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## Nominalization in Indian English: A Morphosyntactic Analysis

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### Abstract

Nominalization—the syntactic transformation of verbs and adjectives into noun forms—is a crucial feature in academic and formal registers. This paper investigates the nature and function of nominalization in Indian English, specifically within the contexts of academic and journalistic discourse. By analyzing two curated corpora comprising research articles and newspaper texts, the study identifies recurring morphosyntactic patterns in the formation and usage of nominal constructions. Drawing on Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar, the research emphasizes how grammatical metaphor underlies the tendency toward abstraction and density in expression. The paper further contextualizes these patterns through syntactic theory and comparative linguistic analysis with British English norms. The investigation reveals that Indian English users frequently employ nominalization to achieve formality, authority, and impersonality in writing. However, the frequency and manner of usage show notable deviations from native English varieties. These differences are attributed, in part, to substrate influence from Indo- Aryan and Dravidian languages, which traditionally favor nominal expressions and bureaucratic style structures. The paper also considers the impact of educational practices, translation conventions, and sociolinguistic factors on stylistic preferences. Through both quantitative and qualitative analysis, the study contributes to the understanding of Indian English as a dynamic, evolving variety shaped by indigenous linguistic frameworks and global academic norms. Its findings have significant implications for language instruction, editorial standards, and corpus-based linguistic research in postcolonial Englishes.

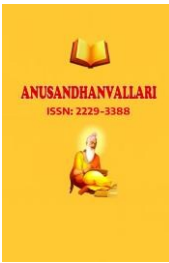
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### 1. Introduction

Nominalization—the process of converting verbs or adjectives into nouns—is a common grammatical strategy used across languages to enhance formality, abstractness, and syntactic density. It enables writers to pack more information into fewer words and to shift the focus from actions to entities or concepts, a feature often seen in scholarly and administrative discourse. In the context of English, nominalization contributes to a formal, impersonal tone and facilitates the construction of dense and abstract arguments, especially in academic and bureaucratic texts.

Indian English, as a distinct and evolving variety of World Englishes, presents a unique opportunity to explore nominalization patterns shaped by multilingualism, educational norms, and socio-cultural influences. Rooted in a linguistic ecosystem dominated by Indo-Aryan and Dravidian languages, Indian English exhibits several structural and stylistic traits that diverge from native English norms. These deviations are often reflected in writing styles, particularly in domains where English is used for formal and institutional communication.



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This study aims to examine the morphosyntactic features of nominalization in Indian English, focusing on two significant textual domains—academic and journalistic writing. By comparing the nominalized constructions found in Indian English texts with those typical of British English, the paper seeks to uncover not only the syntactic choices made by Indian writers but also the underlying linguistic and socio-cultural factors that shape these preferences. In doing so, the study contributes to the broader understanding of how English adapts to local linguistic ecologies while maintaining global intelligibility.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation of this study is grounded primarily in Halliday's (1985) Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), particularly the concept of grammatical metaphor. In SFL, nominalization is viewed as a type of grammatical metaphor where processes (typically expressed as verbs) are reworded as nouns. This transformation is not merely structural but semantic, allowing writers to condense clauses, abstract meanings, and foreground concepts rather than actions. Nominalization thus plays a central role in constructing ideational and interpersonal meanings, making texts more compact and formal.

The study also draws from derivational morphology, which examines the internal structure of words and the processes by which new words are formed from existing ones—especially through affixation (e.g., "inform" → "information"). The syntactic implications of these transformations are analyzed through the lens of lexical grammar, with attention to how nominal forms alter clause structure, word order, and thematic roles within a sentence.

