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## The Nature and Function of the Ancient Turkic Functional Word “Birlan” in Modern Turkic Languages (Using the Example of the Kazakh Language)

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### ABSTRACT

It is known that Soviet Turkologists believe that the affix of the instrumental suffix exists only in the Kazakh language among Turkic-speaking peoples. Because in the modern Kazakh language, “birlan”, which is the archetype of the form “men”, which was once a case affix, once a conjunctive functional word, was not an affix of the case category, but a particle functional word. Also, when developing the theory of grammar of the Turkic peoples of Central Asia, linguists of the national republics were guided by the grammatical theory of the Russian language. And in the grammar of the Russian language, the number of declensions is six. For such reasons, in most modern Turkic peoples, only six types of the category of declension are indicated. The article shows the forms formed by the mosaic method in modern Turkic languages from the early particle “birlan”, some of which are used as affixes, that is, the affixes of the instrumental case exist not only in

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Kazakh, but also in other Turkic languages. The modern Kazakh version of the former particle “*birlan*” is “men”. The grammatical function of this form in the modern Kazakh language is very large: despite the change in form, it has retained its original meaning, as well as many functions that have been added later. However, the semantic motivation between the conjunction and conjunctive is observed, and nevertheless the two are developing separately as two different grammatical categories.

**Keywords:** Turkology; *Birlan*; Category of Declension in Turkology; Kazakh Language; Category of Functional Words in Kazakh

## 1. Introduction

It is well known that languages with genealogical proximity tend to exhibit common features in the formation of their grammar. However, such commonalities are typically characteristic of the early stages of development in related languages, while in later periods, as these languages evolve into distinct national languages, each one develops along a national trajectory, reflecting the speech patterns of its speakers. One such common grammatical form found in Turkic languages is “*birlan*.” In Old Turkic, this form later underwent transformations due to the influence of dialects, and today it exists in various forms across individual national languages. Accordingly, its grammatical meaning is not uniform across these languages, though the connection between its original and contemporary meanings remains clear. This has been confirmed through etymological research and works on the grammar of modern Turkic-speaking peoples.

“*Birlan*” was an ancient postposition used to express comitative and instrumental meanings. Its modern counterpart in the Kazakh language is “men”. In contemporary Kazakh, this form (“men”) functions both as an instrumental case suffix and as a conjunction. Similar functions can be observed in the grammars of other Turkic-speaking peoples. However, Soviet Turkologists traditionally claimed that the instrumental case suffix is found only in Kazakh. Research conducted within the scope of this scholarly article reveals that such a view is one-sided, as the instrumental case suffix is indeed present in the grammars of other Turkic languages as well.

Ahmet Baitursynov was a scholar who laid the foundations of Kazakh grammar in the early 20th century. While seven cases are recognized in modern Kazakh, Baitursynov identified only six in his works, with the following names and basic suffixes:

- Nominative case: no suffix;
- Genitive case: *-nyng, -ning, -dyng, -ding, -tyng, -ting*;
- Dative case: *-ga, -ge, -ka, -ke*;
- Accusative case: *-ny, -ni, -dy, -di, -ty, -ti*;
- Locative case: *-da, -de, -ta, -te*;
- Ablative case: *-nan, -nen, -dan, -den, -tan, -ten*<sup>[1]</sup>.

The seventh case, introduced later, is:

- Instrumental case: *-men (-menen)*.

Baitursynov<sup>[1]</sup> had his own argument for not presenting the later-added comitative case as the seventh case in the Kazakh language. The primary reason was that the old Turkic word *birlan* did not originally function as a case ending with a fully formed grammatical form. The second reason is that the Kazakh language follows the law of synharmonism, which requires that any affix must have both a front and back vowel variant. However, the current comitative case affix does not have a back vowel variant, and thus, in the grammar of modern Kazakh, it is recognized as an affix that does not adhere to the law of synharmonism. The third reason is that historical variants of the *birlan* form did not acquire affix status in the grammar of many Turkic-speaking peoples by the early 20th century. The fourth reason is that the grammar of national republics within the USSR was based on Russian grammar, which had six cases. For these and other reasons, Baitursynov<sup>[1]</sup> believed that only six cases existed in the grammar of the Kazakh language. However, later research has shown that the Kazakh language indeed has seven cases in its case system.

