

# Present Continuous Tense in Teaching Turkish as a Foreign Language

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## 1. Introduction

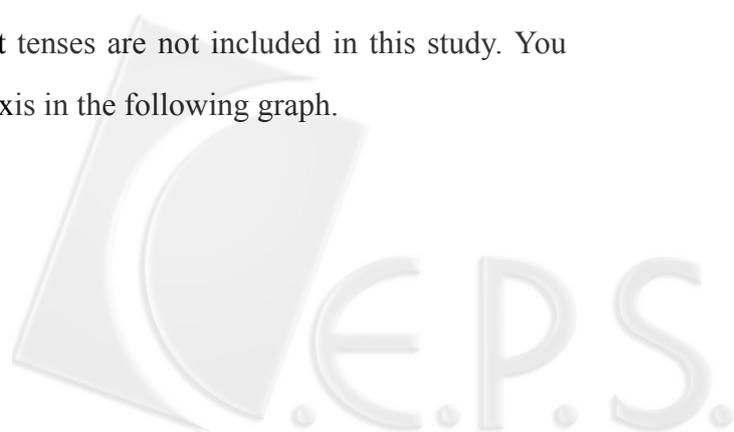
We can briefly define the term “tense (kip)” as structures of the verb in different forms by getting different suffixes (e.g. Tense and pronoun suffixes). Uzun (2004, 150) defines the term “tense (kip)” as the category which is presented by the instructor’s annex to the proposal in the study named “Fundamental Concepts of Grammar (Dilbilgisi Temel Kavramları)”. The instructor may load meanings to sentence in different concepts like statement, necessity, wish, request, negativeness, question, advice, caution, aim, ability, probability, possibility, permission, prohibition, suspicion and condition. Another researcher, Korkmaz (569) defines the term “tense” (kip) as a grammatical structure, a way of explanation which displays the way of the instructor’s, listener’s and the subject’s understanding about behaviour and happening of the infinitive verb. Muharrem Ergin classifies the tenses as statement tenses and contemplation tenses. According to Ergin, there are two types of objects: seen or would-be acting, contemplated acting. The root and infinitive of the verb takes different shapes to form these two actings. Therefore, some verb structures display the current happening or future happenings. These tenses are called statement tenses. Another type of verb structure displays a meaning of planned future happening. These tenses are called as contemplation tenses (Ergin 281). On the other hand, Tahsin Banguoğlu defines this classification as true time tenses and notification tenses (Banguoğlu 458). We can study all verbs in Turkey Turkish in two parts in the light of different definitions. These are statement tenses and wish tenses. Some resaeachers define statement tense as informative tense and wish tense as contemplation tenses.

Statement tenses are generally used to tell the persona an incidents which already happened or surely will happen (Hepçilingirler 250). Tense is very important in

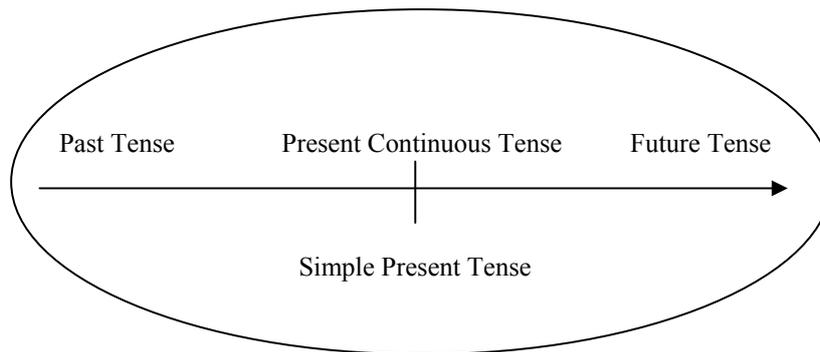
telling the persona an incident or statement. Hence, time is considered as the fundamental component in all tenses. Muharrem Ergin defines the statement tenses as negative or positive actings and happenings or the incidents surely will happen (Ergin 281). In teaching Turkish as a foreign language, calling statement tenses as time suffixes makes it convenient to learn Turkish.

