Balti Morphology

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Language Documentationː Field Methods

Introduction

This paper first focuses on Balti morphology. Overall, Balti is an ergative-absolutive language and has case markings for the ergative, genitive, and dative cases. First will be discussed the nominal morphology and the case markers, followed by verbal morphology, focusing on tense and aspect. It is important to note here that there does not seem to be a clear future tense, and often the only ways to indicate the future tense would be through context or using irrealis verbs, but there is a potential explanation which will be explored in Mysteries, Section 3.3. All data has been elicited by me, unless otherwise noted.

1. Nominal Morphology

1.1 Bare Pronominals

Person	Number	Pol/Fam	M/F	Incl/Excl	Form
1	sg				ŋa
	pl				ŋəja
2	sg	polite			jaŋ
		familiar			kʰjaŋ
	pl	polite			jɪdaŋ
		familiar			kʰɪdaŋ
3	sg		masculine		kʰo
			feminine		mo
	pl		masculine, mixed		kʰoŋ
			feminine		moŋ

1.2 Possessive Pronominals

Person	Number	Pol/Fam	M/F	Incl/Excl	Form
1	sg				ɲi
	pl				ŋəj
2	sg	polite			jeri
		familiar			kʰjeri
	pl	polite			jeti
		familiar			kʰeti
3	sg		masculine		kʰoi
			feminine		moi
	pl		masculine, mixed		kʰodaɲi
			feminine		modaɲi

1.3 Reflexive Pronominals

Person	Number	Pol/Fam	M/F	Incl/Excl	Form
1	sg				ŋaŋ
	pl				ŋai
2	sg	polite			jaŋ
		familiar			kʰjaŋ
	pl	polite*			
		familiar*			
3	sg		masculine		kwaŋ
			feminine		mwaŋ
	pl		masculine, mixed		kʰodaɲi
			feminine		modaɲi

*Had not been elicited.

1.4 Reflexive Possessive Pronominals

Person	Number	Pol/Fam	M/F	Incl/Excl	Form
1	sg				ŋi
	pl				ŋai
2	sg	polite			jeɾi
		familiar			kʰeɾi
	pl	polite			jeti
		familiar			kʰeti
3	sg		masculine		kuɾi
			feminine		muɾi
	pl		masculine, mixed		kʰeti
			feminine		meti

1.4 Definite markers [-po], [-o]
[-po] is added on as a definite marker when the noun ends in a consonant꞉

    (1) di   ʃokʃokʰ-po   ͡tʃi   fila   ɪn
        this   letter- DEF   who   for   is
        'Who is this letter for?'

If the noun ends in a vowel, the last vowel is changed to [-o]:

    (2) b-o-is   xtrax-po   z-ɛn   m-ɛt
        cow-DEF.ERG   gift-DEF   eat-PTCP   NEG-AUX
        'The cow is not eating the gift.'

1.5 Plural Markers [-ŋ] and [-kʊn]
The plural marker [-ŋ] is used on V-final stems.

    (3) kʰuʃu-ŋ   ʒunbo   jʊt

apple-PL   tasty   COP

'Apples are tasty.'

The plural marker [-kʊn] is used instead of [-ŋ] on C-final stems.

(4) mendoq-kʊn   marfɛ   jʊt
     flowers-PL   red   COP
     'All flowers are red.'

1.6 Case Markers

1.6.1 Ergative Markers
The ergative marker on its own is usually [-s] unless appearing after a back vowel in which case it is [-is]. The speaker who was elicited from said that typically the [-s] of the ergative marker is dropped at the end.

(5) ŋa-s   ŋaŋ-la   rg-ɛt
     I-ERG   myself-DAT   love-PRS
     'I love myself.'

(6) bil-o-is   ɲa   z-os
     cat-DEF.ERG   fish   eat-PST
     'The cat ate fish.'

1.6.2 Dative Marker [-la]
[-la] seems to be used as a dative marker just added on at the end of the stem.

(7) ŋa   bil-o-la   xrkjɛl taŋ-ɛn   jʊt-pa
     I   cat-DEF.DAT   bath   make-PTCP AUX.PST
     'I was making a bath for the cat.'

