



Akademik Dil ve Edebiyat Dergisi

Journal of Academic Language and Literature

[Cilt/Volume: 9, Sayı/Issue: 1, Mart/March 2025]

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Eğitim Fakültesi

Yabancı Diller Eğitimi Bölümü

Positive Polarity in Turkish: a Corpus-based Study of 'Oldukça'

Türkçede Olumlu Uçluk: 'Oldukça' Sözcüğü Üzerine Derlem Temelli Bir Çalışma

Araştırma Makalesi | *Research Article*

Geliş Tarihi | *Date Received*: 20.01.2025

Kabul Tarihi | *Date Accepted*: 10.03.2025

Yayın Tarihi | *Date Published*: 20.03.2025

Atıf | Citation

Görgülü, E. (2025). Positive Polarity in Turkish: A Corpus-based Study of 'Oldukça'. *Journal of Academic Language and Literature*, 9(1), 166-178. <https://doi.org/10.34083/akaded.1623728>

Görgülü, E. (2025). Türkçede Olumlu Uçluk: 'Oldukça' Sözcüğü Üzerine Derlem Temelli Bir Çalışma. *Akademik Dil ve Edebiyat Dergisi*, 9(1), 166-178. <https://doi.org/10.34083/akaded.1623728>

Makale Bilgisi | Article Information

| | |
|---|---|
| Değerlendirme <i>Review Reports</i> | Çifti Taraflı Kör Hakemlik (İki İç Hakem+İki Dış Hakem) <i>Double-blind. (Two External Referees)</i> |
| Etik Beyan <i>Ethics Statement</i> | Bu çalışmanın hazırlanma sürecinde etik ilkelere uyulmuştur <i>Ethical principles were followed during the preparation of this study</i> |
| Etik Kurul Belgesi <i>Ethics Committee Approval</i> | Makale, Etik Kurul Belgesi gerektirmemektedir <i>Article does not require an Ethics Committee Approval.</i> |
| Etik Bildirim <i>Complaints</i> | adeddergi@gmail.com |
| Çıkar Çatışması <i>Conflicts of Interest</i> | Çıkar çatışması beyan edilmemiştir <i>The Author(s) declare(s) that there is no conflict of interest</i> |
| Benzerlik Taraması <i>Similarity Checks</i> | Yapıldı Yes – iThenticate |
| Telif Hakkı ve Lisans <i>Copyright&License</i> | Yazarlar, dergide yayımlanan çalışmalarının telif hakkına sahiptirler. Bu çalışma Atıf-GayriTicari 4.0 Uluslararası lisansı altında yayımlanır <i>Authors publishing with the journal retain the copyright. This work is licensed under Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International</i> |

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Abstract

This paper is concerned with the syntactic and semantic properties of the degree adverb 'oldukça' in Turkish. In previous descriptive work, this adverb has been assigned various interpretations such as 'quite', 'rather' and 'fairly', generally appearing in the modifier position of another element. However, what is actually interesting about this lexical item is that its syntactic and semantic behavior seems to have significant implications for polarity sensitivity. Based on the findings of a corpus study (TS Corpus v2), I show that its syntactic distribution is rather constrained since it only appears in positive sentences, excluding negative ones as well as those like if-clauses and questions. Following recent work on polarity sensitivity in the language, I argue that the characteristics of oldukça can be accounted for by way of the semantic notion of (non)veridicality. In other words, oldukça occurs only in veridical contexts but not in nonveridical and antiveridical ones, which makes it a true positive polarity item. One implication of this study is that positive polarity items, just like their negative counterparts, come in different types and display certain variations both within and across languages.

Keywords: Linguistics; positive polarity; positive polarity item; (non)veridicality; Turkish.