Time is defined by Üstünova as continuous happening that does not have beginning or ending, by Hepçilingirler as variable, relative and abstract. We generally separate the time in three different parts. These parts are called yesterday, today and tomorrow. Yesterday tells the one about happened action (e.g. it rained). Today tells the one about happening action (e.g. it is raining). Tomorrow tells the one about would-be action (e.g. it will rain). While happened action indicates the past, yesterday, happening action indicates the present time, now and today. Besides would-be action indicates the future, later and tomorrow. (Üstünova 9). Uzun (2004, 152) studies the time in two formats: absolute times and relative times. According to Uzun, absolute times are past, present and future. Relative times are the ones places on the time axis according to absolute times. From this point of view, relative times have correlation with absolute times in two aspects. These are called as anterior and posterior (Uzun 2004, 152). Uzun calls the concepts of appearance, tense and time as devil triangle and interprets those in his study of “Fundamental Concepts of Grammar” in a different way than the traditional Turkish grammar resources (Uzun 2004, 143-167).

In Turkey Turkish statement tense is classified with four parts. These are present continuous tense, past tense, future tense and simple present tense. Past tense is divided into two parts. These are simple past tense (experienced past tense with a suffix –di), past perfect tense (heard past tense with a suffix –miş). In order to separate the statement tenses from joint tenses like narrative, rumor, condition, these tenses are also called simple tenses. Joint tenses are not included in this study. You can see the positioning of tenses on time axis in the following graph.



Graph 1. Positioning of tenses on time axis



In Turkish language, the suffixes added to verbs in statement tenses (-yor, -dı, -mış- acak, -ar) indicate the timing of action. These suffixes indicate some differences according to verbs classified as exceptionals with the suffixes (-dı, -di, -du, -dü, -tı, -ti, -tu, -tü) as per vowels in infinitive form of the verb.

## 2. Present Continuous Tense

In teaching Turkish as a foreign language, the very first grammatical structure aimed to be taught and expected from students to acquire is the present continuous tense. We can say it is almost the same method used in textbooks of teaching German and English as a foreign language. (See Deutsch Aktiv, Eurolingua, Headway). The reason why the first place is given to the present continuous tense in teaching indicative mood is that it is easier to learn compared to other tenses for sure. First sentences that a new learner wanting to speak out something asks and answers questions in that foreign language are question sentences like; “How are you?”, “What’s your name?”, “Who are you?”, “Where are you from?” or noun clauses like; “I’m fine”, “I am Turkish”, My name is Mehmet”, or “Can you speak Turkish?” , “Can you understand me?”, “Where are you coming from?” which are structured in present continuous tense. The flow which is called “grammatical ordering” and followed in foreign language teaching must be designed according to the needs of language learners instead of going from easy to difficult subjects. Although content of the traditional books for teaching Turkish follow the process of “from simple to

complicated” , works that go opposite with this process can be found. “Yeni Hitit Turkish for foreigners” which is developed by Ankara University TOMER is one of the good examples for these works.

In this section, present continuous tense is explained considering it’s meaning, function, suffixes it gets, and exceptional cases in Turkish. Present continuous tense in general is a tense which describes today and/or the very moment. However, we can see that some of the present continuous tense sentences do not tell us about now, today or this moment. That’s why it’s necessary to make a classification (as below) to describe the functions of present continuous tense.

(1) Present continuous tense sentences are used to describe the actions happening at the time of speech.

*Lütfen gürültü yapma, ders çalışıyorum.*

Don’t make noise, I am studying.

*Can nerede? Duş alıyor.*

Where is Can? He is taking a shower.

*Hadi dışarı çıkalım. Artık yağmur yağmıyor.*

Let’s go outside. It’s not raining anymore.

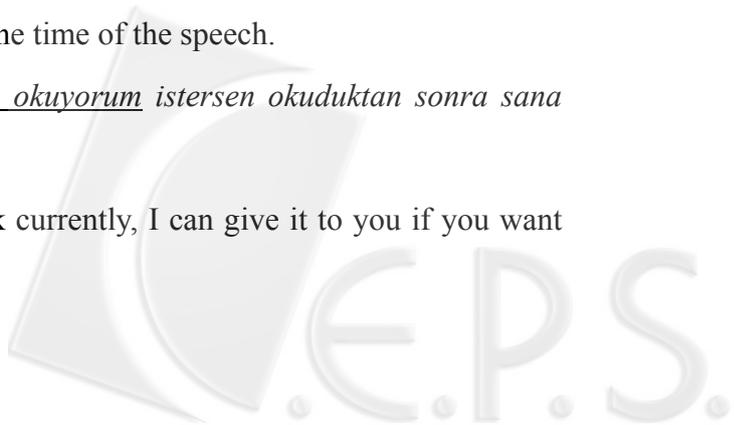
*Merhaba Aydın, spor mu yapıyorsun?*

Hello Aydın, are you doing exercise?

