ı/-i/-u/-ü	ko / Ø	ev-i / ghar ko
Dative	-a/-e	ko	okul-a / skul ko
Locative (in)	-da/-de	me	ev-de / ghar me
Locative (on)	-da/-de	par	masa-da / mez par
Ablative	-dan/-den	se	okul-dan / skul se
Instrumental	-la/-le (ile)	se / ke sath	araba-yla / gaři se
Genitive	-ın/-in/-un/-ün	ka/ke/ki	öğretmen-in / ustad ka
Ergative subject	— (nominative)	ne	— / lařke ne

(3) a. *vo lařke ko pani deta hai.* — *O řocuđa su veriyor.* ‘He gives water to the boy.’

b. *vo ek kitab pařhta hai.* — *O bir kitap okuyor.* ‘He reads a book.’

c. *vo kitab ko pařhta hai.* — *O kitabı okuyor.* ‘He reads the book.’

d. *kitab ghar me hai.* — *Kitap evde.* ‘The book is in the house.’

e. kitab mez par hai. — Kitap masada. ‘The book is on the table.’

f. vo skul se ata hai. — O okuldan geliyor. ‘He comes from school.’

g. vo qalam se likhta hai. — O kalemle yazıyor. ‘He writes with a pen.’

h. ai larke! — Çocuklar! ‘Boys!’ (vocative)

Example (3) shows the difference of locus: where Turkish uses a single inflected word (“ev-de”), Urdu uses an oblique noun plus a separate postposition (“ghar me”) (Comrie, 1989). Three further points follow. Turkish suffixes change form by harmony, as set (4) below shows, while Urdu postpositions are invariant, and it is the noun that changes into its oblique form. A single Urdu postposition may carry several functions: “ko” marks both the dative and the definite object, and “se” marks both the ablative and the instrument, so the learner faces a one-to-many mapping onto separate Turkish suffixes, illustrated in (5). Finally, the two languages share one notable feature: both mark a definite or specific object and leave an indefinite object unmarked, as (3b) and (3c) show (Turkish accusative; Urdu “ko”), so the idea of marking only the definite object should transfer (Butt, 1995; Kornfilt, 1997). The effect of harmony is easiest to see when one grammatical function is traced across several nouns:

(4) *a. ghar ko — ev-i b. skul ko — okul-u c. gulab ko — gül-ü d. gari ko — araba-yı*
(one Urdu form; four Turkish shapes, chosen by harmony)

The one-to-many mapping is just as easy to see with the two busiest postpositions:

(5) *a. vo larke ko dekhta hai. — O çocuğu görüyor. ‘He sees the boy.’ (ko = accusative)*

b. vo larke ko kitab deta hai. — O çocuğa kitap veriyor. ‘He gives the boy a book.’ (ko = dative)

c. vo ghar se nikalta hai. — O evden çıkıyor. ‘He goes out of the house.’ (se = ablative)

d. vo gari se ata hai. — O arabayla geliyor. ‘He comes by car.’ (se = instrumental)

Predicted difficulty: This is probably the most challenging area and deserves the largest share of teaching time. Three interference errors are predicted: treating Turkish case markers as separate words; choosing the wrong harmonic form of a suffix; and choosing the wrong suffix when one Urdu postposition corresponds to more than one Turkish case. Because the mapping is not one-to-one, the Urdu postpositions cannot be translated word-for-word; learners will benefit from meeting the Turkish cases by function rather than as equivalents of Urdu postpositions. On Prator’s hierarchy this is the highest level (Level 5, split): a single Urdu postposition divides into several Turkish cases, which is why this area is predicted to require the most teaching time.

Gender and Agreement

There is no grammatical gender and no gender agreement in Turkish; the same adjective is used in every context, such as “büyük ev” (big house) and “büyük kız” (big girl) (Kornfilt, 1997; Göksel & Kerslake, 2005). Gender is a basic category in Urdu, and the marked adjective varies for gender, number and case: the direct form “bara” becomes the oblique “bare” before a postposition, as in “bare ghar me” (in the big house) (Schmidt, 1999; Bhatia & Koul, 2000).

- (6) a. *bara lar̥ka* — *büyük oğlan* ‘big boy’
 b. *bari lar̥ki* — *büyük kız* ‘big girl’
 c. *naya ghar* — *yeni ev* ‘new house’
 d. *nayi gar̥i* — *yeni araba* ‘new car’
 e. *bare lar̥ke* — *büyük çocuklar* ‘big boys’
 f. *bari lar̥kiyan* — *büyük kızlar* ‘big girls’
 g. *vo ata hai. / vo ati hai.* — *O geliyor.* ‘He comes. / She comes.’

