

NOMINALIZATIONS IN NEPALI

MADHAV PRASAD POKHAREL

Central Department of Linguistics, T.U.

madappokhrel@gmail.com

(Received: 09 Aug., 2025; revised: 09 Oct., 2025; accepted: 5 Nov., 2025; published: 26 Nov., 2025)

The first Nepali inscription (11th c.) starts with a noun-like sentence, a Noun Phrase. This paper reassesses Nepali nominalizations in the comprehensive framework offered in Shibatani (2019), which recognizes both classifying and non-classifying nominalizations. Besides lexical nominalizations creating nouns, there are grammatical nominalizations targeting five structures (numerals, demonstratives, genitives, adjectives and verb-based (V-based), each of which supplies metonymic meanings to the nominalized structures. There are two types (attributive and predicative) of V-based nominalizations, of which the diachronically predicative use of the V-based nominalization (-ta participle) is reanalyzed as a finite verb enriched with TAM markers. Even adverbs are nominalized. Multiple markers of nominalization give noun-like structures whose distribution generates numerous structures with both 'expected' and 'unexpected' functions. Some of the unexpected functions are citation form, purpose, nonrelative attribute, honorific, permission, command, prohibition, duty, volition, compulsion, general notice and modal. There is also a recursive use of nominalizers.

Keywords: Metonymy, NP-use, noun-like sentence, targets of nominalization, TAM-marked nominalization

1. Introduction

This is a supplementary paper to the 'Classifying nominalizations in Nepali' (Pokharel, 2025). The paper on classifying nominalizations is based on the classificatory functions of classifiers (and genders), a unified approach taken by Shibatani (2019; 2023) and Shibatani and Ferreira (2025) merging the functions of classifiers, noun classes and genders under the same umbrella, a nominalization-based analysis. This paper takes the same stand, but is focused on other issues not included in that paper.

Nominalization is the grammatical process of functionally treating a 'usually' non-nominal linguistic category as a nominal category. We are using here the term 'usually', because contrary to widely-held convention, nominalizations are based both on nominal (e.g. nouns) as well as non-nominal bases in languages. The verb-based nominalizations are often called 'relative clauses' or 'participles' in the literature and the noun-based nominalizers are not at all mentioned. In the Nepalese and several other East Asian and South

Asian languages, even the adverbs and adverbials are functionally nominalized (Noonan, 1997; Noonan, 2008; DeLancey, 2002; Watters, 2008).

2. Types of nominalization

The preceding discussions show that there are many semantic and functional types of nominalization. They include N-based, V-based and other-based nominalizations.

In the literature on nominalization, only verb-based nominalization is taken care, but the noun-based and other category-based nominalization commonly found in South Asian, East Asian and other areas are not at all mentioned, but Shibatani (2019) points to the noun-based (N-based) nominalization also. Taking examples from Nepali, we have:

N-based lexical nominalizers used as suffixes

- (1) /ket-i/
child-F
'girl'
- (2) /ket-o/

child-NF.SG

'boy'

- (3) /keʈ-a/
child-NF.PL
'boys'

V-based nominalization

- (4) /paɖ-e-k-i bol-j-i/
read-P-GEN-F speak-PST-F
'The educated female spoke.'

- (5) /paɖ-e-k-o
read-P-GEN-NF.SG
bol-j-o/
speak-PST-NF.SG
'The educated male spoke.'

- (6) /paɖ-e-k-a bol-e/
read-PF-GEN-NF.PL speak-PL.PST
'Educated males/females spoke.'

Other category based grammatical nominalizers as suffixes

- (7) /gor-i/
white.HUM-F
'white female'

- (8) /gor-o/
white.hum -NF.SG
'white male'

- (9) /gor-a/
white.HUM-NF.PL
'white males'

- (10) /dosr-i/
Second-F
'the second female'

- (11) /dosr-o/
Second-NF.SG
'the second non-female'

- (12) /mer-i/
my-F
'my female'

- (13) /mer-o/
My-NF.SG
'my non-female'

- (14) /mer-a/
my-NF.PL/HON
'mine' (PL/HON)

These sets of examples clearly show that the sex-based (number and gender marked) nominalizing suffixes (<i>, <o>, <a>) in (1) are noun-based lexical nominalizers, while the same set of

suffixes convert the adjectives into nominals and are thus grammatical nominalizers.

