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Complex Morphosyntactic Features of Nominal Predicates in Erzya

Abstract

This paper investigates the morphosyntactic features of Erzya nominal predicates, concentrating on the synthetic construction type based on predicative suffixes. The Erzya nominal and locational predicates can be inflected for person, number and tense by using the predicative suffixes. The predicative suffixes are identical with the person markers of verbal conjugation except for the third person singular of the present tense and those past tense constructions in which double marking of plurality is possible. Diachronically, the present tense predicative suffixes most likely developed by extension from the verbal conjugation, while the complex past tense suffix developed by grammaticalization of a copula verb. From the formal point of view, the present tense predicative suffixes display a feature typical of clitics: they have variable hosts, when the predicate is a syntagm including an adjectival modifier. From the functional point of view, the predicative suffixes are ambiguous, as they can occur either with or without an overt controller.

1. Introduction

Mordvin nominal predicate constructions offer an interesting field for research into linguistic complexity. Rich inflectional morphology is considered to be a mature feature which increases linguistic complexity (Dahl 2004). The Mordvin languages Erzya and Moksha stand out among Uralic languages in that they exhibit an especially strong tendency to synthetism with very rich inflectional morphology. This makes morphologically and semantically complex nominal predicate constructions possible: the nominal and locational predicates can be inflected for person, number and tense using the same suffixes that are used for verbal inflection. Besides the synthetic constructions, more simple analytic constructions are also used, but in this study only the morphologically complex constructions are investigated in detail.

The main corpus of the larger investigation I am carrying out on the topic consists of about 4,500 Erzya nominal predicate constructions from

texts of various ages and genres. The older material dates back to the beginning of the last century and is mostly folkloric. The newer material has been collected in a variety of ways, mainly from periodicals and prose works, as well as also from my own consultations with native speakers of Erzya.

In this paper, if not noted otherwise, the term *nominal predicate* is used to refer to all non-verbal predicate classes—class, property and locational predicates—because they are encoded similarly. When necessary, the predicates with the noun inflected in some locative case (or modified by a postposition or an adverb expressing location) are called locational predicates as opposed to the class predicates (expressed by a noun) and to property predicates (expressed by an adjective). (Cf. for example Stassen 1997)

This paper consists of three parts. First, the morphosyntactic features of synthetic nominal predicate constructions are described in detail. Then the diachronic development of predicative suffixes is discussed, and finally, the Erzya predicative suffixes are examined in a typological context and their position on the grammaticalization scale is discussed both from formal and functional points of view.

2. The synthetic nominal predicate construction: predicative suffixes

The most complex type of Erzya nominal predicate constructions is the synthetic one, which is based on using predicative suffixes expressing person, number and tense. The predicative suffixes are the same as those used for verbal inflection. Only the third person is an exception: it is unmarked in singular and takes the plural suffix *-t* in the plural—in verbal inflection the third person is marked in the present tense, although no person marker is used in the past tenses. The unmarkedness of the third person is to be expected, since if a language has a zero person marker, it occurs typically in the third person (Siewierska 2004: 24). Compared to verbal inflection, the nominal inflection paradigm is incomplete: it is found only in the indicative, and not in any other of the six modes besides the indicative. Of the tenses, the present and the perfect forms are used, but not the simple past tense (traditionally called imperfect). Functionally, the perfect form of the nominal conjugation corresponds to the imperfect form

of the verbal conjugation. Table 1 presents the nominal predication of *od* ‘young’ in the present and the past tense.

	Present		Past	
Sg1	<i>od-an</i>	‘I am young’	<i>od-ol' -iń</i>	‘I was young’
Sg2	<i>od-at</i>	‘You are young’	<i>od-ol' -it'</i>	‘You were young’
Sg3	<i>od-Ø</i>	‘He/She is young’	<i>od-ol'</i>	‘He/She was young’
Pl1	<i>od-tano</i>	‘We are young’	<i>od-ol' -ińek</i>	‘We were young’
Pl2	<i>od-tado</i>	‘You are young’	<i>od-ol' -id' e</i>	‘You were young’
Pl3	<i>od-t</i>	‘They are young’	<i>od-ol' -t'</i>	‘They were young’

Table 1. Predicative suffixes, MdE *od* ‘young’ (Cygankin 2000: 109).