For verbs such as 'to know' or 'to like', the subject takes the dative marker, as in 'to me this is occurring'꞉

(8) ŋa-la   ͡tsʰo   rgaʃa ma-ʃɛs   ͡tsar zɛ bana ŋa-la xrkjɛlba ʃjɛs m-ɛt
     I.DAT lake   like   NEG-know   because   I-DAT swim   know NEG-AUX
     'I do not like the lake because I do not know how to swim.'

1.6.3 Genitive Marker [-i]

The genitive marker is [-i], and also always appears before postpositions.

(9) b-o   mwe-i   ɪn
     cow-DEF   woman.GEN   COP
     'The cow is some woman's.'

(10)   kʰo   ͡tsʰo-i   kʰa   xrkjɛlba   go-ɛn   jʊt
       He   lake.GEN   upon   swim   go.PTCP   AUX
      'He is going to the lake to swim.'

2. Verbal Morphology

2.1 Tense
2.1.1 Present tense
[-ɛt] indicates present tenseː

(11)   ŋa-la   ͡tsʰo   rgaʃa   ʃjɛs-ɛt
       I-DAT   lake   love   know-PRS
      'I like the lake.'

2.1.2 Past tense
-s indicates simple past tenseː

(12)   ŋa   ͡tʃulu-la   xlta-s
       I   apricot-DAT   see-PST
      'I saw the apricot.'

2.2 Aspect

2.2.1 Imperfective Aspect

2.2.1.1 Present Progressive
The imperfective present progressive is shown with the participle marker [-ɛn] and the auxiliary [jʊt]ː

(13)   ŋa   xrkjɛl-ɛn   jʊt
       I   bathe-PTCP   AUX
      'I am bathing.'

2.2.1.2 Past Progressive

The past progressive is the present progressive with the past tense [-pa] marking꞉

(14) ŋa naŋ   i   oŋ-ɛn   jʊt-pa
      I   home to   come-PTCP   AUX.PST
      'I was coming home.'

(15) ŋa   zunb-ɛn   jʊt-pa
      I   smile-PTCP   AUX.PST
      'I was smiling.'

2.2.2 Perfective Aspect

2.2.2.1 Present Perfect Progressive

The present perfect progressive is formed by adding the participle marker [-ɛn] to the verb, adding the auxiliary verb [jʊt] and the copula [ɪn]. When [jʊt] appears in front of [ɪn] it has an added ending [-pi] as shown, and in general the last letter of a verb is changed to [-i] in front of [ɪn]꞉

(16) ŋa jɛri   bil-o-la   xrkjɛl taŋ-ɛn   jʊtp-i   ɪn
      I   your   cat-DEF.DAT   bath   make-PTCP   AUX.COP   COP
      'I have been washing your cat.'

2.2.2.2 Future Perfect Progressive

The future perfect progressive seems to take the same form as the present perfect progressive, and the future marking is indicated by stating a time earlier in the sentence (e.g. tomorrow, next week)꞉

(17) haskɛ   ŋa   NYC gw-ɛn   jʊt-pi   ɪn
      tomorrow I   NYC go-PTCP   AUX.COP   COP
      'Tomorrow I will go to New York.'
      (Diana Abagyan; 2020/03/06; GM)

2.2.2.3 Past Perfect Progressive

In order to form the past perfect progressive, the present perfect progressive [-ɛn jʊt-pi ɪn] has [pa], the past marker added at the end (with negation going between the Progressive꞉

(18) ŋa furut z-ɛn   m-ɛt-pi   ɪn-pa

        I   fruit   eat.PROG   NEG-AUX.COP   COP.PST
        'I had not been eating fruit.'

2.3 Modality

2.3.1 Imperative
The imperative seems to be the word stem alone.

(19)   kʰidaŋ   gaŋma   loxsɛ   zgo   pʰɛs
           you all   all   together   door   open
           'All of you open the door together!'

Instead of following the negation rules in Section 2.4, a phrase is negated by placing [ma] before the verbː

(20)   tʰatʰa   ma   bɛs
           laugh   NEG   do
           'Stop laughing!'

