

## Definiteness

The following pair of examples reveals a clear distinction between definite and indefinite marking in Balti. The language marks nouns for definiteness with different suffixes depending on the final sound and number of the noun.

- (1) di      pen-po      ṅala      min  
that    pen-DEF    1SG.DAT    give.IMP  
'Give me that pen.'  
(Context: One pen is sitting on the table. I'd like you to hand it to me.)

- (2) pen      t̪ɨk      ṅala      min  
pen    one    1SG.DAT    give.IMP  
'Give me a pen.'  
(Context: Two pens are sitting on the table. I'd like you to hand me one.)

### Singular, consonant-final definite suffix: -po

When the final sound of a singular definite entity is a consonant, the suffix /-po/ is added to a word.

- (3) łdzo:t-po-la    łtos  
moon-DEF-DAT    look.IMP  
'Look at the moon.'
- (4) ṅas      marp<sup>h</sup>o      doxon-po      lemɪn  
I        red            scarf-DEF      buy  
'I will buy the red scarf.'  
(Context: From table with various scarves, only one of which is red)

### Singular, vowel final: vowel backing

When the final sound of a singular definite entity is a vowel, the final vowel is backed to an /o/ or /u/, as corresponds most closely to the height of the original vowel.

- (5) san̪saŋ      skarm-o-la    łtas-a  
shining      star-DEF-DAT    saw-Q  
'Did you see the shining star?'
- (6) bil-o      rgjuks  
cat-DEF      run.PST  
'The cat ran.'
- (7) kju      rgjuks  
dog.DEF      run.PST  
'The dog ran.'

## Plurals and definiteness

Plural markers also indicate definiteness in Balti. For more on this, see the ‘Plurality’ section.

### Indefinite marker /tʃi/

tʃi is the indefinite marker in Balti. It is almost certainly derived from /tʃik/ ‘one’.

(8) maja-s	ɳala	mendoq	tʃi	mins
Maya-ERG	1SG.DAT	flower	INDEF	give.PST
‘Maya gave me a flower.’				

## Historical Relations

While largely speculative, it seems reasonable that there is a historical connection between the two singular markers and the two plural markers. That is, the original singular definite marker was likely /-po/, and then the /p/ likely began eliding after vowel-final words, leading to an intermediate stage with two vowels at the ends of words. If the first then assimilated in place to the second and the second deleted due to vowel hiatus resolution, we are left with the current system for definite marking. Similarly, it is possible to envision that /-kuŋ/ was the original plural definite marker, and that a similar transition led to the elision of /k/ and the backing on the remaining nasal. However, this needs to be confirmed by historical data that was beyond the scope of this project.