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Intensifiers/moderators of verbal multiword expressions in Modern Greek

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Abstract

We present a comprehensive view of the expression of degree modification of Modern Greek (MG) verbal multiword expressions (VMWEs) with the use of lexical elements that are not part of the VMWE. Our research draws on about 550 natural examples, retrieved from the web, for 63 VMWEs denoting ANGER, SURPRISE, AGONY, FRIGHT, ANXIETY and LOVE. Three general categories of modifiers of this type were recognized: (i) lexical elements that display intensifying or attenuating/mitigating functions as a result of grammaticalization or emphatic stress, (ii) the definite and indefinite article, intensifying $\kappa \alpha i$ and and, (iii) lexical elements expressing levels of gradable properties. The lexical elements in the first two categories seem to apply with a much wider VMWE population than (most of) the items of the group (iii) which is the only group of degree modifiers that seems to need to be recorded in a VMWE lexicon.

Keywords: Verbal Multiword Expressions; degree modification; lexicography

1 Introduction

To the best of our knowledge, this the first attempt to provide a comprehensive view of the expression of degree modification (amplification/intensification or attenuation/mitigation) of Modern Greek (MG) verbal multiword expressions (VMWEs) with the use of lexical elements (either single word ones or multiword expressions) that are not part of the VMWE (We will also use the term "lexicalized" for the non-free parts of a VMWE, for instance, for the English VMWE "She will kick the bucket" lexicalized are the words "to kick", "the", "bucket". The term has been introduced by Savary et al. (2018)). The aim is the updating of IDION, a web-based lexicographic environment for the multidimensional documentation of MG MWEs (Markantonatou et al. 2019) with information about idiosyncratic behavior as regards degree modification phenomena. 63 VMWEs denoting ANGER, SURPRISE, AGONY, FRIGHT, ANXIETY and LOVE¹ were retrieved from IDION. We should point out that we do not make a distinction among the various categories of VMWE according to semantic criteria, for instance manner of contribution of the lexicalized parts of the VMWE to the overall semantics of the construct, or syntactic criteria, for instance degree of fixedness. The reason for this choice is that the classification of the modifiers according to their distribution is beyond the scope of this work that includes the identification of these words, the description of their semantic contribution as intensifiers or mitigators and the brief discussion of other discourse functions these words may fulfill. Our research draws on 544 actual usage examples featuring these VMWEs that were retrieved with the Google browser. We focused on the discovery of all possible structures involving intensification/mitigation lexical elements rather than the quantitative study of the phenomenon which we leave for future research. Three general categories of lexical elements used for degree modification of Modern Greek VMWEs were recognized: (i) lexical elements that display intensifying or mitigating functions as a result of grammaticalization or emphatic stress, (ii) the definite and indefinite article, intensifying και 'and' and, (iii) lexical elements expressing levels of gradable properties. We observe that these lexical elements fall in two groups in terms of distributional behavior. Lexical elements of the first two categories seem to apply with a much wider VMWE population than (most of) the items of the group (iii); distribution particularities are a fact that lexicographic practice might take into account.

2 Grammaticalized lexical items

Grammaticalized expressions include the adverbs $\lambda i \gamma o$ 'a little', $\kappa \nu \rho \iota o \lambda \epsilon \kappa \tau \iota \kappa \dot{a} / \sigma \tau \eta \nu \kappa \nu \rho \iota o \lambda \epsilon \dot{\epsilon} \dot{a}$ 'literally', $\pi \rho \alpha \gamma \mu \alpha \tau \iota \kappa \dot{a}$, $\dot{o} \nu \tau \omega \varsigma$ 'really', $\pi \rho \dot{a} \gamma \mu \alpha \tau \iota$ 'in fact', $\epsilon \iota \lambda \iota \iota \kappa \rho \iota \nu \dot{a}$ and the prepositional phrase $\sigma \tau' \alpha \lambda \dot{\eta} \theta \epsilon \iota \alpha$ 'frankly'.