While the modern Kazakh form “men” derives from the Old Turkic “*birlan*,” other Turkic languages exhibit diverse forms of this construction, all of which originate from “*birlan*” and are morphologically related to it.

This brief study does not focus on any specific Turkic language. This is because, to date, no comprehensive work has been written that provides detailed information on the

grammar of all Turkic languages. Therefore, in identifying the contemporary forms of “*birlan*” in modern Turkic languages, we relied on available materials. From this perspective, this article can be regarded as a significant, albeit brief, contribution to the common grammar of modern Turkic languages. Additionally, the Kazakh form “*men*” is treated as the primary language form in this study, based on the meaning of its counterparts in other Turkic languages and the positions of the authors.

The question of what the contemporary forms of the ancient *birlan* form, which expressed comitative and instrumental meanings, are in Turkic languages and whether their grammatical function aligns with the original—i.e., to what extent the original meaning has been preserved—is of great importance for both Kazakh and general Turkic linguistics. Accordingly, the aim of this study is to identify the modern forms derived from the Old Turkic *birlan* in contemporary Turkic languages, compare them with the meaning of the *men* form in modern Kazakh, and demonstrate the grammatical function of *men* in Kazakh. To achieve this aim, the following objectives have been set:

- To demonstrate that the *men* form in modern Kazakh originates from the Old Turkic *birlan*;
- To identify the modern forms of *birlan* in contemporary Turkic languages;
- To determine the affixal nature of the *birlan* form in other Turkic languages;
- To analyze the affixal function of the *men* form in Kazakh;
- To describe the function of the *men* form as a conjunction in Kazakh.

Fulfilling these objectives will provide extensive opportunities to determine the contemporary forms of the ancient *birlan* in Turkic languages, as well as their meanings and grammatical functions in Kazakh.

## 2. Literature Review

The sources used in this brief study can be broadly categorized into Soviet-era and post-Soviet-era literature. Among them, those focused on Turkological issues belong mainly to the Soviet period, while post-Soviet literature predominantly addresses the grammars of national languages. A key advantage of Soviet-era works is that they were often

written in Russian, a language widely understood, whereas post-Soviet works are mostly written in the respective national languages, creating barriers to fully understanding the contents of works on the grammars of specific Turkic languages. This is due to two main reasons: firstly, each Turkic language has already been established as a national literary language based on a particular dialect; secondly, due to the influence of Soviet ideology, dictionaries translating between the Turkic languages were not developed, and this remains an unresolved issue to this day. Despite the fact that Soviet-era literature was written in a universally accessible Russian, it is natural that some ambiguities arise, given that the authors were not native speakers of Turkic languages.

Kazakh Turkologist Tomanov<sup>[2]</sup>, in his work *Historical Grammar of the Kazakh Language*, shows that the instrumental case affix *-men* in modern Kazakh was previously expressed by *-yn*, *birla(n)*, and the *-ly* form. According to the scholar, during the historical development of the language, *-yn* fell out of use, while *-ly* was preserved only in a few frozen phrases, losing its original grammatical meaning and becoming lexicalized<sup>[2]</sup>.

Thus, *-yn* is an ancient affix predating the formation of the national Kazakh language. The scholar further states that in adverbs of time such as *қысында* (in winter), *жазында* (in summer), *күніне* (per day), *айына* (per month), the affixes *-yn*, *-in* are remnants of the instrumental case affix from the Old Turkic period, while the final *-da*, *-a*, *-e* were added later<sup>[2]</sup>. These affixes, however, have no direct connection to the modern *men* form in Kazakh.

The form directly related to *men* in modern Kazakh is *birlan*. This form existed in various versions, such as *birlan*, *birle*, *bilan*, *bile*, *bilen*, and so on. In the same work, M. Tomanov mentions that the *birle* form was used with comitative and instrumental meaning in the Orkhon-Yenisei inscriptions, alongside the *-yn*, *-in*, *-n* affixes. For instance, in the *Kül Tegin* inscription: “*Бу йірде олурып, табғач будун бирле түзелтім*” (“Here, I made peace with the Tabgach people”). Furthermore, Tomanov states that the *birle* and *bile* forms were used in two versions in Mahmud al-Kashgari’s dictionary, in three versions (*birle*, *bile*, *bilen*) in the Golden Horde period texts *Gulistan* and *Muhabbatname*, and in the *Codex Cumanicus* and royal edicts in a single version, *bile*. He notes that the *r* sound had elided by the 11th century but that the *birle* form “was still part of the

written literary language up until the late 19th century”<sup>[2]</sup>.

