

A Comparative Analysis of Inflectional Morphology in English and Shina

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Abstract

This study is a morphological analysis in order to explore similarities and differences of adjective inflections and their functions in Gilgiti dialect of Shina language. It attempts to explore the morphological features of adjectives in Shina (a Dardic language of Gilgit-Baltistan) and English, focusing specifically on inflectional patterns. Through a comparative analysis, the research examines how the adjective inflections express grammatical categories such as case, number, gender, and degree. English adjectives exhibit limited but distinct inflectional behavior—while adjectives in Shina are highly inflectional. By highlighting these similarities and differences, the study provides insights into the morph syntactic strategies employed by Shina and English and contributes to the broader understanding of cross-linguistic morphology and language typology.

Keywords: Shina Language, Gilgiti Dialect, Adjective Inflection, Morphological analysis.

A Comparative Analysis of Inflectional Morphology in English and Shina

The analysis of the English and Shina adjectives in a comparative study shows that there is a fundamental gap in the way descriptive information is introduced into a sentence. English is to a large extent losing its inflectional nature, with adjectives possessing few morphological indicators, most of which are restricted to degrees of comparison. Shina, nevertheless, still has a complex system of suffixation in which the adjective indicates the grammatical characteristics of the noun. Through these inflectional paradigms, it would be possible to determine more clearly at what the synthetic nature of the Shina is in comparison with the more analytic design of the English language.

Introduction of Shina

Shina is a Dardic language belonging to the Indo-Aryan language family, spoken by approximately two million native speakers across Gilgit-Baltistan in northern Pakistan, as well as parts of Jammu and Kashmir in India and northeastern Afghanistan (Ahmad et al., 2025; Hussain et al., 2024). It encompasses several dialects, including Gilgiti, Astori, and Kohistani (Ahmad et al., 2025; Bailey, 1924). The Gilgiti dialect holds the status of the standard dialect due to the largest number of speakers and the socioeconomic significance of Gilgit town, making it the most widely understood variety across all Shina-speaking communities (Ahmad et al., 2025; Lorimer, 1927; Radloff, 1992). This standardization makes Gilgiti Shina particularly valuable for linguistic documentation and preservation efforts (Ahmad et al., 2025; Anwar et al., 2022).

Inflections and Derivations in Shina

Morphological systems across the world's languages exhibit significant structural variations in how they mark grammatical categories such as number, case, gender, and tense (Yule, 2010). Morphology constitutes the linguistic sub discipline concerned with studying the internal structure of words and the rules governing word formation across languages (Fromkin & Rodman, 1998;

Hussain et al., 2024). The distinction between inflection and derivational morphemes, two basic types of word modification that follows different rules, is at heart of morphological analysis.

Inflections, also known as inflectional morphemes, are bound morphemes that change word without changing their basic lexical category in order to convey grammatical information like number, case, gender, tense, and person (Hussain et al., 2024; Yule, 2010). Only eight grammatical morphemes make up the compact, closed set of inflections in English: -s for plurals, -'s for possessive, -ed for past tense, -ing for progressive aspect, -en for past participle, -er for comparative adjectives, -est for superlative adjectives, and -s for third person singular present tense (Yule, 2010). These inflections fundamentally differ from derivational morphemes, which are used to produce completely new words by either significantly altering meanings or lexical categories, such as turning the verb "read" into the noun "reader" by adding suffix -er (Hussain et al., 2024).

Shina, on the other hand, has extensive and intricate inflectional morphology with several layers of suffixes attached to verbal and nominal stems (Anwar et al., 2022). While Shina uses only suffixes Affixation, English primarily uses word order and auxiliary words to convey grammatical relationships (Ahmad et al., 2025; Anwar et al., 2022). Shina inflections serve purposes beyond those of English inflections; a single Shina inflection can indicate several grammatical features at once. For example, the Gilgiti dialect uses the suffix—"ai" in /Amjatai kitap/ ('Amjad's book') to indicate both singular number and possession, while English uses different mechanisms 's for possession and the article "a" for singularity.

