NOMINAL DENSITY IN TURKISH

by Seda Sürel

INTRODUCTION

1. Function
Nominal density shifts attention from actions to events, processes, and abstract concepts.

- Verb-based structures focus on who did what.
- Noun-based structures focus on the event, state, or concept itself.

This allows Turkish to:

- compress information
- remove the actor
- build analytical, formal, and objective discourse

2. Forms
Nominal density is built using existing nominal resources, not new grammar.

A) Verbal Nominalization

- –mA / –me (event as a unit)
- –mAk / –mek (action as a concept)

B) Event Nouns

Event nouns name an action as a process, occurrence, or patterned event, not just as an abstract act. They are often used to describe how something happens, especially in written, descriptive, or analytical contexts.

Structure:
verb stem + –(y)Iş / –(y)İş / –(y)Uş / –(y)Üş

Examples:
- bekle- → bekleyiş
- işle- → işleyiş
- yürü- → yürüyüş
- konuş- → konuşma ❌ → konuşma is (–mA, not –(y)Iş)
- konuş- → konuşuş ✔️ (rare, marked, stylistic)

Event nouns frequently appear in:
- descriptive writing
- academic or analytical language
- expressions focusing on process rather than action
- –(y)Iş / –(y)İş / –(y)Uş / –(y)Üş
  (process, occurrence)

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C) Abstract Noun Suffix

- –lIk / –lik / –luk / –lük

This suffix turns adjectives or nouns into abstract concepts
(states, qualities, conditions).

D) Possessive-marked Nominal Units

- –(s)I / –(s)İ / –(s)U / –(s)Ü
- (3rd person possessive / compound marker)

3. Morphology

A) Verb → Event Noun

- gelmek → geliş
- iptal etmek → iptal
- analiz etmek → analiz

B) Clause → Nominal Unit (with Possessive)

Nominalized clauses behave like nouns, so possessive marking is obligatory.

Structure:
Verb stem + –mA / –me + Possessive

- gel-me-si
- yap-ıl-ma-sı
- ertelen-me-si

C) Case Marking & Buffer Consonant –n–

When a case suffix follows a possessive form, –n– is mandatory.

Structure:
Nominal + Possessive + (n) + Case

- gel-me-si + (n) + e → gelmesine
- yapıl-ma-sı + (n) + dan → yapılmasından

D) Negation in Nominal Structures

Negation is layered, not simple.

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Structure:
Verb + –mA (negation) + –mA / –me (nominalizer) + Possessive

- gel-me-me-si
- imzalan-ma-ma-sı

The two –mA suffixes serve different functions.

E) Passive + Nominal (Core B2 Pattern)

Nominal density in B2 is frequently combined with passive voice.

- yap-ıl-ma-sı
- durdur-ul-ma-sı
- ertelen-me-si

This removes the actor and foregrounds the process or result.

F) Adjective → Abstract Noun (–lIk)

Structure:
Adjective / Noun + –lIk / –lik / –luk / –lük

- zor → zor-luk
- belirsiz → belirsiz-lik
- yoğun → yoğun-luk
- eşit → eşit-lik

This creates abstract concepts, not concrete objects.

G) Focus Contrast: –mA vs. –(y)Iş

–mA / –me (Verbal Noun):
Focuses on the act itself as a general, functional action.
It names what is done, without describing how it unfolds.

- bekleme → the act of waiting
- yürüme → the act of walking

–(y)Iş / –(y)İş / –(y)Uş / –(y)Üş (Event Noun):
Focuses on the manner, process, or atmosphere of the action.
It highlights how the action happens or how it is experienced.

- bekleyiş → the way of waiting / the ongoing process of waiting
- yürüyüş → a walk / the manner of walking

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Examples of nuance:
- bakma → looking
- bakış → a gaze / the way of looking

- gülme → laughing
- gülüş → a smile / the manner of laughing

- yürüme → movement
- yürüyüş → a walk / march

This distinction explains why written Turkish often prefers –(y)Iş in analytical or descriptive contexts

(e.g. ekonominin işleyişi rather than işlemesi).

4. Structural Guide
Two parallel ways to express the same content:

Verb-based:
Ali geldi.
— Ali arrived.

Noun-based:
Ali'nin gelişi
— Ali's arrival.

Transformation pattern:

- Ali geldi → Ali'nin gelişi
- Maç iptal edildi → Maçın iptali

As nominal density increases:

- verbs lose prominence
- nouns carry informational weight
- the structure becomes impersonal and analytical

5. Usage
Nominal density is used to:

- turn actions into events
- turn qualities into abstract concepts
- report processes without emotion
- analyze causes, results, and conditions
- create academic, bureaucratic, and professional tone

Nominal density is a tool for abstraction.
It turns concrete reality into analyzable concepts.

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Examples

A) Spoken / Verb-Based

Adam bağırdı, ben korktum.
— The man shouted, I got scared.

Yağmur yağdı, maç iptal oldu.
— It rained, the match was canceled.

B) Written / Nominal-Based

Adamın bağırması korkuya neden oldu.
— The man's shouting caused fear.

Yağmur yağışı nedeniyle maçın iptaline karar verildi.
— Due to rainfall, a decision was made to cancel the match.

C) Abstract Conceptualization (–lIk)

Ekonomik belirsizlik, piyasaları olumsuz etkiledi.
— Economic uncertainty negatively affected the markets.

Bu kararın zorunluluğu uzun süre tartışıldı.
— The necessity of this decision was debated for a long time.

D) Professional & Academic Context

Teknolojinin gelişmesi, iletişim alışkanlıklarımızın değişmesine yol açtı.
— The development of technology led to changes in our communication habits.

Sorumluluk alınmaması, sürecin uzamasına neden oldu.
— The failure to take responsibility caused the process to be prolonged.

E) Legal / Bureaucratic Context

Sözleşmenin taraflarca imzalanmaması süreci durdurdu.
— The contract not being signed by the parties stopped the process.

Başvuru süresinin uzatılmasına karar verildi.
— A decision was made to extend the application period.

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Notes

- Nominal density combines event nouns (–mA, –Iş) and abstract nouns (–lIk).
- The suffix –lIk does not only create object nouns; at B2 level, it is a key tool for producing abstract concepts used in academic and professional discourse.
- Nominalized clauses behave like nouns and therefore require possessive marking.
- Case suffixes require the buffer –n– after possessive forms.
- The subject of the action often appears in the Genitive case.
- Passive + nominal combinations are typical of written B2 Turkish.
- Nominal density allows Turkish to express complex processes with fewer verbs.
- Abstract nouns formed with –lIk / –lik / –luk / –lük undergo consonant softening when followed by a vowel-initial suffix.
- In this case, k → ğ.

Examples:

zorluk → zorluğun (zorluk + un → k → ğ)

belirsizlik → belirsizliğe (belirsizlik + e → k → ğ)

- This softening occurs after the abstract noun has already been formed and becomes visible when case or possessive suffixes are added.
- It is especially common in formal and academic Turkish.