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edited by

Matthias Kappler,
Mark Kirchner and Peter Zieme

with the editorial assistance of

Raihan Muhamedowa

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**When is a Present not Present? — Turkish *İmiş*, Kazakh
Eken, and the Albanian Admirative**

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(Chicago)

One of the most vexing problems in describing the meaning of Turkish *imiş* is the question of tense/reference. At the same time – in the larger context of Turkic linguistics – the relationship of various formants of the type *-(I)P* and *-GAN* in Turkic languages such as Kazakh, where their usage corresponds to the nonconfirmativity often expressed by *-mİş* in Turkish, has not received more than superficial treatment (e.g. Haarman 1970). In this paper, I will take a step in the direction of exploring these issues by considering the relationship between Turkish *imiş* and Kazakh *eken* with the help of Albanian data. I am particularly interested in usages with apparent present meaning, and I will argue that the Albanian admirative, which resembles the Turkic nonconfirmatives in many respects, helps demonstrate that in Kazakh, as in Turkish, usages meaning ‘be’ with apparent tense neutralization in fact must contain some reference to a past event or state.¹ In the case of Kazakh, however, the relationship of *eken* to the past tense in *-GAN* is more complex than that of Turkish *imiş* to the *mİş*-past, as it is in transition from marked past to being unmarked for tense, much as happened to the Albanian present admirative, which is of perfect origin. Unlike Albanian, however, where the transition is complete, the Kazakh situation is not yet complete.

As noted by Erdal (2004: 290–91, 297; 1991: 382–87), *-gAn* was obsolescent in Old Turkic and became more productive later in time.

¹ As I have argued elsewhere (Friedman 2000, 2005), the Albanian admirative is marked for non-confirmativity. As such its usage usually indicates surprise, disbelief, or a report. See also Demir (2003) on *imişi* in Cypriot Turkish. I wish to thank my colleagues Kagan Arik and Cornell Fleisher of the University of Chicago, Rexhep Ismajli of the Academy of Arts and Sciences of Kosova, and Eleonora Suleimonva of al-Farabi Kazakh National University, and also Dana Akanova for their help.

Erdal (2004: 297) also notes that attested Orkhon Turkic uses of *-mlš* are identical to modern Turkish with one exception, whereas Uyghur *-mlš* resembles *-gAn* in non-Oghuz languages. The discussion of the use of *-mlš* for non-confirmative status in Old Turkic in Erdal (2004: 272–75) shows that at that period the category was already present in Old Turkic as we see it in Turkish today. Thus hints of the transfer of status from older Turkic *-mlš* to Kazakh (and other West Turkic) *-GAn* are already foreshadowed in the earliest periods. Erdal (1991: 383, 2004: 288, 320) also notes the problematic etymology of *ärkän* (= Kazakh *eken*): the stem in *är-* ‘be’ is clear, but the origin of the *-kän* is problematic – if it is from *-gAn* we must accept the devoicing of /g/ after /r/, if it is from the temporal adverbial suffix *-kan* we must accept that a suffix that only attaches to temporal adverbs was attached to this one verb. Here we accept Erdal’s view that *-gAn* is the more probable source, which makes for more consistent continuity with Kazakh developments.

For Kazakh, Kenesbaev and Karaševa (1966: 332) – who label the Kazakh past tense in *-DI* the categorical past (*kategoričeskoe prošedšee*), e.g. *ol keldi* ‘he came [definitely]’ – treat both *-(I)P* and *-GAn* under the heading *davnoprošedšee* ‘pluperfect’. They specify that the past in *-(I)P* expresses the unexpected, unwitnessed, or irony and use Russian words such as *okazyvaetsja* ‘it turns out/appears/seems’, *jakoby* and *kak budto* both with nuances of ‘supposedly, allegedly, apparently’ in their translations to indicate that *-(I)P* is non-confirmative. They use Russian *davno* ‘long ago’ for the meaning of *-GAn*, e.g. *ol barypty* ‘he apparently/supposedly went’ *biz kelgenbiz* ‘we came (a long time ago)’.² Sulejmenova et al. (1997: 158–166) use Russian *nedavno prošedšee* and Kazakh *žedel ötken* ‘recent past’ for *-DI*, *dejstvitel’no prošedšee* ‘truly past’ and *buryňgy ötken* ‘before past’ for *-(I)P*, *prostoe davno prošedšee* or *žaj eželgi ötken* ‘simple pluperfect (distant past)’ for the past tense in *-GAn*. They specify the first as witnessed or confirmative, the second as unwitnessed but confirmative, and the third as marking the distant past and non-confirmative. Kara (2002: 39–40) states that the past in *-DI* denotes recent past actions with relevance for the present while *-GAn* denotes distant past completed actions. Thus *keldi* is translated ‘he

² Haarman (1970:51), which is based on Kenesbaev and Karaševa (1966:332), apparently misread the page and reports that the *-GAn* form is the *kategoričeskoe prošedšee* ‘definite [confirmative] past’, which is actually the label applied to the past tense in *-DI*.

arrived/has arrived’ and *kelgen* as ‘he arrived (but he is gone now)’. He describes the past in *-(I)P* as ‘evidential’, i.e., (marked) non-confirmative. As can be seen, more needs to be done on Kazakh tense marking in general, but here I shall limit myself to *eken*.

For Kazakh *eken*, we are immediately faced with the problem of its status in the language. Sulejmenova et al. (1997: 220–221) treat *eken* as a ‘modal word’ together with emphatic *ğoj*, existential *bar*, non-existential *žok*, necessitative *kerek* etc., whereas Koç et al. (2003: 137) and Tažutov (199: 102) treat it as the *GAn*-past of ‘be’. It would appear from usage that *eken* straddles these two categories, retaining links to its etymological origin as the *GAn*-past of ‘be’ while also modifying verb phrases as a marker of uncertainty.