One of the most valuable Kazakh literary works written in the late 19th century is Abai Kunanbayev’s Words of Edification. In the 1968 publication, the use of men appears 112 times (15 as a conjunction, 97 as an affix), and birlan appears 30 times, with bilan used once<sup>[3]</sup>.

Let us now consider the etymology of the birlan form, which was once a postposition. Soviet Turkologist Kononov<sup>[4]</sup>, in his work Grammar of the Modern Uzbek Literary Language, highlights German Turkologist W. Bang-Kaup’s connection between the Turkish *ile* form in Turkic languages and the verb *il* (to bind)<sup>[4]</sup>. The *ile* form here is the modern Turkish version of the ancient birlan form. Given that affixes often derive from fully meaningful words, this theory has scientific merit. Hence, the *-lan* affix in birlan likely originated from the verb *il*.

Another Soviet-era Turkologist, E. V. Sevortyan, in his Etymological Dictionary of Turkic Languages, considers the root of birlan to be the numeral *bir* (one)<sup>[5]</sup>. The *-la* verb suffix later developed into an affix that derived verbs from nouns, while *-n* became an affix for the voice category of verbs. A similar stance is held by post-Soviet Kazakh linguist Zh. Tektigul in his work Historical Grammar of the Kazakh Language<sup>[6]</sup>.

As mentioned earlier, over time, the verb *lä* in the Kazakh language transformed into an affix that derives verbs from nouns. The evidence for this is that in modern Kazakh, the affix *-lä* (with variants *-le*, *-da*, *-de*, *-ta*, *-te* according to the law of synharmonism) has become the most active affix for deriving verbs from nouns. For example: *balta* (noun) – *baltala* (verb), *shege* (noun) – *shegele* (verb), *qol* (noun) – *qolda* (verb), *bas* (noun) – *basta* (verb), etc.

Kazakh Turkologist Tomanov<sup>[7]</sup>, in his Comparative Grammar of Turkic Languages, states that forms synonymous with the *-men* affix in modern Kazakh, all of which evolved from the ancient birlan form, are present in various Turkic languages. For instance, the *-men*, *-ben*, *-pen*, *-menen*, *-benen*, *-penen* forms in Kazakh and the Kipchak dialect of Uzbek, the *-la*, *-lo* forms in Altai and Turkish, the *-ba*, *-pa*, *-ma* forms in Shor, Karay, and Chuvash, and the *-ban*, *-man*, *-nan* forms in the Hakas dialects, among others<sup>[7]</sup>.

Dialectologist Sarybayev<sup>[8]</sup> notes that in some dialects of southern Kazakhstan, alongside the *-men* form of the instrumental case, there are *-mynan*, *-bynan*, *-pynan*, *-ban*,

*-pan*, *-man* forms<sup>[8]</sup>.

This view is supported by post-Soviet foreign researchers. For example, Tokmashev<sup>[9]</sup>, who studied the Teleut language within the system of Altai dialects, states that the *-ba*, *-bila*, *-minang* forms in Shor, Teleut, and Hakas dialects, as well as the *-la* form in Altai and *-bile* in Tuvan, among others, were all historically derived from the birlan postposition<sup>[9]</sup>.

In a similar vein, post-Soviet researcher Tazranova<sup>[10]</sup>, in her article on the case system of the Altai language, confirms the transformation of postpositions into affixes. She notes that affixes such as *-la* in Altai have fully evolved into case markers in modern grammar.

Another post-Soviet researcher, Dmitrieva<sup>[11]</sup>, notes the existence of the *mynan*, *myna*, *men* forms in the Baraba dialect of Tatar but emphasizes that they function as postpositions, not affixes.

Kazakh linguist Zhubanuly<sup>[12]</sup> presents the following formation scheme for the *men* form in modern Kazakh, tracing its origin from birlan : *bir+le+in* → *mellen* → *melen* → *menen* → *men*. Therefore, the modern *men* is a contracted form of *menen*.