In example (6) the Urdu adjective changes with the noun’s gender while the Turkish adjective stays the same. The difference is not one of degree but the presence of a whole grammatical category in one language and its absence in the other. The absence also reaches pronouns: Turkish “o” covers he, she, and it, so gender is simply not expressed (6g).

Predicted difficulty: The learner’s task here is unusual: not to learn a new form, but to switch off an agreement habit. The predicted interference is over-marking, that is, trying to change the adjective for the noun or searching for gendered forms that Turkish does not have. Teaching should state plainly, and practise, that Turkish adjectives never change and that gender plays no role at all in Turkish grammar. On Prator’s hierarchy this is underdifferentiation (Level 2): the learner must suppress a category present in the first language. Eckman’s (1977) Markedness Differential Hypothesis points in the same direction, since the learner moves from a system with gender agreement (more marked) to one without it (less marked), and moving toward the less marked is relatively easy. What looks at first like a large difference therefore predicts difficulty that is moderate-to-low rather than high.

Person, Number, Tense, Aspect, and Negation on the Verb

Turkish marks the person and number of the subject with a suffix at the end of the verb, with regular subject–verb agreement based only on person and number (Korkmaz, 2009; Kornfilt, 1997). Urdu verbs agree with the subject in person, number, and gender, and this information is usually carried by a participle together with an auxiliary (Schmidt, 1999; Bhatia & Koul, 2000). Tense and aspect show the same contrast of means: Turkish builds them with suffixes on one verb, distinguishing among others a witnessed past (“-dı”), a reported past (“-mış”), a present (“-yor”), a future (“-acak”), and an aorist (“-r”) (Ergin, 2013); Urdu builds most tense and aspect forms analytically, combining a participle with the auxiliary “hona”, as in habitual “jata hai”, progressive “ja raha hai”, and past habitual “jata tha” (Schmidt, 1999).

- (7) a. *mai jata hun.* — *(Ben) giderim.* ‘I go.’ (male speaker)
 b. *mai jati hun.* — *(Ben) giderim.* ‘I go.’ (female speaker)

Example (7) shows that the speaker’s gender changes the Urdu verb form while the Turkish form does not change. Beyond gender, two structural differences stand out. Turkish packs person and number into one suffix, while Urdu spreads the information across a participle and an auxiliary that changes by person. Turkish grammatically marks the distinction between a witnessed and a

reported past; Urdu does not mark this evidential distinction in the same grammatical way (Göksel & Kerslake, 2005). Set side by side, the main tense–aspect forms look like this:

- (8) a. *mai roz jata hun.* — *Her gün giderim.* ‘I go every day.’
 b. *mai ab ja raha hun.* — *Şimdi gidiyorum.* ‘I am going now.’
 c. *mai jata tha.* — *Giderdim.* ‘I used to go.’
 d. *mai jaunga.* — *Gideceğim.* ‘I will go.’
 e. *vo gaya.* — *O gitti.* / *O gitmiş.* ‘He went (I saw it). / He went (so I hear).’

The two languages also differ sharply in how they negate the verb, and this difference follows the same pattern as the rest of the system. Turkish negates the verb with a bound suffix, “-ma/-me”, placed inside the verb between the stem and the tense–person endings, as in “gel-mi-yor” (is not coming) and “gel-me-di” (did not come); nominal predicates are negated separately with the word “değil”, as in “öğretmen değil” (is not a teacher). Urdu negates with a free-standing word placed before the verb, chiefly “nahi” (with “na” or “mat” in subjunctive and prohibitive contexts), as in “nahi ata” (does not come); the verb itself carries no negation morpheme. So where Turkish binds verbal negation inside the word and keeps a separate negator for nominal predicates, Urdu uses one free negator across both. The contrast is visible directly:

- (9) a. *vo nahi ata.* — *O gelmez.* ‘He does not come.’
 b. *vo nahi aya.* — *O gelmedi.* ‘He did not come.’
 c. *mat jao!* — *Gitme!* ‘Don’t go!’
 d. *vo ustad nahi hai.* — *O öğretmen değil.* ‘He is not a teacher.’

Predicted difficulty: Positive transfer is expected in the basic idea of subject–verb agreement, which both languages have. Learners must nevertheless restructure how the information is expressed, moving from the participle-plus-auxiliary pattern to a single suffixed verb, and must accept that gender plays no role. The witnessed–reported past distinction is a new concept rather than a transfer problem: learners can grasp the forms quickly but may not use them appropriately, so teaching by situation of use (reporting hearsay as against describing what one saw) is likely to help more than form drills. On Prator’s hierarchy, repackaging tense into a single suffixed verb is a reinterpretation (Level 3), while the witnessed–reported past is a new distinction and so overdifferentiation (Level 4), the harder of the two. Negation is a further reinterpretation (Level 3): learners must move from a free negator to a bound suffix, and must not carry a single free negator over to cover both verbal and nominal negation; the predicted interference is a free-standing or misplaced negator, or the use of “değil” for verbal negation. Teaching should present verbal negation as a suffix inside the verb, kept distinct from “değil”.