Example (1) – taken from the Turkish, Kazakh, and Albanian translations of the Russian novella *Sud’ba čeloveka* (usually translated as ‘the fate of a man’)—displays a classic usage of the Albanian present admirative, Turkish *imiş* and Kazakh *eken* to express surprise at the discovery of an unsuspected but previously existing state or event:

1. Dumał, čto ty menja udariš’ s pravoj, no ty, **okazyvaetsja**, smirnyj paren’. [Russian]
Qenke djalë i urtë. Pandeha se do të më jepje ndonjë grusht me dorën e djathtë. [Albanian]
 Sen yine dayanıklı oğlanmışım, dedi, ben bunu yaparken senin sağlam elinle bana yumruklar ekleyeceğini sanmışım... [Turkish]
 Sen meni oñ qolymenğ përip žiberedi ğoj dep edim, zaty, momyn žigit **ekensiğ** [Kazakh]
 ‘I thought you were going to hit me with your right hand, but it turns out that you’re a peaceful lad.’

In fact, however, in precisely this context of present realization of a past state, Albanian can also use a perfect, imperfect, or pluperfect admirative (*paske qenë, qenkëshe, paskëshe qenë*; see Friedman 2000 for details). From this we could conclude either that the Turkish and Kazakh forms neutralize tense or that the existence of reference to a pre-existing state of affairs allows for the usage of a past tense form.

That the second of these two analyses is the more satisfactory here is demonstrated by the fact that the Albanian present admirative, as a true present, can be used in questions that do not refer to a past event or state but only to the moment of speech itself, but, like both Turkish *imiş* and Kazakh *eken*, the Albanian past admiratives are also not permissible with a true present meaning. Thus, for example, a customer entering a shop

and finding the owner absent can express surprise to the apprentice in a question that does not refer to the master's pre-existing absence, but focuses only on his actual whereabouts at the moment of speech:

2. Ku qenka/*paska qenë... mjeshtri? [Albanian]

Usta nerede *imiş? [Turkish]

Ustaz qajda *eken? [Kazakh]

'Where is the boss?'

In such a context, forms marked for pastness are not acceptable. The Albanian present admirative (which is diachronically descended from an inverted perfect, e.g. *ka qenë* 'has been' > *qenka* 'is!'), however, has become a true present with its own derived perfect (of the type *paska qenë*). Nonetheless, many of the speakers interviewed for Turkish and Kazakh felt that one should be able to use *imiş* and *eken*, respectively, in a question expressing surprise at not finding the master in his expected place. The formulations invariably involved a response to the statement of another, as seen in example (3):

3. S'ka mjeshtri? – S'ka. Ku qenka/paske qëne/qenkësha /paskësh qenë? [Albanian]

Usta yok mu? -- Yok. -- O nerede imiş? [Turkish]

Ustaz žoq pa? -- Žok. -- Ol qajda eken? [Kazakh]

'Isn't the boss here?' – 'No.' --Well where *is* he then?

In this scenario, the focus is on the absence of the boss as affirmed by the second speaker (the 'no' functions as a predicate), and thus the second question refers reactively to an already articulated pre-existing state.

Based on these data, I would argue that when standing alone as the predicate, both Turkish *imiş* and Kazakh *eken* in its predicative usage always have some connection to a past state, expectation, speech event, thought, deduction, etc. When *imiş* is a clitic or participial formant this is still the case. Even a sentence like *gelecekmiş* 'He will come *-miş*' carries a reference of the type 'he said...', 'I inferred...', or an implied response to a previously uttered *gelecek* (in which case *gelecekmiş* expresses surprise or disbelief). In the case of Kazakh, however, *eken* can also function as a particle that adds a sense of uncertainty to other verbs used in questions. In this usage, tense does not appear to play a role, as in Example (4):

4. Ne znaeš', skoro li **po**dojdjot lodka? [Russian]
Kayık çabuk **gelecek** mi? Biliyor musun? [Turkish]
Qajyq tez **keler** me eken, bilmejsiñ be? [Kazakh]

'Do you happen to know whether the boat **will come** soon?' or
'You don't happen to know whether the boat **will come** soon, do you?'

Here we see that *eken* expresses a degree of uncertainty with regard to the proposition *tez keler* 'it will come soon' or *tez keler me* 'will it come soon'. Such usage of *eken* can even take person marking, as in example (5):

5. Proskočiš', Sokolov? [Russian]
Geçebilecek misin, Sokolof? [Turkish]
Ötip kete alar ma ekensin, Sokolov? [Kazakh]

'Will you [be able to] get through, Sokolov?'

At issue, then, is how to reconcile the restriction illustrated in (2) with the occurrences of (4) and (5). It would seem that when used in its original meaning of 'be', *eken* retains the kind of restrictions on *-GAn* that we find with Turkish *-miş*, i.e. like *imiş*, *eken* in its literal meaning of 'be' must have some sort of past reference built in. However, as can be seen from examples (4) and (5), *eken* can be used to modify non-past verbs – albeit only but precisely in questions – to add a nuance of uncertainty or doubt, and in this usage it is no longer bound by the tense reference restrictions of *-GAn* but is instead a kind of modal marker. This shift is itself consistent with the behavior of tense in relation to status marking seen in the Albanian admirative. It is also consistent with the historical development of the old perfect marker *-miş* and the shift of meanings from *-miş* to *-GAn* with its revitalized productivity. As indicated by the differences in analyses of the Kazakh verb cited above, there is still considerable work to be done on status categories marked by *-(I)P* and *-GAn* as well as developments of *eken*, but it is hoped that this article will contribute to interest in such work.

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