The same set of examples also show that the same set of suffixes that make the base into lexical nouns (or nominals) are grammatically extended to the non-nouns (here, adjectives) as nominal. It is clear from the examples that nominalizations are of two types viz. lexical and grammatical.

Noonan (2008) notes that in the Tibeto-Burman languages nominalizers are used even after the adverbs. Nepali also supplies such examples.

- (15) /hidʒo ko ḡʌʈʌna]
yesterday GEN incidence
maɪ le birs-ẽ /
I.OBL ERG forget-SG.PST
'I forgot yesterday's incidence.'

- (16) /hidʒo ko] maɪ le
Yesterday GEN I.OBL ERG
birs-ẽ /
forget-1SG.PST
'I forgot yesterday's incidence.'

2.1 Classifying nominalizations

In classifying nominalization the markers of nominalization (like classifiers and genders) both nominalize and classify the targets of nominalization. In the preceding examples, the markers of nominalization (nominalizers) are the set of suffixes (<-i> [F], <-o> [NF.SG], and <-a> [NF.PL=NF.HON]), which both nominalize and classify the targets of nominalization into Feminine, Non-feminine Singular and Non-feminine Plural/Honorific. Thus this set of nominalization is classifying nominalization.

NP-use (referential use)

- (17) /ramr-i bol-j-i/
elegant-F speak-PST-F
'The elegant female spoke.'

- (18) /ramr-o
elegant-NF.SG
bol-j-o/
speak-PST-NF.SG
'The elegant male spoke.'

- (19) /ramr-a bol-e/
elegant -NF.PL speak-PL.PST
'Elegant males/females spoke.'

Classifier as suffixes

- (20)/eu.t̥-a (t^{sh}or-o)/
one.CLF.COUNT-NF child-NF.SG
'a son'
- (21)/eu.t̥-i (t^{sh}or-i)/
one.CLF.COUNT-F child-F
'a daughter'

Repeater classifier

- (22)/tin dana (dana)/
three CLF.round (rudraksa)
'three rukraksas'

Lexical classifiers

- (23)/ek kes (kʌpal)/
one CLF.hair hair
'a strand of hair'
- (24)/tin ɓai (babu)/
three CLF.brother (father)
'two uncles and father' (literally, three brother fathers)
- (25)/tin baɸini (ama)/
three CLF.sister mother
'two aunts and mother' (literally, three sister mothers)

Classifier as clitics

- (26)/dui oɸa/dui=t̥a (t^{sh}or-a)/
two CLF.COUNT son-PL
'Two sons'
- (27)/tin-oɸ-i/ tin=t̥-i (t^{sh}or-i)/
Three CLF.COUNT daughter
'Three daughters'

In example (13) we see sex-based (FEMININE and NONFEMININE) gender-marking suffixes as classifying nominalizers, while in (14-17) we find both HUMAN and NONHUMAN classifiers as classifying nominalizers.

2.2 Non-classifying nominalizations

On the other hand there are nominalizers which nominalize a non-noun into a noun, but they do not classify:

Verbal nominals

- (28)[[/timi=lai sik-au-nu/]
[[you.MHON=DAT learn-CAUS-NOM]
garo^{tsh}ʌ]
difficult is]
'It is difficult to teach you'.

- (29)ɸer-ʌi bol-nu
Excess-EMP speak- NOM
ramr-o ɸio-i-nʌ/
good is-EMP-NEG
'It is not good to speak a lot'.
- (30)/mʌ=lai t̥in-ne ket̥-i/
I=DAT recognize- NOM child-F
'The girl I know'
- (31)/mʌ=lai t̥in-ne
I=DAT recognize- NOM
ket̥-o/
child-NF
'The boy I know'
- (32)/mʌ=lai t̥in-ne
I=DAT recognize- NOM
ket̥-a/
child-NF.PL/HON
'The boys=boy (HON.SG) I know'
- (33)[[/mer-o t̥in-ia sik-ai]
[My-NF.SG China-ADJ learn- NOM]
gaɸi-il-o t̥shʌ-i-nʌ]
speed-ADJ-NF.SG is-EMP-NEG]
'My Chinese learning is not good.'

In this set of examples the nominalizers (-nu, -ne, -ai) have nominalized the verbs, but they have not classified any nominal entity, therefore, these are the examples of non-classifying nominalization, which is the focus of this paper.

