

## A Study of the Structure of Pāli Language

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### Abstract

Pāli is the language of the Buddhist Canon. Structure of Pāli language has four parts of speech. They are Noun (*Nāma*), Verb (*Ākhyāta*), Prefix (*Upasāra*) and Particle (*Nipāta*). Pāli is an inflectional language. The inflections are declensions of the nouns and the conjugation of the verbs. Declension is the inflection of a nominal stem by means of ending which indicate the gender, number and case.

**Key words:** *Nāma, Ākhyāta, Upasāra, Nipāta, Inflections, Declension.*

### Introduction

Pāli is the language of the Buddhist Canon. Structure of Pāli language has Four Parts of Speech. They are Noun (*Nāma*), Verb (*Ākhyāta*), Prefix (*Upasāra*) and Particles (*Nipāta*). Pāli is an inflectional language. The inflections are declensions of the nouns and the conjugation of the verbs. Declension is the inflection of a nominal stem by means of endings which indicate the gender, number and case. Prefix in Pāli are affixed to both nouns and verbs. Particles are used to understand the construction of sentences with particles.

### Pāli Language

Language is the speech, spoken by the people for communication, composed of letters (*akkharā*) or alphabet. Pāli is the language in which is composed the *Tipiṭaka*. The word Pāli is used in the sense of "Text", sacred Text and the same thing for the etymology of Pāli is the Holy Text, the Scriptures or the canon.

Pāli language is a branch of Indo-European family and a sister language of Sanskrit. Pāli was first committed to writing in *Srīlankā* in the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD for the Buddhist Canon. It is the spoken language. It has no own script but only sound. So, Pāli is transliterated into various local scripts. Pāli is an inflectional language (declension, conjugation, assimilation). Pāli had contributed mostly to the growth of Myanmar as a national language. Brahmanism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Sanskrit and Pāli have been well introduced to Myanmar from the beginning of our history of 4<sup>th</sup> century AD. The Myanmar invented Myanmar Script using *Pallava* Script. Moreover phonetics and ideas were taken from Pāli language and literature. As Theravada Buddhism flourished in Myanmar, Pāli became the medium of writing.

### Structure of Pāli Language

Every language has its own alphabet which contains letters of that language. They are called *akkharā, lipi*, script or writing. The Pāli language contains 41 letters. It is divided into eight vowels, thirty two consonants and a nasal sound.



Noun has three miscellaneous nouns: pronouns, adjectives and participles. In Pāli they are called *Sabbanāma*.

**Pronouns:** Pronouns are the same as noun. It is used instead of a noun, the person or thing in general. They may be divided into:

-*Puggala nāma* (personal pronoun)

-*Nidassana nāma* (demonstrative pronoun)

-*Anvayī nāma* (relative pronoun)

-*Pucchā nāma* (interrogative pronoun)

-*Anīyama nāma* (indefinite pronoun)

### **Puggala nāma (Personal Pronoun)**

Person	Singular	Plural
First	<i>ahaṃ</i> (I)	<i>mayam</i> (we)
Second	<i>tvaṃ</i> (you)	<i>tumhe</i> (you)
Third	<i>so</i> (he)	<i>te, tāya</i> (they)
	<i>sā</i> (she)	<i>tāni</i> (it)
	<i>taṃ</i> (it)	

eg. **Aham** *dīpaṃ āharāmi*. (**I** carry the lamp.)

**Mayam** *goṇe harāma*. (**We** bring the oxen.)

**Tvam** *sīhaṃ passasi*. (**You** see a lion.)

### **Nidassana nāma (Demonstrative Pronouns)**

*so, sā, taṃ* = that

*eso, esā, etaṃ, ayaṃ, imaṃ, idaṃ* = this

eg. **So** *tāsaṃ yuvatīnaṃ tāni vatthāni vīkkhītvā tāsaṃ santikā mūlaṃ labhissati*.

(**That** one, having sold those clothes to those maidens will get money from them.)

**Ayam** *ettha dhammatā*.

(**This** is the rule here.)

### **Anvayī nāma (Relative Pronouns)**

*ya, yā, yo* = who

*yaṃ* = what

eg. **Yo** *gāmaṃ gacchati so mama putto hoti*.

(He **who** goes to the village is my son.)

### **Pucchā nāma (Interrogative Pronouns)**

*ka, kā, ko* = who

*kiṃ* = which

eg. **Ko** *tvaṃ bhavasi*. (**Who** are you?)