2.3.2 Potentiality
Potentiality is shown with [na], connecting the two phrases in the middle. However, the last verb's exact derivation is unclear (see mysteries in Section 3.3)ː

(21)   ɲi   kuʃu   jʊt-pa   na   ŋa-s   z-ɛt-pa
           my   apple AUX.PST   POT I-ERG   eat-AUX.PST
'If I had an apple, I would have eaten it.'

(22)   ɲi   ⌢tsʰaniŋ   xmul jʊt-pa   na   ŋa-s   naŋ   ⌢tʃi
           My   with   money AUX.PST   POT I-ERG house one
           lɛn-ɛt-pa
           buy-AUX.PST
           'If I had money, I would have bought a house.'

2.3.3 Irrealis
Two words are used to show irrealisː [sukʰ], used for the past tense, and [duktukʰ], which is the only word other than temporal words that can indicate future tenseː

(23)   kʰo-s   ʁzun   tʰaŋf-i   ɪn   sukʰ
           He-ERG lie   make   COP   IRR

(Diana Abagyan; 2020/03/27; GM)

(24) ŋa   haskɛ   z-ɛn   duktukʰ
     I   tomorrow   eat-PTCP   IRR
     'I shall be eating tomorrow.'

2.4 Negation

The negation affects the last verb of the word by placing [ma] before the verb. A couple of exceptions are that It will show up as [ma] for all verbs except for [jʊt] where the two combine and form [mɛt], and for [ɪn], [ma] combines with it to form [mɛn].

3. Mysteries

3.1 Irrealis Markers

Although it does seem that [sukʰ] and [duktukʰ] are being used to show irrealis, they do appear as well in sentences that do not seem to be containing that quality in English when the speaker was asked to transcribe the future tense:

(25) ŋa   dɛriŋ   ͡tsʰaŋ-la   nitʰaŋ-ɛn   duktukʰ
     I   tonight   sleep-DAT   fall-PTCP   IRR
     'Tonight I will be falling asleep.'

A potential explanation for this is that the future is always seen as uncertain in Balti and the speaker interpreted the sentence in such a manner that it would require the irrealis to be used, but more data would most likely need to be elicited to know for sure.

3.2 Future tense

It is still unclear as to whether the future tense really exists, because whenever it was elicited it did not seem to have a set translation, and when it was elicited the speaker seemed to have some confusion as to how to interpret the sentence. When a time word is not indicated, it seems that the simple future would be indicated by just adding [ɪn] to the end of the sentence (and having the verb change accordingly):

(26) ŋa-s   bil-o   ͡tʃikʰ lenm-i   ɪn
     I-ERG   cat-DEF   one   buy-COP   COP
     'I will buy a cat.'

In other cases, however, it is indistinguishable from the imperfective present progressive:

(27)   ni kʰi   ͡tʃikʰ   jʊtp-i   ɪn
        I   dog   one   AUX.COP   COP
        'I will have a dog.'

The use of [ɪn] in general is very confusing as it is not just seen in the future tense examples, which makes me think that perhaps it is not an indicator of future tense but of something else entirely. Hopefully with more data we can determine if there is a clear future tense or it can only be indicated by temporal words, but for the moment my hypothesis remains that examples 26 and 27 are not examples of future tense but rather just a different use of [ɪn] that cannot be perfectly translated into English.

3.3 Potentiality - Final Verb Ending

The ending of the verb in sentences 21 and 22, while looking very similar to previously explained aspects, does not seem to make much sense here. The [-ɛt-pa] construction is just not seen anywhere, and it could be the present tense but also the past tense marker, but that seems highly implausible. Perhaps the [-ɛt] is being used here to also indicate potentiality along with the [na] used to combine the clauses, but it is unclear and requires more elicitation.

4. Conclusion

Overall, with the exception of the future tense, the irrealis markers, and a couple of pronouns and potentiality, much of the inflectional morphology seems to have been well-elicited. It is curious that [jʊt] and [ɪn] are used so much in various forms throughout the various tenses and aspects. As more sentences will be elicited hopefully these can resolve themselves, but so far a lot of progress has been made.