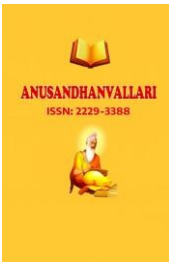
Furthermore, cross-linguistic analysis is incorporated using contrastive grammar models. This approach compares syntactic and morphological features of Indian English with substrate languages—primarily Indo-Aryan (e.g., Hindi, Marathi) and Dravidian (e.g., Telugu, Tamil). These languages often favor nominal constructions and exhibit a tendency toward heavy noun phrases and extensive use of postpositions, which may influence similar patterns in Indian English. By aligning grammatical tendencies in L1s with those observed in Indian English nominalization, the study attempts to trace the pathways of linguistic transfer and hybridization.

Through this composite framework—blending systemic-functional, morphological, syntactic, and contrastive perspectives—the study provides a robust analytical lens for examining nominalization as both a structural and functional phenomenon in Indian English writing.

## 3. Data and Methodology

This study is based on a mixed-method approach, combining corpus-based linguistic analysis with contrastive syntactic comparison. Two corpora were curated to represent formal written Indian English in academic and journalistic settings:

- **Academic Corpus:** A selection of 50 peer-reviewed research articles written by Indian scholars across disciplines such as humanities, engineering, social sciences, and applied sciences. These articles were sourced from Indian academic journals and institutional repositories.



- **Journalistic Corpus:** A sample of 100 news articles published in prominent Indian English newspapers, including *The Hindu*, *Times of India*, and *Deccan Chronicle*. These articles span editorials, features, and analytical reports, offering a wide view of stylistic usage.

Each text was manually scanned and tagged for instances of nominalization. These instances were then extracted and categorized into types, including:

- Derived nominal forms using suffixation (e.g., "establish" → "establishment")
- Complex noun phrases with pre- and post-modifiers
- Nominalizations within nested structures (e.g., noun within a noun phrase functioning as an object or subject)

The analysis employed both quantitative methods—such as frequency counts, distribution comparisons, and corpus annotation—and qualitative syntactic analysis to examine structural patterns and stylistic motivations.

To contextualize findings, the study employed comparative data from two well-established British English corpora:

- BAWE (British Academic Written English) corpus, used to benchmark academic writing norms
- BNC (British National Corpus), for general written English standards

These reference corpora enabled contrastive evaluations of nominalization density, frequency, and placement across sentence structures. Special attention was paid to differences in clause embedding, prepositional stacking, and thematic progression. This triangulated methodological design ensured a comprehensive view of nominalization use in Indian English, allowing for both structural insights and functional interpretations grounded in real-world language use.

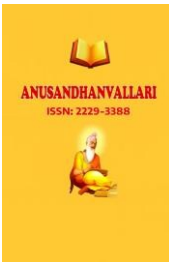
#### 4. Analysis of Academic

Writing Samples Findings from the academic corpus revealed a notably high frequency of nominalized expressions, especially abstract nouns such as "implementation," "development," "evaluation," and "establishment." These forms were prevalent across disciplines, regardless of the subject matter, suggesting a stylistic and rhetorical preference among Indian academic writers for lexical density and abstraction.

A common syntactic pattern observed was the use of extended noun phrases, often initiated by nominalized forms and followed by multiple prepositional modifiers. For example:

- *"The implementation of the revised guidelines for curriculum development..."*
- *"An evaluation of the effectiveness of rural employment schemes..."*

Such constructions tend to obscure agency and prioritize the outcome or concept over the action, which aligns with the norms of academic objectivity. However, this tendency often results in sentences that are longer, syntactically more complex, and occasionally harder to process due to prepositional stacking.



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A comparison with native English usage (especially in the BAWE corpus) revealed that while nominalization is also frequent in British academic English, Indian English texts exhibited a greater tendency to over-nominalize. For instance, Indian writers preferred structures like:

- *"The justification of the experiment was provided through..."* Rather than:
- *"The experiment was justified through..."*

The overuse of such constructions may stem from pedagogical influences—where nominalized forms are often taught as indicators of academic rigor—and from translation habits shaped by Indian vernaculars that favor nominal constructions.

