

NOUN COMPOUNDS I

by Seda Sürel

INTRODUCTION

1. Function

Noun compounds in Turkish are not primarily about possession. They are tools for managing reference and information flow in discourse. The distinction between indefinite and definite noun compounds is functional, not formal.

- Indefinite noun compounds create categories and conceptual labels.
- Definite noun compounds identify a specific, context-bound reference.

This allows Turkish to move from general framing to precise identification without changing the core lexical material.

2. Forms

A) Indefinite Noun Compounds

Form:

Noun1 (Nominative / Unmarked) + Noun2 + -(s)I

- Noun1 appears in the nominative (unmarked) form.
- Noun2 always takes the 3rd person possessive suffix.
- This suffix does not express ownership.
- It functions as a unit marker and turns the phrase into a single conceptual label.

B) Definite Noun Compounds

Form:

Noun1 + Genitive + Noun2 + Possessive

- Noun1 takes the genitive suffix (-in / -ın / -un / -ün).
- Noun2 takes a possessive suffix.
- This structure creates specific and identifiable reference.

3. Morphology

A) Indefinite Compounds (Unit Formation)

Structure:

Noun1 + Noun2 + -(s)I

Examples:

kriz yönetimi
enerji kaynağı
şirket politikası
sürdürülebilirlik raporu

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The possessive suffix binds the nouns into one lexical unit.
Without it, the structure is ungrammatical.

Note on the buffer -s- • The consonant **-s-** appears only when the possessive suffix follows a vowel.

- It has **no semantic or grammatical** function.
- It exists solely to prevent vowel collision.

Example:

masa + örtüsü

This does not change the structure or meaning of the compound.

B) Definite Compounds (Specific Reference)

Structure:

Noun1 + Genitive + Noun2 + Possessive

Examples:

krizin yönetimi
enerjinin kaynağı
şirketin politikası

The genitive suffix anchors the phrase to a specific discourse context.

C) Buffer Consonant -n- (Indefinite and Definite)

When a case suffix follows a possessive-marked noun, the buffer consonant **-n-** is mandatory.

This rule applies to both compound types.

Examples:

kriz yönetimi → kriz yönetimine
şirket politikası → şirket politikasını
şirketin politikası → şirketin politikasını
enerjinin kaynağı → enerjinin kaynağında

The possessive suffix and the buffer **-n-** form an inseparable morphological chain.

D) Pluralization in Noun Compounds

Plural suffixes appear before the possessive (unit marker).

Examples:

belediye başkanları
şirket politikaları
enerji kaynakları

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If Noun1 is plural and specific, it appears in the genitive:

ülkelerin enerji kaynakları
şirketlerin yatırım planları

Plurality does not remove or replace the possessive marker.

E) Consonant Softening (k → ğ)

If a Turkish-origin Noun2 ends in k, consonant softening occurs when a vowel-initial suffix is added. The change happens **before** the suffix is attached.

k → ğ

Step-by-step examples:

- kaynak + i → kaynağ-i
enerji kaynağı
- kaynak + i + n + i → kaynağ-i-n-i
enerji kaynağını

Not all nouns ending in **k** undergo softening.

Many foreign-origin nouns (hukuk, evrak, ittifak) do not soften.

F) Indefinite Compounds with Nominalized Verbs (Passive Bridge)

Indefinite noun compounds can function as a single conceptual block and combine with nominalized verbs.

In this structure, the compound defines the domain or category, and the verbal noun expresses the process applied to that domain.

Structure:

indefinite compound + passive verbal noun + possessive

Examples:

kriz yönetimi planlanması
— the planning of crisis management

veri analizi yapılması
— the conducting of data analysis

enerji politikası belirlenmesi
— the determination of energy policy

In these structures:

- The noun compound behaves as a fixed unit.
- The possessive suffix appears on the nominalized verb, not on the compound.
- The verbal noun carries the unit marker.

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Incorrect forms:

kriz yönetimi planlama
ekonomi politikası belirlenme

Correct forms:

kriz yönetimi planlanması
ekonomi politikası belirlenmesi

This structure forms the functional bridge between nominal density (Lesson 1) and noun compounds (Lesson 2) and is typical of academic and professional Turkish.

4. Structural Guide

Discourse Progression

Typical progression in formal texts:

General framing (indefinite):

Kriz yönetimi günümüzde büyük önem taşır.
(Crisis management is of paramount importance today.)

Specific identification (definite):

Krizin yönetimi bu vakada başarısız olmuştur.
(The management of the crisis has been unsuccessful in this case.)

The structure shifts from classification to identification without altering the lexical base.

Adjective Placement and Scope

Indefinite:

büyük şirket politikası

- the adjective modifies the whole unit
- category-level description

Definite:

şirketin büyük politikası

- the adjective modifies the specific noun
- reference-level description

The position of the adjective determines its scope and interpretive range.

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5. Usage

Indefinite noun compounds are used to:

- introduce topics
- create conceptual categories
- name systems, processes, and domains
- establish general reference

Definite noun compounds are used to:

- identify specific entities
- narrow focus
- refer back to known information
- anchor arguments in discourse

Examples

A) Indefinite (Classification)

Kriz yönetimi uzun vadeli planlama gerektirir.

— Crisis management requires long-term planning.

Enerji kaynakları stratejik öneme sahiptir.

— Energy resources have strategic importance.

B) Definite (Specific Reference)

Krizin yönetimi beklenen sonuçları vermedi.

— The management of the crisis did not produce the expected results.

Enerjinin kaynağı bu bölgede sınırlıdır.

— The source of the energy is limited in this region.

C) Case Marking in Context

Şirket politikasını yeniden değerlendirmek gerekiyor.

— It is necessary to reassess the company policy.

Şirketin politikasını kamuoyuna açıkladılar.

— They announced the company's policy to the public.

Notes

- Indefinite noun compounds create conceptual units, not possession.
- The possessive suffix in indefinite compounds functions as a unit marker.
- Definite noun compounds establish specific reference via the genitive case.
- The buffer *-n-* is required after possessive suffixes in both compound types.
- Plural suffixes precede possessive markers in noun compounds.
- Consonant softening (*k* → *ğ*) is common but not universal.
- Some foreign-origin nouns resist softening (*hukuk sistemi*, *evrak akışı*).
- Indefinite compounds frequently combine with passive nominalizations in academic Turkish.
- This structure is central to professional and analytical writing at B2 level.