(2) Present continuous tense can be used in some sentences to describe an action which started before and still going on at the time of the speech.

*“Şu sıralarda çok ilginç bir kitap okuyorum istersen okuduktan sonra sana veririm.”*

“I am reading an interesting book currently, I can give it to you if you want when I am done with it.”



The sentence above shows that action of reading started before and haven't finished yet. And the sentences below show that action started before and it is going on at that moment.

*Meryem üniversitede tarih okuyor.*

Meryem is studying history at the university.

*Belediye bizim mahalleye yeni bir park yapıyor.*

Municipality is building a new park in our neighbourhood.

(3) Present continuous tense is used to describe the recent events or actions. In these sentences, adverbs like “today, this week, this month, this summer” emphasize the intention of recent time.

*Bugün çok çalışıyorum. Evet, çok işim var.*

I am working a lot today. Yes, I have lots of things to do.

*Hakan bu yaz tatile çıkmıyor. Tezini bitirmek istiyor.*

Hakan is not going for a vacation this summer. He wants to complete his thesis.

*Bu hafta birlikte sinemaya gidiyoruz, değil mi?*

We are going to the cinema this week, aren't we?

(4) Present continuous tense can be used for changing conditions.

*Dünya nüfusu çok hızlı artıyor.*

World population is increasing very fast.

*Hastalığı nasıl oldu? İyileşiyor mu?*

How is his sickness? Is he feeling better?



(5) Some of the sentences in present continuous tense show similarities with sentences in future tense. In other words, using future tense in these sentences do not change the meaning. The moment about taking place describe the events which are going to happen. That is the *future*. These kind of sentences generally are strengthened by the adverbs like “tomorrow, next week, next month”.

*Yarın sabah Moskova'ya uçuyorum.*

I am flying to Moscow tomorrow morning.

*Türkiye yarın Almanya ile oynuyor. Karşılaşma saat 20.00'de başlıyor.*

Turkey is playing with Germany tomorrow. Game is starting at 20:00

*Yaşasın! Gelecek hafta tatile çıkıyorum.*

Hooray! I am going on a vacation next week.

(6) Some present continuous tense sentences are used to describe the habits. These kinds of sentences are similar in meaning with the sentences in present simple tense. Our habits signal not only today, but also yesterday and tomorrow. These kind of sentences are reinforced by the adverbs like; “every, usually, frequently, in the mornings, in the evenings”.

*Her sabah saat yedide kalkıyorum, yarım saat koşuyorum.*

I get up at 7 o'clock every day, and run for half an hour.

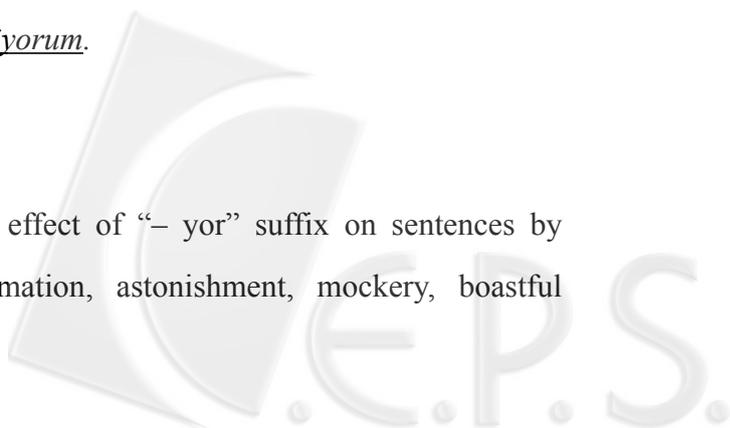
*Akşamları kitap okuyorum ya da televizyon seyrediyorum.*

I either read books or watch TV in the evenings.

