



## DERIVATIONAL WORD FORMATION IN THE DARI LANGUAGE: AFFIXATION AS A PRIMARY MECHANISM

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### Abstract

This study investigates derivational word formation in the Dari language, with a focus on affixation as a primary and highly productive process. The research explores historical and contemporary aspects of affix usage, the classification of derivational elements, and the morphological and lexical patterns formed through them. Drawing on classical lexicographical sources and modern grammatical analyses, the study emphasizes the role of affixes in the development of nouns, adjectives, and adverbs, and highlights their significance in shaping the lexical system of Dari in relation to Persian and Tajik.

**Keywords:** Dari language, word formation, affixation, derivational morphology, Persian, Tajik, grammar, lexical system, suffix, prefix.

### 1. Introduction

Word formation in the Dari language, as in Persian and Tajik, plays a fundamental role in the structure of language at all levels. It is closely tied to both syntax and morphology. Classical lexicographical works from the 16th to 19th centuries—such as “فرهنگ جهانگیری” *Farhang-e Jahângiri*, “فرهنگ رشیدی” *Borhân-e Qâte*, “بهار عجم” *Bahâr-e Ajam*, “غیاث اللغات” *Giyâs-ol-loğat* and “تحفه الأحباب” *Tohfât-ol-Ahbâb* — document early awareness of derivational processes. Despite this, the systematic study of word formation in Classical Dari remains underdeveloped.

Previous research indicates that internal linguistic mechanisms have historically driven lexical expansion in Dari. However, the specific methods used in ancient and medieval stages—particularly affixation—have not been thoroughly classified or evaluated. Moreover, distinctions between nominal and verbal derivation techniques remain crucial, with nominal forms tending toward affixation and compounding, and verbal forms favoring phrasal structures.

### 2. Methods

This research uses descriptive and comparative linguistic methods. Primary sources include historical lexicons, such as those compiled in India and Herat, and



modern grammar references like M.N. Neghat Saidiyn's *Contemporary Dari Grammar* and L.N. Kiseleva's *Essays on Dari Lexicology*. The study analyzes the types, functions, and distributions of affixes based on recorded lexemes, examining both productive and non-productive affixes and their semantic roles.

A corpus of affixal morphemes (103 items from Kiseleva) was classified into:

- Prefixes
- Suffixes
- Semi-affixes
- Compounding patterns

Affix productivity and their roles in forming specific parts of speech were assessed, with particular focus on noun, adjective, and adverb derivation.

### 3. Results

The findings show that affixation is the most productive word formation strategy in Dari. It operates through both historical and modern models of derivation, including:

- **Base + suffix** (e.g., طبل *tabl* + چی -*či* → طبل چی *tabl(a)či* 'drummer')
- **Prefix + base** (e.g., به *ba-* + تند *tond* → بتندی *batondi* 'harshly')
- **Multiple affixes** forming single derivational chains

Affixes typically create lexemes with clearly defined lexical-grammatical categories. For example:

- - چی *či* forms agent nouns (ترمچی *toromči*, تنبور چی *tamburči*)
- -گار *-gar*, گار *-gâr*, کار *-kâr* also produce profession-related nouns (زرگر *zargar*, درودگر *dorudgar*)
- -ی *-i*, آ- *-â*, مند *-mand* form abstract nouns and adjectives (هنرمندي *honormandi*, هنرمند *honarmand*)

Prefixal derivation, though less common, includes:

- به *ba-*, نا *nâ-*, با *bâ-* (for adjectives)
- بی *bê-*, نه *na-* (for adjectives and adverbs)
- Some outdated or unproductive prefixes (دش *doš-*, ام *em-*) persist in grammatical listings



The analysis confirms that derived lexemes in Dari generally belong to well-defined grammatical categories, indicating that affixes also function as **category markers**. Derivational families form semantic networks (e.g., musical instruments, materials, occupations).