To the best of our knowledge, there is little to nothing as regards the literature on the impressively frequent use of κυριολεκτικά/πραγματικά with MG VMWEs. Our data indicate that κυριολεκτικά has similar functions with its English translational equivalent "literally": it marks the speaker's commitment to what his/her utterance denotes, it indicates the dual –literal and metaphorical—meaning of an idiom and assigns the maximal intensity to a metaphorical expression that expresses exaggeration (Israel 2002; Nerlich & Dominguez 2003). Κυριολεκτικά may occupy a pre- (1) or post- (2) VMWE position but it strongly prefers the one immediately after the verb (3):

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¹ There is extensive literature with reference to VMWEs denoting emotions, but this subject is beyond the scope of our work. For a recent review on the topic of how emotions are expressed by VMWEs in Modern Greek (in comparison to French), see Fotopoulou & Giouli (2018).

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- (1) Κυριολεκτικά τα πήρα στο κρανίο! Kiriolektika ta pira sto kranio! literally them took.01.SG on.the cranium 'I literally got mad!'
- (2) Μένω άναυδος κυριολεκτικά.
 Meno anavδos kiriolektika.
 stay.01.SG speechless literally
 'I am literally stunned.'
- (3) Mov κόπηκαν κυριολεκτικά τα γόνατα ξαναείδα. όταν τον kopikan kiriolektika γonata xanaiδa Mou ta otan ton my.GEN cut.03.PL literally the knees.NOM when him saw.01.SG again 'I literally went weak at the knees when I saw him again.'

Πραγματικά (4-6) has the same syntactic preferences with κυριολεκτικά and has functions similar to its English translational equivalent "really": it ensures the truth of the meaning of the utterance (Israel 2002; Paradis 2003) and indicates emphasis (Paradis 2003) or exaggeration as regards the expression of the speaker's emotions (Bordet 2017). Όντως, πράγματι, ειλικρινά and στ' αλήθεια have the same functions with πραγματικά.

- (4) Πραγματικά έμεινα εμβρόντητος από την απάντηση του υπουργού Υγείας. Praymatika emina emvroditos apo tin apadisi ipurγu Iγias. tu stayed.01.SG stunned from the really answer of.the minister of Health 'The minister's of Health answer came as a great surprise to me.'
- υπάρχουν φορές που χάνει την υπομονή της και τότε γίνεται πραγματικά πυρ και μανία. Vevea χani tin ipomoni tis iparyun fores pu ke tote γinete praymatika pir ke mania. of course are 03.PL times that loses the patience hers and then becomes really fire and mania 'Of course there are times when she loses patience and she really gets furious.'
- (6) Κάθε απάντηση είναι χρήσιμη γιατί είμαι σε αναμμένα κάρβουνα πραγματικά... ime praymatika... Kaθe apadisi se anamena karvuna ine χrisimi γiati everv answer useful because am coals really is on lit 'Every answer would be useful because I am very worried really...

Λίγο functions as a politeness marker (Κλαίρης & Μπαμπινιώτης 2004) and as a verbal diminutivizer denoting emotion as a result of grammaticalization (Canakis 2012). However, λ iγο may have an ambiguous function, namely either as an adverbial quantifier – when the emphatic stress is on λ iγο or as a verbal diminutivizer – when the emphatic stress is on the verb; this is a similar though distinct function from that of the prefix ψ ιλο- 'a little' or '(s)lightly' as in ψ ιλοδουλεύω 'work a little' (Canakis 2012: 178). Σαββίδου (2012), also, argues that the ψ ιλο- may have a mitigating descriptive meaning or mitigating pragmatic function.