Öz

Bu makale Türkçede derece ifade eden oldukça belirtecinin sözdizimsel ve anlamsal özellikleriyle ilgilidir. Önceki betimlemeli çalışmalarda, bu belirtece İngilizcede karşılık gelen 'epey', 'epeyce' ve 'hayli' gibi çeşitli anlamlar yüklenmiş ve genellikle başka bir öge niteleyicisi konumunda yer aldığı öngörülmüştür. Bununla birlikte, bu sözcükle ilgili aslında ilginç olan şey, sözdizimsel ve anlambilimsel davranışının, uçluk duyarlılığı açısından önemli sezdirimlere sahip olduğudur. TS Corpus v2 derlemi baz alınarak yapılan bir derlem çalışmasının sonuçlarına dayanarak, bu belirtecin sözdizimsel dağılımının oldukça kısıtlı olduğu ve yalnızca olumlu tümcelerde yer aldığı gösterilmiştir. Yani, olumsuz tümceler ile şart tümceleri ve soru tümceleri gibi ortamlarda bulunmadığı gösterilmiştir. Bu çalışmada, dildeki kutupsallık duyarlılığı üzerine yapılan son çalışmalar baz alınarak oldukça belirtecinin özelliklerinin anlamsal bir nosyon olan doğru(ma)ma kavramı yoluyla açıklanabileceği savunulmaktadır. Başka bir deyişle, oldukça belirteci sadece doğrulamalı bağlamlarda bulunur ve doğrulayıcı olmayan ve doğrulayıcı karşıtı bağlamlarda bulunmaz. Bu durum da onu gerçek bir olumlu uçluk ögesi yapmaktadır. Bu çalışmanın başka bir sonucu da olumlu uçluk öğelerinin, tıpkı olumsuz uçluk öğeleri gibi, farklı türlerde olması ve hem dil içinde hem de diller arasında belirli farklılıklar göstermeleridir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Dilbilim; olumlu uçluk; olumlu uçluk ögesi; doğru(ma)ma; Türkçe.

Introduction

Polarity sensitivity is a linguistic phenomenon that is widely observed in natural language. There are two main types of polarity across languages: negative and positive polarity. Negative polarity refers to those cases where some elements in a sentence are dependent on sentential negation or some other negative element such as a negative preposition it has been widely approached from different points of view by researchers like Ladusaw (1980, 1992), Giannakidou (2000, 2011), Chierchia (2013), and Zeijlstra (2004, 2008, 2013, 2022), among others. These are generally known as negative polarity items (NPIs) and their presence would lead to ungrammaticality if they do not co-occur with some type of negation, namely they need to be licensed by another element. On the other hand, positive polarity can be seen as the mirror image of negative polarity and the phenomenon has been analyzed by way of drawing data from various typologically different languages by Nilsen (2003), Szabolcsi (2004), Ernst (2009), Nicolae (2012), Spector (2014) and Hoeksema (2018). Positive polarity items (PPIs) only appear in positive or other well-defined sentences, and they generally avoid negation and other negative elements. Their co-occurrence with negation either results in ungrammaticality or allows them to fall outside the semantic scope of negation. Both negative and positive polarity have been investigated in terms of their syntax, semantics and pragmatics. In this work, my primary purpose, however, is to investigate positive polarity in mainly syntactic and semantic terms. The structure of this paper is as follows: in section 1. I provide a brief overview of the degree adverb *oldukça* in the language. In section 2, I introduce the corpus work on *oldukça* and show that it exclusively appears in positive sentences. In section 3, I argue that the behavior of *oldukça* can be accounted for by way of the semantic notion of (non)veridicality. The final section briefly concludes the paper and makes some suggestions for further work on polarity sensitivity.

1. The Degree Adverb *Oldukça*

In this work, I investigate the syntactic and semantic properties of the degree adverb *oldukça* in Turkish. In non-theoretical studies, this adverb was assigned different, yet similar interpretations This is illustrated in (1) (Göksel & Kerslake, 2005, p.193) and (2) (Kornfilt, 1997, p. 419).

- (1) Bu oda ban-a oldukça karanlık gel-di.
this room I-DAT quite dark seem-PAST
'This room seems to me quite dark.'
- (2) Ayşe oldukça güzel bir kadın-dır.
Ayşe rather beautiful IND woman-COP
'Ayşe is a rather beautiful woman.'

