



# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

## Nominal Inflection in Molsom

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### Abstract

Molsom is a small language that is mostly spoken in Tripura. This paper describes the Nominal inflection of Molsom. The study is descriptive in nature and is based on authentic data gathered from the native speakers. The study's strength stems from its author's background in language studies. The work is expected to make a substantial contribution to Molsom Morphology.

**Keywords:** Molsom, Inflection, Noun, Number, Case, Gender

### 1.0 Introduction

Inflection is a prominent morphological process. Inflection is accomplished in two ways: affixation and non-affixation. In contrast to derivation, the base never changes its class in consequence of inflection. Consider the following example from Molsom: [tʰaro] 'thing' → [[tʰaro]-ŋwɪ] → tʰaroŋwɪ 'things' (Noun inflected for pluralization: Singular to Plural). Inflection modifies content words for specific grammatical functions. Noun inflects for gender, number, person and case. Adjectives and adverbs acquire comparative and superlative degrees by inflection. Verbs inflect for person, tense, aspect, mood and voice. Grammarians classify inflection under two heads: declension and conjugation. The former involves inflection of nouns, adjectives and adverbs. Inflection for verb is called conjugation. The point of discussion in the paper is on the inflectional processes in Molsom that apply to noun.

### 1.1 Inflectional Processes in Molsom

In Molsom, noun inflects for number, case and gender. Affixes used for inflection are mainly suffixes.

#### 1.1.1 Number

In Molsom morphological processes equipping a noun for use in a sentence proceed through two stages: first, adding number suffix to the base; and second, attaching case marker to the output (cf. 1).

1. [[[N]SFX]<sub>NUMBER</sub> SFX]<sub>CASE</sub> → Output

Number has two subcategories: singular and plural. There is no physical marker for number in case of singular nouns. The lone plural number marker is -ŋwɪ. Tables 1 and 2 below illustrate these.

Inflection for Singular Number: [Base] → [[Base]-∅] → Output

Base	Singular Marker	Suffixation	Output
[sɔkɔɪ]	-∅	[[sɔkɔɪ]-∅]	campɔɪ 'relative'
[zɔŋ]	-∅	[[zɔŋ]-∅]	zɔŋ 'monkey'
[mɛŋ]	-∅	[[mɛŋ]-∅]	Mɛŋ 'cat'
[ɔpɔ]	-∅	[[ɔpɔ]-∅]	ɔpɔ 'boy'
[nɔpɔŋ]	-∅	[[nɔpɔŋ]-∅]	nɔpɔŋ 'girl'
[kel]	-∅	[[kel]-∅]	kel 'goat'

Table 1 Singular Number Marker for Nouns in Molsom

Inflection for Plural Number: [Base] → [[Base]-ηաԻ] → Output

Base	Plural Marker	Suffixation	Output
[sɔkɾɔɪ]	-ηաԻ	[[sɔkɾɔɪ]-ηաԻ]	sɔkɾɔɪηաԻ 'relatives'
[zɔŋ]	-ηաԻ	[[zɔŋ]-ηաԻ]	zɔŋηաԻ 'monkeys'
[mɛŋ]	-ηաԻ	[[mɛŋ]-ηաԻ]	mɛŋηաԻ 'cats'
[tɾɔ]	-ηաԻ	[[tɾɔ]-ηաԻ]	tɾɔηաԻ 'boys'
[nɔpɑŋ]	-ηաԻ	[[nɔpɑŋ]-ηաԻ]	nɔpɑŋηաԻ 'girls'
[kel]	-ηաԻ	[[kel]-ηաԻ]	kelηաԻ 'goats'

**Table 2** Plural Number Marker for Nouns in Molsom

### 1.1.2 Case

Molsom has six cases: nominative, accusative, instrumental, genitive, ablative, and locative. Marker for nouns in nominative case – both singular and plural – is -∅. Other five cases have separate marker each: -raŋ (accusative), -le (instrumental), -kwnɫɔ (ablative), -ɫɔ (genitive) and -kwn (locative). The markers for the six cases are shown in Table 3.