*Genellikle haber programlarını izliyorum.*

I usually watch the news.

Turgay Sebzecioğlu determined the effect of “-yor” suffix on sentences by classifying into the topics of; proclamation, astonishment, mockery, boastful



behavior, praise, grievance, complaint, correction, criticism, persuasion, accusation, warning, question, curiosity, inference, comprehension, yearning, umbrage, indignation, sadness (Sebzecioğlu 18-33). Sebzecioğlu, as a result of his classification study, suggests that “-yor” suffix indicate *continuity* more than *time*, and “-yor” suffix must be under the type of proclamation suffixes rather than tense suffixes and an aspect element which can take place in sentences structured in the other moods. These kinds of studies show us how functional and diverse features present continuous tense possess compared to others. In addition to stating the extreme importance of defining the diverse use of present continuous tense, it is considered that fundamental meaning of present continuous tense mentioned above would be sufficient in teaching Turkish as a foreign language. On the other hand, “I am reading a book” in the sentence “Please do not disturb me, I am reading a book” and “I am in the process of reading a book” in the sentence “Please do not disturb me, I am in the process of reading a book” have the same meaning but, if grammar considered studying the former under the tense suffixes and the later under the nominalization would be a more correct planning. However, “I am reading” and “I am in the process of reading” both indicate the same time, now. In spite of the fact that new approaches and methods emphasize that grammar should be considered as a tool rather than an aim, many institutions teaching Turkish as a foreign language still concentrate on teaching grammar. As a result, learner becomes a person who knows the rules of the language rather than handling how to speak in the target language. European Council suggested in Common European Framework of Reference for Languages that grammar instruction not be considered as the aim but as a tool in acquisition of fundamental language abilities (CEF 2001).

### **3. Analyzing the Present Continuous Tense in Aspects of Suffixes and Conjugation**

The features of Turkish being an agglutinative language and having logical consistency, though there are some exceptions, make it easy to teach and learn.

Therefore, a learner of Turkish language can make a big progress once they figure out these characteristics of Turkish. These factors can offer a lot more advantages for those who have mathematical and logical intelligence as well as linguistics intelligence. We can say that the rules of Turkish is much easier than mathematical formulas. Unlike Math, in Turkish Grammar, there are no divisions, multiplications or substructions, but only additions such as  $(1 + 2 + 3 = 6)$  or  $(gel + iyor + um = geliyorum)$ . Knowing this fact about Turkish can make it very easy for a learner. For this reason, most of the grammatical structures of Turkish are shown in formulas.

(a) In Turkish, the tense suffixes differ in depending on the vowels in the stem or root of the verb. It's because of the vowel harmony rules of Turkish. Classifications of vowels in Turkish as Front-Back, Rounded-Unrounded, and High-Low are keys in teaching Turkish. The agreement of Front and Back Vowels is called Front/End Harmony. This is a unique, the most important and basic rules of Turkish. According to this rule, a word with the back vowels *a, ı, o, u* in it, can be followed only by addings with back vowels. Same way, a word with the front vowels can have addings vowels only with *e, i, ö, ü*. However, this rule does not apply some foreign words derived from Arabic, French, English, and so on. Tense suffixes in all indicative moods apply this rule except for the present continuous tense suffix “-yor”.

Eg: *sevmek*(to like) *Kedi sütü seviyor*. (The cat likes milk.)

As you can see in the example above, there is the letter “o” in the tense suffix. However after *e* or *i* sound in the first letter is supposed to be followed by the front vowel “i” as a rule. The table below shows the vowels according to their attributes.

Table 1: Vowels according to their attributes

	Unrounded		Rounded	
	Low	High	Low	High
Front	e	i	ö	ü
Back	a	ı	o	u

As a result of vowel harmony mentioned above, there are four appearances of the present continuous tenses. They are -iyor (*O ödev yapıyor.* - He is doing his homework.), -iyor(*O okula geliyor* - He is coming to school), -uyor (*O koşuyor* - He is running) and -üyor (*Ali gülüyor* - Ali is smiling). As you can see in the example given, the high vowels *ı, i, u, ü* before the tense suffix 'yor' differs in depending on the last vowel in the root. Therefore, we can classify them in four categories as follow:

- a. The tense suffix is 'iyor' if the last vowel is 'e' or 'i' in the root of the verb.
- b. The tense suffix is 'iyor' if the last vowel is 'a' or 'ı' in the root of the verb.
- c. The tense suffix is 'uyor' if the last vowel is 'o' or 'u' in the root of the verb.
- d. The tense suffix is 'üyor' if the last vowel is 'ö' or 'ü' in the root of the verb.

