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# Avestan

Morphology – Part 1: Morphological properties, nominal composition



**MUYA** —  
**The Multimedia Yasna Project**

# Roadmap

- Morphological type
- Morphological devices
- Word classes
- Caland system
- Nominal composition

## Morphological type

- Largely fusional (inflectional), of the common ancient Indo-European type.
- Cf. OAv. thematic noun inflection:

	sg.	pl.
instr.	-ā	-āiš
abl.	-āṭ	-aēibiō

## Morphological type (cont.)

- Some agglutinative features in verbal inflection (OAv.):

	sg.		pl.	
	non-prs.	prs.	non-prs.	prs.
2.	-h	-h-ī	-tā	-θā
3.	-t̃	-t-ī	-n (< *-nt)	-ṇt-ī

## Morphological type (cont.)

- Morphology mostly concatenative
- Also vowel gradation (ablaut) and, presumably, accent shifts (original accentuation not transmitted)
  - Mostly concomitant feature of concatenation

## Morphological devices (1): suffixation

- By far the predominant device in

- nominal derivation and inflexion:

*gaē-/ji-* 'to live' → *gaē-θā-* 'living being, world of living beings' →  
DAT/ABL.PL *gaē-θā-biiō*

- verbal stem formation and inflexion:

*kar/kərə-* 'to make' → present stem *kərə-naō-* → 3SG *kərə-naō<sup>i</sup>-ti*

→ Root - Suffix - Ending (R - S - E)

## Morphological devices (2): prefixation

privative prefix *a(n)-*     *a-drujiiant-* ‘not deceiving’ (*drujiiant-* ‘deceiving’)  
*an-aēša-* ‘incapable’ (*aēša-* ‘capable’)

*hu-* ‘well-’

*hu-mata-* ‘well-thought’

*duš-* ‘badly-’

*duš-mata-* ‘badly thought’

intensifier *aš-*

*aš.yešti-* ‘plentiful sacrifice’

augment (past tense marker)

*a-māhmaidī* ‘we have (just) recognized’  
(\**a-man-h-madi*)  
(PST-think-AOR-1PL)

## Morphological devices (3): infixation

- Marginal device
- Infix *-na/n-* as present stem marker

*vid-* 'to find'

present stem *vi-na-d-* OAv. 3sg. *vinas-tī*

from underlying *\*vinat-ti* < *\*vinad-ti*

with /t + t/ regularly surfacing as *-st-*



## Morphological devices (4): reduplication

- Employed to derive various types of verbal stems

present stems            *dā-* ‘to put; give’ *da-dā-*

desiderative stems    *sru-* ‘to hear’ *su-sru-ša-* ‘to wish to hear’

perfect stems            *taš-* ‘to fashion’ *ta-taš-*

intensive stems        *γžar-* ‘to flow’ *γžarə.γžar-a-* ‘to flow agitatedly’

- Very marginally used in noun stem formation

## Morphological devices (5): ablaut (vowel gradation)

- Mostly a concomitant feature of suffixation
- Suffix correlating with a specific ablaut grade of the preceding morpheme

+ suffix *-tu/tāu-* (YAv. *-taō-*) → *jiiā-tu-* ‘life subsistence’  
*jiiā-/jī-* ‘to live’  
+ suffix *-ti/taē-* → *jī-ti-* ‘life, living’

*jiiā-tu-/jiiā-tāu-* → ACC.SG *jiiā-tū-m* \*/*ǰiā-tu-m*/

→ GEN.SG *jiiā-tāu-š* \*/*ǰiā-taυ-š*/

## Ablaut as a self-standing morphological device

- Some root nouns: forms with homonymous endings only differentiated by ablaut:

*āp/ap-* ‘water’ → NOM.PL *āp-ō*, ACC.PL *ap-ō*

- Nom.-acc. pl. of neuter consonant stems:

sg. (YAv.) *aiiarə* /aṯ-ar/ ‘day’ → pl. (OAv.) *aiiārē* /aṯ-ār/

sg. *manō* /man-ah/ ‘mind’ → pl. *manā* /man-āh/

- Vṛddhi*-formations (+ suffix *-i-* or *-a-*), indicating appurtenance

*humanah-* ‘someone with good thinking’ → *haomanan̄ha-* /haṷmanaha-/ ‘cheerfulness’

*hauuana-* ‘pressing (of the Haōma)’ → *hāuuani-* ‘time of pressing’

## Word classes

open		semi-closed	closed
verbs	nominals		
	nouns	adpositions	conjunctions
	adjectives	adverbs	numerals
	participles verbal adjectives		pronouns

(Arrows in the original image indicate fuzzy boundaries: a dashed arrow from 'participles' to 'adjectives', a dashed arrow from 'adjectives' to 'adpositions', a dashed arrow from 'adpositions' to 'adverbs', and a dashed arrow from 'adverbs' to 'adjectives'. There are also bidirectional dashed arrows between 'adpositions' and 'adverbs'.)