Furthermore, in several instances, nominalization led to syntactic awkwardness, especially when the noun phrase contained more than two levels of embedded modification. An example includes:

- *"The verification of the accuracy of the evaluation of the environmental impact assessment procedures..."*
- This kind of syntactic overload can reduce clarity, hinder comprehension, and detract from the overall coherence of the text.

Thus, while nominalization serves important rhetorical functions in Indian academic writing, its excessive or uncritical use can create barriers to effective communication, especially for global academic audiences.

## 5. Analysis of Journalistic

Writing Samples In journalistic writing, nominalization occurred less frequently than in academic writing, but its presence was still significant—particularly in opinion pieces, editorials, and analytical reports. The most commonly used nominal forms in the journalistic corpus included "announcement," "response," "protest," "accusation," and "observation." These words often appeared as part of pre-modified or post-modified noun phrases, frequently employed to communicate official discourse, policy declarations, or institutional reactions.

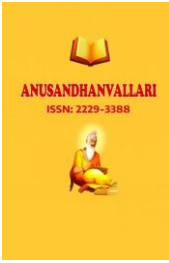
One notable stylistic pattern was the preference for agent-suppressing constructions. For example:

- *"The announcement of the new scheme by the government..."* Rather than the more direct and active:
- *"The government announced a new scheme..."*

Such structures imitate the bureaucratic register, thereby lending a sense of authority, neutrality, and impersonal formality. This choice aligns with long-standing journalistic conventions in Indian English, where the language of governance and administration heavily influences editorial tone.

Additionally, the analysis revealed that nominalization was often employed to condense complex events or processes into succinct labels, as in:

- *"The protest against the reservation policy gained momentum..."* Here, "protest" encapsulates a multifaceted social action into a single nominal entity, which supports economy of expression while signaling objectivity.



These patterns suggest a strong influence from translation practices, especially from Indian languages that regularly employ nominal forms in political, legal, and administrative communication. The use of nominalizations, in this context, may also reflect an effort to align English-language journalism with indigenous idioms of formality and institutional decorum.

However, overuse or imprecise application of nominalized forms occasionally led to ambiguity or a distancing effect, particularly when the sentence lacked a clear agent. For instance:

- *"The condemnation of the act was widespread..."* leaves the reader unsure of who condemned the act.

Thus, while nominalization contributes to efficiency, abstraction, and neutrality in Indian English journalism, it also raises concerns about agency, clarity, and reader accessibility when not carefully calibrated to the context.

## 6. Influence of Indian Languages

The influence of native Indian languages—particularly those from the Indo-Aryan and Dravidian language families—plays a significant role in shaping the nominalization patterns observed in Indian English. This linguistic substrate influence manifests in multiple ways, reflecting deep-rooted grammatical preferences and cultural communication norms.

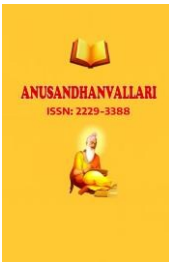
Firstly, there is a noticeable preference for noun phrases over verb-centric clauses, a tendency rooted in the syntactic structures of many Indian languages. In Hindi, for example, constructions such as *"nirnaya lena"* (to take a decision) are commonly used, where the noun *"nirnaya"* (decision) stands at the center of the clause. This structure often translates directly into English as *"to take a decision"* instead of the more concise native English form *"to decide"*.

Secondly, literal translation of abstract nouns from Indian languages into English contributes to an increased use of nominalized expressions. Indian bureaucratic and academic registers frequently rely on elevated, noun-heavy styles, and this tradition carries over into English writing, especially in formal or institutional contexts. Terms like *"implementation," "discussion,"* and *"recommendation"* are favored over their verbal counterparts, sometimes resulting in overly complex syntactic constructions.

Redundancy is another characteristic arising from language transfer. Expressions such as *"the need for a requirement,"* or *"the explanation of the reason,"* though grammatically correct, reflect a layering of nominal forms that are rarely used in native English. These constructions echo the emphasis-based structures of Indian languages, where repetition and parallel forms are used for rhetorical weight.