In (1) and (2), the adverb *oldukça* is in the modifier position of the adjectives and somehow intensifies their meaning. Kornfilt (1997, p. 419) treats this element as an expression of degree in small quality, as opposed to a large measure of quality like *çok* 'very' or a superabundant quality such as *fazla* 'a lot/excessive' in the language. Göksel

and Kerslake (2005, p. 58) also argue that the adverb somewhat reduces the intensity of whatever it modifies (e.g., adjectives, verbs). In that sense, these descriptive analyses seem to agree on the idea that *oldukça* expresses some quality in small measure or degree. This is also corroborated by Deny (1921, p. 296) who notes that such adverbs might indicate a lesser or greater value depending on the meaning of the sentence. What is even more interesting is the observation that *oldukça* seems to favor positive sentences rather than negative ones in terms of their syntactic structure. In other words, it predominantly appears in affirmative sentences, not co-occurring with negative elements in the structure. This raises the question whether it could actually be an element of polarity sensitivity, namely a positive polarity item. The issue of positive polarity has been dealt with in recent work by those such as Gračanin-Yüksek (2023) and Görgülü (2024) and the behavior of the adverb at hand would surely bring some new insights. In order to address this question a corpus study based on the TS Corpus v2 (Sezer & Sezer, 2013) was carried out. The corpus analysis revealed that *oldukça* does function as a positive polarity item in the language. This characteristic of the element will be formally explained through the idea of (non)veridicality. The behavior of *oldukça* is different from other Turkish PPIs reported in prior work in that its occurrence in the structure is rather restricted. In that sense, the findings of this study have implications both for within and across languages.

2. Corpus Work on *Oldukça*

Polarity sensitivity is a linguistic phenomenon that is not new. The issues surrounding it have been in serious scrutiny for almost five decades. Its main subtypes, namely positive and negative polarity across languages have been analyzed in terms of their syntactic, semantics as well as pragmatic characteristics by researchers such as Ladusaw (1980, 1992), Progovac (1994), Giannakidou (1999, 2000, 2011), van der Wouden (1997), Chierchia (2013), Spector (2014), Zeijlstra (2017) and Hoeksema (2018). In Turkish, too, there have been quite a number of studies on the issues of polarity sensitivity such as Keleşir (2001), Şener, (2007), Gračanin-Yüksek (2023), Görgülü (2024) and Kamali & Zeijlstra (2024). Basically, polarity sensitivity is generally defined as a linguistic phenomenon where some lexical elements are sensitive to the polarity of the sentence in which they appear (Penka, 2020). What this means is that certain elements obligatorily need sentential negation or some other negative element in the structure. Consider the examples below, taken from Giannakidou & Zeijlstra (2017, p. 3942).

- (3) a. Bill didn't buy any books.
b. *Bill bought any books. (versus: Bill bought {War and Peace/two books})
- (4) a. I haven't seen Bill in years.
b. *I saw Bill in years.

In (3b) and (4b) above, the sentences are ungrammatical as there is no negative element to license the occurrence of the negative polarity items *any* and *in years*. On the other hand, elements known as positive polarity items rather require a positive sentence without any

negative marker in the structure. This is shown in the examples below (Giannakidou, 2011, p. 1665).

- (5) a. Bill would rather be in Montpellier.
b. #Bill wouldn't rather be in Montpellier.
- (6) a. John is here already.
b. #John is not here already.

After introducing polarity sensitivity and the characteristics of polarity-sensitive items, this paper now turns to the actual topic of inquiry: the syntactic and semantic characteristics of *oldukça* in Turkish. In order to address the questions at hand, I analyze the degree adverb by way of corpus-based data from TS Corpus v2 (Sezer & Sezer, 2013). Basically, this corpus contains data that were directly taken from BOUN Web Corpus that comprises two different files with a magnitude of 4.4 gigabytes. Note that corpus work was chosen as methodology in this paper since this is one of the more reliable ways to gather naturally occurring data rather than depending on a number of constructed sentences as examples. The data were collected as follows: the word *oldukça* was entered in the search engine of the corpus as standard query without any restrictions, which means that the word was looked for in the entire corpus. All the sentences that include *oldukça* were listed on the screen (50 of them per page) and it was possible to reach the resource (i.e., the immediate context) of the sentences by clicking on them. After that the first 600 sentences that included the adverb were taken and put into an electronic spreadsheet. The reason for taking 600 sentences for the analysis was that it was considered to be a good representative of the total number. Then those sentences that are repetitive were removed from the data. Also, those sentences that have *oldukça* whose meaning and function differ from the adverb such as *Kalbimde sevgin oldukça, zenginlik, mal, mülk, para neye yarar?* 'As long as you have love in my heart, what use are wealth, possessions, money?' were also removed from the analysis. After that a total of 539 sentences were left to examine. The findings revealed that *oldukça* modifies both adjectives and adverbs as a true degree adverb as well as verbs. Another result of the corpus work was that *oldukça* modified verbs 72 times (13.4 % of the entire data) while it modified adjectives and adverbs 467 times (86.6 % of the entire data). A careful examination of the data also revealed that all of the sentences (100%) that contained degree adverb were in fact affirmative (i.e., positive). This in turn confirms the aforementioned observation that it does function as a positive polarity item in the language. Some examples are provided in (7), (8) and (9).