2. 3. Other types

2.3.1 Lexical vs. grammatical/ syntactic nominalization

When the markers of nominalization are limited only to the words, then they are called lexical nominalizers, but if the markers of nominalization extend to the phrase level, they are called grammatical nominalizers.

NONHUMAN class

- (34)/bat^{sh}-i/
calf-F
'female calf'
- (35)/bat^{sh}-o/
calf-NF
'male calf'
- (36)/ɸamr-o bat^{sh}-i/
our-NF calf-F
'Our female calf'
- (37)/ɸamr-o bat^{sh}-o/

our-NF calf-NF.SG

‘Our male calf’

HUMAN ROYAL HONORIFIC class

(38)/safiʌdʒjad-i/

king’s.child-F

‘princess’

(39)/safiʌdʒjad-a/

king’s.child-PL/HON

‘prince’

(40)/fiʌmr-a safiʌdʒjad-i/

our-PL/HON

prince-F

‘Our princess’

(41)/fiʌmr-a safiʌdʒjad-a/

our-PL/HON prince-F

‘Our prince’

HUMAN NONHONORIFIC class

(42)/keʔ-i/

Child-F

‘a girl’

(43)/keʔ-o/

child-NF.SG

‘a boy’

(44)/fiʌmr-i keʔ-i/

our-F

child-F

‘Our girl’

(45)/fiʌmr-o keʔ-o/

our-NF.SG child-NF.SG

‘Our boy’

Lexical nominalizers

(46)/qul-ua/

walk-er.NF

Walker

‘loafer’ (male)

(47)/qul-ui/

walk-er.F

‘loafer’ (female)

Grammatical nominalizers

(48)/qul-ua bol-j-o/

walk-er.NF speak-PST-NF.SG

‘a loafer (male) spoke’/

(49)/qul-ui bol-i/

walk-er.F speak-F.PST

‘A loafer’ (female) spoke.’

The above examples (24-26) show that FEMININE and NONFEMININE marking

nominalizers (i-o) are found in all the three classes (NONHUMAN ANIMATE, HUMAN ROYAL and HONORIFIC and HUMAN NONHONORIFIC classes, but in the first two classes, nominalization is on the lexical level only, but in the NONROYAL HUMAN class, nominalization is on the phrasal level, therefore the first two are the examples of lexical nominalization while the last one is an instance of grammatical nominalization (cf. Shibatani, 2019).

2.3.2 Grammatical vs. functional nominalizations

Shibatani (2019) distinguishes nominalization further into two types, viz. grammatical and functional. The grammatical nominalization sticks to syntax while the functional nominalization sticks to usage. From the functional point of view, the first following example is the ‘modification use’ (MOD-use) of the nominalized adjective while the second is an example of the ‘nominal use’ (NP-use) of the target of the nominalizer (<-i> [F]). Although both of the following are the instances of grammatical nominalization, but from the functional (usage) point of view the nominalizers are different.

(50)/ramr-i keʔ-i bol-i/ (MOD-use)

Elegant-F child-F speak-F.PST

‘The beautiful girl spoke.’

(51)/ramr-i bol-i/ (NP-use or referential use)

Elegant-F speak-F

‘The beautiful female spoke.’

Shibatani (2019; 2023; 2025) has showed that although it is a popular belief to take the ‘targets of nominalization’ as the ‘modifiers’ of the head noun, but generally in everyday discourse, cross-linguistically, it has been discovered that both diachronically and synchronically, the NP-use has the primacy over the modification use; and sometimes, it is hard to find the modification use with the head noun.

2.3.3 Argument vs. event nominalizations

Argument nominalizations

(52)/dʒit-ne-le fiar-ne

win-NOM-ERG

lose-NOM

lai

fiɛp-tʰʌ/

ACC

dominate-3.SG.NPST

‘A winner dominates the loser’

(53)/mar-ne sitʌ bātʰ-ne ko

die- NOM ASS live- NOM GEN

kun- λ i lenden

any-EMPH business

fũ-d- λ i-n λ /

BE-NPST-EMPH-NEG

‘The living does not have any business with the dead.’

- (54) /k^ha-ne ma t^hin-ne
eat- NOM LOC know- NOM
dek^hi n λ -t^hin-ne

ABL NEG-know- NOM

samma t^hi-e/

LIM was-PST.PL

‘Among those who were eating were both from the known to the unknown’.

The distribution of nominalizations in this set of examples may traditionally be called ‘headless relative clauses’, however, they are all examples of different case marking functions of nominalization.

