

## INTERCHANGEABILITY OF TENSES IN COLLOQUIAL TURKISH

It is a known fact that the traditional grammars of English, based on Greek and Latin models, invariably assign to various tenses, specific functions of time. Yet the actual usage shows that the lines of demarcation are not so rigid as one wishes them to be.

For instance, in the following examples each tense denotes a time function different from that which is normally attached to it.

### *Simple past*

It is high time you *said* it

denoting will say

### *Simple present*

It is called, I *forget* the name, ...

» forgot

### *Present continuous*

I *am going* to London tomorrow

» will go

### *Future*

Thou *shalt not steal*

» should not steal

The aim of the present paper is to furnish similar examples from colloquial Turkish.

In the following sentences, each tense actually might denote another tense. The criterion in the selection of sentences has been that of free variation, that is, each tense in a sentence is interchangeable with another tense it happens to denote, without any significant semantic difference being involved in the change.

Tenses are written with their agglutinative components spaced apart; and slight changes in spelling are due to morphophonemic alternations.

## The Imperative

as indicated by different tenses

*Indicative, simple present* interchangeably with *Imperative*  
*2nd person singular*

Yarın sabah bu mektupları *at ar sin* at  
 Post these letters tomorrow morning

*Indicative, present continuous*  
*2nd person singular*

Toplantıya sen de benimle *gel iyor sun* » gel  
 Come to the meeting with me

*Indicative, future*  
*2nd person singular*

Bu iş için haftaya Ankara'ya *gid ecek sin* » git  
 Go to Ankara next week for this business

*Subjunctive, subjunctive*  
*2nd person singular*

Gece araba kullanırken dikkatli *ol a sin* » ol  
 Be careful when driving at night

*Subjunctive, optative*  
*2nd person singular*

Aa! Sen misin? İçeri *gir sey din* » gir  
 Oh! Is that you? Come in

It is to be noted however that the tenses which indicate the imperative, are all in the 2nd person, the scheme being very much like that of the English usage, where 'you go' might mean 'go!'

The same interchangeability holds true for the five simple tenses of the indicative out of which three basic ones, namely, past definite,

present continuous and future simple, can each also be denoted by the remaining four.

The following is a simplified conjugation chart of these five simple tenses, showing for the sake of simplicity only the singular personal endings.

**Active Voice, Indicative Mood**

<i>Tense</i>	<i>Root</i>	<i>Verbal ending</i>	<i>Personal ending</i>
<i>Past dubitative</i>			
1st person sing	—	miş	im
2nd » »	—	miş	sin
3rd » »	—	miş	
<i>Past definite</i>			
1st person sing	—	di	m
2nd » »	—	di	n
3rd » »	—	di	
<i>Present simple</i>			
1st person sing	—	ir	im
2nd » »	—	ir	sin
3rd » »	—	ir	
<i>Present continuous</i>			
1st person sing	—	iyor	um
2nd » »	—	iyor	sun
3rd » »	—	iyor	
<i>Future simple</i>			
1st person sing	—	eceğ	im
2nd » »	—	ecek	sin
3rd » »	—	ecek	

**Past Definite**

as indicated by the other four tenses

*Past dubitative* interchangeable with *Past definite*

Ben o şehirlerin hepsini *gör müş üm*, arkadaş *gör dü m*  
Well my friend, I have seen all those cities

*Present simple*

Sen de ne diye *bak ar sın*, birader? » *bak tı n*  
And you, why did you have to look?

*Present continuous*

Bu gece sinemaya gidelim *di yor* » *de di*  
Let us go to cinema tonight, he says

*Future simple, negative*

Aldatacaksın da ben *anla mı yacağ ım*, ha? » *anla dı m*  
You cheated me, and I have noticed it

**Present Continuous**

as indicated by the other four tenses

*Past dubitative* interchangeable with *Present continuous*

Bu elbise doğrusu yok *yakış mış* *yakış ıyor*  
This suit actually suits you well

*Past definite*

Çok mu pahalı? Peki sen ne *ver di n?* *ver ıyor sun*  
Too expensive? Well what do you propose?

*Present simple*

Teklif edilen bu işe sen ne *der sin?* *di yor sun*  
What do you say to this job offered?

*Future simple*

Valla, sana 'uçığa binme' *di yeceğ im* *di yor um*  
Well, I tell you not to fly by airplane

**Future Simple**

as indicated by the other four tenses

*Past dubitative* interchangeably with *Future simple*

Yarın canına *oku muş um* o herifin oku yacağ im  
 Tomorrow I'll give him a tough time

*Past definite*

Desene gelecek sene imtahanlarda *yan dı m* yan acağ im  
 So I shall have a rough time in the exams next year

*Present simple*

Artık geç oldu; kitabı yarın *bitir ir im* bitir eceğ im  
 Too late now; I shall finish the book tomorrow

*Present continuous*

Gelecek hafta bir iş için Ankara'ya *gid iyor um* gid eceğ im  
 Next week, I shall go to Ankara for a business affair

One should however note that the time direction of the tenses is towards the future, that means, the past and the present are more likely to indicate the future, than the future to indicate the present or the past.

In the tenses, indicating the future, there is almost invariably a supplementary word or phrase, such as 'tomorrow' or 'next week', which help clarify the future function of the tenses used. On the other hand, no such auxiliary word or phrase as 'yesterday' or 'last week' is possible with the future tense to denote either the present or the past.

All in all, the interchangeability among the tenses in Turkish prove once more the futility of superimposing a preconceived scheme of grammar of a certain language upon a different language. Therefore it would be more advisable to re-define the functions of tenses in Turkish, or in English for that matter, than to insist on the existing schemes, and to dismiss perfectly legitimate uses of the language as exceptional.