Since our data are textual, it is not always easy to distinguish between the two possible functions. In our data $\lambda i \gamma o$ most probably functions as a verbal diminutivizer – like the mitigating pragmatic $\psi i \lambda o$ – though it could be a quantifier as well (7):

(7) Και μένει λίγο σέκος η κοπελιά Ke meni liγo sekos i kopelia and stays a bit numb the girl.NOM 'The girl was left speechless in a sense'

In the light of the discussion in Canakis (2012), we searched the web for VMWEs that can both accept $\lambda i \gamma o$ as a modifier and appear with their verb head modified by the prefix $\psi \iota \lambda o$. The retrieved data confirm this possibility, at least in certain contexts, and this fact indicates that for some speakers $\lambda i \gamma o$ and $\psi \iota \lambda o$ - function in a similar way (8-9):

- (8) Όταν διάβασα ότι δεν είναι πλέον λίγο κάγκελο... εν ζωή, έμεινα oti δen Otan δiavasa ine pleon en zoi, liγo kagelo... when read.01.SG that not is any more in life, stayed.01.SG a bit rail 'When I read that he has passed away, I was a bit shocked...
- (9) Ψιλοέμεινα αργότερα! κάγκελο και έφυγα με το Johnnie μου λίγα λεπτά Psiloemina aryotera! kagelo ke efiγa me to Johnnie mu liγa lepta slightly-stayed.01.SG rail and left with the Johnnie my a few minutes 'I was a bit shocked and left with my Johnnie a few minutes later!'

3 The articles

In our data we observe that both the definite and indefinite article may have an intensifying/emphatic function which depends on whether there is an emphatic stress on them or not.

The definite article o, η, τo appears with VMWEs with a fixed noun phrase functioning as a subject or an object complement. It functions as an intensifier when it is emphatically stressed especially in the informal, colloquial speech (Κλαίρης & Μπαμπινιώτης 2004; Apostolou-Panara 1994; Σαλτίδου 2018; Τσιακμάκης 2017). In the following example (10) from our data the emphatic stress on the article is already represented with capital letters both for the article TO 'the' and the word ΣOK 'shock'.

```
(10) Kai \stackrel{.}{\epsilon}\phi\tau\alpha\sigma\alpha\nu \tau\alpha \pi\rho\sigma\stackrel{.}{i}\acute{o}\acute{v}\tau\alpha \kappa\alphai \stackrel{.}{\epsilon}\pi\alpha\theta\alpha \tau0 \Sigma0K! Ke eftasan ta proioda ke epa\thetaa to sok! and arrived.03.PL the products.NOM and suffered.01.SG the shock.ACC 'I was so shocked when the products arrived!'
```

The indefinite article ένας, μια, ένα appears with VMWEs with a fixed noun phrase functioning as a subject or object or copula complement. With the appropriate intonation it functions as an intensifier (Τζάρτζανος 1946; Κλαίρης & Μπαμπινιώτης 2004), as an emphasizer (Holton et al. 2000; Mackridge 1999; Χιώτη 2010) and as a moderator (Σαββίδου 2012). In our data the intensifying or mitigating function of the indefinite article depends on whether an emphatic stress can be assumed or not (since our data are only textual) (11):

```
(11) Εκείνη την ώρα
                            έπιασε
                                         ένας
                                                κρύος
                                                       ιδρώτας.
                            epiase
    Ekini
            tin ora
                       me
                                          enas
                                                krios
                                                       iδrotas.
    that
                       me took.03.SG
                                                cold
                                                       sweat.NOM
            the hour
                                          а
'At that very moment I broke out in a cold sweat.'
```

The conjunction $\kappa \alpha \iota$ 'and', among others, also has the function of an intensifier/emphasizer (Τζάρτζανος 1953; Canakis 1996; Κλαίρης & Μπαμπινιώτης 2004; Mackridge 1999; Χιώτη 2010). Canakis (1996), who is the first to systematically analyze the functions of $\kappa \alpha \iota$ 'and', points out that it functions as a filler in a negative context and it means 'after all' [' $\pi \iota \alpha$ ' or ' $\delta \alpha$ ']. In our data this is the most common context where $\kappa \alpha \iota$ 'and' appears and although its absence has no effect in the utterance meaning, its use denotes emphasis (12):

```
(12) Είμαι ερωτευμένη. Δεν κόβω και φλέβα.
Ime erotevmeni. Δen kovo ke fleva.
am in love. not cut.01.SG and vein.
'I am in love with him but I wouldn't die for him.'
```