#### 4. Discussion

It is closely linked to syntax and is inseparable from morphology. According to Kh. Alimova (2019), information on the phenomenon of word formation in Classical Dari was initially found in lexicographic works compiled between the 16th and 19th centuries. These include such glossaries compiled in India as “فرهنگ جهانگیری” *Farhang-e Jahângiri* (1608), “فرهنگ رشیدی” *Farhang-e Rashidi* (1653), “برهان قاطع” *Borhân-e Qâte‘* (1654), “بهار عجم” *Bahâr-e Ajam* (1739), “غیاث اللغت” *Ġiyâs-ol-loġat* (1827), and “تحفه الأحباب” *Tohfât-ol-Ahbâb* (1530) compiled in Herat, which contain detailed information on Persian phonetics, lexicon, grammar, syntax, etymology, and word formation.

A. Quronbekov (2009) emphasizes that internal linguistic mechanisms have always played a leading role in enriching the vocabulary of Classical Dari. However, the processes of word formation in ancient and medieval stages of the language and the predominant methods employed in those periods remain insufficiently studied, requiring further research. It is noteworthy that the processes of word formation in the present-day Persian language differ depending on the part of speech. For instance, nominal word formation is characterized by affixation, semi-affixation, compounding, and lexicalization, whereas verbal word formation frequently employs phrasal or compound verbs. Although some verbs are formed by affixation or conversion, most are already fully developed lexical items.

In studies on the Dari language, the following primary methods of word formation are identified:

1. **Affixation** (وند پیوندی *wandpaywandi*)
2. **Compounding** (ترکیب واژه *tarkib-e wâža*)
3. **Lexicalization** (تبدیل ترکیب نحوی به واژه مرکب *tabdil-e tarkib-e nahwi ba wâža-ye morakkab*)
4. **Semantic derivation**

Among these, affixation and compounding are regarded as the principal word formation techniques. Affixation is the most productive and extensive method, as in many languages. This method involves the addition of an affix to a base and is typically expressed by the formula: **base + derivational morpheme**.



An **affix** (پسوند *paswand* / پیشوند *pêšwand*) is a bound morpheme that lacks independent meaning and usage. It is attached to a base and expresses various meanings connected to the grammatical and lexical features of the base. Affixes may appear at the beginning (*prefix*), middle (*infix*), or end (*suffix*) of a word and vary in their form, meaning, function, and application.

The meaning and other characteristics of a derived word emerge from the semantic and structural combination of its components. Therefore, to clarify the nature of derived words and related phenomena, it is essential to accurately define the roles and properties of both the base and the affix. The base provides a concrete lexical meaning, while the affix contributes a general functional meaning. Thus:

1. Any derived word must contain a meaningful lexical base;
2. A single affix can derive multiple words;
3. The meaning of the affix is realized through the semantics of the base;
4. Regardless of specificity or generality, both components contribute semantically to the new word.

A **derived word** (واژه مشتق *wâža-ye moštaq*) is a linguistic unit, or lexeme, and as such belongs to the lexical level of language, studied in the field of lexicology. In word formation studies, attention is given to how such lexemes are generated, the units involved, and their functions. The semantic structure of derived words emerges from the synthesis of the base and the affix. Derived words sharing a common affix tend to form a lexical-semantic group based on a general conceptual field.

For example:

- *toromči* 'blacksmith' (ترم *torom* 'forge')
- *tambur(a)či* 'tambour player' (تنبور *tambur* 'tambour')
- *sornayči* 'surnay player' (سرنی *sornay* 'surnay')
- *tabl(a)či* 'drummer' (طبل *tabl* 'drum')
- *wailonči* 'violinist' (ویولن *wailon* 'violin')
- *tâlči* 'player of the tâl' (تال *tâl* 'percussion instrument')

This group is semantically defined as: “**name of a musical instrument**” (base) + “**agent**” (affix meaning). The general semantic trait unifying the group is “type of musical instrument.” Thus, each derived word belongs to the same lexical-semantic group and collectively forms a subsystem within the lexicon.