Furthermore, the cultural prestige associated with formality and abstraction in Indian official and academic communication reinforces the use of nominalization. English usage in India is often shaped by translation practices, educational templates, and administrative norms that stem from Indian language structures.

Together, these influences contribute to a distinctly Indian syntactic style in English writing. While these patterns may differ from native norms, they represent a legitimate evolution of English in a multilingual context and highlight the adaptive, context-sensitive nature of linguistic expression in postcolonial Englishes.



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## 7. Discussion and Implications

The findings of this study underline the complex role nominalization plays in Indian English. On one hand, nominalization enables writers to achieve a tone of professionalism, authority, and abstraction—essential qualities in academic, bureaucratic, and journalistic contexts. On the other hand, its excessive or uncritical use often leads to syntactic density, reduced readability, and diminished clarity, particularly when layered within complex noun phrases.

Indian English exhibits a systematic tendency toward nominal-heavy constructions, a feature that can be attributed to multiple interrelated factors. These include first language (L1) transfer effects from Indo-Aryan and Dravidian languages, which traditionally favor nominal expressions; pedagogical conventions that equate nominalization with academic sophistication; and sociocultural preferences for formal, indirect, and impersonal expression in official communication. This confluence of influences results in a stylistic orientation that values abstraction and complexity, sometimes at the expense of directness and accessibility.

From a linguistic perspective, the study contributes to our understanding of Indian English as an emergent, dynamic variety that reflects the socio-pragmatic needs and cultural underpinnings of its speakers. It highlights how global English norms are reinterpreted and reconstituted in localized linguistic environments.

From a pedagogical standpoint, the study raises important implications for the teaching of English writing. In many Indian educational contexts, the ability to use nominalized forms is often emphasized without sufficient attention to functional clarity or audience considerations. Therefore, educators should aim to strike a balance between teaching formal, abstract constructions and encouraging more active, agentive sentence structures.

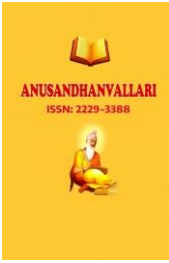
Explicit instruction on grammatical metaphor—especially within Hallidayan frameworks—can empower students to make informed stylistic choices. Moreover, developing learners' awareness of audience, context, and rhetorical goals can help mitigate the pitfalls of over-nominalization. Such an approach not only promotes linguistic precision but also fosters more effective communication across academic and professional genres.

Ultimately, recognizing nominalization as both a stylistic resource and a potential barrier encourages more nuanced, context-sensitive writing instruction and supports the broader goal of linguistic empowerment within multilingual settings.

## 8. Conclusion

Nominalization in Indian English reflects both universal academic discourse strategies and localized linguistic influences, revealing how English adapts in postcolonial multilingual contexts. The study illustrates that while nominalization is a powerful rhetorical and grammatical device—enhancing precision, abstraction, and objectivity in writing—it also introduces stylistic and cognitive challenges when overused or poorly managed.

Indian English, shaped by the syntactic norms of Indo-Aryan and Dravidian languages, demonstrates a marked tendency toward noun-based constructions, particularly in formal registers such as academic and journalistic writing. This preference is further reinforced by pedagogical traditions that associate nominalization with linguistic sophistication and by translation practices that transfer syntactic habits from regional languages into English.



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The analysis of both academic and journalistic corpora reveals that although nominalization serves to emulate native English conventions of formality, its frequency and form in Indian English are distinctively patterned. These patterns often result in complex noun phrases and agent-suppressing constructions, which can hinder clarity and reader comprehension.

Understanding nominalization in Indian English provides valuable insights into how language evolves under socio-cultural and multilingual pressures. It also contributes to the broader study of World Englishes, reinforcing the legitimacy of Indian English as a rule-governed and contextually grounded linguistic variety. For language educators and editors, the findings underscore the need to teach nominalization with an emphasis on clarity, appropriateness, and reader orientation—ensuring that writers can harness its benefits while minimizing its pitfalls.

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