(arrows mark fuzzy boundaries)

## Patterns of suffix distribution: Caland system

- Good evidence for the “**Caland system**” (Willem Caland, 1859-1932)
- Recurring set of nominal and verbal derivatives evolving around “property concept roots” (Rau 2009)
  - adjectives in *-ra-*, *-u-*, *-a-*, *-aṇt-* (replaced by nouns in *-i-* when used as first member of compounds)
  - comparatives in *-iih-*, superlatives in *-išta-* (otherwise *-tara-*, *-tama-*)
  - abstract nouns in *-ah-*, root nouns
  - various associated verbal stems

## Caland system: examples

root	adjective	in compounds	comparative superlative	nouns	verbs
<i>sū-</i> 'STRENGTH'	<i>sū-ra-</i> 'strong'		<i>sāuu-išta-</i>	<i>sāuu-ah-</i> , <i>sū-</i> 'strength, prosperity'	<i>sāuu-aiia-</i> 'to invigorate'
<i>bərəz-</i> 'HIGHNESS'	<i>bərəz-aṇt-</i> 'high'	<i>bərəzi.caxra-</i> 'with lofty wheels'	<i>barəz-iih-</i> , <i>barəz-išta-</i>	<i>barəzah-</i> , <i>bərəz-</i> 'height'	( <i>us-</i> ) <i>barəz-aiia-</i> 'to make great'

## Endo- and exocentric nominal compounds

- Endocentric (Tatpuruṣa):  
*dañhu-paiti-* ‘lord (*paiti-*) of the land’
- Exocentric (Bahuvrīhi):  
possessive: *xruui.dru-* ‘with a bloody club’, *mazda-iasna-* ‘whose sacrifice (*yasna-*) is directed to (Ahura) Mazdā’  
local particles as first member: *apa-kauua-* ‘having a hump (*kauua-*) on the back’ (*apa* ‘away’), *vī-daēuua-* ‘keeping the demons (*daēuua-*) away’ (*vī-* ‘apart’)

## Nominal compounds: *hu-* and *duš-*

- Restricted to the use as first member of compounds, *hu-* (*x<sup>v</sup>-*) and *duš-* (*duž-*) serve as substitutes for the adjectives *vohu-* ‘good’ and *aka-* ‘bad’ respectively

- Endocentric:

*hu-mata-*, *hūxta-*, *huuaršta-* /*hu-uaršta-*/ ‘good thought/word/deed’

*dušiti-* (*\*duš-šiti-*) ‘bad dwelling’

- Exocentric:

*hu-manah-* : *duž-manah-* ‘thinking good/bad thoughts’



## Governing compounds

- Head-final verbal governing compounds
  - 2nd member is root noun (“root compound”): *vərəθra-jan-* ‘obstacle-breaker’ (*vərəθra-* ‘obstacle’, *jan-* ‘breaking, breaker’)
  - 2nd member is verbal abstract noun: *rāniiō.skərati-* ‘making happier (*rāniiāh-*)’, with 2nd member *skərati-* ‘act of making’ ← (*s*)*kar-* ‘to make’
  - 2nd member corresponds to present stem: *pasuš.hauruua-* ‘cattle-watching (dog)’ (present stem *niš-hauruua-* ‘to watch over’)

## Governing compounds (cont.)

- Head-initial verbal governing compounds:

- 1st member is a present participle

*frādaṭ.gaēθa-* ‘promoting the living beings’  
(*frādaṅt-/frādat-* ‘promoting’ ← prs. stem *frāda-*)

- Prepositional governing compounds (exocentric):

- 1st member is an adposition

*auui.miθri-* ‘who is against Miθra’ (here with suffix replacement *-a-* → *-i-*)

## Copulative and iterative compounds

- Copulative compounds (Dvandva):

both members show dual inflection

YAv. *pasu vira* (both NOM.DU) ‘cattle-and-men’

- Adverbial iterative compounds (Āmreḍita):

*nmāne nmāne* ‘in house after house’

## Decasual compounds

- The first member occasionally shows case inflection:

acc.	OAv. <i>ahūm.biš-</i> ‘world-healer’	( <i>ahu-</i> ‘world’)
gen.	YAv. <i>zmas.ciθra-</i> ‘containing the seed of the earth’	( <i>zam-</i> ‘earth’)
dat.	OAv. <i>yauuaē-jī-</i> ‘forever living’	( <i>āiiu-/yauu-</i> ‘life age’)
loc.	YAv. <i>maidiiōi.šad-</i> ‘sitting in the middle’	( <i>maidiiā</i> ‘middle’)
ins.	OAv. <i>ašā.aōjah-</i> ‘strong through Aša-’	( <i>aša-</i> ‘principle of order/truth’)

## Nominal compounds: formal features

- Suffixes *-a-*, *-ā-*, *-an-* of first member often replaced by *-ō-* (redactional intervention)

*daēuua-* ‘demon’ → *daēuuō.dāta-* ‘established by the demons’

*daēnā-* ‘vision, religion’ → *daēnō.dis-* ‘showing the vision, or religion’

*zruuan-* ‘time, “Time”’ → *zruuō.dāta-* ‘established by Time’