Event nominalization

- (55) /t λ p α i
You.2HON
bol-e-k-o
speak-PF-GEN-NF.SG. NOM
m λ -i le sun- \tilde{e} /
I-EMP listen-1SG.PST
‘I heard what you spoke.’ (I heard your speaking/ I heard you speaking)

3. Markers of nominalization

A typical noun phrase in Nepali has the structure MOD+N/DET+N/ SPEC+N. Nominals in Nepali inflect for number, “gender”, person, case and honorific. The following are the markers of nominalization in derived nominals and nominal markers in the verb agreement.

3.1 Number and class (gender/noun class/classifier) markers

- (56) FEMININE: /-i/
(57) NONFEMININE singular /-o/
(58) NONFEMININE plural/HONORIFIC /-a/
(59) Enclitic plural particle /f λ ru/
(60) Feminine copula: /t^{sh}e/ ‘is’
(61) NONFEMININE plural/HON in the finite verbs: /-n/, /-*ja/ (inscriptional), /-e/.

3.2 Case markers

- Nominative agreement markers
- Absolutive agreement markers (in Far Western dialects)

3.3 Postpositional particles

(62) Ergative/instrumental /le/

(63) Dative/accusative /lai/

(64) Ablative /ba λ /

(65) Locative: /ma/

(66) Associative: /s $\tilde{\lambda}$ g λ /, /sit λ /

4. Semantics of nominalized targets

Shibatani (2019) says, the semantics of the nominalized target has metonymic connotations, where the markers of nominalization not only nominalize but also classify the target whereas the the base gives the metonymic semantic interpretation. In the nominalized base <ramr-i> in the following example, the feminine marking nominalizer <-i> makes the base nominal and in addition, classifies the base as FEMININE. On the other hand, the base <ramr-> gives the metonymic connotation of elegance. So, the nominalized word in toto metonymically gives the sense of ‘an elegant female entity’.

NP-use (referential use)

- (67) /ramr-i bol-i/
Elegant-F speak-PST.F
‘A beautiful female spoke.’

MOD-use

- (68) /ramr-i ke λ -i bol-i/
Elegant-F child-F speak-F
‘A beautiful girl spoke.’

4.1 Noun-like entities

Nominalization creates morphological and syntactic noun-like structures with corresponding nominal functions in larger structures. Shibatani (2019) thinks such structures are given nominal syntactic category by the nominalizers (nominalizing morphemes), whose resulting meaning is metonymically derived from the base.

- (69) /gor-i/
white.HUM-F
‘white female’
(70) /gor-o/
white.HU -NF.SG
‘white male’

In these examples the base (/gor-/ ‘white’) was originally an adjective which is turned into a nominal and then classified into FEMININE and MASCULINE by the corresponding suffixes (<i> vs. <o>) and the glosses of the resulting structures in each of the examples are metonymically derived from the base.

4.2 Noun-like sentences (Nominalized sentences)

Matisoff (1972) says that in the Tibeto-Burman language Lahu, a nominalized sentence is noun-like. Noonan (1997) also endorses this fact from many Tibeto-Burman languages.

The only sentence in the first Nepali inscription (Bamu Khadgah, 11th century) is in the nominalized form (Khana, 2011):

- (71) बामु षडगहाको कीर्ति षंभ
/bamu kʰʌdɡʌɦa.ko kirti kʰʌmbʌ/
Bamu Khadgaha.GEN fame pillar
‘The glorious pillar of Bamu Khadgaha’

Even in the everyday speech, there are frequent uses of nominalized sentence without any finite verb.

- (72)/kʌɦile a-e-k-o/
when come-(PF-GEN-NF.SG).NOM
‘When did you come?’
(73)/kʌɦā dʰa-ne/
where go-NOM
‘Where are you going?’

5. Targets of grammatical nominalizations

Noun-like phrases

Shibatani (2019, 2023 and 2025) has set the following five structural targets of nominalizations, which can be nominalized: Numerals (NUM), Demonstratives (DEM), Genitive (GEN), Adjectives (ADJ), Verb (V)-based. Nepali examples may help to visualize this statement.

5.1 Numerals (NUM)

NP-use

- (74)/eu.t-i bol-j-i/
one. CLF-F speak-F
‘one female spoke’
(75)/eu.t-a bol-j-o/
one. CLF-NF speak-NF.SG.PST]

- ‘one male spoke’
(76)/tin dʰʌn-a bol-e/
three CLF.HUM speak-PL.PST
‘three people spoke’
(77)/dosr-i bol-i/
second-F speak-F
‘the second female spoke.’

