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## Quasi-mermaid construction in Sakha (Yakut)

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## Quasi-mermaid construction in Sakha (Yakut)

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1. Introduction
2. Initial illustration
3. Profile of the language
4. Types of sentences and clauses
  - 4.1 Verb-predicate and nominal-predicate sentences/clauses
  - 4.2 Adnominal clauses
5. Quasi-MMC
  - 5.1 Introductory notes
  - 5.2 The proprietive suffix -LEEX
  - 5.3 Use of the proprietive suffix -LEEX in the quasi-MMC
  - 5.4 Nouns in the 'Noun' slot
    - 5.4.1 Nouns meaning "appearance" or the like
    - 5.4.2 Nouns meaning "plan", "idea" or the like
    - 5.4.3 Nouns meaning "fear" or "anxiety"
    - 5.4.4 Nouns meaning "future" or "fate"
    - 5.4.5 Nouns meaning "power" or "ability"
    - 5.4.6 Nouns meaning "event", "time" or "fuss"
    - 5.4.7 Nouns meaning "custom" or "habit"
    - 5.4.8 Nouns meaning "right" or "obligation"
  - 5.5 Summary of the semantics of the quasi-MMC
  - 5.6 Grammaticalization from a nominal to a particle
6. Summary and concluding remarks

### 1. Introduction

Tsunoda (this volume-a) proposes the structure of the prototype of the mermaid construction ('MMC') as follows:

- (1) [Clause] Noun Copula.

Sakha has a construction which resembles the MMC (hereafter, quasi-mermaid construction: quasi-MMC). Twenty-eight nouns have been attested in the 'Noun' slot. They are all content nouns, and the meaning of the quasi-MMC is modal, aspectual, temporal or the like. The predicate verb of the 'Clause' is in the adnominal form, i.e. a non-finite form. The 'Copula' is a suffix, not a free form. The crucial difference from the prototype of the MMC is that the 'Noun' must take the proprietive suffix meaning 'having', as is the case with the quasi-MMC in Khalkha Mongolian (see Umetani (this volume)). The proprietive suffix -LEEX is a derivational suffix (not a case suffix) which derives nominals from nominals.

## 2. Initial illustration

Examples of the Sakha quasi-MMC are given below as an illustration. Recall that nouns in the ‘Noun’ slot must take the proprietive suffix *-LEEX*<sup>1</sup>.

- (2)     *min*     *tokio-ka*     *bar-ar*     *bulaan-naax-pun*  
1SG     Tokyo-DAT     go-VN.PRS     plan-PROP-COP.1SG  
LT: ‘I have a plan [that I] go to Tokyo.’  
FT: ‘I plan to go to Tokyo.’

- (3)     *ylete suox*     *xaal-ar*     *keskil-leex-ter*  
without.work     remain-VN.PRS     future-PROP-COP.3PL  
LT: ‘They have a future [that they] remain without work.’  
FT: ‘They will still be unemployed.’

## 3. Profile of the language

Sakha is a member of the Turkic language family. It is spoken mainly in Sakha Republic in eastern Siberia. The number of its speakers is estimated to be approximately 450,000. Almost all the speakers are Sakha-Russian bilinguals. For the name of this language, the present paper uses the self-designation name “Sakha”, which is actually cognate with another well-known language name, “Yakut”.

The inventory of consonants is as follows: /p, b, t, d, č, ž, k, g, s[s~h], x, ɣ, m, n, ŋ, l, r, j<sup>2</sup>/. Sakha has twenty vowel phonemes: eight short vowels /a, e, o, œ, u, i, u, y/, eight long vowels /aa, ee, oo, œœ, uu, ii, uu, yy/, and four diphthongs /ua, ie, uo, yœ/. Word-stress, which does not have a distinctive function, is placed on the word-final syllable. There are rich morphophonological alternations, e.g. the vowel harmony rule and assimilation of consonants, especially in suffixation. Often, 16 or more allomorphs of one suffix result from morphophonological alternations.

Sakha is a strongly agglutinating language and uses suffixes extensively. Sakha exhibits both dependent-marking and head-marking. For example, case relations are marked by case suffixes attached to NPs (i.e. dependent-marking). On the other hand, possessive suffixes are attached to the possessed NPs and possessor NPs take no formal marking (i.e. head-marking). The case system is basically of the nominative-accusative type (A/S vs. O). The nominative case has a zero suffix, while the accusative has an overt suffix. Under certain conditions, the object lacks an overt case suffix, and in this respect the case system is of the neutral type (S=A=O).