As regards the distribution of the grammaticalized lexical items, κυριολεκτικά seems to apply freely. However, we have not been able to find an example of the use of the VMWE μου κόβονται τα ήπατα, Lit. to me cut.PASS the liver.NOM, 'I am terrified' with κυριολεκτικά and this might be an indication that the particular VMWE, and probably other VMWEs that we have not studied yet, do not combine with this adverb. A much wider search of the web, probably supported by Natural Language Processing tools, as well as well-designed studies of native speaker intuitions would be necessary in order to arrive to a precise picture about the distribution of κυριολεκτικά. The situation seems to be the same with πραγματικά and λίγο. The distribution of the emphatic stress on the articles seems to be constrained only by the syntax of the VMWE, that is whether there is an article to be stressed or not. The remaining adverbs and PPs are in less use since their functions overlap with the functions of the widely used κυριολεκτικά, πραγματικά, λίγο and there are no indications that they are subjected to particular selection constraints by the VMWEs. This overall picture suggests that there is no need to record information about the distribution of these lexical items in the lexical entries of the VMWEs.

4 Degree modification

In this section we focus on lexical elements expressing levels of gradable properties, such as inherently degree adverbs, and various manner adverbs as well as adjectives, which function as intensifiers.

4.1 Πολύ/εντελώς

Degree adverbs occurring with VMWEs may denote upper or lower points in a climax (maximizers εντελώς/τελείως 'perfectly, completely' and approximators σχεδόν 'nearly' (13)). They may also be degree modifiers of a property/situation (boosters πολύ 'a lot, much', moderators σχετικά, κάπως 'somewhat' (14)) (Paradis 1997; Γαβριηλίδου 2013; Gavriilidou 2015).

```
(13) Μπορώ να πω πως έμεινα σχεδόν μαλάκας!
Boro na po pos emina sχεδον malakas!
can to say.01.SG that stayed.01.SG nearly jerk
'I could admit that I was nearly blown away!'
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² We would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for drawing our attention to this point.

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(14) Εγώ ίσως ήθελε να δεν δει. KQ1 να ήμουν κάπως τσιμπημένη μαζί του, μα αυτός tsibimeni δen Εγο isos ke na imoun kapos mazi tu, ma aftos iθele δi na to pinched I maybe and was somewhat with him, but he didn't want to see 'I was probably a bit soft on him, but he did not want to see it.'

Given that Γαβριηλίδου (2013) argues that the modification of inherently intensified verbs with $\pi o \lambda \dot{v}$ is redundant and considers VMWEs as inherently intensified expressions, it can be inferred that the modification of VMWEs with $\pi o \lambda \dot{v}$ would be redundant. Additionally, Gavriilidou & Giannakidou (2016) point out that $\pi o \lambda \dot{v}$ modifies gradable verbs/participles that do not combine with maximizers, such as $\epsilon v \tau \epsilon \lambda \dot{\omega} \varsigma$. Coming to the object of this research, although the studied VMWEs express the maximum of a property/situation, a considerable percentage of them (11 out of 63) were found to be gradable and some of them occurred with both $\pi o \lambda \dot{v}$ (15) and $\epsilon v \tau \epsilon \lambda \dot{\omega} \varsigma$ (16):

(15) Κάτι φώναξε πέρα, κι κρανίο! εκεί εγώ τα πήρα πολύ στο Kati fonaxe eki pera, ki еγо ta pira poli sto kranio! shouted.03.SG something over there, and I them took a lot on.the cranium 'Someone shouted something over there and I got really furious!'

 $(16) T\alpha$ πήρα εντελώς στο κρανίο ... kranio... Ta pira edelos sto took.01.SG them completely on.the cranium 'I got absolutely furious'

4.2 Adverbs of manner

In our data we found the manner adverbs χοντρά, Lit. 'fatly', άγρια 'wildly', γερά, δυνατά 'strongly', τρελά 'madly', κανονικά 'normally', σοβαρά 'seriously', επικίνδυνα 'dangerously' which, in the spirit of Γαβριηλίδου (2013), we could consider as boosters (17). We observe that these adverbs select the categories ANGER, LOVE but not SURPRISE, AGONY, FRIGHT. This could be an indication that selection restrictions hold as regards the distribution of these adverbs. Of course, the further study on these categories would lead us to safer conclusions. We suggest that such restrictions are recorded in the lexicographic description of a MG VMWE because it does not seem possible to obtain this information from some general rule of the language (Hanks, 2013: 54).