MOD-use:

- (78)/eu.t-i ket-i bol-j-i/
one. CLF-F child-F speak-F
‘A girl spoke.’
(79)/eu.t-a ket-o
one. CLF-NF child-NF
bol-j-o/
speak-NF.SG.PST
‘A boy spoke.’
(80)/tin dʰʌn-a ket-i
three CLF.HUMAN child-F
bol-e/
speak-PL.PST
‘Three girls spoke.’
(81)/dosr-i ket-i bol-i/
second-F child-F speak-F
‘The second girl spoke.’

Numerals are nominalized subject arguments and hence are in the nominal (NP)-use, while in the nominalized numerals are in the modification (MOD)-use.

5.2 Demonstratives (DEM)

NP-use:

- (82)/jo bol-j-i/
this speak-F.SG.PST
‘This female spoke.’
(83)/tjo bol-j-o/
that speak-NF.SG.PST
‘That male spoke.’
(84)/i bol-e/
these speak-NF.PL.PST
‘These people spoke.’
(85)/ti bol-e/
those speak-NF.PL.PST
‘Those people spoke.’

MOD-use:

- (86)/jo ket-i bol-j-i/
this child-F speak-PST-F
‘This girl spoke.’
(87)/tjo ket-o bol-j-o/
that child-NF speak-PST-NF.SG

‘That boy spoke.’

- (88)/i ket-i bol-e/
these child-F speak-PL.PST
‘These girls spoke.’

- (89)/ti ket-a bol-e/
those child-NF.PL speak-NF.PL
‘Those boys spoke.’

Demonstratives (<jo>, <tjo>, <i>, <ti>) in (4a) are nominalized subject arguments and hence are in the nominal (NP)-use, while in (4b) the nominalized demonstratives are in the modification (MOD)-use. These demonstratives are although classifying nominalizers but without markers. The same demonstrative is used to refer both to the feminine and the non-feminine referents. In contrast with these demonstratives, the numerals in the preceding set of examples were both classifying and with markers.

5.3 Genitives (GEN)

NP-use:

- (90)/mer-i bol-j-i/
my-F speak-PST-F
‘My female spoke.’
(91)/mer-o bol-j-o/
my-NF.SG speak-PST-NF.SG
‘My male spoke.’
(92)/mer-a bol-e/
my-NF.PL speak-PL.PST
‘My males/females spoke.’

MOD-use:

- (93)/mer-i ket-i bol-j-i/
my-F child-F speak-F
‘My girl spoke.’
(94)/mer-o ket-o
my-NF.SG child-NF.SG
bol-j-o/
speak-PST-NF.SG
‘My boy spoke.’
(95)/mer-a ket-i bol-e/
my-NF.PL child-F speak-PL.PST
‘My girls spoke.’
(96)/mer-a ket-a
my-NF.PL child-NF
bol-e/
speak-NF.PST
‘My boys spoke.’

In these examples, the genitive-based nominalizers (<-i>, <-o>, <-a>) function as

subject arguments and hence are in the nominal (NP)-use, while the nominalized genitives are in the modification (MOD)-use. These genitives are classifying nominalizers with markers. The same genitive plural marker <-a> in the last two examples is used to refer both to the feminine and the non-feminine referents.

5.4 Adjectives (ADJ)

NP-use:

- (91)/ramr-i bol-j-i/
elegant-F speak-PST-F
‘The elegant female spoke.’
(92)/ramr-o bol-j-o/
elegant-NF.SG speak-PST-NF.SG
‘The elegant male spoke.’
(93)/ramr-a bol-e/
elegant -NF.PL speak-PL.PST
‘Elegant males/females spoke.’

MOD-use:

- (94) /ramr-i ket-i bol-j-i/
elegant-F child-F speak-F
‘The beautiful girl spoke.’
(95) /ramr-o ket-o
elegant-NF.SG child-NF.SG
bol-j-o/
speak-PST-NF.SG
‘The handsome boy spoke.’
(96) /ramr-a ket-i bol-e/
elegant-NF.PL child-F speak- PL.PST
‘The beautiful girls spoke.’
(97) /ramr-a ket-a bol-e/
elegant-NF.PL child-NF speak-NF.PST
‘The handsome boys spoke.’