Alignment: Accusative Versus Split-Ergative

Clause alignment concerns how subject and object are marked and which of them the verb agrees with (Comrie, 1989; Dixon, 1994). Turkish follows a consistent nominative–accusative alignment: the subject stays in the nominative and the verb agrees with the subject in every tense

(Kornfilt, 1997). Urdu is split-ergative: in perfective transitive clauses the subject takes the ergative marker “ne” and the verb agrees with the object; in other contexts the alignment is accusative-like (Butt, 1995; Schmidt, 1999).

(10) a. *laṛka kitab paṛhta hai.* — *Çocuk kitap okuyor.* ‘The boy reads a book.’

b. *laṛke ne kitab paṛhi.* — *Çocuk kitabı okudu.* ‘The boy read the book.’

(11) a. *laṛke ne kitab paṛhi.* — *Çocuk kitabı okudu.* ‘The boy read the book.’ (kitab, feminine)

b. *laṛke ne sabaq paṛha.* — *Çocuk dersi okudu.* ‘The boy read the lesson.’ (sabaq, masculine)

Example (10) shows the split: in the present the Urdu subject is plain and the verb agrees with it, exactly as in Turkish; in the perfective the subject becomes “laṛke ne” and the verb agrees with the object, so the feminine “kitab” yields “paṛhi”. Example (11) confirms the object agreement: the subject is identical in both clauses and only the object changes, taking the verb from “paṛhi” to “paṛha”. When the object itself carries the marker “ko”, agreement with the object is blocked and the verb shows a default masculine singular form, as in (12c) (Butt, 1995; Schmidt, 1999). This object-agreement pattern is also reported in earlier descriptive work on Urdu, which notes that the perfective transitive verb reflects the gender of the object and not of the agent (Ansari & Mangrio, 2019). Turkish shows none of this: the subject never takes such a marker, and the verb agrees with the subject throughout. An intransitive perfective such as “laṛka gaya” (the boy went) keeps the plain subject (12a–b), which is why the ergativity is called split (Dixon, 1994). Three further pairs complete the picture:

(12) a. *laṛka gaya.* — *Çocuk gitti.* ‘The boy went.’

b. *laṛki gayi.* — *Kız gitti.* ‘The girl went.’

c. *laṛke ne laṛki ko dekha.* — *Çocuk kızı gördü.* ‘The boy saw the girl.’ (verb stays masculine: dekha, not *dekhi)

Predicted difficulty: This difference is conceptually the deepest, but it may surface as hesitation rather than as frequent overt error, since the learner’s task is to not transfer the ergative pattern. A clear rule statement is usually enough: in Turkish the subject never changes form and the verb always agrees with the subject, in every tense. Scarce teaching time is better spent on the case system. On Prator’s hierarchy this is underdifferentiation (Level 2): the ergative pattern, absent in Turkish, must be suppressed. Eckman’s (1977) model supports this, since the learner moves from a more marked (split-ergative) system to a less marked (consistently accusative) one. The model thus classifies this deep difference as a suppression task rather than a high-difficulty one.

Pedagogical Implications

The predicted difficulties can be organised along the two lines that contrastive analysis suggests: areas of positive transfer to build on, and areas of interference to target (Lado, 1957; Odlin, 1989). The shared ground is real: both languages are verb-final and subject–object–verb; in both, the possessor precedes the possessed and the adjective precedes the noun; both mark case after

the noun; both have subject–verb agreement; and both mark the definite object while leaving the indefinite unmarked. Teaching can start from this familiar ground and present Turkish as a different way of marking relations the learner already understands. The areas of interference, with the predicted learner behaviour and the corresponding teaching response, are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2: Summary of predicted difficulty areas for Urdu-speaking learners of Turkish