**Kim** te puttana. (**What** use is the son for you?)

### Anāyama nāma (Indefinite pronoun)

*koci, kāci*,= anyone= whoever

*kañci*= anything= whichever

eg. *Atthi nu te añño **koci** mayā upaṭṭhākatāro.*

(Is there anyone else **who** is a better attendant to you?)

**Adjective (Nāma visesana):** Adjectives qualify the nouns. They are possessive adjective and comparative adjective. They are called *Taddhita*.

- Possessive adjective (express that possession of the (*Assathi Taddhita*) quality, to be, praise, comparison and superior)

eg. *sīla+vā = sīlavā* (virtuous)

*Sīlavā puriso.* (The man is virtuous.)

- Comparative adjective (It is used to compare nouns or (*Visesa Taddhita*) pronouns.)

There are three degrees of adjective: Positive degree, Comparative degree and Superlative degree.

eg.	<b>Positive</b>	<b>Comparative</b>	<b>Superlative</b>
	<i>suci</i> (pure)	<i>sucitara</i> (more pure)	<i>sucitama</i> (most pure)

*Appamdañ ca medhāvī dhanam seṭṭham va rakkhati.*

(The wise man guards earnestness as the **greatest** treasure.)

In Pāli, Cardinal numerals are regarded as adjectives.

eg. *eka*=one, *ti*=three etc.

**Participles:** It is used as adjective, noun, or pronoun. Participles are formed by addition of suffixes to the root or base. There are three kinds of participle. They are:

**-Present Participle** - (expresses an incomplete action) (*Paccupanna kita*)

eg. *Vicaranto samaṇo.* (The wandering monk)

*Gāyantī kaññā.* (The singing girl)

**-Past Participle** - (expresses the time perfect in the (*Atīta kita*) passive sense)

eg. *Dhammo bhikkhūhi suto.* (The doctoring **was listened** by the monks.)

**-Future Participle** - (expresses "fitness, suitability and (*kicca kita*) prosperity")

eg. *Paṇḍitena kusalam kammaṃ.* (The wise man **should** do the good deed.)

## 2. Ākhyāta (Verb)

Express an action. In Pāli, to form a verb, conjugational sign and verbal suffixes are added to the roots (the origin of the verbs). Root sign √. The roots are divided into seven groups. They are called seven conjugations. Each conjugation has its own conjugational sign.

eg. 1<sup>st</sup> conjugational sign- "a"

2<sup>nd</sup> conjugational sign- "a" etc.

3<sup>rd</sup> conjugational sign- "ya" etc.

**Verbal suffixes** – There are five in numbers.

Present Tense (*paccupanna*)

eg. *labhāmi* - I get

*labhāma* - we get

*labhati* – he get

Imperative Mood (*ānatti*)

eg. *gacchāmi* – let me go

*gacchāma* – let us go

*gacchātu* – let him or her go

Optative Mood (*sattamī*)

eg. *paceyyāmi* – I should cook

*paceyyāma* – we should cook

*paceyya* – he should cook

Past Tense (*ajjatanī*)

eg. *gamim* - I went

*gamimhā* – we went

*gami* – he went

Future Tense (*bhavissanti*)

eg. *pacissāmi* – I will cook

*pacissāma* – we will cook

*pacissati* – he will cook

They are divided into three tenses. They are Present, Past and Future which show time. Two moods are Imperative and Optative, which express intention. In verbal form we may distinguish the root, the stem, the personal ending and the vowel gradation.

The verbs can be classified into three: the finite verbs, the indefinite verbs and the derivative verbs or the secondary verbs.

-**The finite verbs** are primary and they are conjugated in the verbal suffixes.

eg. *So paceyya.* (He should cook.)

*Ahaṃ gāyantim kaññaṃ passāmi.* (I see the girl who is singing.)

-**The indefinite verbs** are:

Gerund (*Pubbakāla*) = (having or after having)

eg.  $\sqrt{\text{gam}} + \text{tvā} = \text{gantvā}$  (having gone)

*Dārikā rudantī ammāya santikaṃ gantvā pīṭhe nisīdati.*

(The crying girl, **having gone** to the mothers, sits on the bed.)