In these examples, the adjective-based nominalizers (<-i>, <-o>, <-a>) function as subject arguments and hence are in the nominal (NP)-use, while the nominalized adjectives are in the modification (MOD)-use. These adjectives are classifying nominalizers with nominal markers. The same plural marker <-a> in the last two examples is used to refer both to the feminine and the non-feminine referents, because there is neutralization of gender as non-feminine in the plural.

5.5 V-based nominalizations

a. NP-use: ‘headless relative clauses’

- (98) /pʌd-e-k-i bol-j-i/

read-P- GEN-F speak-PST-F
 ‘The educated female spoke.’

- (99) /pʌḍ-e-k-o
 read-P- GEN-NF.SG
 bol-j-o/
 speak-PST-NF.SG
 ‘The educated male spoke.’

- (100) /pʌḍ-e-k-a bol-e/
 read-P- GEN -NF.PL speak-PL.PST
 ‘Educated males/females spoke.’

b. MOD-use: ‘externally-headed relative clauses’

- (101) /pʌḍ-e-k-i keṭ-i
 read-P- GEN -F child-F
 bol-j-i/
 speak-F
 ‘The educated girl spoke.’

- (102) /pʌḍ-e-k-o keṭ-o
 read-P- GEN-NF.SG child-NF.SG
 bol-j-o/
 speak-PST-NF.SG
 ‘The educated boy spoke.’

- (103) /pʌḍ-e-k-a keṭ-i
 read-P-GEN-NF.PL child-F
 bol-e/
 speak-PL.PST
 The educated girls spoke.’

- (104) /pʌḍ-e-k-a keṭ-a
 read-P-GEN-NF.PL child-NF
 bol-e/
 speak-NF.PST
 ‘The educated boys spoke.’

c. Internally-headed relative clause

- (105) /dʒun keṭ-i=le
 which child-F=ERG
 pʌḍ-e-k-i
 read-PF- GEN-F
 tʰi-i, tjo (keṭ-i) bol-i/
 was-F that (girl) speak-F
 ‘The girl which was educated, spoke.’

The V-based determiners/modifiers in this set of examples are commonly called *relative clauses* in the linguistic literature in that their NP-use is named the *headless relative clauses*, the MOD-use examples are called the *externally headed relative clauses* and an example of an *internally-headed relative clause*. Shibatani (2019) opines that these are simply the NP-use and the MOD-

use of V-based nominalization and it is unnecessary to take them as a separate grammatical category. Anyway, these verbal (so-called) modifiers in the NP-use do not modify any noun, because there is no noun at all to modify. Instead, they are simply nominalized clauses, which are nominalized by the suffixes that originated as noun-suffixes, but grammatically extended to their modifiers in the clause level. The so-called modifiers, in turn, when nominalized, can act functionally as an independent nominal argument in the absence of a noun (in the NP-use).

d. V-based nominalizers with TAM markings (finite verbs): noun-like sentences

Nepali original V-based nominalizers in the predicative use are reanalyzed as finite verbs with tense-aspect-mood markings as is commonly found in Tibeto-Burman languages like Lasargha dialect of Magar and in an Iranian dialect (Yap et al., 2011).

- (106) /ko bol-e-ko/
 Who speak-PF- NOM
 ‘(a) Who spoke?’
 ‘(b) Who is speaking?’
- (107) /ramr-i keṭ-i bol-i/
 Elegant-F child-F speak-PST.F
 ‘A beautiful girl spoke.’
- (108) /ramr-i bol-i/
 Elegant-F speak-PST.F
 ‘A beautiful female spoke.’
- (109) /bol-i/
 Speak-PST.F
 ‘A female spoke.’

The last example in this section is a finite verb, which was originally a V-based modifier (or a relative clause) in the predicative use (Hock, 1986), developed in course of time, into a finite verb with tense-aspect-mood markers.

6. Functions of nominalization

In all the targets (NUM, DEM, GEN, ADJ, V-BASED) of nominalization, we can see the FEMININE and NONFEMININE marking nominalizers attached to each of the targets, which when nominalized function as modifiers of the following nouns in the modification (MOD) use, but in the NP-use (as a nominalized entity),

there is no noun to modify, therefore Shibatani (2019, 2023, 2025) opines that modification of the nouns is not the primary function of a nominalizer (like gender/classifier), rather, its primary function is to nominalize and classify the targets.