Verbs inflect for negation, tense, person-cum-number of the subject, etc. A verb stem must take a finite suffix, a participle suffix, or a converb suffix. Participles are also called “verbal nouns”. They form a nominal clause or an adnominal clause. The copula is a suffix, not a free form (with zero suffix only for 3SG).

The verb-final orders, i.e. AOV and SV, are preferred, but the topic NP can precede the A. A demonstrative, a numeral, an adjective and an adnominal clause precede the noun they modify.

Constituents of a sentence can be omitted if their referent is clear. This is particularly the case with the subject, for the person-cum-number of the subject is indicated in the predicate.

The current orthography, which employs Cyrillic letters, was established in 1939, replacing the previous Latin-alphabetical one. Children can choose the Sakha language as their medium of instruction at school, but some urban schools provide education only in Russian. The data for the present paper are taken from the spoken language of Sakha.

#### 4. Types of sentences and clauses

##### 4.1 Verb-predicate and nominal-predicate sentences/clauses

Roughly speaking, the sentences/clauses in Sakha can be classified as follows:

- (a) Verb-predicate sentences/clauses, e.g. (4). The predicate verb must have a finite suffix and a person-cum-number marking.
- (b) Nominal-predicate sentences/clauses, e.g. (5). Nouns, adjectives and a few adverbs can be the predicate with the copula suffix, only when the sentence is present affirmative. Elsewhere they occur with an auxiliary verb.

(4)     *min*    *kuorak-ka*     *bar-a-bun*  
           1SG   city-DAT       go-PRS-1SG  
           ‘I go to the city.’

(5)     *min*    *učuutal-bun*  
           1SG   teacher-COP.1SG  
           ‘I am a teacher.’

##### 4.2 Adnominal clauses

The predicate verb of an adnominal clause (‘AC’) has the form of a verbal noun. The inflected forms of verbal nouns are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Forms of verbal nouns

	tense-neutral	past	present	future
positive	-TEX	-BIT	-r/-Er	-IEX
negative	-BETEX		-BET	-(I)MIEX

Like Japanese, Sakha has both “internal adnominal clauses” (“internal ACs”) and “external adnominal clauses” (“external ACs”). (See Teramura

(1969) and Tsunoda (this volume-a, 7.2) for a discussion of these two types of ACs.)

[1] Internal ACs

In internal ACs, the head noun corresponds to an argument or an adjunct of the AC. In terms of Keenan and Comrie's (1977) accessibility hierarchy, the following positions can be relativized on: subject, e.g. (6), direct object, e.g. (7), indirect object, e.g. (8), oblique object, e.g. (9), and the possessor, e.g. (10). However, the object of comparison cannot be relativized on.

When the subject is relativized on, the head noun has no marking, e.g.:

- (6)     *syrr-er*            *kihi*  
           run-VN.PRS        person  
           ‘a person who runs’

Elsewhere the NP qualified by an AC obligatorily takes a possessive suffix, which indicates the person-cum-number of the subject of the AC. In examples (7), (8), and (9), possessive suffixes (-*m*, -*um*, or -*but*) are obligatory even when the subject is omitted.

- (7)     (*min*)            *aax-puut*            *kinige-m*  
           1SG            read-VN.PST        book-POSS.1SG  
           ‘the book that I read’

- (8)     (*min*)     *belex*        *bier-bit*            *žon-um*  
           1SG        present    give-VN.PST        people-POSS.1SG  
           ‘the people to whom I gave a present’

- (9)     (*bihigi*)        *kel-bit*            *suol-but*  
           1PL            come-VN.PST        way-POSS.1PL  
           ‘the way by which we came’

As noted above, the possessor can be also relativized on. In this example the head noun does not need a possessive suffix because the head noun *uol* ‘boy’ is the possessor of the subject in the AC.

