

FUTURE TENSE

by Seda Sürel

INTRODUCTION

The future tense suffix -ecek / -acak attaches to the verb stem and marks events expected or planned to occur after the speech moment. The suffix follows two-way vowel harmony and combines with personal endings.

1. Function

The future tense expresses future actions, intentions, scheduled events, or predictions. The tense marker is -ecek / -acak; person is encoded through personal endings.

2. Forms

a. Vowel Harmony (A → a / e)

Back vowels (a, ı, o, u) → -acak

Front vowels (e, i, ö, ü) → -ecek

b. Personal Endings

1st singular: -Im → -acağım / -eceğim

2nd singular: -sın → -acaksın / -eceksin

3rd singular: -Ø → -acak / -ecek

1st plural: -Iz → -acağız / -eceğiz

2nd plural: -sınız → -acaksınız / -eceksiniz

3rd plural: -IAr → -acaklar / -ecekler

3. Consonant Behavior

a. Stem-final alternation

A small set of verb stems ending in t soften to d before the vowel-initial future suffix. This softening is lexically restricted and does not apply to all t-final stems (see section 11 for the full scope).

Examples:

git → gidecek

et → edecek

tat → tadacak

Other voiceless consonants do not soften:

bak → bakacak

çık → çıkacak

kok → kokacak

iç → içecek

FUTURE TENSE

by Seda Sürel

b. Suffix-final alternation

The final consonant k of the future suffix softens to ğ when followed by vowel-initial personal endings:

-ecek + im → eceğim

-ecek + iz → eceğiz

-acak + im → acağım

-acak + iz → acağız

This alternation is internal to the future suffix.

4. Structure

The morphological sequence is:

verb stem → future suffix → personal ending

Examples:

gel + ecek → gelecek

oku + yacak → okuyacak (see section 9 for the buffer consonant y in vowel-final stems)

5. Usage

The future tense is used for:

- planned actions
- expectations
- predictions
- arrangements and schedules

Its temporal reference is strictly future.

6. Negative Form

The negative is formed by inserting the negative suffix -mA before the future suffix.

Because -mA ends in a vowel and -EcEk begins with a vowel, the buffer consonant y appears between them.

Structure:

verb stem → -mA → y → -EcEk → personal ending

FUTURE TENSE

by Seda Sürel

Examples:

gel + me + y + ecek → gelmeyecek
yap + ma + y + acak → yapmayacak
bak + ma + y + acak + ım → bakmayacağım

The k → ğ softening still applies in the negative before vowel-initial personal endings, exactly as in the affirmative.

7. Question Form

The question particle *mi* attaches after the future suffix and before the personal ending, except in the third person plural, where it follows *-lar*. The particle undergoes vowel harmony (*mı / mi / mu / mü*) and is written as a separate word.

Structure:

verb stem → -EcEk → *mi* → personal ending?

Examples:

gel + ecek + *mi* + sin? → Gelecek misin?
yap + acak + *mı* + yım? → Yapacak mıyım?
onlar gelecek + ler + *mi*? → Gelecekler mi?

8. Negative Question Form

The negative and the question particle combine by applying both rules in sequence: negative suffix, buffer *y*, future suffix, question particle, personal ending.

Examples:

gel + me + y + ecek + *mi* + sin? → Gelmeyecek misin?
bak + ma + y + acak + *mı* + sınız? → Bakmayacak mısınız?

9. Buffer Consonant *y*

The future suffix begins with a vowel. When it attaches to a verb stem that also ends in a vowel, the buffer consonant *y* is inserted to keep the two vowels apart. This applies to all vowel-final stems, not only to isolated cases.

FUTURE TENSE

by Seda Sürel

Examples:

oku + y + acak → okuyacak
bekle + y + ecek → bekleyecek
anla + y + acak → anlayacak
izle + y + ecek → izleyecek

This y is a regular part of the vowel-final paradigm and appears in the same position in the negative form (see section 6).

10. Irregular Narrowing: de- and ye-

Two very common verbs, de- (to say) and ye- (to eat), undergo a vowel change before the future suffix. The stem vowel e narrows to i.

Examples:

de + ecek → diyecek
ye + ecek → yiyecek

This narrowing is lexically restricted to these two verbs and does not apply to other e-final stems such as izle- or bekle-.

11. t → d Softening: Scope of the Rule

The softening of stem-final t to d before the future suffix applies only to a small set of verbs, not to all verbs ending in t.

Softens: git → gidecek, et → edecek, tat → tadacak

Does not soften: at → atacak, yat → yatacak, unut → unutacak, bit → bitecek

Learners should treat this as a lexical list to memorize rather than a general phonological rule.

12. Future Tense with Nouns and Adjectives (olmak)

To express a future state rather than a future action, the verb olmak (to be, to become) carries the future suffix. It cannot be attached directly to a noun or adjective.

Examples:

Öğretmen olacağım. — I will be a teacher.
Yorgun olacaksın. — You will be tired.

FUTURE TENSE

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13. Optionality of -IAr in Third Person Plural

In the third person plural, the plural marker -IAr on the verb is optional when the subject (onlar) is stated or understood. Both forms are correct and commonly used.

Examples:

Onlar dönecekler. and Onlar dönecek. are both correct.

Examples

- Yarın gideceğim. — I will go tomorrow.
- Sen bakacaksın. — You will look.
- O başlayacak. — He/She/It will start.
- Biz yazacağız. — We will write.
- Siz konuşacaksınız. — You will speak.
- Onlar dönecekler. — They will return.
- Hava açacak. — The weather will clear up.
- Yarın gelmeyeceğim. — I will not come tomorrow.
- Sen bakmayacaksın. — You will not look.
- Gelecek misin? — Will you come?
- Yapacak mıyız? — Will we do it?
- Bakmayacak mısınız? — Won't you look?
- Ne diyeceksin? — What will you say?
- Yemek yiyecek miyiz? — Will we eat?
- Öğretmen olacağım. — I will be a teacher.
- Onlar dönecek. — They will return.

Notes

- The suffix undergoes vowel harmony and internal softening.
- Verb stems ending in t soften before the future suffix only in a small, memorized set (see section 11).
- Personal endings attach after the tense marker.
- The buffer consonant y appears in every vowel-final stem before the future suffix, in both affirmative and negative forms.
- de- and ye- narrow their stem vowel to i before the future suffix: diyecek, yiyecek.
- The question particle mı is written separately and carries the personal ending, except after -IAr in the third person plural.
- The future suffix cannot attach directly to nouns or adjectives. The verb olmak carries the tense in these cases.
- In spoken Turkish, vowel narrowing is common in casual pronunciation (başlayacak heard as "başlıycak"), though the written form always keeps the full vowel.
- In everyday speech, the present continuous (-lyor) is often used for near-future planned actions instead of the future tense: Yarın geliyorum can mean the same as Yarın geleceğim in context.
- Everyday expressions like bakarız and hallederiz show how Turkish often approaches the future with flexibility rather than certainty