Shina's polysynthetic morphological orientation, in which words encode significant grammatical information through their internal structure, is reflected in this functional multiplicity (Ahmad et al., 2025). The polysynthetic nature of Shina implies that the language prioritizes affixation--the stacking of prefixes, suffixes, and infixes--to condense entire propositions into a single word unit. Rather than relying on separate helper words (like "will," "have," or "to") as English does, Shina's internal word structure is dense and "functional."

Key Aspects of this Multiplicity:

Morpheme Density: A single verbal root can be modified by multiple layers of markers. For instance, a single word can simultaneously indicate the action, the person performing it, the time it occurred, and the gender of the subject.

Case and Agreement: As noted in the text regarding adjectives, Shina's words are highly sensitive to their environment. A noun or adjective doesn't just exist in a vacuum; its "internal structure" changes to agree with gender and number, ensuring that grammatical relationships are visible within the word itself.

Syntactic Efficiency: This "functional multiplicity" allows for a flexible word order. Because the grammatical role of a word (subject, object, or instrument) is encoded directly into its morphology, the meaning remains clear even if the word's position in a sentence changes.

The Highly Inflectional Nature of Shina: Nominal, Verbal and Adjectival Inflections

According to Ahmed et al. (2025), adjectives in Shina also take part in the inflectional system, matching the gender and number of their head nouns. For example, the masculine singular adjective /ispao/ becomes /ispae/ in the feminine and it becomes /ispaey/ for plurals. Regardless of the gender, number, or case of nouns they modify, English adjectives are completely uninflected.

This study advances our understanding of language typology and contact phenomena by comparing the agglutinative morphology of Shina, where accent shifts and vowels mutations determine declension e.g., /paa/ (foot).... /paey/ (feet) and /shako/ (arm) → /shakay/ (arms)- with the analytical system of English (Ahmad et al., 2025; Yule, 2010). Linguistic diversity that should be preserved is exemplified by Shina's item-and- process morphology, in which processes such

as suffixation produce complex forms without altering lexical class (Ahmad et al., 2025; Anwar et al., 2022). In addition to offering important insight into language preservation efforts for minority languages like Shina that are facing competition from dominant languages like Urdu and English, these typological differences highlight basic distinctions between the way languages encode grammatical relationships (Ahmad et al., 2025; Hussain et al., 2024).

This comparative analysis provides important insights for educational and linguistic preservation efforts, especially as Shina faces endangerment due to code-mixing with Urdu and English, which threatens its traditional morphological system among younger speakers (Ahmad et al., 2025; Hussain et al., 2024). In order to highlight important structural and functional distinctions, the study compares the inflectional system of adjectives between English and Gilgiti dialect of Shina. It uses an extensive synthetic and agglutinative morphology, encoding rich grammatical information through suffixation, whereas English uses minimal inflections and analytical constructions. The study aims to gain a better understanding of how grammatical categories are marked differently in each language by concentrating on these word classes. In addition to advancing knowledge of language typology and morphology, this study highlights the linguistic and cultural importance of maintaining Shina's intricate inflectional system, supporting efforts to record and revitalize this language for coming generations (Yule, 2010; Ahmad et al., 2025).

Objectives:

1. To explore inflections of adjectives and their grammatical functions in Gilgiti dialect of Shina language.
2. To compare the process of inflection at adjective level in English and Gilgiti dialect of Shina language.

Research Questions:

1. How are adjectives inflected in Gilgiti dialect of Shina language and what grammatical functions these inflections show?
2. How is the process of inflection at adjective level in English and Gilgiti dialect of Shina language similar or different?

Literature Review:

The central aim of this study is to review the literature related to the adjective inflections in Gilgiti dialect of Shina and the correlation between inflections, syntax and morphology. Adjective inflections are important because they help to express linguistic structures, grammatical agreement and meaning, making communication more vivid. The purpose of inflections in all languages, and that of Shina in particular, will be the subject of literature review.

