Number and Gender in Balti (Spoken in Kargil)

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Abstract

Balti, the prevailing language all over Baltistan, belongs to the 'Tibeto-Burman' family of languages (Grierson, 1909). All Tibeto-Burman languages are verb-final (SOV), so is the case of Balti which too have subject-object-verb pattern.The languages of the subcontinent have been studied at length yet there has not been a comprehensive study of Balti spoken in Kargil (Jammu and Kashmir State). The present paper aims to discuss the number and gender system in Balti (spoken in Kargil).

Keywords: Baltistan, Tibeto-Burman, Number, Gender, Suffix, Balti, Noun.

Introduction

Balti or Bhotia of Baltistan, the prevailing language all over Baltistan, belongs to the 'Tibeto-Burman' family of languages (Grierson, 1909). The Tibeto-Burman family comprises of various dialects spoken from a) Tibet in the north to Burma in the south, and b) Baltistan in the west to the Chinese provinces of Ssechuən and Yünnən in East (Grierson, 1909). All Tibeto-Burman languages are verb-final (SOV), so is the case of Balti which too have subject-object-verb pattern.

Baltistan ('Baltiyul' as known to locals) is situated at the north-eastern most tip of today's Pakistan. Its boundaries are defined by Gilgit in the

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west, Ladakh in the east (Dras, Kargil, i.e. the line of control (LOC) with India that extends to Tibet), Kashmir in the south and to the north, along the crest of the Karakoram mountain range. Baltiyul comprises several valleys including Skardo, Khapulo, Shigar, Rongdo and Kharmang.

The areas/villages in Ladakh region of Jammu and Kashmir State where Balti speakers are settled down are: Kargil, Drass, Karkichu, Hardass, Laatoo, Namso, Lamsu, Kanoor, Minji, Tripson, Batambis, Apati, Wakha, Chicktan, Kharbo, Shumsha, Nubra, Turtuk, etc. Some families have migrated to Srinagar and other parts of the Jammu and Kashmir state and settled there.

Number

In linguistics, grammatical number is a grammatical category of nouns, pronouns, and adjective and verb agreement that expresses count distinctions (such as "one", "two", or "three or more"). In many languages, the number categories are singular or plural. Some languages also have a dual number or other arrangements.

The count distinctions typically, but not always, correspond to the actual count of the referents of the marked noun or pronoun.

Balti has two-tier number system i.e. singular and plural. Most countable nouns form their plurals from singular forms. Some countable nouns have the same form for both number (singular and plural). Generally plurals are formed from singular by suffixation. In Balti [un] and [kun] suffixes are used to form the plurals. It is pertinent to mention here that the final phoneme of the lexical item decides the plural marker, i.e., whether the word will take [un] or [kun] as a plural marker. If the lexical item ends with a consonant, it takes [kun] as a plural marker and if the lexical item ends with a vowel it takes [un] as a plural marker. Below are the examples to illustrate this.

[kun] as a plural marker:
For the words which have a consonant phoneme at the final position, the plural marker [kun] is used e.g.

Singular	Plural	Gloss
gamyul	gamyul-kun	village/s
hlaŋ	hlaŋ-kun	cow/s
čhuzur	čhuzur-kun	bank/s of river
saŋgul	saŋgul-kun	earth-quake/s
hrgen	hrgen-kun	relative/s
bebjun	bebjun-kun	egg/s
mik	mik-kun	eye/s
raskis	raskis-kun	goat/s (masc.)
rabakʰ	rabakʰ-kun	goat/s (fem.)
zubundak	zubundak-kun	ant/s
zer	zer-kun	nail/s
horgum	horgum-kun	box/es
naŋ	naŋ-kun	house/s
phekulik	phekulik-kun	key/s

[un] as a plural marker:
The words with vowel ending take [un] suffix as a plural marker e.g.