- (10)    *ije-te*            *baluuha-va*        *ylelii-r*            *uol*  
           mother-POSS.3SG    hospital-DAT        work-VNPRS        boy  
           ‘a boy whose mother works in a hospital’

[2] External ACs

In external ACs, in contrast with internal ACs, the head noun does not correspond to any argument or adjunct in the AC but, so to speak, is added from outside the underlying clause. Examples of Sakha external ACs are:

- (11)    *kim =ere*        *xaam-ar*            *tuah-a*  
           who =CLT        walk-VN.PRS        sound-POSS.3SG

LT: ‘the sound that someone walks’  
FT: ‘the sound of someone walking’

- (12)     *žadaju*       *buol-ar*               *kuttal-a*  
          poor           become-VN.PRS       fear-POSS.3SG  
          LT: ‘the fear that [(s)he] becomes poor’  
          FT: ‘the fear of his/her becoming poor’

## 5. Quasi-MMC

### 5.1 *Introductory notes*

As noted in Section 1, Sakha has what may be considered a quasi-MMC. The crucial difference from the prototype of the MMC is that the ‘Noun’ in the quasi-MMC of Sakha has the proprietive suffix *-LEEX*. The ‘Noun’ is in turn followed by the copula suffix. Twenty-eight nouns have been attested in the ‘Noun’ slot. The predicate verb of the ‘Clause’ is in the verbal noun form, i.e. a non-finite form. The ‘Clause’ cannot be used by itself as a sentence.

We shall first look at the use of the proprietive suffix (5.2), followed by a discussion of various aspects of the quasi-MMC: the use of the proprietive suffix in the quasi-MMC (5.3), and the nouns that are attested in the ‘Noun’ slot (5.4). There is a ‘Noun’ with the proprietive suffix *-LEEX* which may not take a copula suffix (5.5). In this case the ‘Noun’ is grammaticalized as a particle.

A note on the similarity between external ACs and the MMC is in order. As noted by Tsunoda (this volume, 7.2) they are similar as follows. In external ACs, the head noun does not correspond to any argument or adjunct in the AC but, so to speak, is added from outside the underlying clause. That is, the head noun is not coreferential with any argument or any adjunct of the AC. Similarly, in the MMC, the ‘Noun’ is not coreferential with the subject of the ‘Clause’. The same applies to the Sakha quasi-MMC.

As mentioned in Tsunoda (this volume, 7.2), at the beginning of the collaborative research project whose main outcome is the present volume (Tsunoda, this volume-a, Section 2), it was hypothesized that the presence of external ACs is a prerequisite to the presence of the MMC. However, this hypothesis has turned out to be untenable.

Nonetheless, it is important to recall that Sakha has external ACs, without which the quasi-MMC may not be likely to exist in the language.

### 5.2 *The proprietive suffix -LEEX*

In Sakha, predicative possession is expressed with the proprietive suffix *-LEEX*, which means ‘having’. An NP with the suffix *-LEEX* can be used both attributively, e.g. (13), and predicatively, e.g. (14):

- (13) *uhun battax-taax kuus*  
 long hair-PROP girl  
 ‘a girl with long hair’
- (14) *min ys oko-loox-pun*  
 1SG three child-PROP-COP.1SG  
 ‘I have three children.’

A noun followed by the proprietive suffix may be preceded and modified by an AC, e.g.:

- (15) *araj kepset-er tabaarus-taax-pun*  
 just talk.with-VN.PRS friend-PROP-COP.1SG  
 ‘I have only friends to talk with.’

In (15), *kepset-er* ‘talk.with-VN.PRS’ modifies just *tabaarus* ‘friend’, and not the entire *tabaarus-taax-pun* ‘friend-PROP-COP.1SG’.

### 5.3 Use of the proprietive suffix -LEEX in the quasi-MMC

The quasi-MMC contains “AC + Noun-LEEX-COP.” Although this construction is not an instance of the prototypical MMC in terms of the structure shown in (1) above, semantically it is very similar to the MMC of Japanese; the latter is an instance of the prototypical MMC. Indeed, many of the MMC examples in Japanese can be translated into Sakha by using an “AC + Noun-LEEX-COP”. An example of this quasi-MMC is the following (the same as (2)):

- (16) *min tokio-ka bar-ar bulaan-naax-pun*  
 1SG Tokyo-DAT go-VN.PRS plan-PROP-COP.1SG  
 LT: ‘I have a plan [that I] go to Tokyo.’  
 FT: ‘I plan to go to Tokyo.’