Morphology and syntax are closely related because the words are usually inflected according to the syntactic structure of the sentence. Morphology can be considered as a sub discipline of grammar as inflections are the major concern of morphology. Inflections show grammatical functions by means of affixes (Haspelmath & Sims, 2010).

The origin of Shina is difficult to ascertain since the theorists have presented opposing points. Fussman presents linguistic data that Shina is connected to the Gandhari Prakrit of lower Kabul and Swat River valleys that are mentioned in Asoka (3rd century B. C.) inscriptions and subsequent inscriptions. In this postulation, he proposes that by the time Pashtun tribes had conquered this land between the 11th and the early 16th centuries, there could have been migrations or forced migrations of groups of Shina-speaking people to valleys under the Indus.

Western academic attention to Shina began at the end of the nineteenth century. Early Leitner, Biddulph and Cunningham were rather influenced by the colonial interest than by any formal theory of language. Further work on the linguistic analysis of Shina was done in the 1920s, by

Grierson and Bailey, who took keen interest in Shina phonology. Overall, the colonial perspective regarding the Shina language was very limited as it lacked research and linguistic accuracy. Modern work began in the 1980s with Georg Buddruss and Amin Zia working on Shina phonemes. Some elementary phonemic descriptions were offered by Zia in his Urdu grammar which the further research was based on (Radloff, 1999). This was a breakthrough in the work of Radloff since she was the first one to provide a comprehensive documentation of Gilgiti Shina. She classified Shina as Dardic language and recorded linguistic records of people who spoke Shina in the North-Western Pakistan. Shina phonology and grammar was developed by Morgenstern in the middle of the twentieth century. Schmidt would later develop the first full-fledged modern grammar of Shina (including phonology, morphology, syntax, verbal and nominal systems).

Shina literature is spread across the territories, and there are no numerous written materials in the language. Nazir et al. (2018) note that Shina is a verbal language. Khaliq Taj agrees that although there is no large written corpus Shina has achieved recognition as complete language with all the attributes of a fully-fledged system, hundreds of thousands of speakers, geographical area, written sources which are limited, and is intergenerationally transmitted (Gilgit Baltistan ka Urdu Adab). The Shina Language and cultural promotion Gilgit society has also played its role in coming up with documented documents of the Shina basics. This is an entity that targets maintaining, inspiring and recording Shina. This study uses words that are partly borrowed in their publications like Shina-Urdu-English Conversation and Shina Likhnay Ki Workbook. They provide standardized words of daily use from the Shina language. Such attempts are critical to conservation and provide consistent patterns of inflexibility utilization.

According to grammar by Rajapurohit, Shina has a highly unyielding Indo-Aryan grammar, grammatical relationships (gender, number, case, tense, aspect, etc.) are attained mainly through the use of suffixes. This inflectional richness of Shina relies on the suffixation. The comparison is made with English to bring out the contrast.

Noun inflection in English language is very limited because in English, nouns mainly inflect only to form plurals and show inflections in case, only in pronouns, not in the nouns themselves. On the contrary, in Shina language, the process of inflection in nouns occurs for gender, number and a wide range of cases, which are expressed through suffixes.

(Zia et al.) Verb inflections in English language are limited as compared to the verb inflections of Shina language as it has a highly inflectional verbal morphology. In English, verbs mainly inflect for tense, aspect and third person singular. In contrast, Shina verbs inflect extensively for person, number, gender, tense, aspect and mood using a wide variety of suffixes.

In English language adjectives include inflectional forms that indicate degrees (comparative and superlative) such as pretty, prettier, and prettiest. They do not change for gender, number and case. On the other hand, In Shina language distinct terms are employed to convey the comparative and superlative degrees, instead of suffixes. Also, adjective inflections in Shina may agree with gender, number and case.

Zia ul Haq et al. article provides an in-depth analysis of the Shina and English inflections that are premised on nominal paradigm and verbal paradigm. They argue that Shina has a rich case system, and numerous varieties of words are formulated and the case is characterized by multiple layers of endings added on a word root that indicate a case, tense, person, possession, gender, and additional morphological elements. Their Process and Item approach is dynamic in the way word formation is considered.