In conclusion, the *-men* affix of the instrumental case in modern Kazakh originates from the ancient birlan. In the historical development of Turkic languages, the phenomenon of consonant elision (e.g., the loss of *r*) and the *b p m* consonant correspondence are well-established principles. Thus, the historical formation of the *-men* affix can be schematized as follows: *bir+il* → *birlan* (*birlen*) → *bilan* (*bilen*) → *milan* → *minan* (*minen*) → *menen* → *men*. In Turkish: *bir+il* → *birlen* → *bilen* → *ilen* → *yle* → *le*.”

### 3. Methodology

The study employed the following methodologies to analyze and discuss the evolution and functions of the form “birlan” in contemporary Turkic languages:

1. Diachronic Analysis This method traced the historical changes in the form “birlan” from ancient Turkic languages to modern variants. It facilitated the examination of how “birlan” has evolved into affixal and postpositional forms across various Turkic languages, including Kazakh, Uzbek, Turkish, and others.

2. Synchronic Analysis A comparative analysis was

conducted to assess the contemporary use of “birlan” and its equivalents across different Turkic languages. This method identified similarities and differences in the current functions and forms of “birlan” within a specific timeframe.

3. *Comparative Analysis*: This approach involved comparing data from various sources and languages to identify common patterns and distinctive features of the form “birlan.” It provided insights into the functional and morphological variations of the form across different Turkic languages.

4. *Generalized Analysis*: This method systematized and synthesized the collected data to form a comprehensive understanding of the use and evolution of the form “birlan” in Turkic languages. It enabled the identification of key functions and developmental trends of the form.

These methodologies facilitated an in-depth understanding of how the form “birlan” has evolved from historical contexts to its current functions and usages in Turkic languages.

The study utilized the following materials:

1. *Historical Texts and Literary Works*: Analysis included works by Kazakh and Turkic authors such as publications in “Turkestan Uyalayatynyn Gazeti” and “Dala Uyalayatynyn Gazeti,” as well as Abai’s “Kara Sozder,” to study historical forms and their transformations.

2. *Linguistic Studies and Articles*: Contemporary linguistic studies and articles on the form “birlan” and its equivalents in various Turkic languages were reviewed. This included scholarly articles published in academic journals.

3. *Dictionaries and Reference Materials*: Consulted dictionaries and grammatical references provided clarifications on the meanings and uses of the form “birlan” in different languages and contexts.

4. *Field Studies and Personal Observations*: Conducted field research and personal observations on the usage of the form “birlan” in contemporary speech and literature of Kazakh and other Turkic languages, offering current examples and data.

These materials allowed for a thorough analysis of the form “birlan,” its evolution, and its present functions in Turkic languages, with a particular focus on Kazakh.

## 4. Results and Discussion

The ancient Turkic form “birlan” has evolved into various grammatical forms in modern Turkic languages. From

the literature review above, it is evident that while some languages still use the form “birlan” in a conjunctive sense, others have developed it into an affix. For instance, in Kazakh, in the Kipchak dialects of Uzbek, in Altai, in the dialects of Turkish, Hakas, Shor, Karayim, Chuvash, and in the dialects of Tuvan, Shulym, and the Barabin dialect of Tatar, it is used as an affix, whereas in Tatar, Uzbek, etc., it is used as a conjunction. Similarly, the form “men” derived from “birlan” is used in Kazakh both as a case affix and as a conjunction, while the form “menen” is used in Kyrgyz and Karakalpak, “bilän” in Uzbek, Tatar, etc., are used solely as case particles.

Another important point is that in modern Turkish, the variants *yle* and *le*, derived from the old *birlan* form, function similarly to their counterparts in Kazakh. In Turkish, these grammatical forms have evolved to serve both as affixes and as conjunctions. For instance, the Turkish instrumental affix (terminologically referred to as *Vasita*) is attached in the form *-le* to words ending in consonants and in the form *-yle* to words ending in vowels. Examples include: İstanbul’a hızlı trenle gideceğim (Kazakh: Стамбулға жүрдек пойызбен кетемін [High-speed train to Istanbul]), Sabahın ilk ışıklarıyla kenti terk ettik (Kazakh: Таңның алғашқы жарығымен қаладан шықтық [We left the city at the first light of Dawn]), etc.<sup>[13]</sup>.

