

Some remarks on future reference in Turkish

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In almost all languages reference can be made to action or states prior to the time of utterance, to those simultaneous with the time of the the utterance and finally to future acts and states, but this reference admits of categorization in many different ways in different languages.

Under the influence of traditional grammar, in English and in many other western languages, this tripartite system of past, present and future was recognized as basic for tense categorization, and indeed it was considered almost a universal phenomenon. This was rather an oversimplification or rather a monistic view of language. However, in recent years a similar reductionist view seems to reign over discussions of tense, in particular with reference to the Turkish tense system.

Following O. Jespersen (1049,299) several scholars conceded that 'English has no pure future tense' (i.e. Allen 1960, Leech 1975) because future was colored with modality in many cases. Now this idea seems to be extended to cover future reference in Turkish too (see e.g. Kuruoğlu in Koç and Erguvanlı).

It is a truism that future as a yet non-materialized piece of time, is most liable to modal interpretation, and future tense markers often do indicate intention, wish, plan, expectation, certainty etc.; yet the mere fact that these dispositions are records of occurrences or states expressed as intentions, plans (whatever) to take place in future rather than, for example, at a recent past, indicates that one can talk of future temporal reference in languages. This is at least true for the Turkish language.

In Turkish the characteristic marker of future reference is (y)EcEk.

Note the following sentences:

1. Bugün yağmur yağacak (It will rain today)

2. Biraz sonra hava kararacak (It will soon get dark)

3. Barış 1995'te üç yaşına girecek (Barış will be three years old in 1995)

All three sentences are unmarked significations of a future occurrence; the first two are predictions and the third sentence is a descriptive statement of fact.

Let us now change the sentence slightly and see the consequences:

4. Bugün herhalde yağmur yağacak.

5. Diyelim biraz sonra hava kararacak.

6. Barış sanırım 1995'te üç yaşına girecek.

Now the addition of adjuncts like *herhalde* (probably, in any case) *diyelim* (say), *sanırım* (I think) to the previous sentences changes the import of future marker *(y)EcEk* in that it is no longer an unmarked, neuter future indicator in each case but shows the strong conviction, assumption and guess of the speaker respectively and thus has a modal as well as temporal implications. This change in its significations is due largely to the use of adjuncts indicating various attitudes rather than anything else. Therefore, abstract specifications as to the occurrence or non-occurrence of pure future reference, in Turkish are not valid. The prime signification of *(y)EcEk* is future temporal reference, but depending on the co-text or context of the utterance it may have modal or non-modal import. Let us consider the sentences below:

7. Arkadaşım önümüzdeki yıl üniversiteyi bitirecek (My friend will finish the university next year).

8. Yirmibirinci yüzyılda dilbiliminin önemi azalmayacak (The importance of linguistics will not be reduced in the 21st century).

These are again 'matter of fact statements' about some future occurrence, but we can interpret them as having modal implications if we assume an underlying adjunct, so perhaps a valid test for unmarked/marked use of *(y)EcEk* could be the possibility of addition or deletion of modal adverbs. For example in the sentence:

9. Hava bugün mutlaka kararacak

mutlaka (certainly) is redundant, therefore *(y)EcEk* has an unmarked neuter future reference whereas in the sentence:

10. Bugün yağmur yağacak.

(y)EcEk is predictive and basically temporal, but depending on the context of use we may assume an underlying *belki* (perhaps) or *sanırım* (I think). That is, it is ambiguous out of context. Such cases indicate that there is an un-

derlying adjunct, but it is optionally deleted. Under such circumstances (y)*EcEk* is more of a modal indicator than a temporal marker; otherwise it is basically temporal. Therefore, future time reference is not lacking in Turkish (i.e. it is not always modal) but it is colored with modality because of the surface/deep occurrence of a certain modal adjunct.

Another indication which shows that future reference is basically a temporal concept in Turkish is that (y)*EcEk* is kept as such in embedded constructions whereas some other tense markers are lost:

11. Ahmet 'Yarın geliyorum.' dedi.

Ahmet yarın geleceğini söyledi (Ahmet said he would come tomorrow).

12. Çocuk 'Okula gideceğim' dedi.

Çocuk okula gideceğini söyledi (The boy said he would go to school).