The fact of the limited adjective inflections in English and Shina as shown by a comparative study of the adjective inflections of English and the Astori dialect of Shina by Altaf Hussain and Irshad Hussain means that English has a limited adjective inflection compared with Shina which is richly inflected morphologically.

This paper contributes to the already existing literature because it demonstrates using evidence that Shina adjectives are rich in inflections when compared to English. It is attempting the comparison of adjective inflections usage in the English language and in the Gilgiti dialect of Shina. The speakers fear that the institutional and educational support of Shina is not much and therefore it will be lost. Therefore, the researches on the totality of Shina are much needed.

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive and contrastive research design to examine morphological processes in English and Shina. A contrastive approach is employed to highlight similarities and differences between two languages, particularly in their use of morphological markers.

Theoretical framework:

The study is grounded in Item-and-Process approach which was proposed by Charles Hockett (1954). It is suitable for studying any language in which morphological change involves phonological or structured processes, not just the addition of separate morphemes. The theory assumes that linguistic forms are built when a base undergoes a process-such as affixation, internal modification, vowel change or suppletion to produce a grammatical meaning.

This study is anchored in the broader linguistic concept of inflection, which refers to the morphological modification of a word to express grammatical categories such as degree, number, case, gender or tense. This study is focused on adjective inflections. Adjectives are the descriptive words. In many languages, adjectives undergo inflection to show grammatical features. However, the extent and type of adjective inflection vary significantly across languages, depending on their morphological typology.

Data collection:

The data for this research is collected from multiple sources. English data is derived from English Dictionary and standard grammar books. Shina is an oral-dominant language and lacks written records. So, Shina data has been collected from native speaker intuition, existing descriptive sources, and informal consultations with Shina speakers. Shina words are presented along with phonetic transcriptions to ensure clarity.

In English, adjective exhibits a limited but clear inflection system. They have comparative and superlative forms. Additionally, they can be classified into various types (descriptive, quantitative, demonstrative, interrogative, possessive) and occasionally participate in case like functions. In contrast, Shina shows a different structural behavior. Based on these observations, the present study investigates:

1. Degrees of adjectives in English and how they are compared with the syntactic strategies used in Shina to express similar functions.
2. Types of adjectives in English contrasted with their structural and functional equivalents in Shina.
3. Cases or positional functions of adjectives in English e.g. attributive vs predicative, compared with the behavior of adjectives in Shina.

Data Analysis

The collected data is analysed through identification and categorization of adjectives, followed by a comparison of morphological processes to identify the similarities and differences. The data obtained is interpreted through descriptive and comparative framework, that is, the application of the Item and Process (IP) model of the morphological analysis developed by Charles Hockett. The

positive form of the Shina adjective is considered the base of the Items in this study and the following grammatical variations are the Processes (transformation) that operate on the base.

Data analysis is based on three levels of classification:

1. Analysis of Types

The adjectives are initially divided into types (Qualitative, Quantitative, etc.). In the IP model we determine the status of the "Item" as a simple root or a derived form. We compare the procedure of Derivation, that is, a base (e.g., a noun or verb) is changed to an adjective with the help of certain morphological changes.

2. Degrees (Comparison) Analysis.

The Positive to Comparative and Superlative change is seen as Morphological Process.

Synthetic Process: In which the base is suffixed (i.e. a marker is added to the Shina root).

Analytical Process: In this case, the base is held constant but an additional intensifier is acted upon with it (as in the English more).

Suppletive Process: In which the base "Item" is completely changed to a new form in order to indicate a degree change.

3. Case and Positional Analysis.

Lastly, the data is examined on Attributive vs. Predicative functions. We investigate in the IP framework whether the syntactic position of the adjective activates any inflectional operation (e.g. case-marking or gender agreement) that changes the phonological form of the underlying base "Item" in the IP framework.