Area		Nature of the difference	Predicted learner behaviour and teaching response
Plural after numerals <i>Prator level: (reinterpretation)</i>	3	Urdu keeps plural after numerals; Turkish drops it	*üç kitaplar; teach the no-plural-after-numeral rule early
Possession <i>Prator level: (reinterpretation)</i>	3	Urdu marks only the possessor; Turkish marks both parts	Omission of possessive suffix (*öğretmenin kalem); practise two-part marking
Case marking <i>Prator level: 5 (split) — highest</i>	—	Separate invariant postpositions vs. bound harmonic suffixes; one-to-many mapping (ko, se)	Treating suffixes as words; wrong harmonic form; wrong suffix choice; teach cases by function, most teaching time here
Gender <i>Prator level: (underdifferentiation)</i>	2	Urdu has gender agreement; Turkish has none	Over-marking; searching for gendered forms; teach active suppression of the agreement habit
Tense and aspect <i>Prator level: (reinterpretation overdifferentiation)</i>	3–4 /	Analytic participle + auxiliary vs. synthetic suffixes; Turkish evidential past is new	Repackaging tense into one word; teach -dı/-miş as a new concept, by situation of use
Negation <i>Prator level: (reinterpretation)</i>	3	Urdu uses a free negator (nahi) for both verbal and nominal negation; Turkish binds verbal negation as a suffix (-ma/-me) and uses değil for nominal predicates	Free-standing or misplaced negators; using değil for verbs; teach verbal negation as a suffix, distinct from değil
Alignment <i>Prator level: (underdifferentiation)</i>	2	Split ergativity in Urdu; consistent accusative in Turkish	Hesitation over subject marking and agreement in past transitive clauses; state the Turkish rule explicitly

Two of the predicted problems deserve separate treatment because they are not problems of simple transfer. The witnessed–reported past is a category Urdu does not mark grammatically, so it must be taught as a new concept, with attention to meaning and use. Gender is the mirror case: Turkish lacks a category Urdu has, so the aim is to help learners switch off an agreement habit. Recognising this difference, between learning what is new and unlearning what transfers, allows instruction for this group to be more precise.

Seen through Prator's levels, the predicted difficulties form a ranked pattern rather than a flat list. The highest difficulty is in case marking (Level 5, split); next is the witnessed–reported past, absent in Urdu (Level 4). Possession, the repackaging of tense, verbal negation, and the loss of the plural after numerals are moderate (Level 3). Gender agreement and split ergativity, though they look like the “deepest” differences at first, are in fact suppression tasks (Level 2): the learner builds nothing new but must refrain from using a first-language pattern. Eckman's (1977) model independently supports this last point, since in both cases the learner moves from a more marked to a less marked system. Two independent refinements thus give the same priority: the most teaching time should go to the case system, then to the evidential past, while gender and ergativity can be handled more quickly through explicit rules and suppression practice. This ranking is a testable proposal about priority, not a validated measure.

The Possible Role of English as a Third Language

The comparison so far has considered only two languages, the first language Urdu and the target language Turkish. In the teaching settings described, however — language centres, universities, and cultural institutions — most learners also know English, as a second or third language. Research on multilingualism shows that transfer can come not only from the first language but from any previously learned language (De Angelis, 2007; Odlin, 1989). The possible effect of English is not in one direction. At some points it may help: English adjectives, like Turkish ones, do not change for the gender of the noun, so a learner who knows English may find it easier to suppress the Urdu gender-agreement habit. At other points it may add interference: English is subject–verb–object, which may work against the Turkish subject–object–verb order and its verb-final morphology. Because the English case system is very limited, it offers little help with the Turkish case suffixes. As a two-language comparison, this study cannot measure the third-language effect; but it is clearly a real factor, and one that should be taken into account in the later studies where these predictions are tested.

Conclusion

This study compared the inflectional morphology of Turkish and Urdu in order to predict the difficulties of Urdu-speaking learners of Turkish. The comparison showed that the two languages are similar in position but different in means: they share verb-final order, marking of relations on or after the noun, subject–verb agreement, and definite-object marking, but they differ in whether relations are marked inside or outside the word, in whether gender is a live category with wide agreement, and in whether the clause is accusative or split-ergative. From these differences the study derived specific predicted difficulties, chief among them the case system, possession, gender, and the verbal system, and drew teaching suggestions organised by positive transfer and interference.

The main limitation follows from the method. The predictions are derived from a contrastive comparison of grammars, not from learner data, and contrastive analysis is known to both over-predict and under-predict (Selinker, 1972; James, 1980). The study also covers only inflection and only the standard written varieties, and it does not take into account transfer that may come from other languages the learners know, such as English. These limitations point directly to the next step: the predicted difficulties should be tested against the actual production of Urdu-speaking learners of Turkish through error analysis. Such a study can be designed concretely: data could be gathered from thirty to forty learners at the A2–B1 level, through guided written

tasks (for example, prompted compositions that require case suffixes, possession, and past tense) and an oral narrative task; errors would then be coded against the levels predicted here, showing which predictions hold, which do not, and which errors were missed. If the learners' level of English is also recorded as a variable, the third-language effect can be separated out. The same function-based framework could also be extended to the comparison of Turkish with other New Indo-Aryan languages. The practical value of the present comparison will finally be decided by that empirical test.

Author Note

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This study is based on the analysis of published reference grammars and did not involve human participants; ethical committee approval was therefore not required.

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