- (7) Bütün takım-lar yarış-a oldukça iddialı başla-dı-lar.
all team-PL race-DAT quite assertive start-PAST-PL
'All the teams started the race quite assertively.'
- (8) Şimdi-ye kadar bir uzman-a danış-ma-dan oldukça fazla kilo
now-DAT until one specialist-DAT consult-NEG-ABL quite a lot weight
kaybet-miş-siniz.
lose-PERF-3PL

- 'You have lost a lot of weight so far without consulting a specialist.'
- (9) Barrichello ve Montoya arasındaki rekabet oldukça art-tı.
Barrichello and Montoya between competition quite increase-PAST
'The competition between Barrichello and Montoya increased considerably.'

Note that the occurrence of *oldukça* is not restricted to verbal sentences above in the language. It can also appear in non-verbal sentences, as illustrated below.

- (10) Kaya-lar yüzünden tırmanm-mak oldukça zor.
rock-PL because of climb-INF quite difficult
'It is quite difficult to climb because of the rocks.'
- (11) Yaş hanım-lar arasında oldukça tartış-ıl-an bir durum-dur.
age woman-PL among quite debate-PASS-SBJP IND issue-COP
'Age is a highly debated issue among women.'

As it has been pointed out in the discussion above, the adverb *oldukça* seems to never occur in structures other than positive ones. More specifically, the corpus data showed that it never appears in negative sentences, questions (negative or positive), conditionals or modals contexts. This behavior of *oldukça* becomes even more interesting when we compare it with a similar degree adverb *fazla* 'a lot' that is also used to express some quality (Kornfilt, 1997, p. 419). A small-scale corpus research showed that *fazla* can be used in negative sentences, modals as well as questions, as exemplified below.

- (12) Ama mutluluk fazla sür-me-di.
but happiness a lot last-NEG-PAST
'However, the happiness did not last very long.'
- (13) Belki eleştir-il-me-yi asıl hak ed-en şey ise,
perhaps criticize-PASS-NMN actually right do-SBJP thing as to
şarkı düzenleme-ler-i-nin fazla şaşırtıcı ol-ma-ma-sı
song arrangement-PL-3SG-GEN a lot surprising be-NEG-NMN-POSS
ol-abil-ir.
be-ABIL-AOR
'Perhaps what really deserves criticism is the fact that song arrangements may not be too surprising.'
- (14) Kaş-lar-ınız fazla mı kalın, yoksa fazla mı yoluk?
eyebrow-PL-2PL a lot Q thick or a lot Q plucked
'Are your eyebrows too thick or too plucked?'

This raises the question whether *oldukça* is a true positive polarity item in the language. Either way, its behavior is rather interesting as its distribution is rather different than other PPIs analyzed in previous work. For instance, in her work Keleş (2003) shows that the indefinite element *bazı* 'some' is a positive polarity item. It can appear in negative sentences but it is always interpreted outside the scope of sentential negation. However,

Keleşir (2003) does not offer a formal analysis to account for the polarity behavior of the indefinite *bazı*. Görgülü (2024), on the other hand, argues that the adverb *çoktan* ‘long ago’ is functioning as a positive polarity item as it predominantly occurs in positive sentences even though it can also appear in a small number of conditionals and negative questions. Görgülü (2024) goes on to say that the true nature of *çoktan* can be accounted for through (non)veridicality, a semantic notion introduced and then further developed in a series of papers by Giannakidou (1998, 1999, 2011). In the next section, I will introduce (non)veridicality and argue that the characteristics of *oldukça* can be captured by this notion as well.