Notably, the grammatical function of the form “men,” derived from the ancient Turkic “birlan,” has developed particularly in Kazakh. The affixal forms of “men” in Kazakh (including dialects) are numerous, such as: -men, -ben, -pen, -menen, -benen, -penen, -man, -ban, -pan, -mynan, -bynan, -pynan. In contrast, the versions in other Turkic languages are much more diverse: -bıla, -bıle, -bınan, -mınan, -mınan, -menen, -benen, -penen, -bıla, -pıla, -mıla, -pala, -palan, -(b)ala, -(b)ılañ, -lañ, -(b)la, -ban, -man, -ba, -pa, -ma, -nan, -dan, -tan, -men, -ben, -pen, -yle, -le, -la, -lo, etc. Similarly: birlen, birlle, bile, birlan, birlle, bilä, birlan, bilen, pirlan, pilän, pıla, billän, bilän, bilan, billä, bulan, mynan, myna, män, ilän, ilä, lä, ilen, lo, etc. However, not all these forms in Turkic languages are recognized as affixes, as noted above. Particularly in languages where “bilän” forms have survived (such as Tatar, Uzbek, etc.), it is considered a case particle with instrumental or associative meaning.

It follows that asserting that the instrumental case affix is present only in Kazakh among the Turkic-speaking peo-

ples is a one-sided view. As noted in Turkological studies, while there might not be a direct equivalent to the Russian instrumental case in other Turkic languages, we observe that the historical form “birlan” has evolved into an instrumental affix in several Turkic languages. In other words, affixes adding instrumental or associative meaning in Turkic languages often have a comitative or instrumental character.

The reason for mentioning the Russian instrumental case is that A. Baitursynov, who showed in the early 20th century that Kazakh had only six cases, compared the grammatical function of the “men” form with the Russian instrumental case. Thus, he considered the meaning of “men” to align with the Russian preposition “s” interpreting it not as a case affix but as a conjunction particle<sup>[14]</sup>.

This perspective later influenced the grammar of other Turkic-speaking peoples within the USSR. For instance, the unshortened form “menen” in contemporary Kyrgyz and Karakalpak languages is written separately with the meaning of a particle. See (in Kyrgyz): Мына, карап отурса бала чагынан өз эмгеги, өз кесиби менен жашап келатыптыр (Mina, karap otursa bala chagynan oz emgegi, oz kesibi menen jashap kelatypыр). Kazakh: Міне, карап отырса бала шағынан өз еңбегі, өз кәсібіменен өмір сүріп келеді. Жалғыз жүріп жол тапқанша, көпшілікпенен адас (Jalgız jürіp jol tapqanша, көpshilik penen adas). Kazakh: Жалғыз жүріп жол тапқанша, көпшілікпен адас. However, it is not difficult to see that the “menen” forms in these sentences are used more in an affixal sense rather than as a particle.

It is observed that in post-Soviet Turkic languages, there is a tendency to compare the instrumental form with the meaning of the Russian instrumental case affix and to limit themselves to six cases, as in Russian grammar. Moreover, grammar theories in Soviet republics, including Turkic-speaking ones, were based on Russian grammar. In other words, the fact that Russian has six cases seems to have influenced Turkic languages to adopt a similar number of cases.

Another major reason is that the ancient Turkic “birlan” was originally a case particle, not an affix. Consequently, in the early versions of Kazakh national press, the “birlan” form and its derivatives like “ilan,” “ila,” and “menan” were written separately as particles. For example, “Türistan ualaatynyn gazetі” (1870–1882), “Dala ualaatynyn gazetі”

(1888–1902), and “Aiqap” (1911–1915) provide ample evidence for this. See: Адес шаһарына өз жайынан чығмыш газетінің айту бойынча кела баслағанлар пұллар алуб каюларны жибермак ният илән Азия ічинде тұрмыш жамағатлар араларине тағы да күтуб тұрадылар бик көп келатұғын кездема пұлларны уа ғайри һәр хил пұллардан һәр хил темир нарсаларны уа ғайри ұсақ түйек пұллар илән («Dala ualaatynyn gazetі», 18.03.1888)<sup>[15]</sup>. Көптан бері мен қалаб едім сенуң менан сөйласуга, кымбатлы достум, һич бір уақыт болмай жүр еді («Dala ualaatynyn gazetі», 25.03.1888)<sup>[15]</sup>. Generally, in the early editions of Kazakh national press, the forms “men” and “menen” were written separately both as particles and as affixes, and they were mostly used as case affixes rather than as particles<sup>[16]</sup>.

