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# Avestan

Morphology – Part 3: The verb



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

# Roadmap

- Aspect and tense in Old and Young Avestan
- Verbal stem formation
- Voice
- Participles and verbal adjectives

## Aspect stems and tense marking: OAv.

- Aspect stems:
  - present stem (imperfective)
  - aorist stem (perfective)
  - perfect stem (stative-resultative)
- Tense marking:
  - “primary endings” (present tense) vs. “secondary endings” (non-present)
  - prefix *a-* (“augment”) for past tense (rare)
  - future: future stem, subjunctive mood

## Primary and secondary endings: active voice

	sg.		pl.	
	secondary (non-prs.)	primary (prs.)	secondary (non-prs.)	primary (prs.)
1.	<i>-m</i>	<i>-mī</i> (them. <i>-ā</i> )	<i>-mā</i>	<i>-mahī</i>
2.	<i>-h</i>	<i>-hī</i>	<i>-tā</i>	<i>-θā</i>
3.	<i>-t̥ /-t/</i>	<i>-tī</i>	<i>-n</i> (< <i>*-nt</i> )	<i>-nt-ī /-nti/</i>

(OAv.)

## Primary and secondary endings: middle voice

- Middle (non-active) endings: some without apparent formal relation to the corresponding active endings
- More marked compared to their active counterparts

	active		middle	
	primary	secondary	primary	secondary
2. sg.	<i>-hī/-šī</i>	<i>*-h/-š</i>	<i>-hē, -šē</i>	<i>-hā, -šā</i>
3. sg.	<i>-tī</i>	<i>-t̥</i>	<i>-tē</i>	<i>-tā</i>
1. pl.	<i>-mahī</i>	<i>-mā</i>	<i>-maidē</i>	<i>-maidī</i>
2. pl.	<i>-θā</i>	<i>-tā</i>	<i>-duiē</i>	<i>-dūm</i>

(OAv.)

## Overview of OAv. aspect-tense categories

	present stem	aorist stem	perfect stem	(future stem)
SE	prs. injunctive	aor. injunctive	perf. injunctive (rare)	
SE + augment	imperfect (rare)	aor. indicative	-	
PE	prs. indicative	-	-	(future)
perfect endings	-	-	perf. indicative	

SE/PE = Secondary/primary endings

## OAv. aspect: examples

- Present stem: progressive / durative

*mazdā dadāt̄ (prs. of dā- ‘give’) ... yauuōi vīspāi.ā*

“Mazdā gives (it) ... for (my) entire life time” (Y 53.4)

- Aorist stem: punctual

*spəntəm aṭ θbā mazdā māñhī (\* /man-h-i/, aor. of man-  
‘think/realize’) ahurā*

“I realize you to be beneficent, o Ahura Mazdā” (Y 43 passim)

## OAv. aspect: examples (cont.)

- Contrast:

*yōi nōiṭ aṣam mainiiantā (prs. of man-) aēibiiō dūirē vohū as (aor. of ah-  
‘throw’) manō*

“those who do not think (in line with) *aṣa-* (true order) - far away from them do you cast good thinking” (Y 34.8)

*taṭ θβā pərəsā (prs.) arəš mōi vaōcā (aor.) ahurā*

“that I am asking you, tell me straight, Ahura Mazdā” (Y 44 passim)



## Aspect stems and tense marking: YAv.

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- Tense marking:
  - “primary endings” (present tense) vs. “secondary endings” (non-present)
  - prefix *a-* (“augment”) for past tense (rare)
  - future: subjunctive mood, future stem

## Overview of YAv. aspect-tense categories

	present stem	aorist stem	perfect stem	future stem
SE	prs. injunctive = narrative past	<del>aor.</del> injunctive	perf. injunctive (rare)	
SE + augment	imperfect (rare)	<del>aor.</del> indicative	-	
PE	prs. indicative	-	-	future
perfect endings	-	-	perf. indicative	

## YAv. tense system

tense	form
past	present injunctive
present	present indicative
future	future stem in <i>-hīia-/-šīia-</i> present subjunctive

## Future tense (OAv./YAv.)

- “Future stem” in *-hiia-/-šiiā-*: not a full-fledged verbal category (comparatively rare) - formally a present stem
- Competes with the subjunctive in its “prospective” use

*aṭ tā vaxšiiā* (FUT) ... *yā*

“Next I shall speak about those things, which...” (OAv., Y 30.1)

*aṭ vā yazāi* (PRS.SUBJ) *stauuas mazdā ahurā*

“I shall sacrifice to you, praising (you), o Ahura Mazdā” (OAv., Y 50.4)

→ immediate future (?)

## Future tense (cont.)

*aēšqm uxδanqm ... yāiš yauua fra=ca vaōce fra=ca mruie fra=ca*  
**vaxšiete** (FUT)

“of these utterances which have ever been uttered, are being uttered,  
and **will be uttered**” (transl. Skjærvø 2009) (YAv., Y 19.10)

*yaθā=ca aṇhaṭ* (PRS.SUBJ) *apāmam aṇhuš*

“and how existence **will eventually be**” (OAv., Y 30.4)

→ general/distant future

## Present stem formation

- Root present, reflecting atelic root meaning
- Besides large variety of derived present stems, modifying root meaning, including:

athematic:

suffix *-naō-*, infix *-na-*, reduplication

thematic:

suffixes *-a-*, *-iia-*, *-aiia-*, *-sa-*, reduplication

## Present stem formation (cont.)

- Typically one verb - one present stem. Derived present stem types partly associated with certain types of valency and aktionsart:

suffixes <i>-aiia-</i> , <i>-naō-</i> , infix <i>-na-</i>	transitivity
suffix <i>-iia-</i>	intransitivity
suffix <i>-sa-</i>	ingressivity/fientivity