Case	Base	Case Marker for both Singular and Plural
Nominative	N	-∅
Accusative	N	-raŋ
Instrumental	N	-le
Genitive	N	-ɫɔ
Ablative	N	-kwnɫɔ
Locative	N	-kwn

**Table 3** Case Markers for Nouns in Molsom

The suffixation for indicating number must precede that for marking case on the noun. Tables 4 and 5 below illustrate the routes passing through the two stages of suffixations leading to the birth of the Molsom word /tɾɔ/ 'boy' in its various incarnations.

Case	Base	Singular Number	Case Marker	Output	
Nominative	[tɾɔ]	-∅	-∅	tɾɔ	'boy'
Accusative	[tɾɔ]	-∅	-raŋ	tɾɔraŋ	'to boy'
Instrumental	[tɾɔ]	-∅	-le	tɾɔle	'with/by boy'
Genitive	[tɾɔ]	-∅	-ɫɔ	tɾɔɫɔ	'of boy'
Ablative	[tɾɔ]	-∅	-kwnɫɔ	tɾɔkwnɫɔ	'from boy'
Locative	[tɾɔ]	-∅	-kwn	tɾɔkwn	'in/within boy'

**Table 4** Singular Noun inflected for Number and Case

Case	Base	Plural Number	Case Marker	Output	
Nominative	[tɾɔ]	-ηաԻ	-∅	tɾɔηաԻ	'boys'
Accusative	[tɾɔ]	-ηաԻ	-raŋ	tɾɔηաԻraŋ	'to boys'
Instrumental	[tɾɔ]	-ηաԻ	-le	tɾɔηաԻle	'with/by boys'
Genitive	[tɾɔ]	-ηաԻ	-ɫɔ	tɾɔηաԻɫɔ	'of boys'
Ablative	[tɾɔ]	-ηաԻ	-kwnɫɔ	tɾɔηաԻkwnɫɔ	'from boys'
Locative	[tɾɔ]	-ηաԻ	-kwn	tɾɔηաԻkwn	'in/within boys'

**Table 5** Plural Noun inflected for Number and Case

### 1.1.3 Gender

Molsom does not have any specific affix signifying gender i.e., either masculinity or femininity. It copies one syllable from a disyllabic monomorphemic word meaning a male or a female:  $\text{ɔpɔ}$  'boy/man' and  $\text{nɔpɔ}$  'girl/woman'. The copied syllable must be CV. It is attached as a suffix to a word that refers mainly to a verb meaning 'to X'. Semantic implication of the word carrying inflection for gender is an agentive noun i.e., the doer of the action. In addition, there are some instances of the base of the new word being 'a noun referring to a profession'. For instance, consider the following words in Tables 6-7. From  $/\text{ɔpɔ}/$   $\text{pɔ}$  is copied and used as a suffix to the base to convert the latter to its masculine version.

Base	Gloss	Masculine Marker	Output	Gloss
$\text{ɔsak}$	'to sing'	$-\text{pɔ}$	$\text{ɔsakpɔ}$	'male singer'
$\text{ɔlɔm}$	'to dance'	$-\text{pɔ}$	$\text{ɔlɔmpɔ}$	'male dancer'
$\text{ɔsɔɪ}$	'to write'	$-\text{pɔ}$	$\text{ɔsɔɪpɔ}$	'male writer'
$\text{arɔdɔɪ}$	'to play'	$-\text{pɔ}$	$\text{arɔdɔɪpɔ}$	'male player'
$\text{ɔlem}$	'to lie'	$-\text{pɔ}$	$\text{ɔlempɔ}$	'male liar'

Table 6 Masculine Gender

From  $/\text{nɔpɔ}/$   $\text{nɔ}$  is copied and used as a suffix to the base to beget the feminine version of the base.

Base	Gloss	Feminine Marker	Output	Gloss
$\text{ɔsak}$	'to sing'	$-\text{nɔ}$	$\text{ɔsaknɔ}$	'female singer'
$\text{ɔlɔm}$	'to dance'	$-\text{nɔ}$	$\text{ɔlɔmnɔ}$	'female dancer'
$\text{ɔsɔɪ}$	'to write'	$-\text{nɔ}$	$\text{ɔsɔɪnɔ}$	'female writer'
$\text{arɔdɔɪ}$	'to play'	$-\text{nɔ}$	$\text{arɔdɔɪnɔ}$	'female player'
$\text{ɔlem}$	'to lie'	$-\text{nɔ}$	$\text{ɔlemnɔ}$	'female liar'

Table 7 Feminine Gender

Some few examples are there in Molsom in which the base refers to a race, ethnicity or language of the individual referred to by the output of inflection (cf. 2-3).