The examples below demonstrate the use of predicative suffixes and the similarities of nominal (examples 1 and 3) and event (examples 2 and 3) predicate constructions. Note that the same 2SG suffix that indicates the subject in *kij-at*, *tej-at* (examples 1 and 2) marks the possessor in *t' et' a-t-kak* in example 3. The locational predicates take the same suffixes as nominal predicates but have an additional spatial marker (examples 4 and 5). The use of subject personal pronouns is not necessary, since the information is carried by the bound form—nevertheless, double marking of the subject is quite frequent in the data.

- (1) *Kij-at ton?* (Paltin et al. 1997: 35)
 who-2SG you
 ‘Who are you?’
- (2) *A ton meže t' ej-at?* (Mosin & Bajuškin 1983: 24)
 And you what do-2SG
 ‘And what are you doing?’
- (3) *T' et' a-t-kak soda-sa: jalga-tano, vej-se kal-t*
 father-2SG.POSS-too know-1SG/3SG friend-1PL one-INCESS fish-PL
kund-še-t' ano. (Syatko 3:8, 51)
 catch-FREQ-1PL
 ‘I know your father, too: we are friends, we fish together.’
- (4) *T' e-se-t' ano!* (Syatko 7: 1, 19)
 This-INCESS-1PL
 ‘We are here!’

- (5) *Tago valm-alo-tado!* (Syatko 1: 14, 13)
 Again window-under-2PL
 ‘You are again under the window!’

Synchronically, in Erzya there is a whole paradigm with nominal predicates agreeing in tense and person with the subject. In the present tense, no trace of an auxiliary can be seen and the person marker attaches straight to the nominal stem. In contrast, the form of the past tense predicative suffix is transparent: the source of the new person and tense marker is a suffixed and reanalyzed auxiliary verb. Before the person agreement marker the suffix *-l'* is attached, which originates from the auxiliary *ul' ems* ‘be’ and which, through the grammaticalization process, has been reduced to a tense marker (Bartens 1999: 108, 130; see also Siewierska 2004: 133).

In the past tense, besides the synthetic constructions, an analytic construction with the copula verb can also be used. Even though the same copula verb can be shown in both the synthetic and the analytic past tense constructions, the two constructions do not differ only in the degree of the fusion of their elements: in the synthetic construction phonological reduction affects the verb *ul' ems* ‘be’, and in the analytic past tense construction the copula verb never occurs in its simple form (*ul' e-*) but always with the frequentative suffix (as *ul' -ńe-*).

The synthetic and analytic construction types are in free variation in the past tense. The free variation of the predicative suffix and the copula in past tense is illustrated by examples 6 and 7. Example 7 contains a past tense copula (example 7.a) and a past tense predicative suffix (example 7.c) and, furthermore, a predicate of origin (which is in Erzya usually an adjectivized noun with the adjectivizing genitive suffix *-ń*) (example 7.b) and a locational predicate in present tense (example 7.d).

- (6) *Ušo-s ekše-l', set' me-l'.*
 weather-DEF cool-PF.3SG silent-PF.3SG

Meńel' -eš ul' -ńe-š čopoda-seń. (Kločagin 1997: 56)
 sky-DEF be-FREQ-PST.3SG dark-blue.
 ‘It was cool and silent. The sky was dark blue.’

- (7) a. *Ki-je te ul' -ńe-š?* b. *Ko-sto-ń?*
 Who this be-FREQ-PST.3SG where-ABL-ADJ
 ‘Who was this man?’ ‘Where is he from?’

c. *Kodamo-l'?*
 What.like-PF.3SG
 'What was he like?'

d. *Nej koso?* (Syatko 1: 4.22)
 Now where
 'Where is he now?'

In a locational predicate construction the predicative suffix may attach to a postposition as in *lang-so-l' -i-t'* in example 8.

(8) *Kuvat' ki lang-so-l' -it'?* (Syatko 4, 41)
 long.time road on-INESS-PF-2SG
 'Where you long on the road?'

The locational predicate *tarka-so-n-zo-l'* in example 9 displays a high level of syntheticity with the inessive suffix and the plural suffix of the possessive paradigms, the possessive suffix of the third person and the last, the past tense predicative suffix of the third person singular. So, one inflectional form exhibits multiple functional properties: it indicates location, the number of the possession, the number and person of the possessor, and tense.