- Distinctions often obliterated through interaction with voice (active/middle inflection)

## Aorist stem formation

- Root aorists, reflecting telic root meaning, cf. *dā-* ‘to give; to put’ (present stem *da-dā-* :

	sg.	pl.
1.	* <i>dā-m</i> (not attested)	<i>dā-mā</i>
2.	<i>dā̇</i> (< * <i>dā-h</i> )	<i>dā-tā</i>
3.	<i>dā-<u>t</u></i>	<i>dq-n</i>

- Other types of aorist stems:

thematic (R(∅) + *-a-*), *s*-aorist (R(*ā/a*) + *-s-*), reduplicated



## Correlation between present and aorist stems

root	present stem	aorist stem
<i>dā-</i> 'put, give'	<i>da-dā-</i>	<i>dā-</i>
<i>ah-</i> 'be'	<i>ah-</i>	-
<i>naē-</i> 'lead'	<i>naii-a-</i>	<i>naē-š-</i>
<i>kar/kərə/car-</i> 'make'	<i>kərə-naō-</i>	<i>car-</i>
<i>gam/jam-</i> 'come'	<i>ja-sa-</i>	<i>gam-, jāṇ-gh- /jam-s-/</i>
<i>mraō-</i> 'speak'	<i>mraō-</i>	-
<i>vac-</i> 'say'	-	<i>vaōca- /va-uc-a-/</i>

## The perfect

- Reduplication syllable + R( $\bar{a}/a \sim \emptyset$ ):

*hāii-* (variant *šāii-* after *i*) 'to bind' → 3. sg. perfect *hi-šāii-ā* 'he keeps bound'

- Special set of endings with little resemblance to primary and secondary endings:

	sg.	pl.
1.	- $\bar{a}$	- <i>mā</i>
2.	- $\theta\bar{a}$ , - <i>tā</i>	(not attested)
3.	- $\bar{a}$	- <i>arā</i>

## Aspectual properties of the perfect (OAv./YAv.)

- Present state: YAv. *jayāra* ‘is awake’ (*gar-* ‘to become awake’)
  - Resultative: OAv. *tatašā* ‘has fashioned’ (*taš-* ‘to fashion’)
  - Universal/comprehensive: *yā zī **ānharē** yāscā həntī* ‘those **who have been** and who are’ (OAv., Y 33.10) (*ah-* ‘to be’)
- Perfect (perhaps better called “anterior”) aspect

## The moods

- From the unmarked stem (indicative mood), two extended mood stems are derived by means of suffixation
  - Optative: suffix *-iiā-/-ī-* + non-present endings
  - Subjunctive: suffix *-a-* + present/non-present endings
- Principally, all three stems (present, aorist, perfect) may serve as basis
- Imperative (only 2nd and 3rd person): present/aorist stem + special imperative endings

## Nascent periphrastic constructions

### Progressive/durative

- Periphrasis with *stā-* ‘to stand’ + present participle (example Skjaervo 2009):

*tē*                      *hištānti*                      *γžarə.γžarəntiš*  
DEM.NOM.PL          stand.PRS.3PL              flow.rapidly.PRS.PTCP.NOM.PL  
“they keep undulating up and down” (V 5.19)

### Ingressive

- Periphrasis with *ni-šad-* ‘to sit down’ + present participle

*yā*                      *taṭ ...*                      *nigāṇheṇti*                      *nišhadaiti*  
REL.NOM.SG.F      DEM.ACC.SG.N      devour.PRS.PTCP.NOM.SG.F      sit.down.PRS.3SG  
“who sets about to devour it” (Y 10.15)

## Nascent periphrastic constructions (cont.)

### Fientive

- Verbal adjective in *-ta-* + *bū-* ‘to become’

*t̥bištō*                                      *bauuaiti*                                      (verb *t̥biš-* ‘to hate, offend’)  
offended.NOM.SG.M                      be/become.PRS.3SG  
“he becomes offended” (Yt 10.28)

### See also: past habitual/iterative

- Expressed by the (augmented or unaugmented) present optative:

*zaraθuštrō*              *ahunəm vairim*              *frasrāuuaiiōiṭ*  
Z.NOM.SG              AV.ACC                                      recite.PRS.OPT.3PL  
“Zarathustra used to recite / constantly recited the *Ahuna Vairiia* formula” (V 19.2)

## Participles, verbal adjectives

- Present, aorist participle (derived from the respective stems):
  - active: suffix *-nt-*
  - middle: suffix *-āna-*, thematic *-mna-*
- Perfect participle active: suffix *-uuah-/-uš-*
- Verbal adjective in *-ta-* (≈ past participle):
  - derived directly from root
  - passive with transitive verbs, active with intransitive verbs

## Transitive deverbal nominals

- Desiderative adjectives:

*xšnu-* ‘to satisfy’ → *ci-xšnu-ša-* ‘wishing to satisfy’

(besides desiderative present stem *ci-xšnu-ša-* ‘to wish to satisfy’)

*mašiiāṇg* (ACC.PL) *cixšnušō* (NOM.SG) ‘wishing to satisfy the mortals’ (OAv., Y 32.8)

- Deverbal superlatives (Tucker 2009):

*paiti.yud-* ‘to fight against ACC’ → *paiti.yūidišta-* ‘best at fighting against ACC’

*hamərəθəm* (ACC.SG) *paiti.yūidištō* ‘best at fighting against the enemy’ (YAv., Yt 13.107)