A Japanese equivalent for (16) is the following:

- (17) *watasi=wa tookyoo=ni ik-u yotee=da.*  
 1SG=TOP Tokyo=DAT/LOC go-NPST plan=COP.NPST  
 LT: ‘I am a plan [that I] go to Tokyo.’  
 FT: ‘I plan to go to Tokyo.’

There is one important difference between the Japanese MMC and the Sakha quasi-MMC. In Sakha, even when *tokio-ka bar-ar* ‘Tokyo-DAT go-VN.PRS’ is deleted from (16), the resultant sentence is still acceptable:

- (18) *min bulaan-naax-pun*  
 1SG plan-PROP-COP.1SG  
 ‘I have a plan.’

However, in Japanese, if *tookyo=ni ik-u* ‘Tokyo=DAT/LOC go-NPST’ is deleted from (17), the resultant sentence makes no sense (See Tsunoda, this volume-b, 6.4).

- (19) ? *watasi=wa yotee=da.*  
 1SG=TOP plan=COP.NPST  
 LT: ‘I am a plan.’

That is, the crucial difference is the presence of the proprietive suffix attached to the ‘Noun’ in the quasi-MMC of Sakha.

#### 5.4 Nouns in the ‘Noun’ slot

Sakha has no non-content nouns, such as the Japanese *mono* ‘thing’ and *koto* ‘fact’. Also, no nominalizer or the like occurs in the ‘Noun’ slot. Twenty-eight nouns have been attested in the ‘Noun’ slot. They are difficult to classify in a clear-cut way, and they are tentatively classified as follows. All of these nouns are content nouns.

##### 5.4.1 Nouns meaning “appearance” or the like

This group comprises nouns that have the meaning of “appearance” or the like: *buhuuu* ‘appearance’, *keriŋ* ‘appearance’, *kaeryŋ* ‘appearance’, *žyhyn* ‘shape’, and *čiči* ‘sign’. Their meaning is evidential: inference, e.g. (20), or direct observation, e.g. (21), (33).

- (20) *buhax-um syp-pyt keriŋ-neex*  
 knife-POSS.1SG disappear-VN.PST appearance-PROP:COP.3SG  
 LT: ‘My knife has an appearance [that it] disappeared.’  
 FT: ‘It seems that my knife has disappeared.’
- (21) *žollom-mut žyhyn-neex-xin*  
 feel.happy-VN.PST shape-PROP-COP.2SG  
 LT: ‘You have a shape [that you] feel happy.’  
 FT: ‘You look happy.’

##### 5.4.2 Nouns meaning “plan”, “idea” or the like

This group consists of nouns that have the meaning of “plan”, “idea” or the like: *bulaan* ‘plan’, *burajuak* ‘design’, *anal* ‘aim’, *soruk* ‘goal’, *sual* ‘goal’, *sanaa* ‘idea’, *tolkuj* ‘thought’, *baxa* ‘hope’, *žykkyær* ‘volition’, and *žuluur* ‘ambition’. They have a modal meaning. Examples include (2) (=16) and:

- (22) *yle-ti-n salguuu-r sanaa-laax-pun*  
 work-POSS.3SG-ACC continue-VN.PRS idea-PROP-COP.1SG  
 LT: ‘I have an idea [that I] take up his work.’  
 FT: ‘I will take up his work.’

- (23) *policija* *yærev-er* *bar-ar*  
 police study-POSS.3SG:DAT go-VN.PRS  
*baŋa-laax-puun*  
 hope-PROP-COP.1SG  
 LT: 'I have a hope [that I] go to a police school.'  
 FT: 'I want to go to a police school.'

#### 5.4.3 Nouns meaning "fear" or "anxiety"

The nouns are *kuttal* 'fear' and *kuhalŋa* 'anxiety'. They have a modal meaning.

- (24) *sotoru* *xotugu* *territorija-lar-but*  
 soon northern territory-PL-POSS.1PL  
*kuraanaxsuj-ar* *kuttal-laax-tar*  
 get.empty-VN.PRS fear-PROP-COP.3PL  
 LT: 'Our northern territories have fear [that they] soon become uninhabited.'  
 FT: '[We are worried that] our northern territories might become uninhabited soon.'

