

# IDENTIFICATION, DESCRIPTION AND CLASSIFICATION OF BALTI INFLECTIONAL MARKERS: A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY

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## ABSTRACT

The current study aims to identify and categorize inflectional markers of Balti Language spoken in Baltistan region of Gilgit-Baltistan Pakistan as well as some cities of India. Balti belongs to west Tibetan language of the Tibeto-Burman family which is entrenched to Sino Tibetan. In order to conduct this study 200 Balti root words (nouns, verbs and pronouns) were collected from the corpus data using both the naturalistic and documented sources. The selected 200 words were critically analyzed within the paradigm of inflectional morphemes descriptively using the qualitative research design. The study shows that there are 24 inflectional morphemes including 3 plural markers i.e., “-kun”, “-ong” and “-ng”, 6 case markers, i.e., “-si”, “-i”, “-la”, “-ing”, “-kha”, and “-na”, 1 gender marker, i.e., “-mo”, 11 tense markers, i.e., “-ed”, “-en”, “-set”, “-s”, “-uk”, “-nuk”, “-tuk”, “-ik”, “-in”, “-se” and “-e” and 3 mood markers, i.e. “-s”, “-i”, and “-a”. This study will hopefully encourage and provide a base for future researchers to explore other morphological aspects of Balti language.

**Keywords:** Case markers, inflection, root words

## INTRODUCTION

### Background of the Study

Balti is a Tibeto-Burman language that belongs to the Western Tibetan sub-family, which also includes Ladakhi, Puriki, and Zangskari. It is spoken primarily in the Gilgit-Baltistan region of northern Pakistan, which is also called Baltiyul (Balti State) and in neighboring Ladakh in India (Pandey, 2011). This language is a member of Sino-Bodic sub-family of the Himalish group, which originated from the Tibeto-Burman of Sino-Tibetan family (Sino Tibetan-Tibeto Burman sub family-Bodic Branch-Tibetan Group-Western Archaic-Balti and Ladakhi) of languages. The tree of Tibeto-Burman, in particular the place of Chinese within it or as sister branch in the larger Sino Tibetan family is highly controversial (Driem, 2003). Balti language

is a family member of Tibeto-Burman of Sino-Tibetan family which is spoken in 4 districts (Skardu, Khaplu, Kharmon and Shiger) of Baltistan region within Gilgit Baltistan having 4,00,000 its native speakers (Abbas, 2016). Moreover, this language is also spoken in Kargil, Ladakh, Tibet and some southern Chinese regions. This study aims to identify and categorize inflectional markers of Balti Language.

### Research questions

This paper addresses the following research questions:

1. How many inflectional markers are there in Balti language?
2. How can we classify the Balti inflectional markers into different groups?

### Research Objectives

The objectives of the study are:

1. In order to describe the possible Balti inflectional markers.
2. In order to classify the different inflectional markers into different groups.

### Significant of the study

The study investigates the identification and classification of Balti inflectional markers. Not much linguistics research has been done on Balti language so far and this study is the first ever research work on Balti inflectional markers. This study will help to know the different Balti inflectional markers for the native as well as for the non-native linguistic researcher. This study will be very fruitful for the future researcher to work on Balti grammar as well as syntactic structures.

### Literature Review

As much as linguistics exposure is concerned languages vary with respect to the degree of experience. A number of languages have a real breakthrough having a lot more exposure such as English, Arabic, and Persian and to some extent Urdu as well. But Balti is one of the languages, which has least amount of exposure in this regard. Balti has handful amount of literatures in the form of books (Traditional Grammars, stories and history) but all the important linguistic aspects including morphology have been untouched yet linguistically. Even the available Balti literatures have not been documented within the proper paradigm of linguistics. A single research paper can't address all the linguistics perspectives of Balti language, so the present study is an attempt to explore more exclusively Balti inflections markers. So far from the available literatures; Short Sketch of Balti Grammar, a traditional grammar, composed by Lobsang (1995) describes Balti words formations process as: Numbers in noun and verb in tenses; for example, 'fro' (boy) can be pluralized by adding inflection "-ng" as 'fro-ng' (Boys), by the same token 'Barban' (window) can be pluralized by adding the inflection "-kun" that will be 'barban-kun' (windows). What's more, in the context of verb changes can be applied such as the word 'zaed' (eat) is its present form that can be converted into past

by using the word 'pa' so the word in past form is attributed as 'zosed-pa' (ate) and in future 'ze-in' (will eat) as well as 'za'(eat) into 'za khan'(eater) and 'zakhan-kon'(eaters).