(9) *V' el' e-ń a vejke mazij-ka-ń sed' ej-gak a*
 village-GEN NEG one beauty-DEM-GEN heart-too NEG

tarka-so-n-zo-l'. (Syatko 1: 4.4)
 place-INESS-PL-3SG.POSS-PF.3SG
 'The hearts of many beautiful girls of the village were not in the right place.'

As noted by Laakso (1997: 268), the conjugation of the predicate noun differs from the complete verbalization of nouns: unlike ordinary verbalization, predicate conjugation does not delete information about the relationship between noun and other entities involved since that relationship can be expressed with case suffixes, as in *tarka-so-nzo-l'* in example 9.

2.1 The double marking of plural

Sometimes a plural subject is marked twice on the nominal predicate: the plurality is expressed first by the nominal suffix *-t* and then by the predicative suffix. In our present tense example 10, the nominal predicate *koda-t-tado* contains the plural suffix *-t* and the predicative suffix of second person plural *-tado*. The complex past tense predicative form in example 11

išt' a-t-ol' -t' contains the plural suffix *-t*, then the tense suffix of the perfect, and again the same plural suffix.

- (10) *Koda-t-tado tiń, ruz-t' -ńe...* (Syatko 2: 45)
 What-kind-PL-2PL you Russian-PL-DEF
 'What are you like, Russians...'
- (11) *T' et' a-nzo-ava-nzo, kort-it', išt' a-t-ol' -t'* (Syatko 1: 4, 2)
 father-3SG-mother-3SG talk-3PL like that-PL-PF-3PL
 'His/her parents, they say, were like that.'

According to my data, double marking is more usual in the perfect tense of the third person plural and with some frequently used pronouns. One of the older grammars of Erzya shows a paradigm with double plural marking in all plural forms (Evsevev 1963: 117, 413), but the newer ones do not have such examples. In Moksha this kind of double marking is basically always used in the plural past tense (Bartens 1999: 131).

The double marking of plural, as in example 11, would be expected in the past tense, if we assume that the synthetic types have developed from analytic constructions. In the analytic types the nominal predicate always agrees in number with the subject, as illustrated by a present tense juxtaposition in example 12 and a past tense copula construction in example 13.

- (12) *Ki-t' tiń?* (Syatko 1: 12, 21)
 who-PL you.2PL
 'Who are you?'
- (13) *Min-ś ul' -ń-i-ńek azor-t.* (Kločagin 1997: 82)
 we-EMPH be-FREQ-PST-1PL landlord-PL
 'We were landlords.'

The plural double marking in the past tense constructions would thus be expected to occur when the copula *ul' ems* 'be' agglutinates to the noun and becomes a bound morpheme. The lack of double marking in modern Erzya reflects a more advanced state in the grammaticalization process, through which the morphological complexity of the construction has decreased.

Unlike nominal predicates, the locational predicate does not take the plural marker *-t* when the subject is in the first or second person plural (but it does obligatorily with the subject of third person plural). Thus **miń*

kudo-so-t (we house-INESS-PL) is not a possible construction type in Erzya (S. Motorkina, N. Kazaeva, personal communication). In contrast with Erzya, other Finno-Ugric languages such as Komi, Udmurt and Khanty use their plural markers on locational predicates also with the first and the second person subjects (Honti 1992: 264).

3. The origin of the predicative suffix

Since the person markers of nominal predicates are the same as those of the verbal conjugation, a commonly accepted view about their origin is that the present tense predicative suffixes have been extended from the verbal paradigm into the nominal, as, indeed, dependent person markers have been known to evolve from other dependent person markers via extension (Siewierska 2004: 247). The extension may have happened at least in two ways, as hypothesized by Honti (1992) on the one hand and Keresztes (2001) on the other.