Singular	Plural	Gloss
šukbu	šukbu-un	book/s
bila:	bila:-un	cat/s
piʦe:	piʦe:-un	rat/s
hlčaŋma:	hlčaŋma:-un	tree/s
ri:	ri:-un	hill/s
baho:	baho:-un	cave/s
ruRɨduva:	ruRɨduva:-un	stone/s
kaka:	kaka:-un	elder brother/s
pʰono:	pʰono:	younger brother/s
bomo:	bomo:-un	daughter/s

ʦo:	ʦo:-un	nephew/s
ʦamo:	ʦamo:-un	niece/s
nomo:	nomo:-un	younger sister/s
aše:	aše:-un	elder sister/s
ʦʰanbiyu:	ʦʰanbiyu-un	bat/s
kʰamčʰu:	kʰamčʰu:-un	beak/s
drenmo:	drenmo:-un	bear/s
čari:	čari:-un	bed bug/s
beto:	beto:-un	calf/s
ʦʰelbo:	ʦʰelbo:-un	cage/s
kʰi:	kʰi:-un	dog/s

In Balti, there are different lexemes for younger and elder kinship relations as seen in Punjabi. The Balti uses **/kaka:/** for 'elder brother' and **/pʰono:/** for 'younger brother', the plural forms for elder brothers is **/kaka:-un/** and for younger brothers is   /pʰono:-un/. But when Balti have to represent both younger and elder brothers, the plural suffix [un] is added to the final lexeme and not with the both lexemes as **/kaka: pʰono:-un/**.

Similarly, for nephew and niece Balti uses the lexemes **/ʦo:/** and **/ʦo:mo:/** and their plural forms are **/ʦo:-un/** and **/ʦo:mo:-un/** respectively. But while stating both nephews and nieces compound instead of *__/ʦo:-un ʦo:mo-un/__, Balti uses **/ʦo: ʦo:mo:-un/**

The same could be seen in words like /nomo:/ for 'younger sister' and /aše:/ for 'elder sister e.g.

Singular	Plural	Gloss
nomo:	nomo:-un	younger sister/s
aše:	aše:-un	elder sister/s
aše: nomo:	aše: nomo:-un	younger and elder sister/s

Gender

Grammatical gender is a system of noun classification present in approximately one fourth of the world's languages. In languages with grammatical gender, every noun must pertain to one category called gender. The different genders form a closed set of usually 2 or 3 divisions, in which all the nouns are included. Very few items can belong to several classes at once. Common gender divisions include: masculine, feminine, neuter, animate, or inanimate.

Balti nouns too have the distinction between the number and gender as the other world languages have. Grammatically speaking, Balti nouns have no gender, except as a matter of sex or absence of sex (Read, 1934:4). Balti nouns uses [pʰo:] and [mo:] to differentiate between male and female respectively. There are many examples where suppletion and some phonological changes are also reported for gender formation.

Use of [pʰo:] and [mo:]

In Balti, to make the difference between male and female of non-humans [pʰo:] and [mo:] are used as gender markers. [pʰo:] marker is used to show the male while as [mo:] marker is used to show female e.g.

Masculine	Feminine	Gloss
biya:-pʰo:	biya:-mo:	cock/hen
bakʰ-pʰo:	bakʰ-mo:	groom/bride
bila:-pho:	bila:-mo:	he/she cat

Sometimes the masculine forms does not take the suffix [pʰo:] but its feminine form always takes the [mo:] marker with it e.g.

Masculine	Feminine	Gloss
bizba:	bizba:-mo:	he/she servent
tso:	tsamo:	nephew/niece
šadi:	šadi:-mo:	he/she monkey

Suppletion

Like other major languages of the region, Balti also report the case of suppletion in gender distinction e.g.

Masculine	Feminine	Gloss
raskis	rabakʰ	he/she goat
pʰuDõ:s	lukʰ	lamb/ewe
ata:	amo:	father/mother
mo:mo:	ne:ne:	maternal uncle/aunt
kaka:	aše:	elder brother/sister
pʰono:	nomo:	younger brother/sister
pʰru:	bomo:	son/daughter

There are certain cases where phonological changes take place in gender formation e.g.

Masculine	Feminine	Gloss
apo:	api:	grand-father/mother

Conclusion

Balti like other Tibeto-Burman languages have two tier number and gender system. There are two ways to form plurals from the singular nouns i.e. by adding [kun] or [un] as plural markers depending upon the phoneme at the final position of the word. If the word ends with a consonant, [kun] marker is used to make its plural and if the word ends with a vowel [un] marker is used. In Balti, the distinction between male and female is made by using [pʰo:] and [mo:] suffixes. Balti gender reports many examples of suppletion as well. Sometimes certain phonological changes also occur while forming the feminine form.

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