

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36719/2706-6185/59/57-61>

Yegane Babasoy
Nakhchivan State University
PhD student
<https://orcid.org/0009-0008-2318-4056>
babasoy.yegane@gmail.com

The Nature of Nouns in Linguistics: A Structural, Semantic, and Cross-Linguistic Analysis

Abstract

This study investigates the nature of nouns from grammatical, semantic, and cross-linguistic viewpoints, highlighting their fundamental importance in both language and cognition. Nouns are analyzed as linguistic elements that represent entities, ideas, and categories, serving as essential components in meaning construction and interpretation. Based on the structuralist approach of Ferdinand de Saussure, nouns are viewed as signs that link form with meaning within a linguistic system. The research examines how nouns are classified according to grammatical features such as number, case, and syntactic roles, as well as semantic distinctions between concrete and abstract notions. Special emphasis is placed on the contrast between proper and common nouns and their functions in reference and categorization. A cross-linguistic comparison involving Azerbaijani language, English language, Russian language, Turkish language, and Chinese language reveals both shared characteristics and structural variation in noun systems. The results indicate that nouns function not only as grammatical units but also as reflections of cognitive mechanisms and cultural frameworks, playing a significant role in how individuals perceive and organize their understanding of the world.

Keywords: nouns, linguistics, semantics, morphology, cross-linguistic comparison, cognition

Yeganə Babasoy
Naxçıvan Dövlət Universiteti
doktorant
<https://orcid.org/0009-0008-2318-4056>
babasoy.yegane@gmail.com

Dilçilikdə isimlərin təbiəti: Struktur, semantik və dillərarası təhlil

Xülasə

Bu tədqiqat isimlərin təbiətini qrammatik, semantik və dillərarası nöqtəyi-nəzərdən araşdıraraq, onların həm dildə, həm də idrakda əsas əhəmiyyətini vurğulayır. İsimlər varlıqları, ideyaları və kateqoriyaları təmsil edən linqvistik elementlər kimi təhlil edilir, mənanın qurulmasında və şərhində vacib komponentlər kimi xidmət edir. Ferdinand de Saussure-un strukturalist yanaşmasına əsaslanaraq, isimlər dil sistemi daxilində formanı məna ilə əlaqələndirən əlamətlər kimi baxılır. Tədqiqatda isimlərin say, hal və sintaktik rol kimi qrammatik xüsusiyyətlərinə görə necə təsnif edildiyi, konkret və mücərrəd anlayışlar arasında semantik fərqlər araşdırılır. Xüsusi və ümumi isimlər arasındakı ziddiyyətə və onların istinad və təsnifatdakı funksiyalarına xüsusi diqqət yetirilir. Azərbaycan dili, ingilis dili, rus dili, türk dili və çin dilini əhatə edən dillərarası müqayisə isim sistemlərində həm ortaq xüsusiyyətləri, həm də struktur dəyişkənliyini aşkar edir. Nəticələr göstərir ki, isimlər təkcə qrammatik vahidlər kimi deyil, həm də koqnitiv mexanizmlərin və mədəni çərçivələrin əksi kimi fəaliyyət göstərir, fərdlərin dünyanı necə qavraması və dərk etməsində mühüm rol oynayır.

Açar sözlər: isimlər, dilçilik, semantika, morfologiya, dillərarası müqayisə, idrak

Introduction

Nouns represent one of the most essential categories in linguistic theory, serving a central role in expressing reality, structuring concepts, and facilitating human communication. As core lexical elements, nouns denote entities, objects, events, and abstract ideas, forming a fundamental component of both language and cognitive processes. In linguistic research, nouns have been analyzed from multiple perspectives, including their grammatical structure, semantic interpretation, and syntactic function.

The theoretical foundation for the study of nouns can be traced to structural linguistics, particularly the work of Ferdinand de Saussure, who conceptualized language as a system of signs composed of signifiers and signifieds. Within this framework, nouns operate as linguistic signs that link phonetic forms to conceptual meaning. Subsequent developments in modern linguistics have expanded the study of nouns to include morphological, cognitive, and cross-linguistic approaches.

An important aspect of noun analysis involves the distinction between proper and common nouns, which reflects different types of reference-specific versus general-and illustrates the relationship between language and categorization. Furthermore, cross-linguistic research demonstrates that while the functional role of nouns is largely universal, their grammatical expression varies across languages. Agglutinative languages, such as Azerbaijani language and Turkish language, employ extensive suffixation systems, whereas analytic languages, including English language and Chinese language, rely more heavily on word order and functional markers.

This study aims to provide a comprehensive examination of nouns by analyzing their grammatical, semantic, and morphological properties, alongside their variation across diverse linguistic systems. Through this approach, the research highlights that nouns are not merely lexical items but complex units that reflect both the structural organization of language and the conceptual frameworks underlying human thought.