Honti (1992) suggests that the third person is the source of the extension. According to him, it used to be morphologically neutral with respect to the opposition between verb vs. noun in many Uralic languages: in the verbal conjugation, third person present tense person markers use suffixes of nominal origin. Because the present tense third person predicate did not have morphological elements of only verbal origin, it was not morphologically distinct from the present tense nominal predicate. Due to the neutral character of the third person, the verb vs. noun opposition became weaker in the first and the second persons, and it became possible to attach the person agreement markers of the first and the second person to nominal predicates. (Honti 1992: 269)

Keresztes (2001) argues that the agreement phenomena of the present tense nominal predicates are of secondary origin. According to him, the past tense of the nominal conjugation developed first. Then, the fusion of the copula to the nominal predicate probably led to the development of the verbal inflections of the perfect tense. After developing the perfect tense of verbal conjugation with the material from the nominal conjugation, the nominal conjugation has, in turn, developed the present tense by analogy. Thus, the opposition of present tense and perfect in verbal paradigms may have extended to the nominal paradigm: *sod-il' -iń* : *sod-an* 'I knew : I know' > *od-ol' -iń* : *od-an* 'I was young : I am young.' (Keresztes 2001: 95–96) Since the prototypical instance of person agreement is that of subject and verb (Siewierska 2004: 120), it seems logical that in the

predicative position the nominal constituent has been given verbal features, and it is, therefore, possible for the constituent to take the suffixes expressing person, number and tense.

As far as other Uralic languages are concerned, predicative suffixes attach to nouns in the Samoyedic languages as well. The predicative suffixes of Mordvin and Samoyedic most likely are not of Uralic origin, but they have extended to nominal paradigms during the later development of these languages (Honti 1992: 270; Keresztes 2001: 95). The Permic languages and Khanty use their plural markers on locational predicates also with first and second person subjects—contrary to Erzya, as described above. That is, these languages mark both the nominal and locational predicate, but the copula function is filled by the plural suffix. The predicative element is nominal in Khanty and Permic, and verbal in Mordvin and Samoyedic (Honti uses the term ‘Pseudoverbalisierung’, cf. Honti 1992: 264, 266, 270). Considering the inflections of nominal predicates in present-day Uralic languages and looking at the large area of nominal conjugation in North-Eastern Asia, Hajdú claims that the nominal conjugation was possibly used in Proto-Uralic (Hajdú 1981: 133–134).

Mordvin nominal predicate constructions are discussed in Stassen’s (1997) typological study of intransitive predication. His view about the origin of Mordvin (and other North-East Asian) predicative suffixes is opposite to those of Honti and Keresztes. Stassen states that the similarity between the nominal and verbal paradigms is due to nominal merging. The person agreement markers of nominal predicates have extended their range of usage to verbal inflection (in Mordvin in the subject conjugation) and not the other way round. Stassen’s theoretical assumptions about the development of personal affixes in Uralic languages are studied in detail in Pajunen (1998). One of the main misleading factors in the classification of Mordvin is that Stassen does not discuss the negation of nominal and verbal predicates in Mordvin in detail. He states that the encoding of nominal and verbal predicates differs. According to him, event predicates are encoded nominally except for negation (Stassen 1997: 50, 285, 291). As earlier pointed out in Pajunen (1998), this observation does not hold, since the negation particle *avol’* used with nominal predicates is etymologically of the same origin as the particle *a* used with verbal predicates (Pajunen 1998: 480–481). Furthermore, in the present tense constructions the particle *a* can be used with nominal predicates as *a šimića-n* in example 14 (see also example 7 above with a locational predicate) as well as with verbal predicates as *a večk-an* in example 15.

- (14) *Mon ed' a šimića-n.* (Syatko 4: 88)
 I namely NEG drinker-1SG
 'I am not a drinker, you see.'
- (15) *Mon a večk-an šokś-eń ška.* (Mosin & Bajuškin 1983: 33)
 I not love-1SG autumn-GEN time
 'I don't like autumn time.'

Even if the negation strategies of nominal and verbal predicates are partly the same in the present tense, in the past tense constructions they differ: the same negation particle is used with nominal predicates as in present tense, whereas verbal predicates have an inflected negation verb. In any case, Stassen's hypothesis about nominal merging of person markers in Uralic languages is highly questionable, as pointed out in Pajunen (1998).

A similar kind of system of nominal predicate constructions as in Mordvin is used in the neighboring Tatar (for more detail, see Turunen, to appear). Whether language contact could have played some role in the rise of the predicative suffix in Mordvin is an issue which should definitely be examined in further research in more detail.

4. The functional and formal dimension of the predicative suffix

In this section I discuss the degree of grammaticalization of predicative suffixes. The grammaticalization of person markers proceeds along a functional, formal and semantic dimension.