13. Ali 'Yarın erken gelirim' dedi.

Ali yarın erken geleceğini söyledi (Ali said he would come early tomorrow).

As is clear from these examples, tense markers *-Iyor* and *-Ir* are lost in these embedded constructions but (y)*EcEk* is intact; therefore the generalization that there is no future tense in Turkish does not hold.

On the other hand, *-Iyor* and *-Ir* are also used for future reference, but, for both, future reference is more a modal than a temporal character:

14. Yarın İstanbul'a gidiyorum (I am going to İstanbul tomorrow).

15. Yarın İstanbul'a giderim (I go to İstanbul tomorrow).

Whereas sentence 14 indicates a planned near future fact, the second sentence shows the intention, determination etc. of the speaker. Although we do not have any modal markers on the surface of these sentences, addition of an appropriate adjunct will not be redundant, so a rephrasing of these sentence could be:

14a. Yarın İstanbul'a gitmeyi planladım.

15a. Yarın İstanbul'a gitmeyi istiyorum.

-Iyor in the future is especially frequent with dynamic verbs like *gelmek* (come), *gitmek* (go), *oyunmak* (play), *değişmek* (change), *okumak* (read), *yazmak* (write), etc. In Turkish the *-Iyor* form is particularly frequent in newspaper language denoting near future (Kocaman 1976,74):

16. Dünyanın en güçlü kapitalist ülkeleri bir ticaret savaşını önlemek için toplanıyor (The most powerful capitalist countries of the world are to meet to prevent a commercial war).

17. Ortak Pazar Mısır ile gıda antlaşması yapıyor (European Common Market is to make a foodstuff agreement with Egypt).

Jespersen claims that 'in using the present tense in speaking of future events, one disregards, as it were, the uncertainty always connected with prophesying and speaks of something not indeed as really taking place, but simply as certain' (Jespersen 1949,202). This fact attributes to the future the same degree of certainty one normally associates with present and past events, hence the use of the present marker *-Ir* to denote immutable events and fixture.

18. Yarıyıl 12 Ekimde başlar (The semester begins on October 12).

Thus Kuruoğlu's statement "the aorist in declarative sentences implies a high degree of uncertainty in describing future events" lacks evidence (Kuruoğlu 1984, 138).(See also Lewis 1967, 117). Perhaps her statement is true if conditional sentences are considered, but for other cases it seems to be an overgeneralization. Notice also that the Turkish aorist is not so common with a human subject in the 'future sense'. The examples with human subjects below have modal and habitual implications:

19. Bundan sonraki tren sekizde kalkar (The next train leaves at 8).

20. Ahmet sekizde kalkar (Ahmet gets up at 8).

21. Seni görmeye gelirim elbet (Of course I will come to see you)

Again note that like *-Iyor* in future reference, the aorist (*-Ir*) in this use is restricted to dynamic transitional verbs such as *gelmek*, *gitmek*, *kalkmak* etc.

In Turkish we have the ancient suffix *-Esi* and its derivations *-Esi tutmak* (may be) *-Esi olmak* (feel like) used colloqually and in some cursory expressions, but these are mainly of a modal character, so it will be out of place to consider them as temporal future markers in the usual sense.

Conclusion

Temporal reference, modality and aspect are closely integrated in Turkish as well as in other languages, but to say that future reference is basically of a modal character in Turkish is an overgeneralization on the face of the evidence found in ordinary language use.

It is true with human subjects that it is not always easy to distinguish tense and mood, but this is true for other tenses as well. Since indicative is also considered as a mood per se in traditional terminology, there is no way out of that dilemma.

I think what one should do is to avoid being trapped by overgeneralizations and to try not to map a system of western languages (i.e. English) on the Turkish language. Evidence shows that apart from the use of such clear modal adjuncts as *mutlaka* (certainly), *elbette* (of course), *herhalde* (in any case), *kuşkusuz* (doubtless), *ola ki* (maybe), *diyelim* (say), *belki* (perhaps) etc., with (y)*EcEk* (whether they appear on the surface or can be derived from deep structure), and a marked use of human subjects through stress, rhythm etc., (y)*EcEk* clearly has future temporal reference whereas *-Iyor* and *-Ir* can be said to denote basically modality in future. There is no doubt that scrutiny of the phenomena on the overall discourse level will reveal more in this respect.

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