

ABILITY & POSSIBILITY

by Seda Sürel

INTRODUCTION

The suffix -(y)Abil expresses ability, potential, or possibility. It attaches to the verb stem and follows vowel harmony. The meaning depends on the verb and the surrounding context.

1. Function

-(y)Abil indicates:

- capacity or skill
- external possibility
- feasibility or permission

The suffix does not inflect; tense and personal markers follow it.

2. Forms

The suffix harmonizes with the vowel of the verb stem:

Back vowels (a, ı, o, u) → -abil

Front vowels (e, i, ö, ü) → -ebil

If the stem ends in a vowel, y may occur between the stem and the suffix:

oku → okuyabil-
ye → yiyebil-
ara → arayabil-

If the stem ends in a consonant, no buffer appears:

gel → gelebil-
bak → bakabil-
sev → sevebil-

3. Position in the Verb Structure

-(y)Abil appears immediately after the verb stem and before tense, aspect, and personal endings.

Sequence:

verb stem → -(y)Abil → tense/aspect → personal ending

Examples:

gel-e-bil-ir
yap-a-bil-ecek
oku-y-a-bil-di
ara-y-a-bil-iyor

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4. Interaction with Tense

-(y)Abil combines with all tense and aspect markers.

Present:

gelebilir, yapabilir

Future:

yapabileceğim, alabileceksiniz

Past:

yapabildim, görebildik

Continuous:

görebiliyordum, yapabiliyorsunuz

The ability suffix retains its position regardless of tense.

5. Negation

Negation is formed with the negative marker -ma / -me, which surfaces as -ama / -eme according to vowel harmony.

The negative marker precedes -(y)Abil.

Back vowel stems → -ama

Front vowel stems → -eme

If the stem ends in a vowel, y may appear between the negative marker and -(y)Abil.

Sequence:

verb stem → negative (-(a)ma / -(e)me) → -(y)Abil → tense → person

Examples:

- gel-e-me-y-e-bil-ir
- yap-a-ma-y-a-bil-ir
- oku-y-a-ma-y-a-bil-di
- gör-e-me-y-e-bil-ecek
- al-a-ma-y-a-bil-dik

Examples

- Yapabilirim. — I can do it.
- Gelebilirsin. — You can come.
- O görebilir. — He/She can see.
- Biz yapabileceğiz. — We will be able to do it.
- Siz alabilirsiniz. — You can take it.
- Onlar duyabildiler. — They were able to hear.
- Koşamadım ama yürüyebildim. — I could not run, but I was able to walk.

Notes

- The ability marker follows the stem and precedes tense and personal markers.
- The negative marker surfaces as -ama / -eme before -(y)Abil.
- Buffer y appears only with vowel-final stems.