The functional dimension of person markers is studied within the framework of Bresnan and Mchombos' (1987) grammatical vs. anaphorical agreement typology on which Siewierska (2004) builds. In this typology the person agreement markers and the typology of agreement are based on the co-occurrence possibilities of person markers and their controllers in the same construction (and not on the morphophonological form of the agreement markers). The agreement markers are divided into syntactic, ambiguous and pronominal. The syntactic agreement markers cannot occur without an overt controller and the pronominal markers cannot occur with an overt local controller in the same construction. The ambiguous markers can occur both in the presence of an overt controller in the same construction and in the absence of such a controller. According to Siewierska (2004: 262), the functional dimension relates to the change from a pronoun, that is a referential expression with deictic or anaphoric

force to a syntactic agreement marker which only redundantly expresses person features:

PRONOMINAL AGREEMENT MARKER > AMBIGUOUS AGREEMENT MARKER > SYNTACTIC AGREEMENT MARKER

The predicative suffixes of Erzya are ambiguous agreement markers: they can occur both in the presence of an overt controller, as *ton* ‘you’ in example 1, and in the absence of such a controller, as in example 3. The classification of Erzya predicative suffixes is made with the help of the pronominal controllers of the first and the second persons, because, as noted above, in Erzya the third person has no overt person marker.

Bresnan and Mchombo use the term grammatical agreement for syntactic agreement with an overt local controller, and the term anaphorical agreement for pronominal agreement with a non-local controller (Bresnan & Mchombo 1987: 752). Since the Erzya predicative suffixes are ambiguous, they may be involved in both grammatical and anaphoric agreement.

From the formal point of view, the person markers may be classified on the basis of their morphological independence and phonological substance. According to Dahl (2004: 106), by maturation the complexity of linguistic patterns tends to increase as periphrastic constructions develop from free to fusional constructions:

FREE > PERIPHRASTIC > AFFIXAL > FUSIONAL

The grammaticalization of the past tense predicative suffixes has been studied in detail above. It was noted that they developed as the copula agglutinated into the nominal stem. The development of the past tense of nominal predicates mirrors the increase of maturity: patterns involving words with a complex morphological make-up develop out of syntactic constructions (Dahl 2004: 106).

The development of person markers is in accordance with the more general assumption of development of grammatical patterns and maturation. Siewierska (2004: 261–262) suggests that person markers may undergo the following change in the formal dimension:

INDEPENDENT PERSON MARKER > WEAK FORM > CLITIC > AGGLUTINATIVE AFFIX > FUSIONAL FORM > Ø

From the formal point of view, the Erzya predicative suffixes need to be studied in more detail, especially as far as the borderline between affixes and clitics is concerned. The basic diagnostic feature distinguishing clitics from bound forms is their relative independence from their hosts: bound forms attach only to a particular type of stem, but clitics are not thus restricted. They attach not to a particular stem but rather to phrases and/or specialized syntactic positions. The Erzya predicative suffixes are affixal, but one particular feature makes them more like clitics: they have variable hosts (Siewierska 2004: 24, 27, 34).

To study the Erzya predicative suffixes in the light of the clitic hypothesis, first we need to take a look at the marking of definiteness. In Erzya, nouns get a definite suffix as *ušo-ś* ‘weather-DEF’ in example 6. Predicate nouns in the nominative may also be marked as definite. According to descriptive grammars of Erzya as well as my informants, the definite suffix does not block the predicative conjugation when the predicate is in the nominative (Evsevev 1963: 137). However, I have not found any constructions of that kind in my corpora. Definite predicate nouns are all analytic constructions, like in example 16, in which the subject *mon* is expressed with a pronoun and is not suffixal:

- (16) *T' e-se nej komand' ir-eś mon,..* (Erkay 1991: 160)
 here now chief-DEF I
 ‘Here I am the chief now’

When the nominal predicate is a syntagm including an adjectival modifier, marking the definiteness of the predicate noun and choosing the host for the predicative suffix depend on each other in a rather complex way. As pointed out by Bartens (1996: 23, 29), the constructions with restrictive or contrastive adjectival modifiers are usually formed so that the modifier bears the predicative suffix and the noun is marked definite. The example 17 contains such a contrastive modifier: the predicative suffix attaches to the adjective *vad'ra* ‘good’. The suffix can only be attached either to the adjective or to the noun, but not to both of them. When the predicative suffix attaches to the modifier, the noun is obligatorily marked as definite.