#### 5.4.4 Nouns meaning "future" or "fate"

The nouns are *keskil* 'future' and *ŋulŋa* 'fate'. Their meaning may be "temporal" or "modal". Examples include (3) and:

- (25) *nuučča* *omug-u-n* *kuutta* *sulž-ar*  
 Russian nation-POSS.3SG-ACC with be-VN.PRS  
*ŋulŋa-laax-puut*  
 fate-PROP-COP.1PL  
 LT: 'We have a fate [that we] live with Russian people.'  
 FT: 'We are destined to live with Russian people.'

#### 5.4.5 Nouns meaning "power" or "ability"

The nouns are *kuax* 'power' and *ŋokur* 'ability'. They have a modal meaning.

- (26) *ajmax-tar-a* *æjææ-tæx-tæryne =ere*  
 relative-PL-POSS.3SG support-COND-3PL =CLT  
*uččat-tar-a* *yæren-er* *kuax-taax-tar*  
 youth-PL-POSS.3SG study-VN.PRS power-PROP-COP.3PL  
 LT: 'The young people have a power [that they] study only when their relatives support them.'  
 FT: 'The young people can study only when their relatives support them [financially].'



*xonnox-toru-ttan*                      *ul-s-an*                      *kieŋ*                      *kekke-nen*  
 underarm-POSS.3PL-ABL      take-COOP-CVB      wide                      row-INS  
*ajannuuw-r*                      *tykteri*                      *kemelži-leex-ter*  
 travel-VN.PRS                      rude                      habit-PROP-COP.3PL  
 LT: 'Girls have a bad habit [that they] walk in a wide row along  
 sidewalks taking each other's underarms.'  
 FT: 'Girls tend to walk arm-in-arm in a wide row across  
 sidewalks.'

Note that in (31) the 'Noun' *kemelži* 'habit' is modified by an adjective *tykteri* 'rude'. We shall return to this in Section 6.

#### 5.4.8 Nouns meaning "right" or "obligation"

The nouns are *buraap* 'right' and *ebeehines* 'obligation'. Their meaning is "modal".

(32)      *arassuuja*      *graždan-nar-a*                      *yrdyk*                      *yærex-xe*  
 Russia                      citizen-PL-POSS.3SG                      high                      study-DAT  
*bosxo*      *yæren-er*                      *buraap-taax-tar*  
 free                      study-VN.PRS                      right-PROP-COP.3PL  
 LT: 'Russian citizens have a right [that they] study for free  
 in higher education.'  
 FT: 'Russian citizens can study for free in higher education'

#### 5.5 Summary of the semantics of the quasi-MMC

We have looked at the twenty-eight nouns that can occupy the 'Noun' slot of the Sakha quasi-MMC. They are all content nouns when used outside the quasi-MMC. As seen above, the quasi-MMC has various meanings, such as modal, evidential, aspectual and modal. See Table 2.

Table 2. Semantics of the ‘Noun’ and the quasi-MMC

‘Noun’	meaning outside quasi-MMC	meaning of quasi-MMC
[1] <i>buhuuu</i>	appearance	
[2] <i>keriŋ</i>	appearance	
[3] <i>kæryŋ</i>	appearance	speaker’s inference
[4] <i>žyhyn</i>	shape	[evidential; §5.4.1]
[5] <i>čiči</i>	sign	
[6] <i>bulaan</i>	plan	
[7] <i>burajuak</i>	design	
[8] <i>anal</i>	aim	
[9] <i>soruk</i>	goal	
[10] <i>swal</i>	goal	volition, intention
[11] <i>sanaa</i>	idea	[modal; §5.4.2]
[12] <i>tolkuj</i>	thought	
[13] <i>basa</i>	hope	
[14] <i>žykkyær</i>	volition	
[15] <i>žuluur</i>	ambition	
[16] <i>kuttal</i>	fear	apprehension
[17] <i>kuhalša</i>	anxiety	[modal; §5.4.3]
[18] <i>keskil</i>	future	future
[19] <i>žulša</i>	fate	[temporal/modal; §5.4.4]
[20] <i>kuax</i>	power	potential
[21] <i>žokur</i>	ability	[modal; §5.4.5]
[22] <i>tygen</i>	event	
[23] <i>kem</i>	time	experiential
[24] <i>aždaan</i>	fuss	[aspectual; §5.4.6]
[25] <i>yges</i>	custom	habitual
[26] <i>kemelži</i>	habit	[aspectual; §5.4.7]
[27] <i>buraap</i>	right	possibility, obligation
[28] <i>ebeehines</i>	obligation	[modal; §5.4.8]

### 5.6 Grammaticalization from a nominal to a particle

In all of the examples of the Sakha quasi-MMC we have examined, the ‘Noun’ is followed by the proprietive suffix. Another example is (33). If the proprietive suffix is deleted from (33), we obtain (34).

