

EVIDENTIAL PAST

by Seda Sürel

INTRODUCTION

The suffix *-miş* marks past events not directly witnessed by the speaker. It expresses inference, hearsay, or indirect knowledge. The suffix undergoes four-way vowel harmony and takes personal endings.

1. Function

The evidential past conveys statements based on indirect evidence, reported information, or inference.

It encodes both tense and evidential meaning.

2. Forms

a. Vowel Harmony (i → i / ı / u / ü)

e / i → *miş*
a / ı → *miş*
o / u → *muş*
ö / ü → *müş*

b. Person Endings

1st singular: -m → *mişim* / *mışım* / *muşum* / *müşüm*
2nd singular: -sin → *mişsin* / *mışsin* / *muşsun* / *müşsun*
3rd singular: -ø → *miş* / *mış* / *muş* / *müş*
1st plural: -iz → *mişiz* / *mışız* / *muşuz* / *müşüz*
2nd plural: -siniz → *mişsiniz* / *mışınız* / *muşsunuz* / *müşsunuz*
3rd plural: -lAr → *mişler* / *mışlar* / *muşlar* / *müşler*

The suffix attaches directly to the verb stem.

3. Consonant Behavior

No consonant alternation occurs at the stem–suffix boundary.

Stems ending in vowels or consonants take *-miş* without buffer consonants.

Examples:

gel → *gelmiş*
bit → *bitmiş*
oku → *okumuş*
yürü → *yürümüş*

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4. Usage

The evidential past is used for:

- reported events
- inferred situations
- outcomes recognized later
- information not directly witnessed

The form indicates indirectness rather than uncertainty.

5. Contrast with Simple Past

The simple past (-di) encodes direct past events.

The evidential past (-miş) encodes indirect past events.

gelmış (heard, inferred)
geldi (directly witnessed)

The distinction is semantic, not temporal.

Examples

- Gelmiş. — Apparently he/she came.
- Bitmiş. — It seems finished.
- Sen çalışmışsun. — It appears you worked.
- Biz duymuşuz. — Apparently we heard.
- Siz bakmışsınız. — Apparently you looked.
- Onlar konuşmuşlar. — It seems they talked.
- Hava değişmiş. — The weather seems to have changed.

Notes

- The suffix encodes evidentiality and past reference simultaneously.
- No buffer consonant is used with -miş.
- Person endings follow regular vowel harmony.