- (17) *Arś-iń, vadřa-tado lomań-t' -ńe, paro paro-so*
 think-PST.1SG good-2PL people-PL-DEF good good-INCESS

pand-tado! (Syatko 3: 8.29)

pay-2PL

‘I thought you were good people and return good deeds for good deeds.’

According to my Erzya informants, the adjective is emphasized if it takes the predicative suffix, but this depends also on intonation (S. Motorkina, N. Kazaeva, V. Cipkajkina, personal communication). If the adjective is not contrastive, the noun is not marked definite and thus the predicative suffix can attach to the noun, as in *jalga-tano* in example 18.

- (18) *Miń son-ze marto paro jalga-tano.* (Syatko 1: 13, 6)
 We (s)he-3SG with good friend-1PL
 ‘(S)He and I are good friends.’

One factor influencing the choice of construction type is the word order. In Erzya, the attributive adjective precedes the noun when the word order is unmarked, as illustrated by the examples above. If the word order is marked—the noun precedes the adjective—the adjective obligatorily takes the predicative suffix and the noun is marked definite. (Bartens 1996: 23–24) In example 19 the word order is unmarked and the noun bears the predicative suffix, as opposed to example 20, in which the word order is marked.

- (19) *išt' akak b' eřań lomań-an, išt' akak plohoj lomań-an* (MVII: 257)
 such bad man-1SG such wretched man-1SG
 ‘I am such a bad man, I am such a wretched man.’

- (20) *mon lomań-eś b' eřań-an, mon lomań-eś plohojń-an* (MV II: 284)
 I man-DEF bad-1SG I man-DEF wretched-1SG
 ‘I am a bad man, I am a wretched man.’

The clitic-like nature of the predicative suffixes is supported by the fact that they are also used in many other construction types besides the nominal and locational predicate constructions discussed in this paper. The predicative suffixes may attach to participles, infinitives, and they are met in possessive and quantifying constructions (see Bartens 1996). The pragmatic and semantic factors influencing the use of the predicative

suffix, the choice of the host as well as the word order in nominal predicate constructions are issues which need further investigation.

It is worth noting that the analytic construction agreeing with the nominal predicate only in number also displays a similar kind of variation. There are two ways of marking the plurality of the construction. In the morphologically simple construction the plural suffix attaches to the noun, while the adjectival modifier stays unmarked, as in example 21. The other possibility is that the noun is marked as definite plural, and the adjective takes the plural suffix, as *lomań-t' -ńe* and *vadra-t*, respectively, in example 22.

- (21) *Miń Miša marto vadra oja-t.* (Syatko 7: 1, 1)
 we Misha with good friend-PL
 'Misha and I are good friends.'

- (22) *Tiń vadra-t lomań-t' -ńe.* (Nina Kazaeva, personal communication)
 you good-PL people-PL-DEF
 'You are good people.'

5. Conclusion

The nominal predicate constructions of Erzya display complex morphosyntactic features: they can be inflected for person, number and tense using the same suffixes as are used in the verbal conjugation. The locational predicate constructions connect nominal inflection (locative cases) to nominal conjugation (predicative suffixes). The nominal conjugation is not totally identical to the verbal one, for example the negation strategies of the two differ in part. Furthermore, unlike verbal predicates, nominal predicates may display the plural suffix before the predicative suffixes, which is not surprising in the light of their diachronic development. In the grammaticalization process, from the functional point of view, the predicative suffixes of Erzya display features of both pronominal and syntactic agreement markers and are, thus, ambiguous. From the formal point of view, the grammaticalization process of the present tense and the past tense predicative suffixes differs. First, the past tense suffix is an agglutinated copula which has gone through phonological reduction processes. The present tense suffix most probably extended from the verbal conjugation. The variability of the host makes the present tense predicative suffixes clitic-like: when the predicate nominal is a syntagm

consisting of an adjectival modifier and a noun in nominative, the predicative suffixes may attach either to the modifier or to the noun.

List of abbreviations

ADJ	adjective
DEF	definite
EMPH	emphatic
FREQ	frequentative
GEN	genitive
INESS	inessive
NEG	negative
PF	perfect
PL	plural
POSS	possessive
PST	past
SG	singular

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