Sibarani, (2002) defines as inflectional morphemes are bound morphemes. Inflectional morphemes neither change the word category nor the meaning, but only transform the existing words with extra grammatical information. More clearly, inflectional morpheme is related to the syntax and words that have been driven syntactically (Moradi, 2014). Inflectional morphemes are more grammatical. The morpheme which signals grammatical variants of a word, as the inflectional, '-s' at the end of words indicates both pluralities of a noun as well as third person singular with the verb in English. Furthermore, inflectional morphemes are not used to create new words, but rather indicate tense and aspect with other grammatical functions of a word. Inflectional morphemes are used to show numbers, tenses and aspects (Yule, 2006). Inflectional morphology studies word-structure information relevant to the syntax. Inflection attributes of words are allocated by syntax and depends upon the interaction of words with others in a phrase, clause or sentence (Anderson, 1982). Anderson further classifies four types of morphological properties that describe inflection: configurational, agreement, inherent and phrasal. In addition, inflectional affixes perform purely grammatical functions extending the meaning of words which are already existed (e.g, number, person, gender, case, tense and aspect etc). It also creates syntactic relationship between words (e.g, possession, comparison). For example the various forms of the verb 'paly' are all accounted to be verb too, namely, 'play', 'played' and 'playing'.

Likewise, the comparative and superlative forms of the adjective 'clever' also remain in the same word category of adjectives such as; 'cleverer' and 'cleverest'. Syntactic affixes are the main sources of inflectional morphology that control grammatical operations while preserving the core meaning of base. Hence in English inflectional '-s' is added to pluralize the noun such as; (dog → dogs) and to make third-person singular (run → runs) (Erik and Charles, 2003).

Languages differ dramatically on the amount of inflectional features and values they possess. Some languages, such as Vietnamese and Igbo (a

language of Nigeria) have least amount of inflectional values; while other languages have plenty of inflectional values with their words. However, despite all these facts the types of inflectional values seem to be uniformed across languages surprisingly. Common inflectional features and values are; number (singular/plural), case (nominative and accusative.), gender (masculine, feminine.), person (1st, 2nd, 3rd) tense (present, future, past.), aspect (perfective, imperfective, habitual,) mood (indicative, subjunctive, imperative) (Haspelmath & Sims, 2010). Additionally, Haspelmath & Sims (2010) explains inflectional features further, e.g. numbers (singular and plural), mostly languages mark on nouns. Languages may express various cases such as Latin has five cases, but few languages don't show case distinctions at all, and few languages show more than ten different cases. Likewise, person differences generally marked on verb in the world's languages, but only English shares unique person value that is 'be' depending upon the subjects, whether, the subject is first person (the speaker), the second person (the addressee) or the third person, i.e. (I) am, (you) are, (he/she/it) is. Other inflectional features such as tense, aspect and mood are contemporary to some extent in all languages. Tense specifies the verb's action with reference to time as ;( past, present, future). On the other hand, aspect refers, whether an action is completed (perfective aspect) or not (imperfective aspect). Finally, mood indicates the inevitability, desirability or conditionality of an event such as; imperative mood (commands), subjunctive mood (not-realized events) and indicative mood. Besides these inflectional values, there are few others values that can be generalized and less widespread in the world's languages. For instance, in English comparative and superlative degree of adjective mark additional inflectional values that is not widespread in other languages. Such inflections seem to be confined with the European and south-western Asian languages. Some languages also have passive voice inflections on verb, which share unusual relation of semantic and syntactic functions, for example in Swedish *kasta* 'throw', *kasta-s* 'be thrown'.

### Method

The research design employed in the current study is essentially descriptive and qualitative. The

nature of the present study demands description of possible inflectional markers of Balti Language, so the study is lacking a proper theoretical frame work. In this regard the collected data have been transcribed and analyzed descriptively following the paradigm of qualitative research design keeping in view the pattern of inflectional morpheme. For this purpose, lexical items documented in the present study have been collected from two different sources (naturalistic and documented). One set of instance of lexical items have been taken from naturalistic conversations (naturalistic source) involving different Balti native speakers. For this purpose, the researcher has used two data collection tools (Observation and Recording). First of all, the researcher recorded the conversations of Balti native speakers occurring in natural settings. The researcher selected 30 participants (Balti native speakers). They have been divided into different groups and organized a day to day conversations setting. From the recorded conversations, the researcher observed and taken 100 Balti root words (nouns, verbs and pronouns). The second data set consisted 100 Balti root words (nouns, verbs and pronoun) which have been extracted from the three authentic books (documented source) written by native Balti speakers. The documented source (books) is consisted of 'Short Sketch of Balti Grammar by Hassan Lobsang' (1995), 'Balti Bol Chal by Fida Gasangi', (2011) and 'The Balti History by Hussain Abadi', (1985).

