

THE VERB "TO BE"

by Seda Sürel

INTRODUCTION

In the present tense, Turkish nominal sentences use personal endings to mark person and number. There is no separate verb corresponding to "to be" in these sentences.

Predication is expressed through endings attached to the predicate. The third person singular uses a zero form. Other tenses and constructions follow different patterns, which you will learn at later levels.

1. Structure of Nominal Predication

The basic pattern is:

Predicate + Personal ending

The predicate may be a noun, adjective, or locative phrase (such as *evde*, "at home").

Examples:
Öğretmenim.
Hazırsın.
Evdeyiz.

2. Personal Endings

The endings follow four-way vowel harmony. The third person plural ending *-IAr* is the exception and follows two-way harmony.

1st singular (ben): *-(y)Im* → *ım / im / um / üm*
Öğretmenim.

2nd singular (sen): *-sIn* → *sın / sin / sun / sün*
Hazırsın.

3rd singular (o): *-ø* (no ending)
Hasta.

1st plural (biz): *-(y)Iz* → *ız / iz / uz / üz*
Evdeyiz.

2nd plural (siz): *-sInIz* → *sınız / siniz / sunuz / sünüz*
Yoğunsunuz.

3rd plural (onlar): *-IAr* → *lar / ler*
Mutlular.

The consonant *y* appears before the *ben* and *biz* endings when the predicate ends in a vowel. See Section 4.

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3. Zero Form (3rd Singular)

Third person singular takes no ending:

O hasta.
Bu doğru.
Ev büyük.

You may also see the suffix -DİR in the third person (Bu doğrudur). It adds a sense of certainty or general truth and is common in formal and written Turkish. At A1 level, the zero form is enough for everyday sentences.

4. Buffer Consonant y (Vowel-Final Predicates)

When the predicate ends in a vowel and the personal ending begins with a vowel, y appears:

iyi → iyiyim
mavi → maviyim
hasta → hastayım
mutlu → mutluyum

All of these show vowel + vowel sequences resolved by the buffer y.

5. Direct Attachment (Consonant-Final Predicates)

If the predicate ends in a consonant, the personal ending attaches directly since no buffer is needed:

hazır → hazırsın
zengin → zenginiz
tembel → tembelsiniz

Some words undergo consonant softening before vowel-initial personal endings. For example, genç → gencim (ç → c).

6. Plural Predication

When the subject onlar is present, the predicate may appear with or without plural marking:

Onlar mutlu.
Onlar mutlular.

Both forms are grammatical. When the subject is omitted, -lAr can indicate that the subject is plural:

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Mutlular.

In everyday Turkish, context may also make the plural meaning clear:

Çocuklar nerede? Bahçede.

With non-human plural subjects, -IAr is usually omitted:

Evler büyük.

7. Full Conjugation with Different Predicates

hazır

ben hazırım · sen hazırsın · o hazır · biz hazırız · siz hazırsınız · onlar hazır(lar)

hasta

ben hastayım · sen hastasın · o hasta · biz hastayız · siz hastasınız · onlar hasta(lar)

iyi

ben iyiyim · sen iyisin · o iyi · biz iyiyiz · siz iyisiniz · onlar iyi(ler)

mutlu

ben mutluyum · sen mutlusun · o mutlu · biz mutluyuz · siz mutlusunuz · onlar mutlu(lar)

üzgün

ben üzgünüm · sen üzgünsün · o üzgün · biz üzgünüz · siz üzgünsünüz · onlar üzgün(ler)

The buffer y appears only in the ben and biz forms of vowel-final words (hasta, iyi, mutlu). The parentheses in the onlar forms show that -IAr is optional when onlar is present.

Examples

- Ben öğretmenim. : I am a teacher.
- Sen hazırsın. : You are ready.
- O güzel. : He/She/It is beautiful.
- Biz evdeyiz. : We are at home.
- Siz yoğunsunuz. : You (plural/honorific) are busy.
- Onlar mutlu. : They are happy.
- Onlar mutlular. : They are happy.
- Mutlular. : They are happy.

Notes

- In the present tense, Turkish nominal predicates use personal endings without a verb stem.
- Third person singular is marked by a zero form.
- The buffer consonant y prevents vowel–vowel sequences.
- Third person plural may include or omit -IAr when onlar is present. When onlar is omitted, -IAr can make the plural subject explicit.