Findings and Analysis

Adjectives (Degrees of Adjectives)

Table 1

Adjectives and their Degrees

Adjective	Phonetic transcription	comparative	superlative
Beautiful	/mɪl:eli/, /mɪl:elo/	/bodu mɪl:eli/	/po:renodʒo mɪl:eli/
Strong	/ʃa:tɪlo/, /ʃa:tɪli/	/bodu ʃa:tɪlo/	/po:renodʒo ʃa:tɪlo/
Short	/kʰuʈo/, /kʰuʈi/	/bodu kʰuʈu/	/bodu kʰuʈu/
Big	/ba:ru/, /ba:ri/	/bodu ba:ru/	/po:renodʒo ba:ru/
Small	/tʃʰunu/, /tʃʰuni/	/bodu tʃʰunu/	/po:renodʒo tʃʰunu/
Good	/mɪʃtu/, /mɪʃti/	/bodu mɪʃtu/	/po:renodʒo mɪʃtu/
Happy	/kʰo:ʃ/	/bodu kʰo:ʃ/	/po:renodʒo kʰo:ʃ/
Hot	/ta:tu/, /ta:ti/	/bodu ta:tu/	/po:renodʒo ta:tu/
Cold	/ʃɪdalɔ/, /ʃɪdali/	/bodu ʃɪdalɔ/	/po:renodʒo ta:tu/

Sad	/hipa/	/bodu hipa/	/po:renodʒo hipa/
Ugly	/budʒu:to/, /budʒu:ti/	/bodu budʒu:tu/	/po:renodʒo budʒu:tu/

Discussion:

Adjectives in Shina are gendered i.e. words ending with “o” or “u” indicate masculine whereas words ending in “i” refer to feminine. In English, “er” is added to the show the comparative degree and the suffix, “est” indicates the superlative degree. In Shina, distinct words are added to show the comparative and superlative forms. E.g. the word “bodu” and “bodi” are added to show the comparative degree. So, even the distinct words which precede the adjectives are also inflected whereas, the word “poorenojo” is added to show the superlative degree.

Sometimes, English adjectives also come with distinct words, like more and most but these words never get inflections. They remain same in all cases of gender and number.

Adjective Cases / Positions: English vs. Shina

A comparative table showing English adjective cases/positions alongside Shina (Gilgit dialect) equivalents with examples.

Findings:

Table 2

Adjectives and their cases

Adjective Case	Description	English Example	Shina Example
Attributive Position	Adjective comes before the noun.	A little boy	“milleli mulai” (beautiful girl)
Predicative Position	Adjective comes after a linking verb.	The sky is blue.	Mulai millelik hin (the girl is beautiful)
Postpositive Position	Adjective comes after the noun.	the best option available	Mulai millelik hin (the girl is beautiful)
Adjectives as Intensifiers	Adjectives used to emphasize degree.	An utter disaster	'a very big child' Bodu baru shudder

Discussion:

In English, adjectives do not have grammatical cases the way nouns or pronouns do. However, adjectives function in different syntactic positions, which some teachers informally call “cases” or “positions” of adjectives. Here are the three main positions (or “cases”) of adjectives in English: In Attributive Adjectives (Pre-Noun Position), the adjective comes before the noun it describes. Examples: a beautiful dress. This position of adjective is the most common in both Shina and English e.g. “jaru musha” (an old man). Shina adjectives usually come before nouns.

Second case of adjective position in English is Predicative Adjectives. In this case, adjectives come after the copula. The adjective appears after a linking verb (be, seem, look, become, appear,

feel, etc.). e.g. The dress is beautiful. Shina language uses inflections instead of linking verbs. As there is no concept of copula in Shina, this position of adjectives cannot be directly related to Shina but adjectives take a position after adjectives with the inflection of “k” e.g. “musha jaruk han” (the man is old). When the adjective is placed after the noun, it takes “k” sound as an inflection.