Even in the case of lexical nominalization (keɽ-i, keɽ-o), the functions of nominalizing morphemes (suffixes/-i/ and /-o/) is to nominalize and classify the base. They do not modify the resultant noun. It is these suffixes which nominalize the base (*keɽ-/) and make them nominal, the process of which is called *lexical nominalization* and the process of nominalizing the targets is called *grammatical nominalization*.

Nominalizations in Nepali have different discourse grammatical functions and uses.

6.1 Unexpected functions

As noted by Noonan (1997), multiple V-based nominalizers have been developed even in Nepali, each of which has a battery of different functions like the following:

6.1.1 Citation form of the verb

Noonan (1997) notes that the citation form of the verbs in the dictionaries in the Tibeto-Burman area is also found in the nominalized form. Nepali data also corroborate Noonan's assertion.

- (110) /kʰel-nu/
play- NOM
'to play'

6.1.2 Purpose clause

Noonan (1997) has also pointed to this function of nominalization in the Tibeto-Burman area. Nepali is also endowed with this function.

- (111) /adʰa dʰa-ne ki
today go- NOM or
ɸoli dʰa-ne/
tomorrow go- NOM
'Are you going today or tomorrow?'

6.1.3 Nonrelative attributive use of nominalization

Noonan has also hinted to this type of unexpected function of nominalization in the Tibeto-Burman languages of the area.

Nepali

- (112) /gulapʰ ko pʰul/
rose NOM flower
'The rose flower'

6.1.4 Standalone nominalization

Yap et al. (2011) has mentioned this function of nominalization in Asian languages.

- (113) /tʃas lai
he/she.OBL DAT/ACC
maɪ le
I.OBL ERG
paɽ-a-e-ko/
learn-CAUS-PF- NOM
'I have taught her/him.'

6.1.5 Honorific function

Top two grades of HONORIFIC verb forms in Nepali are in the nominalized forms.

- (114) /ama au-nu
mother come- NOM
hu-n-tʰa/
be-HAB-is
'Mother comes' (2nd HONORIFIC)=
'Mother's coming happens'

6.1.6 Permission

The same structure may be reanalyzed as permissive reading.

- (115) /[ama au-nu hu-n-tʰa]/
mother come-NOM be-HAB-is
'Mother's coming is allowed'.

6.1.7 Functions of V-nu: (citation form, command, prohibition, duty, permission, honorific, general notice, etc.)

- (116) Citation form
/kʰa-nu/
eat- NOM
'to eat'
- (117) Command
/tʃ dʰa-nu/
you.NHON go- NOM
'You go!'
- (118) Prohibition
/ɽaɽ-nu
To.tell.a.lie- NOM
hũ-d-a-n-
be-HAB-EMP-NEG

‘One should not tell a lie.’

- (119) Duty (volitional)
/mΛ dʒa-nu pΛr-j-o/
I go- NOM fall-PST-SG
‘I should go’.

- (120) Compulsion
/mΛi le dʒa-nu
I-OBL ERG go- NOM
pΛr-j-o/
fall-PST-SG
‘I had to go’.

- (121) Permission
/jΛhā tʃuroʃ kʰa-nu
here cigarette eat-NOM
fiu-n-tʃhΛ/
be-HAB-is
‘Smoking is allowed here’.

- (122) High Honorific
/mama tʃuroʃ kʰa-nu
uncigarette eat-NOM
fiu-n-tʃhΛ/
be-HAB-is
‘(My maternal) uncle smokes’.

- (123) General notice
/ʃoli au-nu fiola/
Tomorrow come-NOM PART
‘Please come tomorrow’.

- (124) Polite command:
/ʃoli au-nu fios/
Tomorrow come-NOM OPT
‘Please come tomorrow’.

6.1.8 Functions of V-ne: relativization and modal

- (125) Relativization
/bol-ne mantʃhe/
speak-NOM man
‘speaker’/ ‘speaking man’

- (126) Modal
/pani pΛr-ne thɪ-j-o/
water fall- NOM was-PST-SG
‘It would have rained’.

7. Recursive markings of nominalization

Noonan (2008) reports multiple and recursive markings of nominalization in the Bodic languages. Nepali also shows such markings in the data.

- (127) /nΛ-pΛḍ-e-k-a k-o
NEG-read-PF-GEN-OBL-GEN
SAMAsja pΛḍ-e-k-a le

problem read-PF-GEN-PL

buḍz-d-Λi-nΛ-n/

understand-HAB-IMP-NEG-3PL

‘The educated cannot understand the problems of the uneducated.’