Another example:



- آهنگر *âhangar* ‘blacksmith’ (آهن *âhan* ‘iron’)
- چرمگر *čarmgar* ‘leatherworker’ (چرم *čarm* ‘leather’)
- زرگر *zargar* ‘goldsmith’ (زر *zar* ‘gold’)
- درودگر *dorudgar* ‘carpenter’ (درود *dorud* ‘wood’)

These represent individuals associated with processing certain materials, and again, form a unified semantic category based on the “material” involved.

L.N. Kiseleva’s monograph (1973) *"Essays on Dari Lexicology"* lists 103 derivational and inflectional affixes used in the Dari language, including several semi-affixes. Affix productivity varies, with most affixes used to form nouns and adjectives. The typical formation model — **base + affix** or **affix + base** — is considered a standard derivational structure in Dari language history. However, it is noted that the number, function, and productivity of affixes change over time. Some affixes have become less productive, new ones have emerged, and certain affixes have merged with roots or developed allomorphs or homonyms, resulting in complex affixal systems and the emergence of semi-affixal blocks.

Kiseleva identifies eight suffixes—*-gak (-ak)*, *-a*, *-i (< -ih)*, *yâ-e nesbat*, *-in*, *-ina*, *-dâni*, *-bâb*, *-ôk* —as reflecting post-classical changes in the word formation systems of Dari, Persian, and Tajik. These suffixes are commonly used to form concrete nouns, abstract nouns, and adjectives.

Word-forming affixes in the Dari parts of speech are also discussed in M.N. Neghat Saidiyn’s grammar *"Contemporary Dari Grammar"* (2013), particularly pages 149–159. It lists eight nominal/adjectival derivational prefixes, of which **ba-**, **nâ-**, **bâ-** form adjectives; **bê-**, **na-** produce adjectives and adverbs; **doš-** forms nouns; **ham-** and **em-** are used for nouns and adjectives, though **em-** and **doš-** are currently unproductive in modern Dari, Persian, and Tajik.

Derivational suffixes are categorized into:

- **Nominal suffixes** (28 items)
- **Adjectival suffixes** (17 items)
- **Adverbial suffixes** (8 items)

Some listed nominal suffixes include plural or diminutive forms, and certain suffixes (e.g., *-čī*) are incorrectly classified.

The “universal” suffix group (**noun-adjective-adverb**) contains 14 suffixes, though analysis reveals that some can be clearly attributed to nouns or adjectives. For example, *-bân/-wân* could be classified as nominal, and *-â*, *-mand* as adjectival.



Others such as *-asâ*, *-sân* yield both adjectives and adverbs; *-a* mostly forms nouns and occasionally adjectives; *-gar*, *-gâr*, *-kâr* are typically agentive and may function adjectivally.

In Persian linguistics, it is often emphasized that a strict formal boundary between core adjectives and adverbs is difficult to establish for root words. However, derived words in Dari and Persian usually express a clear categorical function. For instance:

- زیر *zêr* can mean ‘under’ (noun) or ‘lower’ (adjective), whereas زیرین *zêrin* is strictly an adjective;
- خنک *xonok* (‘cold’, adj.) vs. خنکی *xonoki* (‘coldness’, noun);
- قیمت *qimat* (‘value’, noun) vs. پرقیمت *porqimat* (‘valuable’, adj.);
- بامداد *bâmdâd* (‘dawn’, noun) vs. بامدادان *bâmdâdân* (‘at dawn’, adverb);
- نیک *nêk* (‘good’, adj./adv.) → نیکی *nêki* (‘goodness’, noun);
- تند *tond* (‘harsh’, adj./adv.) → بتندی *batondi* (‘harshly’, adv.).

Thus, in Dari, derivational affixes generally yield lexemes that belong to a specific lexical-grammatical category. In other words, affixes also serve as **markers of grammatical category**, functioning not only to derive words but to define their part of speech.

## 5. Conclusion

Affixation in Dari demonstrates a dynamic and structurally essential process of word formation, with distinct historical roots and contemporary relevance. It serves not only to expand the lexicon but also to solidify grammatical categories. This study underscores the importance of distinguishing between productive and non-productive affixes and calls for further diachronic and synchronic analyses comparing Dari with Persian and Tajik to uncover deeper typological patterns.

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