

VERBAL NOUNS: –MAK VS –MA

by Seda Sürel

INTRODUCTION

Turkish distinguishes between the infinitive (–mAk) and the verbal noun (–mA).

Both forms allow actions to function as nominal elements, but they differ in their morphological behavior and syntactic distribution.

1. Function

The suffixes –mAk and –mA form nominal expressions from verbs. These expressions can function as subjects or complements within a sentence.

Their use depends on the grammatical construction and the requirements of the governing verb.

2. Forms

This lesson focuses on two nominalized verb forms:

- –mAk: the infinitive.
- –mA: the verbal noun.

The two forms have different grammatical properties. Their selection depends on the governing verb, the required case marking, and how the subject of the embedded action is expressed.

3. Morphology

–mAk (Infinitive)

- Forms the infinitive.
- Does not take possessive suffixes in its ordinary verbal use.
- Can combine with –DA (locative), –DAn (ablative), and –IA (instrumental/comitative).
- Does not ordinarily take accusative or dative case suffixes directly. Corresponding constructions generally use –mA.

Suffix shapes:

- –mAk → mak / mek

Vowel harmony examples:

- gelmek (to come)
- gitmek (to go)
- okumak (to read)

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Forms with –DA, –DAn, and –IA:

- okumakta
- okumaktan
- okumakla

Examples:

- Kitap okumaktan hoşlanıyorum. (I enjoy reading books.)
- Gitmekte ısrar ediyor. (He/She insists on going.)
- Konuşmakla sorun çözülmez. (Talking alone will not solve the problem.)

–mA (Verbal Noun)

- Forms a verbal noun.
- Can take possessive suffixes identifying the subject of the action.
- Can take case suffixes directly or after possessive marking.
- Participates in a wider range of nominal inflection.

Suffix shapes:

- –mA → ma / me

Vowel harmony examples:

- okuma (reading)
- gelme (coming)
- gitme (going)

Case Inflection of –mA

When the subject of the action is not marked by a possessive suffix, case suffixes can attach directly to –mA. This commonly occurs when the subject is understood from the construction or when the action is expressed generally.

Examples:

- Kitap okumayı seviyorum. (I like reading books.)
- Türkçe öğrenmeye başladım. (I started learning Turkish.)
- Sigara içmeyi bıraktım. (I quit smoking.)
- Türkçe öğretmede farklı yöntemler kullanılıyor. (Different methods are used in teaching Turkish.)

Possessive Inflection of –mA

The verbal noun formed with –mA can take possessive suffixes.

These suffixes identify the subject of the nominalized action. This subject may be the same as or different from the subject of the main clause.

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Illustrative forms:

- okumam (my reading)
- okuman (your reading)
- okuması (his/her reading)
- okumamız (our reading)

After possessive marking, case suffixes may also be added:

- okumamı
- okumana
- okumasından

Examples:

- Erken gelmeni istiyorum. (I want you to come early.)
- Burada çalışmam gerekiyor. (I need to work here.)
- Onun geç kalmasına şaşırdım. (I was surprised that he/she was late.)

Morphological Contrast

–mAk follows vowel harmony (mak / mek). In its ordinary infinitival use, it does not take possessive suffixes. It commonly combines with –DA, –DAn, and –IA.

–mA follows vowel harmony (ma / me) and allows a wider range of possessive and case inflection.

The following examples illustrate how the two forms occur in different grammatical constructions:

- okumak: Okumak istiyorum. (I want to read.)
- okumayı: Okumayı seviyorum. (I like reading.)
- okumaya: Okumaya başladım. (I started reading)

Examples

–mAk (Infinitive)

- Okumak faydalı bir hobidir. (Reading is a useful hobby.)
- Kitap okumak istiyorum. (I want to read a book.)
- Erken gelmek zor. (Coming early is difficult.)
- Kitap okumaktan hoşlanıyorum. (I enjoy reading books.)
- Gitmekte ısrar ediyor. (He/She insists on going.)
- Hızlı okumakta zorlanıyorum. (I have difficulty reading quickly.)

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–mA (Verbal Noun)

- Okumayı seviyorum. (I like reading.)
- Türkçe öğrenmeye başladım. (I started learning Turkish.)
- Sigara içmeyi bıraktım. (I quit smoking.)
- Erken gelmen önemli. (It is important that you come early.)
- Burada çalışmayı planlıyoruz. (We are planning to work here.)
- Erken gelmeni istiyorum. (I want you to come early.)
- Burada çalışmam gerekiyor. (I need to work here.)
- Onun geç kalmasına şaşırdım. (I was surprised that he/she was late.)

Notes

- –mAk does not normally take possessive suffixes in its infinitival use.
- –mAk can combine with –DA, –DAn, and –IA.
- –mA can take possessive suffixes and a wider range of case suffixes.
- Possessive suffixes on –mA can identify the subject of the nominalized action.
- The selection of –mAk or –mA depends on the governing construction.

Be careful: The verbal noun suffix –mA and the negative suffix –mA have the same form but different functions.

- Gelme can mean “coming” as a verbal noun.
- Gelme! means “Don't come!” as a negative imperative.

In speech, stress helps distinguish them. The verbal noun follows regular final stress (gelME). The negative suffix places stress on the syllable before it (GELme). In writing, the grammatical construction and context determine the meaning.