In this example the first nominalizer in the NP-use (nΛ-pΛḍ-e-k-a) is immediately followed by another nominalizer (k-o).

8. Conclusion

Nominalization is a characteristic of Nepali. The first Nepali inscription (11th c.) starts with a nominalized sentence. It means Nepali, although an Indo-European language, follows the Asian language strategy of nominalization in morphology, syntax, semantics and discourse strategies right from the beginning. There are five targets (numerals, demonstratives, genitives, adjectives and verb-based (V-based) of nominalization, each of which supplies metonymic meanings to the nominalized structures. There are two types (attributive and predicative) of V-based nominalizers, of which the diachronically predicative use of the V-based participle is reanalyzed as a finite verb enriched with TAM markers. Even adverbs are nominalized. Multiple markers of nominalization give noun-like structures whose distribution generates numerous structures with both ‘expected’ and ‘unexpected’ functions. Some of the unexpected functions are citation form, purpose, nonrelative attribute, honorific, permission, command, prohibition, duty, volition, compulsion, general notice and modal. There are recursive use of nominalizers also in the data.

Abbreviations

1	first person
2	second person
3	third person
ACC	accusative
ADJ	adjective
ASS	associative
CAUS	causative
CLF	classifier
DAT	dative
DEM	demonstrative
DET	determiner
EMP	emphatic

ERG	ergative
F	feminine
GEN	genitive
HAB	habitual
HON	honorific
HUM	human
LIM	limitative
LOC	locative
MOD	modification
N	noun
NEG	negative
NF	Non-feminine
NOM	nominalizer
NP	noun phrase
NPST	non-past
NUM	numeral
OBL	oblique
OPT	optative
PART	particle
PF	perfect
PST	past
PL	plural
SG	singular
V	verb

References

- DeLancey, S. (2002). Relativization and nominalization in Bodic. *BLS*, 28S, 55-72.
- Hock, H. H. (1986). P-oriented constructions in Sanskrit. In B. Krishnamurti, C. P. Masica, & A. K. Sinha (Eds.), *South Asian languages: Structure, convergence and diachrony* (pp. 15-25). Motilal Banarasi Das.
- Khanal, M. P. (2011). *Nepali bhasaka hajar varsha* [A thousand years of Nepali inscriptions]. Raino.
- Matisoff, J. A. (1972). Lahu nominalization, relativization and genitivation. In J. Kimball (Ed.), *Syntax and semantics* (Vol. 1, pp. 237-257). Seminar Press.
- Noonan, M. (1997). Versatile nominalizations. In J. Bybee, J. Haiman, & S. Thompson (Eds.), *Essays on language function and language type* (pp. 373-394). John Benjamins.
- Noonan, M. (2008). Nominalizations in Bodic languages. In M. J. Lopez-Couso, & E. Seoane (Eds.), *Rethinking grammaticalization: New perspectives* (pp. 219-237). John Benjamins.
- Pokharel, M. P. (2025, November 29). *Classifying nominalizations in Nepali* [Paper presentation]. *Conferences on Nominalizations*, Wuhan, Hebei, China. (to be presented)
- Shibatani, M. (2019). What is nominalization? Towards the theoretical foundations of nominalization. In R. Zariquiey, M. Shibatani, & D. W. Fleck (Eds.), *Nominalization in languages of the Americas* (pp. 15-167). John Benjamins.
- Shibatani, M. (2023). Towards dynamic functional typology: Classifiers, genders and nominalization. *Historical linguistics in Japan*, XII, 1-52. https://doi.org/10.57565/hlj.12.0_iii
- Shibatani, M., & Ferreira, M. (2025, November 29). Dynamic functional typology of Tukanoan classifying nominalizations. [Paper presentation]. *Conferences on Nominalizations*, Wuhan, Hebei, China. (to be presented)
- Watters, D. E. (2008). Nominalizations in Kiranti and Central Himalayish languages of Nepal. *Linguistics of the Tibeto-Burman area*, 31(2), 1-43.
- Yap, F. H., Grunow-Härsta, K., & Wrona, J. (2011). Nominalization strategies in Asian languages. In F. H. Yap, K. Grunow-Härsta, & J. Wrona (Eds.), *Nominalization in Asian languages: Diachronic and typological perspectives* (pp. 1-60). John Benjamins.