(17) Ποδοσφαιριστής δάγκωσε χοντρά τη... λαμαρίνα σαγηνευτική αοιδό! ti... lamarina Poδosferistis χodra me δagose sayineftiki aiδo! football player fatly bit the sheet iron with seductive singer 'A football player fell hard for a seductive singer!'

5 External modification with VMWEs

The following cases can be considered "external modifiers" (Ernst 1981). External modification by an adjective that modifies a lexicalized noun of the VMWE occurs when the adjective can be paraphrased with an adverb (in (18) the relevant adverb is "sociologically") that takes the meaning of the whole VMWE in its scope rather than the meaning of the modified noun only (19); "internal modification" occurs if the adjective takes only the meaning of the modified noun in its scope.

- (18) Don't rock the sociological boat with your ideas. (Gehrke & McNally 2019: 782)
- (19) The federal agency decided to take the project under its well-muscled wing. (Gehrke & McNally 2019: 781)

Examples (20-21) below are instances of external modification because the adjective can be paraphrased with the adverbs $\pi o \lambda \dot{v} / \pi \dot{a} \rho \alpha \pi o \lambda \dot{v}$ 'very much' applying to the meaning of the whole VMWE and not to the modified part of the VMWE only:

1. The head noun of the Noun Phrase that functions as the lexicalized subject, object or copula complement of a VMWE can be modified by an intensifying adjective. In our data, the most frequent intensifier of this type is $(\pi o\lambda i)$ $\mu \epsilon \gamma \delta \lambda o \varsigma$ '(very) big' while the maximum degree is expressed with the adjective $\tau \epsilon \rho \delta \sigma \tau i o \varsigma$ 'huge'.

(20) Έπαθα μεγάλο σοκ Εραθα meyalo sok suffered.01.SG big shock 'I was shocked very much.'

The adjectives $\mu \epsilon \gamma \delta \lambda o \zeta$ and $\pi o \lambda \delta \zeta$ seem to have a wide distribution constrained by the same rules as in the general language, therefore their application will not be mentioned in the lexicographic entry of the VMWE.

2. Particular VMWEs select particular intensifying adjectives: μου έρχεται βαριά/χοντρή κεραμίδα, Lit. to.me comes heavy/thick roof tile, παθαίνω διπλό/τετραπλό/πενταπλό/... εγκεφαλικό, Lit. I suffer double/triple/four-/five-tuple/... stroke, παθαίνω απίστευτο/τρελό σοκ, Lit. I suffer unbelievable/mad shock, παθαίνω τρελή κολούμπρα, Lit. I suffer mad CRANBERRY WORD, έγινα σωστό/πραγματικό/άγριο θηρίο/θηρίο ανήμερο, Lit. I became proper/real/wild beast/beast untamed.

```
ήρθε
                                        χοντρή κεραμίδα...
(21) Kai
          βέβαια
                     μας
                                                keramiδa..
    Ke
          vevea
                    mas
                          irθe
                                        γodri
                          came.03.SG
                                                roof tile.NOM
          of course us
                                        thick
'And of course, we were floored'
```

In this case, each VMWE selects specific intensifying adjectives; the distribution of the adjectives is clearly idiosyncratic and this is a fact that has to be recorded in the lexicographical description of a VMWE. A similar idea has been implemented in DUELME (Grégoire, 2010) as a special device for encoding the modifiers of the lexicalized nouns in a VMWE (such as the heads of fixed object NPs) whether these modifiers are fixed as in the cases of $\alpha v \eta \mu \epsilon \rho o$ $\theta \rho \rho i o$ and $\phi v v \rho \rho \rho i o$ and $\phi v v \rho \rho i o$ $\phi v \rho i o$ respectively.

The extent of the fixed subject or object can be used as an intensifier (Gehrke & McNally (2019) mention *blow off steam* < blow off a lot of steam). In MG we find the adjective $\delta\lambda o\varsigma$ 'all, whole' (22) and numerals (23). This property should be mentioned in the entries of the VMWEs that are found in the corresponding structures.