3. The Theory of (Non)veridicality

The issue that needs to be addressed here is whether we can capture the polarity behavior of *oldukça* in a uniform way. One way to do it is to approach this problem in terms of (non)veridicality. The idea of (non)veridicality as a semantic notion is not new and goes as far back as Montague (1969, p. 178). In his seminal work, Montague used the term veridicality in a way to mean *exist* in order to be able to distinguish perception verbs such as *see* and *seem* in English. According to him, the verb *see* entails the existence of the individuals that are involved. More specifically, if someone sees a linguist, that linguist exists and thus the verb *see* is veridical. On the other hand, in a series of papers, Zwarts (1995) and Giannakidou (1998, 1999, 2011, 2014) argue that the syntactic and semantic characteristics of both negative and positive polarity item can be explained in terms of their sensitivity to certain semantic features of the environment where they occur. In this framework, polarity items are properly characterized as follows (Giannakidou, 1999, p. 367):

- (15) (i) A polarity item α is an expression whose distribution is limited by sensitivity to some semantic property β of the context of appearance.
 (ii) β is (non)veridicality.

The term *sensitivity* is considered to be some kind of semantic deficiency of lexical items. More specifically, polarity items, whether they are negative or positive, cannot be interpreted if they do not occur within contexts that would somehow take care of their sensitivity. This sensitivity is dubbed as (non)veridicality, which is defined as in (16) below (Giannakidou, 1999, 2011, p. 1674-1675):

- (16) (Non)veridicality for propositional operators
 (i) A propositional operator F is veridical iff Fp entails p : $Fp \rightarrow p$; otherwise, F is nonveridical.
 (ii) A nonveridical operator F is antiveridical iff Fp entails not p : $Fp \rightarrow \neg p$

What the statement in (16i) means is that a propositional operator F is veridical iff whenever Fp is true, p must also be true. If that does not hold, F is nonveridical. For instance, if I know that *Ahmet sleeps* then *Ahmet sleeps* is true. More specifically, *Ahmet sleeps* is not only entailed in this particular context but is presupposed to be true since it is part of the common ground. On the other hand, (16ii) holds that a nonveridical F is antiveridical iff whenever Fp is true, p is not true. In that sense, antiveridical operators

are a proper subset of nonveridical operators. Modal verbs, intensional operators, questions and downward entailing contexts are all nonveridical. Antiveridical operators are sentential negation and also the preposition without. These elements are able to license (negative) polarity items.

The question that arises here is if the idea of (non)veridicality can account for the behavior of the polarity item *oldukça* in the language. When we consider the results of the corpus analysis, we see that each of the 581 sentences in which the adverb appears is positive without exception. From this, it follows that *oldukça* seems to occur only in veridical contexts but not in nonveridical (i.e., modal expressions, conditionals, questions) or antiveridical (e.g., negative sentences) ones. The idea of veridicality is once again exemplified in (17) and (18).

- (17) Coulthard ancak bu sefer oldukça fazla süre kaybet-ti.
Coulthard however this time quite a lot time lose-PAST
'However, Coulthard lost quite a lot of time this time.'
- (18) Koltuğ-a otur-ur-ken oldukça şaşır-dı.
armchair-DAT sit-AOR-while quite surprise-PAST
'He was quite surprised as he sat on the armchair.'

Recall that the idea of veridicality is closely related to the truth. In other words, it is defined in terms of truth (Giannakidou, 2011, p. 1674). In (17) and (18), both sentences are veridical in the sense that the speaker is fully committed to the truth of them based on what they know or believe in the actual world. More specifically, both sentences entail the truth of the proposition and the veridical operator (i.e., past tense in this case) indicates certainty and the individual's commitment to the truth of the proposition. Therefore, it is safe to say that the degree adverb is licensed only in veridical contexts. Having established that, it also follows that *oldukça* will never appear along with nonveridical operators, namely modal expressions, questions or conditionals and the corpus data corroborated that. Similarly, it will never occur with sentential negation that is known as the quintessential antiveridical operator. The analysis also shows that the syntactic distribution of the degree adverb is rather limited when compared to the other positive polarity items in Turkish. As stated earlier, *bazı* 'some' is a one and it can occur in negative sentences but is obligatorily interpreted outside the scope of negation. Another item of positive polarity, namely *çoktan* primarily appears in positive sentences but it can also occur in negative questions and conditionals, albeit very rarely. On the other hand, it was shown that the occurrence of the degree adverb *oldukça* is restricted to positive sentences only. One way to interpret this is to argue that it is much more sensitive to the nonveridical contexts than others as a polarity item in the language. This in fact corroborates the arguments that polarity items come in different flavors and show variation within and across languages (Horn 1978, Ernst, 2009; Giannakidou, 2011).