The current function of the “men” form in Kazakh is quite extensive. Primarily, it has influenced the formation of conjunctions such as “aytkanda” (however), “söytkanda” (while), “ögä” (however), and interrogative pronouns like “qaytken?” (what if?) and “ne etken?” (what did?). It has also contributed to the formation of adverbs like “ertemen” (in the morning), “tañermen” (with dawn), “küniмен” (throughout the day), “tünimen” (at night), “jaiymen” (with ease), “retimen” (in order), “kezekpen” (in turn), “özdigimen” (independently), “shynymen” (truly), “tolуғymen” (completely), “ärmen” (to each side), and “bermen” (towards). A more detailed account of the delexicalized words in the Kazakh language, which have developed through the lexical decay of the form *men*, is provided in the work of the post-Soviet researcher A. Baidautova<sup>[17]</sup>.

As an affix, the form “men” in Kazakh grammar serves several functions:

1. Instrumental meaning: arriving by horse, chopping with an axe, etc.
2. Associative meaning: met with me, arrived with his grandfather, etc.
3. Locative meaning: passed through the central street, traveled with the hill, etc.
4. Temporal meaning: as soon as his friend arrived, this began, etc.
5. Procedural meaning: discussed calmly, swayed uniformly, etc.
6. Comparative meaning: equal to the wind, equal to the boat, etc.
7. Purposeful meaning: he came here with a certain in-

tention, etc.

8. Concessive meaning: although this is known, that one did not know, etc.

In the last example, the *men* affix functions as a suffix, while in the first seven examples, the *men* affix serves as a conjunction. Due to the relatively late development of the affixal function of the *men* form in Kazakh, this form's grammatical role has been specifically examined in Kazakh grammar and has become the subject of research by many scholars. For instance, during the Soviet period, researchers such as Zhubanov<sup>[18]</sup>, Amanzholov<sup>[19]</sup>, Zhubaeva<sup>[14]</sup>, and Amirov<sup>[20]</sup>, and in the post-Soviet period, scholars like Iskakov<sup>[21]</sup>, Mamanov<sup>[22]</sup>, Oralbay<sup>[23]</sup>, Medetbekova<sup>[24]</sup>, Isanova<sup>[25]</sup>, Maralbek<sup>[26]</sup> and others have written works to define the grammatical function of the "men" form in the Kazakh language.

Since the affix *men* and the conjunction *men* in Kazakh are homonyms in form and both originated from the same common genesis, it can sometimes be difficult to distinguish whether *men* in a sentence is an affix or a conjunction<sup>[27]</sup>.

For example:

*Eki ata, eki ru el – qazaq, qalmaq,*  
*Asyqpay tügel tynda, batyr, biraq.*  
*Munda Kóbik, Kápimen, onda Qusan*  
*Bul jauyzdar jaugushy ed kimgе, shyrak? (I. Baizakov)*  
*Qarasha, zheldoqsan men sol bir-eki ai,*  
*Qystyn basy biri erte, birewi jai (Abai).*

In these sentences, the form *men* can be understood either as the comitative (instrumental) case affix or as a conjunction that has been displaced in the syntax of the poetic couplet. Soviet Kazakh linguist Amirov<sup>[20]</sup> also paid particular attention to this phenomenon.

Let us turn to the following lines from the poem by the Kazakh poet Abai:

"Senimen men ten be?" dep maqtanasyng,  
 Bilimsizdik belgisi – ol bayaǵy.