However, if the last vowel in the verb root is the final sound, we cannot categorize as shown above because in this case the final sound is a vowel and the suffix -iyor begins with a vowel. In Turkish two vowels never come together. For this reason, the suffixes *-iyor, -iyor, -uyor, -üyor* are transformed to *-yor*:

Eg: *uyumak* (to sleep)      *Kedi uyuyor.* (The cat is sleeping.)

*okumak* (to read)      *Öğrenci kitap okuyor.* (The student is reading a book.)

(b) There is an exception when transforming the suffix -iyor into -yor. If the final vowel is *a* or *e* in the verb root, they are replaced by *ı, i, u,* or *ü* with the influence of the consonant 'y' in the suffix 'yor'.

Eg: *dinlemek* (to listen)      *Müzik dinliyorum.* (I'm listening to music.)

*anlamak* (to understand)      *Seni anlıyorum.* (I understand.)

*şarkı söylemek* (to sing)      *Şarkı söylüyor.* (I'm singing a song.)

*futbol oynamak* (to play football)      *Futbol oynuyorlar.* (They are playing football.)

(c) There is a similar situation with the consonant 't' seen in the verbs *etmek,* *gitmek,* and *tatmak.* Yet, the situation here is different. The exceptional situation here

is that the consonant 't' becomes softer. That is, when these verbs are added with a suffix beginning with a vowel, the 't' sound is replaced by a softer sound 'd'.

Eg: *etmek* (to make)      *Sohbet ediyoruz.*(We are having conversation.)  
      *gitmek* (to go)        *Bugün gidiyorum.*(I am going today.)  
      *tatmak* (to taste)      *Türk yemeklerini tadıyorum.* (I am tasting Turkish food.)

(d) The infixes *-me* and *-ma* added to the verbal stem indicates negation. In Turkish *-mek* and *-mak* added to the root make the verb positive infinitive and *-memek* and *-mamak* negative infinitive (*koşmak- koşmamak, yürüme- yürümeme*; to run-not to run, to walk-not to walk). But if the verb is conjugated in present continuous tense, the negation infixes *-me* and *-ma* changes to be *-mi, -mi, -mu* and *mü* because the verbal root is added to a negation adding, and the negation adding ends in a vowel, which is 'e' or 'a'. Therefore, the sounds 'a' and 'e' are transformed into the sounds *ı, i, u, ü*. The transformation of the negation suffixes 'me' and 'ma' into *-mi, -mi, -mu, and -mü* is the unique situation of the present continuous tense, and it can't be seen in other tenses. In the other tenses, adding *-me* or *-ma* to the verbal root is enough to indicate negation.

Eg: *içmemek* (not to drink)      *Ben çay içmiyorum.* (I'm not drinking tea.)  
      *bakmamak* (not to look)      *Ben sana bakmıyorum.* (I'm not looking at you.)  
      *yememek* (not to eat)        *Yemek yemiyor musun?*(Aren't you eating meal?)

(e) The present continuous tense in Turkish is different from that in other languages because of its unique agglutinative characteristics. In Indian- European languages such as German, verbs don't change at all and cannot be added personal suffixes. However, in Turkish, verbs take different suffixes depending on the personal pronoun in the sentence. For instance, in the sentence, "Kitap okuyorum." (I'm reading a book.) doesn't have personal pronoun "Ben"(I) but the suffix "um" in the end of the verb indicates the first person singular. So, we can list the personal

pronouns as follow:

<b>Ben</b> gülüyorum.	→	Gülüyorum.	→	gül + üyor + <b>um</b>	I'm smiling.
<b>Sen</b> gülüyorsun.	→	Gülüyorsun.	→	gül + üyor + <b>sun</b>	You're smiling.(Singular 'you')
<b>O</b> gülüyor.	→	Gülüyor.	→	gül + üyor + <b>Ø</b>	He's/She's/It's smiling.
<b>Biz</b> gülüyoruz.	→	Gülüyoruz.	→	gül + üyor + <b>uz</b>	We're smiling.
<b>Siz</b> gülüyorsunuz.	→	Gülüyorsunuz.	→	gül + üyor + <b>sunuz</b>	You're smiling.(Plural 'you')
<b>Onlar</b> gülüyorlar	→	Gülüyorlar.	→	gül + üyor + <b>lar</b>	They're smiling.

