

## 'Head' idioms in Turkish: contrasts and correlations

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This paper presents a semantic and syntactic investigation of idioms containing the terms for 'head' in Turkish. In a study based on 350 idioms and their occurrences in a corpus (TS corpus), we found that (i) there is a pattern in the senses of the idioms created with different terms for 'head' (i.e. metaphor themes link idioms, cf. (Lakoff & Johnson 2003)) (ii) this pattern is reflected, to some extent, in the syntactic difference between the idioms that these terms create, (iii) while all the terms can be used metaphorically, only *baş* idioms create metonymy (iv) metonymy can always bear possession.

Turkish has five terms that refer to 'head': The Turkic words *baş* and *tepe*, the Arabic loan word *kafa*, and the Persian loanwords *kelle* and *ser*. In this study, we investigate the idioms that are formed by *baş*, *kafa* and *kelle*, the most commonly used terms among the five. The dictionary definitions (see, Güncel Türkçe Sözlük) of these terms show a broad distinction in their lexical meanings (1). Our study, firstly, reveals that the distinction based on these definitions only partly carries over to the idioms formed by these terms. We observe that *baş* is the inalienable physical head (and brain) and is metaphorically extended to denote organic/social structures, self, life, position, rank (Aksan 2011) (2).

*kafa* has two broadly distinct senses: (i) In its concrete sense it refers to the skull, and always has some absurd/negative connotation (3). (ii) In its abstract sense it refers to idioms that relate to the mind (being drunk/high, confused, angry, insane, or of a negative mindset or character) (4).

These differences in meaning carry over to other semantic and structural differences. Abstraction of 'head' to 'mind' correlates with alienable possession, which has a different syntax than inalienable possession (cf. Öztürk & Taylan 2015).

The idioms that refer to the physical head have *baş/kafa* variants. Where difference in meaning arises, *kafa* means 'mind' and *baş* means 'self/position'. The structure of 'character' idioms is used with *baş* as well (see Baş 2015). While *x-kafalı* 'x-headed' is negative/absurd, *baş* in the same configuration yields both positive and negative concepts (5). The contrast between *kafa* and *baş* can be best observed in idioms where all other items are identical (6). Further, possession is contrastive for *baş* but not for *kafa* (7). The difference in meaning is directly reflected in the syntax of possessive structures.

*kelle* is the alienable term with the semantic role of patient: decapitated/detached human head, cooked animal head (8).

Thus, we show that semantic differences correlate to some extent with syntactic structures.

## Examples:

- (1) *baş*: The upper or front part of the (human or animal) body that hosts organs such as the brain, eye, ear, mouth, etc. Also leader, main, top, tip, position.  
*kafa*: Human head, ser. Also part of a mechanism, mind, memory, mentality.  
*kelle*: Cooked sheep, lamb or goat's head. Also *baş*, *kafa*.
- (2) a. *baş-ı çek*: head-ACC pull 'take the lead'  
b. *baş-ı sıkış*: head-POSS squeeze 'be in trouble'  
c. *baş-in-ı ver*: head-POSS-ACC give 'die (for a cause)'
- (3) a. *kafa kafa-ya çarp-ış*: head head-DAT crash-RECIP 'crash head on'  
b. *kafa-yı kazı-t*: head-ACC scrape-CAUS 'shave the head'
- (4) a. *kafa-dan at*: head-ABL throw 'make something up'  
b. *kafa çalış*: head work 'be intelligent'  
c. *kafa-ya tak*: head-DAT fix 'be obsessed'
- (5) a. *örümcek kafa-lı*: spider-head-ASS\* 'narrow-minded'  
b. *ağır baş-lı*: heavy head-ASS: 'serious'
- (6) a. *kafa-sı boş*: head-POSS empty 'empty-headed' vs.  
b. *baş-ı boş*: head-POSS empty 'stray'
- (7) a. *baş-a gel*: head-DAT come 'lead', 'rule' vs.  
*baş-in-a gel*: head-POSS-DAT come 'happen to'  
b. *baştan al*: head-ABL take 'restart' vs.  
*baş-in-dan al*: head-POSS-ABL take 'relieve someone of'
- (8) *kelle koltuk-ta*: head armpit-LOC 'reckless'

\*ASS: associative

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