In the first line of this example, it is not immediately clear whether the bolded *men* forms are affixes or conjunctions. In fact, the first *men* is the comitative (instrumental) case affix, and so it is written together with the preceding word. The question is *kimmen?* (with whom?). On the other hand, in the sentence *Ony qulattai, seni men men siiqty-larǵa jaryq ómir joq* (S. Mukanov), the *men* is a conjunction, and thus it is written separately as a helper word linking the

pronouns *sen* and *men*, which serve as coordinated members of the sentence. The question here is *kimderge?* (to whom?).

The homology between the *men* form functioning as a conjunction and the *-men* form functioning as a comitative case affix in Kazakh brings their grammatical meanings closer in modern standard Kazakh literary language. This is why, in modern Kazakh stylistics, it has become normalized to use the conjunction *zháne* (and) instead of *men* between coordinated members in such constructions, as in *Sen zháne men siiqtylarǵa kóp oqy qájet*, etc.

As mentioned above, the "men" form, derived from the ancient Turkic "birlan," functions both as an affix and as a conjunction particle in Kazakh. The next aspect to address is its function as a conjunction particle. Importantly, the homonymous affix and conjunction particle in Kazakh stem from a single genesis.

R. Amirov, who studied conjunctions in the Kazakh language during the Soviet era, notes that many conjunctions in Turkic languages are borrowed from Arabic and Persian, while Kazakh predominantly uses Turkic conjunctions<sup>[20]</sup>. That is, in the 15th–16th centuries, the influence of Arabic and Persian on Turkic languages increased, and many languages adopted ready-made conjunctions from those languages. Languages that did not borrow conjunctions from Arabic created their own through evolution. For example, in Uzbek, conjunctions like "ham" and "va" replace the Turkic conjunctions "bilän," "men," and "jäne."

The transition of the "men" form from a case particle to a conjunction in contemporary Kazakh is a natural development. Thus, since the *men* form in Kazakh, which evolved from the *birlan* form originally used as a postposition, began to function as a conjunction, the Arabic and Persian conjunctions *ham* and *va*, introduced through Islam, could not establish themselves in the Kazakh language.

The grammatical function of the conjunction "men" in Kazakh is to connect items of equal grammatical status. It links only nouns or substantivized words with equal grammatical meanings, as well as participles and verbal nouns. Examples include:

1. Connecting nouns: "The dense crowd's 'Amin!' echoed from one end to the other, and hundreds of hands reached out, pouring like water running over a beard" (Sh. Aitmatov).

2. Connecting substantivized words: "The winding and

twisting of a long life began this way, and now it is nearing its end” (Sh. Aitmatov).

3. Connecting participles: “Each love bears its own fruit. Of course, if the exchange, mutual interaction, and balance between receiving and giving are equal” (kazgazeta.kz).

4. Connecting verbal nouns: “The similarity between birth and death is not in the excess of one over the other; just understand this” (O. Bokey).

The “men” form connects units of equal grammatical status within each semantic group—whether nouns, substantivized words, participles, or verbal nouns.

In summary, the function of “men” as a conjunction in Kazakh is quite extensive. However, in other Turkic languages, conjunctions connecting equal grammatical elements are often borrowed from Arabic and Persian. The ancient Turkic “birlan” form has not significantly developed as a conjunction in most Turkic languages<sup>[28]</sup>. From this perspective, Kazakh and Turkish are the only languages that have developed both an affix and a conjunction from the Old Turkic *birlan* form.

## 5. Conclusion

From the brief comparative analysis above, it is clear that the ancient Turkic form “birlan” has evolved into several versions in the modern Turkic languages through a mosaic-like process. According to etymological studies, the ancient “birlan” case particle originated from the verb “il” meaning “to bind,” “to join,” or “to unite,” combined with a numeral. Over time, this case particle underwent phonetic changes, resulting in different versions used in various dialects of the Turkic languages that later became national languages. Despite these variations, the original meaning of “birlan” as a case particle indicating association or instrumentality has been preserved across all versions. In contemporary Kazakh, one variant of the ancient “birlan” is the case particle “men.” This case particle, which only combines with words in the instrumental (or comitative) case in Kazakh, is also present in modern Uzbek. For example: “sen bilan birga bormiman” (Kazakh: “I will go with you”).

In modern Kazakh, the “men” form has evolved from the original “birlan” form to the form “menen,” which has been contracted due to linguistic economy. Thus, the current “men” form in Kazakh has developed into both an affix and

a conjunction, with its grammatical function being notably advanced. It is important to note that while both “men” and “menen” forms are used in modern Kazakh, the “men” form is more active compared to “menen.”