### Number Marker (Vowels Ending Roots)

Whereas inflectional marker "-ong" marks number when it attaches with singular nouns and pronoun ending with vowels. Moreover, the researcher found few exceptions that few vowel ending roots don't bear the inflection "-ong" rather than take the inflection "-ng" as a plural marker. The researcher perceived that roots ending with vowels, e.g. /e/, /a/, /i/, /i:/, /ə/ and /a:/ take the inflection /-ong/ at the end as a plural marker. For instance, the word 'ata' (father) singular noun ends with the short vowel /ə/, to change into plural takes the inflection "-ong" as 'at-ong' (fathers), 'bowa' (cleric) singular noun ends with the vowel /a:/ sounds, change into plural as 'baw-ong' (clerics) and the word 'stagjee' (tree) singular ends with /i/ sound, change into plural as (stagjee-ong) (trees).

After the addition of plural marking inflection “-ong” at the end of the root, generally the last sound is omitted from the ending of the roots as ‘ata’ (father) into ‘ata-ong’ (fathers) and ‘bowa’ (cleric) into ‘baw-ng’ (clerics). Both the words lost the final sounds due to the addition of plural marking inflection ‘-ong’ e.g. the word ‘ata’ lost /ə/ sound and the word ‘bowa’ lost, /a:/ sound. Similarly, Balti third person singular pronoun “kho” (he) can be converted into its corresponding(plural) as “kho-ong” (they). But Balti first person ‘nya’(I) ends with short vowel/ə/ takes a new exceptional number marker as; nya-tang.

### Number Marker (Vowels Ending Roots)

The researcher has also observed some exceptions that number marker “-ong” can’t be attached with roots ending with the vowels, e.g. /ʊ/, /əʊ/, /u/, /u:/ and/ ʌʊ/. Such as the word ‘shoqbu’(book) singular noun ends with the short vowel /u/, to change into plural the inflection “-ng” is added in Balti Language, e.g. ‘shoqbu-ng’(books), ‘kosho’(apple) singular ends again with the short vowel /u/ sound, changes into plural as ‘kosho-ng’(apples) and the word ‘fro’(son/boy) singular ends with the long vowel/u:/, changes into plural as ‘fro-ng’(sons/boys)

### Ergative Case

The study found that both the inflectional morphemes “-si” and “-i” are used as ergative case markers in Balti language. Both “-i” and “-si” are attached with nouns or pronouns to mark the transitivity in Balti sentence. Besides, the researcher found that roots (nouns/pronouns) ending with vowels take the inflection “-si” as an ergative case marker in Balti Language. For example, the word ‘ata’(father) ends with the short vowel /ə/, change into ergative case as “ata-si” means father(actor), “bowa” (cleric) ends with long vowel /a:/, changes into ergative case ‘bowa-si’ cleric(actor) and ‘fro’(boy) ends with the long vowel /u:/, change into ergative case as “fro-si”, boy(actor). Similarly, pronouns ‘kho’ ends with vowel /ʊ/, convert into ergative case ‘kho-si’(actor), mo(she) ends with the same vowel /ʊ/ takes the same marker as; ‘mo-si;(actor) and ‘nya’(I) into ‘nya-si’(actor).Whereas consonants ending roots take “-i” as an ergative marker e.g. ‘Javed’ ends with the consonant /d/ sound into

“Javed-i” means “Javed”(actor), “Khong”(they) ends with the consonant /ŋ/ into “khong-i” means they(actor) and the word “meong”(people) ends with the same consonant /ŋ/, change into ergative case as “meong-i” people(actor).