Research

This study adopts a qualitative and comparative linguistic approach to examine the nature and functions of nouns across various languages. The research is primarily theoretical and descriptive, drawing on established frameworks in linguistics, semantics, and language typology.

Initially, a descriptive method is employed to define and classify nouns according to their grammatical, semantic, morphological, and syntactic properties. Next, a comparative cross-linguistic method is applied to investigate how noun categories are realized in different languages, including Azerbaijani language, English language, Russian language, Turkish language, and Chinese language. Additionally, a conceptual and cognitive perspective is incorporated to explore the role of nouns in human thought and categorization. This involves analyzing how nouns represent mental concepts and contribute to the organization of knowledge.

Finally, the study relies on a literature-based analysis, integrating insights from leading linguists and scholars to establish a theoretical foundation. By combining these approaches, the research provides a comprehensive understanding of nouns as both linguistic and cognitive constructs.

Definition of the noun category in linguistics

According to Crystal (2019), nouns are defined in linguistics as words that depict both animate and inanimate entities, occasions, and attributes. Nouns serve as linguistic markers connecting phonological forms to conceptual meanings, according to contemporary structural and cognitive methods, which hold that language is made up of form-meaning pairings (Evans, 2019). Studying a noun's role in the language system, including its structural, semantic, relational, and other characteristics, is part of linguistics. In linguistics, a noun's place entails examining its roles within the language system, its structural and semantic characteristics, and its connections to other language units. Nouns can be classified into the following groups:

1. Grammatically: Nouns are word types that convey things, ideas, and entities. -They have grammatical categories like singular/plurality, gender, case, and number. They are typically employed in sentences as complements and subjects (Aarts, 2018). These grammatical categories are mixed in inflectional languages (Moravcsik, 2017). These categories and their

interactions across languages are further explored by general linguistic theory, which highlights how grammar systems differ while adhering to universal principles (Dixon, 2019).

2. Semantic (meaning): Nouns convey both concrete and abstract ideas. For instance, happiness and anxiety are abstract, whereas doors and people are concrete (Croft & Cruse, 2020).

- door, person - concrete

- fear, happiness - abstract.

- They are divided into semantic fields: personal names, place names, objects, feelings, concepts, etc.

3. Morphologically: Suffixation and other procedures can give nouns different forms (Lieber, 2016). As an illustration, consider the room—rooms—in the room. Noun structure and grammatical relations are also intimately connected to morphosyntax, which explores how form and function interact within language systems (Payne, 2020).

4. Syntactically: - Nouns can function as subject, object, or complement in a sentence. For example: *The boy is reading a book*, where **boy** is the subject (Huddleston & Pullum, 2021). More broadly, nouns typically appear within noun phrases, which serve as the primary units for reference and modification in sentence construction (Rijkhoff, 2021).

5. Nouns make up a significant portion of the lexicon and can have different forms according on their phonological structure (Crystal, 2019).

6. In human cognition, nouns serve as conceptual categories and are crucial for articulating reality and organizing information (Evans, 2019). That is a concept arises in thought and it is named with a noun. As a result, saying “The place of nouns in linguistics” means learning how important and functional a unit they are in terms of the structure and processing of language.

Differences between proper and common nouns

Common nouns are the common names of entities of the same gender (city, country, nation), whereas proper nouns relate to a particular, single entity (London, Arif, Azerbaijan) (Crystal, 2019). Because proper nouns usually convey direct reference whereas common nouns represent broader conceptual groups, this distinction is crucial from a semantic standpoint (Trask & Stockwell, 2017). Grammatically, both types can take plural and possessive forms.

Notebook-notebooks-notebooks’

Anar-Anar’s

Both proper and common nouns can be abstracted.

General, concrete-house, window

General, abstract-hate, thought, love

Particular, concrete-Nakhchivan, Ganja

Particular, abstract-Kuran, Bible (although in physical form, sometimes taken as an idea).

Comparison of noun categories in different languages

Different grammatical systems are used in different languages to express noun categories. For instance, nouns in Turkish and Azerbaijani display rich inflection through suffixes, such as possessive, plural, and case markers (Haspelmath & Sims, 2020). English, on the other hand, depends more on word order and articles to convey grammatical relationships and definiteness (Aarts, 2018).

Cross-linguistic comparison (Azerbaijani, English, Russian, Turkish, Chinese).