#### 2. Noun → Masculine Noun $[[N]pɔ]$

Base (Noun)	Masculine Marker	New Word (Masculine Noun)
$[\text{wɔɪ}]$ 'Kokborok'	$\text{pɔ}$	$\text{wɔɪpɔ}$ 'Kokborok man'
$[\text{kɔɪ}]$ 'Bengali'	$\text{pɔ}$	$\text{kɔɪpɔ}$ 'Bengali man'
$[\text{sɔp}]$ 'English'	$\text{pɔ}$	$\text{sɔppɔ}$ 'English man'

#### 3. Noun → Feminine Noun $[[N]nɔ]$

Base (Noun)	Feminine Marker	New Word (Feminine Noun)
$[\text{wɔɪ}]$ 'Kokborok'	$\text{nɔ}$	$\text{wɔɪnɔ}$ 'Kokborok woman'
$[\text{kɔɪ}]$ 'Bengali'	$\text{nɔ}$	$\text{kɔɪnɔ}$ 'Bengali woman'
$[\text{sɔp}]$ 'English'	$\text{nɔ}$	$\text{sɔpnɔ}$ 'English woman'

In respect of [-human, +animate] nouns no example of inflection for changing gender through affixation is attested in Molsom. In fact, independent adjectives carrying the meaning of male or female is added to the noun to constitute a noun phrase (NP). Molsom is a head-first language. Hence the formal structure of the phrases is  $[[N] [A]] \rightarrow \text{NP}$ . Only the following phrases are recorded referring to the common pets of the native Molsom speakers.

4.

Noun	Adjective	Noun Phrase	Gloss
sarɔ̃t 'cow'	cal 'male'	sarɔ̃t cal	'cow male → bull'
kel 'goat'	cal 'male'	kel cal	'goat male → he goat'
saloi 'buffalo'	cal 'male'	saloi cal	'buffalo male → male buffalo'
menɟ 'cat'	cal 'male'	menɟ cal	'cat male → male cat'
wɔ̃tɔk 'duck'	cal 'male'	wɔ̃tɔk cal	'duck male → male duck'
wɔk 'pig'	ɬaŋ 'male'	wɔk ɬaŋ	'pig male → male pig'
ɔɪ 'dog'	ɬaŋ 'male'	ɔɪ ɬaŋ	'dog male → male dog'
ɔr 'chicken'	kʰɔŋ 'male'	ɔr kʰɔŋ	'chicken male → cock'

5.

Noun	Adjective	Noun Phrase	Gloss
sarɔ̃t 'cow'	pɔɪnɔ 'female'	sarɔ̃t pɔɪnɔ	'cow female → cow'
kel 'goat'	pɔɪnɔ 'female'	kel pɔɪnɔ	'goat female → she goat'
saloi 'buffalo'	pɔɪnɔ 'female'	saloi pɔɪnɔ	'buffalo female → female buffalo'
menɟ 'cat'	pɔɪnɔ 'female'	menɟ pɔɪnɔ	'cat female → female cat'
wɔ̃tɔk 'duck'	pɔɪnɔ 'female'	wɔ̃tɔk pɔɪnɔ	'duck female → female duck'
wɔk 'pig'	pɔɪnɔ 'female'	wɔk pɔɪnɔ	'pig female → female pig'
ɔɪ 'dog'	pɔɪnɔ 'female'	ɔɪ pɔɪnɔ	'dog female → bitch'
ɔr 'chicken'	pɔɪnɔ 'female'	ɔr pɔɪnɔ	'chicken female → hen'

### 1.3 Conclusion

This paper has unveiled the inflectional modes and properties of Nouns in Molsom. The study is carried out in a descriptive mode keeping aside any theoretical inputs. It is found that Molsom noun inflection relies largely on suffixation. It inflects for number, case and gender. No irregularities in Molsom inflection are attested and hence not discussed. At par with other languages across the world, function words are not found to display formal transformation for the sake of inflection. It is expected that this work will encourage scholars to attempt further study on the inflectional processes of Molsom.

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