### Genitive Case

The analyzed data further shows, root words (nouns/pronouns) ending with both consonants and vowels take the inflection “-i” as genitive case marker in Balti Language. For instance, the word ‘ata’(father) ends with the short vowel /ə/, change into genitive case as “at-i” (father’s), “bowa” (cleric) ends with the long vowel /a:/, change into genitive case ‘bowa-i’ (cleric’s) and the pronoun ‘mo’(she) ends with //ʊ/, change into genitive case as “mo-i”, (her/her’s). Likewise, consonants ending roots also take “-i” as a genitive marker, e.g. ‘Kazim’ ends with the consonant /m/, change into “Kazam-i” (Kazim’s), “Khong” (they) ends with the consonant /ŋ/, change into “khong-i” (their’s) and the word “meong” (people) ends with the same nasal /ŋ/, change into genitive case as “meong-i” (people’s). But an exception has been observed with the pronoun ‘khyang’(you), kho(he) and mo(she) and nya(I). Unlike other Balti root words, the khyang(you) takes ‘-ri’ genitive marker as ‘khy-ri, removing last part ‘ang’ from the root (khyang). While rest of the mentioned pronouns take both “-i” and “-ri” as genitive markers; mo-i(her’s) or mo-ri(her’s), kho-i(his) or kho-ri(his) and nya-i(mine) or nya-ri(mine).

### Dative Case

The inflection “-la” marks dative case, when it attaches with roots (nouns/pronouns) ending with both consonants and vowels. For instance, the word ‘kaka’ (elder brother) ends with the vowel /ə/, changes into its dative case as “kaka-la” (to elder brother), “amu” (mother) ends with the vowel /u:/, changes into its dative case ‘amu-la’ (to mother) and the pronoun ‘mo’(she) ends with the short vowel /ʊ/, change into dative case as “mo-la”, (to her). With the same token consonants ending roots also take “-la” as a dative marker e.g. ‘Akhtar’ ends with the consonant /r/, change into “Akhtar-la” (to Akhtar), “Khyang” (you) ends with the consonant /ŋ/, change into dative case as “khyang-la” (to you) and the word “rhamaq” (public) ends with the consonant /k/ change into dative case as

“rhamaq-la” (to people) and the pronoun ‘nyatang’(we) ends with the consonant /ŋ/, change into dative case as ‘nyatang-la’ (to us).

### Locative Case

The inflectional marker “-ing” acts as a locative case marker in Balti, when it attaches with roots (nouns/pronouns) ending with both consonants and vowels. For instance, the word ‘ata’(father) ends with the short vowel /ə/, changes into dative case as “at-ing” (in father), “kho” (he) ends with the vowel /ʌ/, change into locative case ‘kho-ing’ (in him) and the pronoun “nya” (I) ends with the vowel /ə/, changes into locative case as “nya-ing”, (in me). In the same way, consonants ending roots also take the inflection “-ing” as a locative marker, e.g. ‘Ashraf’ ends with the consonant /f/ sound, changes into locative case as “Ashrf-ing” (in Ashraf), “Khong” (they) ends with the consonant /ŋ/, change into “khong-ing” (in them) and the word “ngatang” (we) again ends with /ŋ/, change into locative case as “ngat-ing” (in us). On the other hand, “-kha” another locative Balti case marker has some exceptions, as it attaches with genitive case (nouns/pronouns). “-kha” marks locative case on Balti roots (nouns/pronouns) identifying “on” location. For instance, the word ‘lam’(way) ends with the consonant /m/, change into its locative case as “lam-i-kha” (on the way), “handog” (roof) ends with the consonant /k/, change into locative case ‘handogh-i-kha’ (on the roof) and the pronoun “khyang” (you) ends with the consonant /ŋ/, change into locative case as “khyar-i-kha”, (on you). Like that vowels ending roots also take “-kha” as locative marker, e.g. “bomo” (girl) ends with the vowel /u/ sound, change into locative case as “bom-i-kha” (on the girl), and the noun “Razia” ends with the short vowel /ə/, change into locative case as “Razi-kha” (on Razia) and the pronoun “nya” (I) again ends with the short vowel /ə/, change into locative case as “nya-i-kha” (on me).

### Ablative Case

The inflection “-na” functions as an ablative case marker in Balti, when it attaches with roots (nouns/pronouns) ending with both consonant and vowel sounds. Furthermore, the inflectional morpheme “-na” marks an ablative case on Balti roots (noun/pronoun) indicating the starting points of an action regarding both time and location. For instance, the noun ‘Karachi’ ends

with the long vowel /i/, changes into ablative case as “Karachi-na” (from Karachi), the pronoun “nya” (I) ends with the short vowel /ə/, changes into ablative case, as ‘nyi-na’ (from me) and the noun “Iran” ends with the consonant /n/, changes into ablative case “Iran-na”, (from Iran). Similarly starting point of time is also marked by the same case marker “-na” as, “gjuxpi” (morning) ends with the vowel /i/, changes into ablative case as “gjuxpi-na” (since morning), “gonde” (yesterday) ends with the diphthong /ei/, changes into ablative case as gonde-na (since yesterday) and “pishin” (noon) ends with the consonant /n/, changes into ablative case as pishin na (since noon).