Characteristics	Azerbaijani	English	Russian	Turkish	Chinese
Case category	6 cases	There is no case (expressed with prepositions)	6 cases	5 cases	There is no concrete case system
Gender category	-	-	Male, female, neuter gender	-	-
Grammatical plurality	-lar,-lər	-s	-л, -И və s	- lar,-ler	Depends on context

Difference of singularity and plurality	+	+	+	+	There is (but no formal plural suffix)
Used as a subject	+	+	+	+	+
Compatibility of subject and predicate	+(according to person and quantity)	+	+	+	-(word order is important, grammatical consistency is weak)
Proper-common noun distinction	+	+	+	+	+(but sometimes there is no different spelling system)

Main similarities and differences:

Similarities:

- In all these languages, nouns are the main word type that denotes entities and concepts.
- Nouns perform grammatical functions such as subject and object.
- Proper and common nouns are distinguished in most languages.

Main differences

-Case system:

- In Azerbaijani, Russian, Turkish, it is expressed by case suffixes.
- In English and Chinese, there are no cases; meanings are given by prefixes and word order.

-Gender system:

- In Russian, nouns change according to gender (for example: стол (male), книга (female)).
- In other languages (Azerbaijani, Turkish, Chinese, English) there is no gender category.

-Plural expression:

- In some languages (English, Russian), slight plural differences are observed lexically and morphologically.
- In Chinese, there is no independent plural suffix, it is expressed by context and number words.

-Meaning expression:

- Since Chinese is tonal and analytic, the use of nouns is often contextual and structurally dependent.

-Azerbaijani and Turkish are agglutinative languages; suffixes can change the meaning of a noun.

As a result, we obviously see that, although the noun category in different languages is structurally different, it has similar functional roles. This comparison shows that:

- In agglutinative languages (Azerbaijani, Turkish), nouns are rich in case suffixes.
- In inflectional languages (Russian), nouns have both gender, case, and plural categories.
- In analytic languages (English, Chinese), grammatical relations are established more with prefixes and word order.

Languages vary greatly in how they organize noun systems and classify reality, according to cross-linguistic studies (Moravcsik, 2017). For example:

Suffixation is widely used in agglutinative languages (Haspelmath & Sims, 2020).

Word order and functional components are more important in analytical languages (Aarts, 2018).

Several grammatical categories, including gender, number, and case, are combined in inflectional languages (Moravcsik, 2017).

These variations show that although noun categories are universal, many languages have different grammatical realizations of them.

Conclusion

Nouns are complex structures that integrate grammatical, semantic, and cognitive characteristics, as demonstrated by the study of nouns. The way language encodes various forms of reference and classification is reflected in the distinction between proper and common nouns (Trask & Stockwell, 2017).

All languages have nouns, although their grammatical expression differs greatly, according to

cross-linguistic study. Analytical languages like English rely on word order, agglutinative languages like Turkish and Azerbaijani rely on suffixation, and inflectional languages contain several grammatical categories within noun forms (Haspelmath & Sims, 2020; Moravcsik, 2017).

From a cognitive standpoint, nouns are essential to the organization of human knowledge since they represent mental conceptions (Evans, 2019). Nouns can therefore be viewed as dynamic components that link language, cognition, and cultural interpretation.

Overall, the noun category holds a vital position in both linguistic theory and human cognition. Investigating nouns not only deepens our understanding of language systems but also reveals how different cultures and linguistic communities conceptualize the world. Consequently, nouns can be regarded as dynamic and multifunctional elements that connect language, cognition, and cultural meaning.

References

1. Aronoff, M., & Fudeman, K. (2016). *What is morphology?* (2nd ed.). Wiley-Blackwell.
2. Aarts, B. (2018). *English syntax and argumentation* (5th ed.). Palgrave Macmillan.
3. Crystal, D. (2019). *The Cambridge encyclopedia of the English language* (3rd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
4. Croft, W., & Cruse, D. A. (2020). *Cognitive linguistics* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
5. Haspelmath, M., & Sims, A. (2020). *Understanding morphology* (3rd ed.). Routledge.
6. Huddleston, R., & Pullum, G. K. (2021). *A student's introduction to English grammar* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
7. Evans, V. (2019). *Cognitive linguistics: A complete guide* (2nd ed.). Edinburgh University Press.
8. Moravcsik, E. A. (2017). *Introducing language typology*. Cambridge University Press.
9. Trask, R. L., & Stockwell, P. (2017). *Language and linguistics: The key concepts* (3rd ed.). Routledge.
10. Lieber, R. (2016). *Introducing morphology* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
11. Payne, T. E. (2020). *Describing morphosyntax: A guide for field linguists* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
12. Dixon, R. M. W. (2019). *Basic linguistic theory volume 4: Further grammatical topics*. Oxford University Press.
13. Rijkhoff, J. (2021). *The noun phrase* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.

Received: 21.11.2025

Accepted: 08.03.2026