- (33) *sulaj-but*                      *buhuuu-laax-xuun*  
 be.tired-VN.PST              appearance-PROP-COP.2SG  
 LT: ‘You have an appearance [that you] are tired.’  
 FT: ‘You look tired.’

- (34) \* *sulaj-but*                      *buhuuu-guun*  
 be.tired-VN.PST              appearance-COP.2SG  
 Intended meaning: ‘You look tired.’

Example (34) has the structure of the prototype of the MMC, shown in (1); the ‘Noun’ is no longer followed by the proprietive suffix. However, (34) is not grammatical.

Now, it is interesting to note that (33) can be paraphrased as (35).

- (35)     *sulaj-buk-kun*     *buhuuulaax*  
           be.tired-PST-2SG   it.appears  
           ‘It appears that you are tired.’

In (33), the verb *sulaj-* ‘be.tired’ is in the verbal noun form, i.e. a non-finite form. However, in (35), it is in a finite form, having the past form with person/number marking. Also, in (33), the noun *buhuuu* ‘appearance’ plus the proprietive is followed by the copula (*-xun* ‘COP.2SG’). In contrast, it is not followed by the copula in (35). These facts suggest that in this case *buhuuu* ‘appearance’ is no longer a noun, and that *buhuuulaax* ‘it.appears’ has been grammaticalized and become a particle. It now follows a finite form of a verb, i.e. it follows a sentence.

At this stage of investigation, *buhuuulaax* is the only “Noun-LEEX” that can appear after a finite verb form and has apparently become a particle. Petrov (1978) lists several nouns with the proprietive suffixes as particles, such as *buhuuu-laax*, *buulaan-naax*, *keriŋ-neex*, etc. Among these “particles” only *buhuuu-laax* allows the copula to precede, and therefore it can be regarded to be grammaticalized.

## 6. Summary and concluding remarks

Sakha has what may be considered to be a quasi-MMC. Twenty-eight nouns have been attested in the ‘Noun’ slot. They are all content nouns. The meaning of that quasi-MMC has is modal, evidential, aspectual, temporal or the like and is summarized in Table 2. The predicate verb of the ‘Clause’ is in the verbal noun form, i.e. a non-finite form. The ‘Clause’ cannot be used by itself as a sentence. The ‘Noun’ has the proprietive suffix ‘having’, like the quasi-MMC in Khalkha Mongolian. Without the proprietive suffix the sentence is ungrammatical. The noun with the proprietive suffix is followed by the copula suffix. One of these nouns followed by the proprietive suffix appears to have become a particle.

In the MMC of some other languages, nouns in the ‘Noun’ slot are grammaticalized and they have a lower degree of “noun-hood” than when they are used outside the MMC. For example, in the Japanese MMC, nouns in the ‘Noun’ slot cannot be modified by an adjective (Tsunoda this volume-b, 5.6.4). However, in the quasi-MMC of Sakha, the ‘Noun’ can be modified by an adjective; see (31). At least in this respect, it is not grammaticalized.

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## Abbreviations

ABL - ablative; AC - adnominal clause; ACC - accusative; AUX - auxiliary; CLT - clitic; COND - conditional; COOP - cooperative; COP - copula; CVB - converb; DAT - dative; FT - free translation; INS - instrumental; LOC - locative; LT; literal translation; MMC - mermaid construction; NPST - nonpast; PL - plural; POSS - possessive; PROP - proprietive; PRS - present; PST - past; REFL - reflexive; SG - singular; TOP - topic; VN - verbal noun

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<sup>1</sup> A suffix form is written with small capital letters when it has several allomorphs.

<sup>2</sup> [s] and [h] can be regarded as allophones of one phoneme.