Another case of adjectives in English is Postpositive Adjectives in which the adjectives come just after the noun, without any use of helping verb. This position can be observed in Shina also. e.g. mulai milleelik hin (the girl is beautiful) and musha jaruk han (the man is old). In both the examples, adjective is placed after the noun but with addition of “ik” at the end of the feminine adjective and an addition of “uk” and “ek” with masculine adjectives. So, the addition of “ik” in Shina adjectives allows the adjectives to be placed after the noun. In case of plural adjectives, the sound would shift from “ik” to “ek” e.g. mushaey jarey han (men are old) and mulaey milleelek han (girls are beautiful).

As **intensifiers**, adjectives modify another adjective, adverb or even the whole clause to show strong emotion, emphasis or evaluation. Their main purpose is not the description of noun but to strengthen or intensify the meaning of another adjective E.g. an utter disaster, a sheer joy, a mere child. Adjectives acting as intensifiers also exist in Shina but they are not as common as in English. E.g. Bodu mushkil kom, “an extremely difficult task”. Such examples in Shina rarely exist. Shina uses intensifiers like “bodun” with adjectives.

Example:

Adjectives do not change form for gender and number in English whereas the adjectives inflect for gender and number in Shina. Most Shina adjectives like “baru” (big) masculine, and “bari” (big) feminine do show gender but the adjectives in Shina that have been borrowed from Urdu, Persian or other languages do not show gender e.g. “safa” (clean) remains same in both gender cases. Adjectives also inflect for number in Shina e.g. addition of “k” sound at the end of any adjective indicates that it is single e.g. the sentence. “mulai mishtik hin”, (the girl is good) indicates that the speaker is talking about a single girl.

Types of adjectives:

Findings

Table 3

Types of Adjectives in English and their corresponding Urdu Equivalent

Types of Adjectives	Function	English Examples	Urdu Examples	Linguistic Feature
Descriptive adjectives	Describe the quality of noun	Big, tall, beautiful	Baru, chunu, millilu	O for masculine I for feminine
Quantitative adjectives	Show the quantity of something	Some, many, few	Kamek, boday, ahook	Distinct words
Demonstrative adjectives	Points out a specific noun	This, that, these, those	Anu, paro, ani, paraey	Distinct words
Possessive adjectives	Shows possession	My, your, his, her, its, our, their	Mai, thai, resai, asai, rinai, anesai	Addition of inflection “ai”
Interrogative adjectives	Used to ask questions	Which, what, whose	Ko, jek, kesai	Distinct sounds
Distributive adjectives	Refers to member or group	Each, every, either, neither	No specific words	No distinct words

Numerical adjectives	Show number or order	First, second, third, one , two, three	Yar chupai, dumungu, chemungu, ek, du ,chay	Specific words
Indefinite adjectives	Refer to non-specific nouns	Any, some, few, several	Koga, kamek, achool	Specific words

Discussion:

The types of adjectives perform similar functions in both languages. Descriptive adjectives take “o” and “i” sound as inflections in Shina and they also agree with the gender. The possessive pronouns take specific inflections like, “ai” to show ownership. Distributive adjectives do not have specific words in Shina. However, replacements exist or a combination of other words can be used to replace the distributive adjectives. The rest of the types of adjectives do not show specific inflections to show any category rather, they have distinct words in Shina language.

Conclusion:

All the languages of the world follow a specific pattern of rules. For the purpose of convenience, words in English have been classified into various parts of speech, each of which perform a specific function. Adjectives are the words that modifies a noun. A comparison of adjective inflections in English and Shina reveal that while both languages employ adjectives to describe, qualify, and modify nouns, they differ significantly in structure, grammatical behavior and patterns of agreement. English adjectives remain morphologically stable regardless of nouns gender or number. In contrast, Shina adjectives exhibit morphological variation. The structural and functional differences highlight the distinct grammatical systems of two languages, even though they serve similar communicative purposes. The findings contribute not only to understand the linguistic features of Shina but also to the broader field of comparative linguistics by documenting the unique features of a less documented language. It also provides a foundation for further studies on Shina morphology, syntax and language preservation.

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