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

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

*Present continuous*
I *am going* to London *tomorrow*

*Future*
Thou *shalt 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**
2nd person singular

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

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

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

**Indicative, future**
2nd person singular

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

**Subjunctive, subjunctive**
2nd person singular

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

**Subjunctive, optative**
2nd person singular

Aa! Sen misin? İçeri *gir sey din*
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**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tense</th>
<th>Root</th>
<th>Verbal ending</th>
<th>Personal ending</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Past dubitative</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st person sing</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>miș</td>
<td>im</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd » »</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>miș</td>
<td>sin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd » »</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>miș</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Past definite</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st person sing</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>di</td>
<td>m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd » »</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>di</td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd » »</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>di</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Present simple</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st person sing</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>ir</td>
<td>im</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd » »</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>ir</td>
<td>sin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd » »</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>ir</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Present continuous</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st person sing</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>iyor</td>
<td>um</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd » »</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>iyor</td>
<td>sun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd » »</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>iyor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Future simple</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st person sing</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>eceğ</td>
<td>im</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd » »</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>ecek</td>
<td>sin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd » »</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>ecek</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Past Definite

as indicated by the other four tenses

Past dubitative interchangeable with Past definite

Ben o şehirlerin hepsini gör mü; üm, arkadaş gör düm
Well my friend, I have seen all those cities

Present simple

Sen de ne diye bak ar sin, birader? bak tın
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 yacağım, ha? anla di 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 yahıs mıș yahıs iyör
This suit actually suits you well

Past definite

Çok mu pahalı? Peki sen ne ver di n? ver iyör 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 'uçaga 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
Yarın canına oku mus um o herifin
Tomorrow I'll give him a tough time

Past definite
Desene gelecek sene imtahanlarda yan d1 m
So I shall have a rough time in the exams next year

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

Present continuous
Gelecek hafta bir iş için Ankara'ya gid iyor um
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.

Özcan Başkan