Infinitive (*Icchattha*) = (expresses purpose, motive and intention)

eg.  $\sqrt{gah} > gaṇhā + i + tum = gaṇhitum$  (to catch, to take)

*Paresaṃ dhanaṃ dhaññaṃ vā gaṇhitum mā cintetha.*

(Don't think **to take** the wealth or the paddy of others.)

There are three participles. It is used as finite verb. They are:

Present participle - (expresses an incomplete action) (*paccupanna kita*)

eg. *So vihārasmā āgato* (*hoti*). (He has come from the monastery.)

Past participle - (expresses the time perfect in the (*atīta kita*) passive sense)

eg. *Sūriye uggate* *padum āni pupphanti.*

(When the sun had arisen, the lotuses blossomed.)

Future participle - (expresses "fitness, suitability and (*kicca kita*) prosperity")

eg. *Ayaṃ maggo gantabbo.* (This road should be gone.)

They are not conjugated in the verbal suffixes.

**-The derivative verbs are:**

The causal verb - (expresses causation, urging) (*kārita kiriyā*)

eg. *Rājā kumāraṃ yāne nisīdāpesi.*

(The king made the prince sit in the chariot.)

The passive verb - (expresses the subject as the receiver of (*kammabhāva*) the action)

eg. *Mayaṃ amhākaṃ arīhi mārīyāma.* (We are killed by our enemies.)

The desiderative verbs - (expresses the desire or wish to do that (*tumicchatha kiriyā*) which is denoted by the root)

eg.  $\sqrt{tij}$  – to bear endure

*titij + sa > titikkha* – wish to endure

The denominative verbs- (expresses "to act as, to be like, to desire, (*nāma kiriyā*) to make into, to use, etc,

eg. *Seṭṭhinā bahūnaṃ yācakānaṃ dānaṃ dīyati.*

(The alms are given to the many beggars by the rich man.)

The intensive verbs - (The intensive verb also called (*atisayattha kiriyā*) frequentative verbs express the frequent repetition of the intensification of the action denoted by the sump (root).

eg.  $\sqrt{lap}$  – to talk – *lālappati* (to talk very much)

$\sqrt{kam}$  – to go - *caṅkamati* (to walk up and down)

### 3. Upasāra (Prefix)

Prefixes in Pāli are added to both nouns and verbs. They generally modify the meaning of the root, or intensity it or totally alter it or give the opposite meaning. But in many cases the original meaning of the root is maintained. The prefixes are twenty in number. They are:

*ati* = beyond, across, over, past, very much

eg. *Ayaṃ kaññā **ati**sundaro hoti.* (This girl is **very** beautiful.)

*adhi* = over, above, depending, in, upon

eg. *Rājā raṭṭhassa **adhi**pati hoti.* (The king is a **chief** of country.)

*anu* = after, along, behind, according to, near to, less than, like, etc.

eg. *Sīto miḡaṃ **anu**dhāvati.* (The lion runs **after** the deer.)

### 4. Nipāta (Particle)

The conjunctions, prepositions, adverbs and indeclinable are included in the particles.

**Conjunctions** in Pāli are connected words of clauses. They are:

*Vā.....vā* = either.....or

eg. *Dārako **vā** kaññā **vā** ḡamaṃ gacchissati.*

(**Either** the boy **or** the girl will go to the village.)

*Sace* = If, etc.

eg. ***Sace** ḡamaṃ gacchati, ahaṃ nagaraṃ gacchissāmi.*

(**If** he goes to the village, I'll go to the town.)

**The prepositions** are indeclinable used in the sentences. They generally followed the word they govern. These are:

*pati* = towards, never, against

eg. *Nadiṃ **pati** caro palāyati.* (The thief runs **towards** the river.)

*vinā* = without

eg. ***Vinā** dhanena mā jīva.* (Do not live **without** wealth.)

*upari* = above, upon, on, etc.

eg. *Rakkhassa **upari** sakuṇo hoti.* (The bird is **above** the tree.)

**Adverbs** (indeclinable) are also *nipāta*. They are:

*divā* – by day

eg. *Sā **divā** Buddhamaṃ vandati.* (She worships the Buddha **by day**.)

*ajja* – today

eg. ***Ajja** tvaṃ kuhiṃ gamissasi.* (Where will you go **today**?)

*attha* – then

eg. *Atha kho Bhagavā imaṃ udānaṃ udānesi.*  
(Then the Blessed One uttered this utterance.)