One last issue to discuss here is the contribution of the adverb to the sentences in terms of meaning. It is worth reminding that in prior work the element was argued to express

different things. For instance, it was considered to (i) indicate some degree in small quality (Kornfilt, 1997), (ii) reduce the intensity of whatever it modifies (Göksel and Kerslake, 2005), or (iii) express indicate a lesser or greater value depending on the meaning of the sentence (Deny, 1921). The question one might ask would be what the corpus analysis has to offer about this issue. In fact, the corpus data showed that its primary function as a degree adverb is to express some degree such as *a lot*, *very* or *almost completely* rather than *moderately but not so much*, at least within the confines of this corpus-based study. This is exemplified in the sentences below.

- (19) Lakin yerleşimci-ler hala oldukça yoksul.
however settler-PL still quite poor
'However, the settlers are still quite poor.'
- (20) Görüşme-ler oldukça olumlu hava-da başla-dı ve kısa zaman-da
talk-PL quite positive atmosphere begin-PAST and short time-LOC
karar-a var-dı-k.
decisionn-DAT reach-PAST-1PL
'The talks began in quite a positive atmosphere and we reached a decision in such a short time.'
- (21) Yarış ilk tur-dan itibaren oldukça olaylı geç-ti. Start-ın
race first lap-ABL onwards quite eventful take place-PAST start-GEN
hemen ardından Schumacher ve Trulli çarpış-tı.
right after Schumacher and Trulli collide-PAST
'The race was quite eventful since the first lap. Right after the start Schumacher and Trulli collided.'
- (22) Tedavi sırasında en sık gör-ül-ebil-en problem ol-an
treatment during most often see-PASS-ABIL-SBJP problem be-SBJP
hassasiyet, geliş-en ilaç-lar sayesinde oldukça azal-mış-tır.
sensitivity develop-SBJP medicine-PL thanks to quite decrease-PERF-COP
'Sensitivity, the most common problem during treatment, has decreased significantly thanks to developing medications.'

In (19), *oldukça* modifies an adjective and it has a reading that indicates a higher degree. Similarly, in (20), it modifies an adjective within a postpositional phrase and its meaning is *a lot* rather than *a little* or *moderately* in the sentence. Note that this can be also captured in the subsequent sentence. Last but not least, in (21) and (22), the adverb is not used to express a small degree but quite the opposite, as its meaning in each sentence indicates. The conclusion to draw then is that regardless of whether *oldukça* modifies an adjective, an adverb or a verb in the sentence, its meaning is associated with higher degrees such as *a lot* or *almost totally* in the language. In that respect, this finding differs from previous arguments made in earlier descriptive studies.

Conclusion

In this paper, I investigated the structural and interpretational properties of the degree adverb *oldukça* in Turkish. Based on a corpus-based analysis, I showed that the adverb only appears in positive sentences, excluding all other types of structures (i.e., questions, conditionals, modals and so forth). It was also argued that the sensitivity of *oldukça* can be explained if we assume that it is a positive polarity item. Its distribution and semantics were accounted for by way of the semantic notion of (non)veridicality. More specifically, it only occurs in veridical (i.e., positive) sentences. It was also noted that the adverb differs from other elements of positive polarity in terms of whether it can occur in sentences other than affirmative ones. Future work will undoubtedly bring much more insight to the polarity phenomena in Turkish.

Abbreviations

| | | | |
|------|---------------------|------|----------------------|
| 1 | : First person | IFF | : If and only if |
| 3 | : Third person | LOC | : Locative case |
| ABL | : Ablative case | NEG | : Negative marker |
| ABIL | : Ability | NMN | : Nominalizer |
| ACC | : Accusative case | PASS | : Passive voice |
| AOR | : Aorist marker | PAST | : Past tense |
| COP | : Copula | PERF | : Perfect aspect |
| DAT | : Dative case | PL | : Plural |
| GEN | : Genitive marker | POSS | : Possessive marker |
| IND | : Indefinite | Q | : Question particle |
| INF | : Infinitive marker | SBJP | : Subject participle |

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