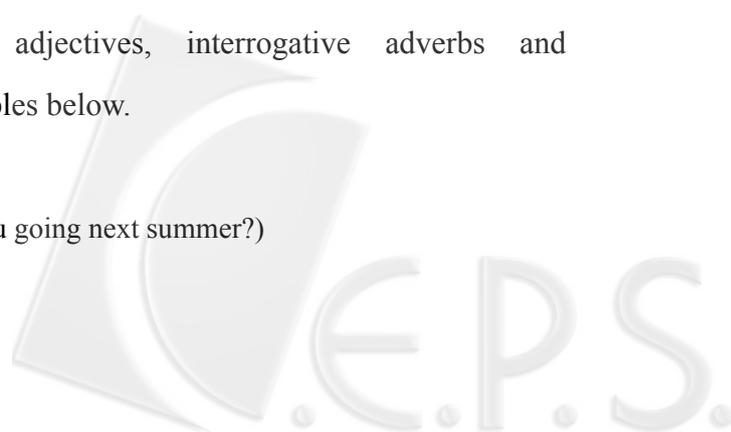
Since the present continuous tense suffix 'yor' coming after the verb root never changes, the suffixes following it also doesn't change. In other words, the vowel 'o' in the suffix 'yor' doesn't change. Consequently, the following additions are also left unchanged. It makes it easy for students to learn personal suffixes added to verb since vowels in the suffixes *-um*, *-sun*, *-uz*, *-sunuz* and *-lar* are always the same.

We have covered the present continuous tense in the aspects of positive, negative and personal suffixes. In the final part we will look at the suffixes *-mi*, *-mi*, *-mu*, and *-mü* called question particles. In this section, we will see how to use these suffixes in the present continuous tense.

(f) In Turkish, the word used in the place of a noun in a question is called interrogative pronoun. Among these words, the word *kim*(who) is used for people; *ne* (what), *kaç* (how many/much), *hangi* (which) for animals and things. Although interrogative pronouns usually remain in bare form, they get noun form suffixes (indicative, dative, locative and ablative) and are conjugated. Hepçilingirler (127) classifies the words indicating questions in four categories in Turkish. They are interrogative pronouns, interrogative adjectives, interrogative adverbs and interrogative particles shown in the examples below.

Yazın *nereye* gideceksin? (Where are you going next summer?)

Soru adılı(Interrogative pronouns)



*Akşama hangi giysiyi giyeyim?* (Which clothes are you going to wear this evening?)

Soru sıfatı( interrogative adjectives)

*Sınavın nasıl geçti?* (How was the test?)

Soru belirteci (interrogative adverbs)

*Dün kimlerle konuştuğumu biliyor musun?* (Do you know whom I talked to yesterday?)

Soru ilgeci (interrogative particles)

The question particles *-mı*, *-mi*, *-mu*, and *-mü*, attached with personal suffix comes immediatly after the tense suffix *-yor* in the present continuous tenses except for pronoun 'onlar' (third person plural). In such sentences, question particle comes after the personal suffix 'lar'. One of the most common mistakes that we may come across in teaching Turkish as a foreign language is that students combine question particle with the verb. Since question particles are considered as a word, they cannot be combined with nouns. On the other hand, sentences made with question particles end with a question mark “?”.

(g) Since the vowel in the tense suffix *-yor* in the present continuous tense, the question particle is “mu” according to vowel harmony. This situation changes only with “onlar”, the third person plural, and “mu” is replaced by “mı” as in “*Onlar geliyorlar mı?* (Are they coming?) because “*Onlar geliyor mular*” is incorrect. The following examples illustrate how the question particles look like depending on personal pronouns.