### Gender Marker in Balti

The inflection “-mo” marks feminine gender when it attaches with root (masculine gender). However, the inflection “-mo” is not attached with all roots ending with both consonant and vowels. The inflection “-mo” is added to the respective roots (masculine) to get the corresponding feminine. For example the word “khi” (dog) masculine gender takes the inflection “-mo” at the end to change into the corresponding feminine gender as “khi-mo” (bitch), “hyak” (yak) masculine gender change into feminine “hyaq-mo” (female yak), “bot”(male Buddhist) into “bot-mo”(female Buddhist) and bo(boy) masculine gender takes the same gender marker to change into its correspondence feminine gender, “bo-mo”(girl).

### Imperative Mood

The inflection “-s” marks imperative mood, when it attaches with roots (verbal roots) ending with vowel sounds. Whereas, consonants ending verbal stems are identified plain imperatives. However, if the vowel of the verbal root is the infix “-a-” then the infix is replaced by the infix “-o-” for imperative mood in Balti Language. For example, the verbal roots ending with consonants, e.g. ‘zer’(tell) ends with the consonant /r/, change into imperative form as “zer” (tell), “min” (give) ends with the consonant /n/, change into imperative mood ‘min’(give), and ‘lang’(stand) ends with the consonant /ŋ/, change into imperative mood “l-o-ng” (stand). While, verbal roots ending with vowels in Balti, e.g. “ngu” (weep) ends with the short vowel /u/, change into imperative mood “ngu-s” (weep), “be” (do) ends with the diphthong /ei/, change into imperative

mood “be-s” (do) and the verb “rbi” (write) ends with the short vowel /i/, change into imperative mood rbi-s(wite). But the verbal root “ze” (eat) has an exception that to change into “zo-” (eat), the verbal root “ze” replaced its last sound, “ei” by the short vowel /u /. In addition, the inflection “-i” is added to the imperative form for friendly request (persisting mood). For instance, the imperative form “ong” (come) change into persisting mood, e.g. “ong-i” (come/will you!), and “l-o-ng” (stand) into “l-o-ng-i” (stand/will you!)

### Interrogative Mood

The inflection “-a” marks interrogative mood, when it attaches to affirmative form (verbs). However, for the present participle affirmative doesn’t take the inflection “-a” rather the inflection is added with the corresponding auxiliary. For instance the affirmative verbal form ending with consonants, e.g. ‘zer’(tell) ends with the consonant /r/, change into interrogative moods, e.g. “zer-a”(should “subj” tell?), ‘zer-ed-a’(do/does “subj” tell?), ‘zer-en yod-a’(be “sub” telling?), ‘zer-set-a’(Have “subj” told?) and ‘zer-uk-a’(Will “subj” tell?). While, affirmative verbal form ending with vowels in

Balti as “ngu”(weep) ends with /u/, change into interrogative mood, e.g. “ngu-a”(Should “subj” weep?), ngu-ed-a (do/does “subj” weep?), ‘ngu-en yod-a’ (be “subj” weeping?), ‘ngu-set-a’(have “subj” wept?) and ‘ngu-ik-a’(will “subj” weep?).

### Finding

The study concludes that Balti language is a less explored language having no proper linguistics breakthrough in the field of morphology. The current study tried to expose an inconsequential dimension of Balti morphology “Inflectional Markers”. The collected data have been analyzed descriptively keeping in view the features of inflectional morpheme. The study found 24 inflectional markers.

The Balti inflectional morphemes have been classified into the following categories according to their nature.

- 3 Plural markers i.e., “-kun”, “-ong” and “-ng”
- 6 Case Markers, i.e., “-si”, “-i”, “-la”, “-ing”, “-kha”, and “-na”.
- 1 Gender Marker i.e., “-mo”.
- 11 Tense Markers, i.e., “-ed”, “-en”, “-set”, “-s”, “-uk”, “-nuk”, “-tuk”, “-ik”, “-in”, “-se” and “-e”.
- 3 mood markers, i.e., “-s”, “-i”, and “-a”

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