The *yle* and *le* forms in Turkish are also condensed variants of the old *birlan* form. We can see that in modern Turkish grammar, these forms have developed to perform both affix and conjunction functions.

The “men(en)” form has given rise to adverbs, conjunctions, pronouns (interrogative), and isolated words in modern Kazakh, as well as participial suffixes. This indicates that the Kazakh language has preserved the original meaning of the ancient “birlan” case particle while evolving the “men(en)” variant into a new form. In other Turkic languages, variants like “birlen,” “birle,” “bile,” “birlan,” “birle,” “bila,” “birlan,” “bilen,” “pirlen,” “pilin,” “pyla,” “billan,” “bilan,” “billä,” “bulan,” “minan,” “myna,” “men,” “ilan,” “ila,” “la,” “ilen,” and “lo” mostly serve as case particles and sometimes as conjunctions. In any case, the modern forms derived from the old “birlan” in Turkic languages serve a much narrower function compared to the “men” in Kazakh and “yle,” “le” in Turkish. For example, the conjunctions “men” and “yle, le”, which link coordinated members, are found only in Kazakh and Turkish. In other Turkic languages, coordinated members are mostly connected by the conjunctions “ham” and “va”, which were borrowed from Arabic and Persian.

In modern Kazakh, while the “men” affix and “men” conjunction share a common origin, they have developed along different paths, as they belong to different grammatical categories in contemporary Kazakh grammar.

The belief that the instrumental (comitative) case particle exists only in Kazakh is a one-sided view. Various Turkic languages have different evolved versions of the “birlan” case particle, such as -bila, -bile, -bunan, -munan, -minäng, -menen, -benen, -penen, -byla, -pyla, -mila, -pala, -palán, -bala, -bilan, -ban, -man, -ba, -pa, -ma, -nan, -dan, -tan, -men, -ben, -pen, -yle, -le, -la, -lo, etc., which are now established as affixes.

This brief study reveals the developmental characteristics of the ancient “birlan” form, showing that various versions have formed in modern Turkic languages while preserving the original case particle meaning, and in some languages, have developed into instrumental case particles and participial suffixes, and even into conjunctions. This

demonstrates that grammatical forms in any language evolve over time, with their functions constantly expanding. The importance of studying languages from a diachronic perspective, rather than just synchronically, is evident from this. Diachronic research is particularly crucial for languages that, due to historical ideological shifts, have diverged despite having genealogical closeness.

The research was conducted within the scope of available materials. Future studies will provide a more detailed examination of the current forms and grammatical functions of the ancient “birlan” in Turkic languages, requiring comprehensive review of works on the grammar of contemporary Turkic-speaking peoples.

## Author Contributions

B.Z. wrote the Introduction, Z.B. reviewed the literature, S.K. selected a method for the study. Z.S., A.K. and M.B. collected the research material, analyzed the study, and were responsible for visualizing the study. All authors participated in writing the Discussion of the study.

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## Institutional Review Board Statement

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## Data Availability Statement

The materials for the study included the following sources:

1) Historical Texts and Literary Works: This included analyzing texts such as the works of A. Baitursynov and other Kazakh scholars who made significant contributions to the development of Kazakh grammar and theory. Specifically, publications in periodicals like “Turkestan Uyalayatynyn

Gazeti” and “Dala Uyalayatynyn Gazeti,” as well as texts like “Kara Sozder” by Abai, were studied.

2) Linguistic Studies and Articles: This included using works of contemporary linguists who researched the use of the form “birlan” and its equivalents in various Turkic languages. This involved articles and studies published in scientific journals and collections.

3) Dictionaries and Reference Books: This involved consulting dictionaries and grammatical references to clarify the meaning and use of the form “birlan” in various contexts and languages.

4) Personal Observations and Field Studies: This involved conducting personal research and observations on the use of the form “birlan” in contemporary speech and literature of Kazakh and other Turkic languages.

These materials allowed for a comprehensive analysis of the form “birlan,” its evolution, and its current function in modern Turkic languages, particularly in the Kazakh language.

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## Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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