*Ben seni tanıyor muyum?* (Do I know you?)                      mu + y + um

*Sen Türkçe bilmiyor musun?* (Do you speak Turkish?)                      mu + sun

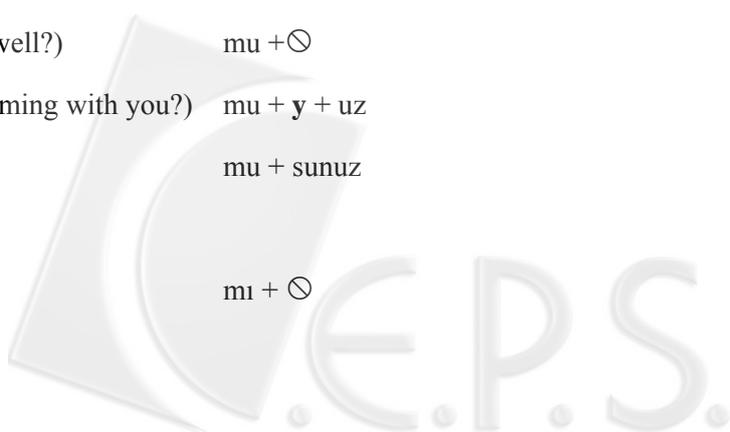
*O güzel konuşuyor mu?* (Does he speak well?)                      mu + ⊙

*Biz de sizinle geliyor muyuz?* (Are we coming with you?)                      mu + y + uz

*Siz Türk kahvesi içiyor musunuz?*                      mu + sunuz

(Are you drinking Turkish coffee?)

*Onlar şimdi uyuyorlar mı?*                      mı + ⊙



(Are they sleeping now?)

In the question sentences made with the pronouns 'ben', the personal singular and 'biz' the first person plural, the consonant 'y' comes between the personal suffixes *-um* and *-uz* and interrogative particle *-mu*. This is because of the rule in Turkish that a vowel cannot follow another vowel in one word. The following two sentences both mean “Are they sleeping now?”

*Onlar şimdi uyuyorlar mı?*                      mı + ⊙

*Onlar şimdi uyuyor mu?*                      mu + ⊙

(h) Unlike English and German, the third person singular pronoun doesn't specify the gender. The pronoun “o” is used for male, female, animals and inanimate things. By the same token, regardless the gender, the particle *-mu* never changes.

*Kadın süt içiyor mu?*    *Is the woman drinking milk?*    (feminine)

*Adam süt içiyor mu?*    *Is the man drinking milk?*    (masculine)

*Kedi süt içiyor mu?*    *Is the cat drinking milk?*    (neutral)

*Çiçek süt içiyor mu?*    *Is the flower drinking milk?*    (neutral)

Analyzing the present continuous tense in the aspects of suffix and conjugation, we can show the conjugation as seen below:

Table 2. Conjugation of the Present Continuous Tense

Pronoun	Affirmative	Negative	Positive Interrogative	Negative Interrogative
Ben	seviyorum	sevmiyorum	seviyor muyum	sevmiyor muyum
Sen	seviyorsun	sevmiyorsun	seviyor musun	sevmiyor musun
O	seviyor	sevmiyor	seviyor mu	sevmiyor mu
Biz	seviyoruz	sevmiyoruz	seviyor muyuz	sevmiyor muyuz
Siz	seviyorsunuz	sevmiyorsunuz	seviyor musunuz	sevmiyor musunuz
Onlar	seviyorlar	sevmiyorlar	seviyorlar mı	sevmiyorlar mı

We can expand the tables as above. Such tables summarize the grammatical structures. They should remain just as reference tables. Using only these tables are not enough to get students to speak and understand what they read and listen to. And also teaching a foreign language is not teaching Maths. In teaching Maths, while formula has the fundamental importance, in language teaching it is just a tool.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The main suffix of present continuous tense *-yor* is compatible with other suffixes in Turkish language vowel harmony. The main suffix of present continuous tense *-yor* gives not only a meaning of today or present, but also the past or the future happenings. One of the important reasons of teaching present continuous tense is that this tense provides to the learners a wide range of coverage for other tenses. Thus, the learners can express themselves without using other tenses. It is considered that in teaching present continuous tense it would be better to lead a teaching by giving sample conversations and texts about daily life rather than grammatical teaching.



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