```
(22) Tov
          Μήτσου του
                               είχε ανέβει
                                              όλο
                                                   το
                                                         αίμα
                                                                 στο
                                                                        κεφάλι.
                               iχe anevi
                                                                        kefali.
    Tu
          Mitsu
                    tu
                                              olo
                                                   to
                                                         ema
                                                                 sto
    the
         Mitsos
                    he.GEN
                               had ascended all
                                                    the
                                                         blood
                                                                 to.the
                                                                        head
'Mitsos was furious.'
```

```
(23) Το επεισόδιο ξεκινάει
                            με
                                                                Jon και
                                                                                θεατής περιμένει –
                                  το
                                      άψυχο
                                              κορμί
                                                      του
                                                                                       perimeni –
    To episoδio
                  xekinai
                            me
                                  to
                                      apsiχo
                                              kormi
                                                      tu
                                                                Jon ke
                                                                                \thetaeatis
                                                                           0
    the episode
                  begins
                            with
                                 the
                                      dead
                                               body
                                                       the.GEN Jon and
                                                                          the
                                                                                viewer waits -
    έχοντας φάει
                   και
                        τα
                             20
                                 νύχια του – το πότε
                                                        θα
                                                             αναστηθεί.
                             20
    eyodas fai
                   ke
                         ta
                                 niχia tu – to
                                                 pote
                                                        θa
                                                              anastiθi.
    having eaten and the 20 nails his – the when will resurrect.03.SG.MIDDLE
```

'The episode begins with John's dead body and the viewer waits – in great agony – when it will be resurrected.'

Lastly, the (very) formal/learned lexical elements ολίγον τι, ολίγον 'a little', ελαφρώς 'slightly', όντως 'really', αγρίως 'wildly' were found functioning as degree modifiers. For instance, in the example below, κράνα 'cranium' is strongly colloquial; its co-occurrence with the formal ολίγον may result to intensification/emphasis (Καμηλάκη 2009) or add a humorous tint to the expression (Αναστασιάδη-Συμεωνίδη & Φλιάτουρας 2004) or, as in this example, function as a politeness marker moderating the probably negative impression created by the colloquial κράνα (24):

```
(24) Συγνώμη
                                         πήρα ολίγον
                                                                κράνα,
                                                                         αλλά
                                                                                δεν
                                                                                      είσαι
                                                                                                     πρώτος,
                και
                      εγώ
                            που τα
                                                        στην
    Siγnomi
                ke
                      еγо
                            pu
                                 ta
                                         pira
                                               oliγon
                                                        stin
                                                                krana,
                                                                          ala
                                                                                δen
                                                                                      ise
                                                                                                     protos
                      Ι
                            that them
                                        took
                                               a little
                                                        on.the
                                                               cranium, but
                                                                                      be.02.SG the
    sorry
                and
                                                                                not
                                                                                                     first
    ούτε
              καν
                           δέκατος...
                     0
                           δekatos...
    ute
              kan
                     0
    neither even
                     the
                           tenth
'I am also sorry that I got somewhat furious, but you are not the first, not even the tenth...'
```

Conclusion

To sum up, our data show that most of the studied VMWE co-occur with the adverbs κυριολεκτικά 'literally', πραγματικά 'really', which have multiple functions including intensification/emphasis, as well as $\lambda i \gamma o$ 'a little', whose function is ambiguous – either as a quantifier or a mitigating pragmatic indicator. Also, it seems that the distribution of MG definite and indefinite article depends on the syntactic structure of the VMWEs. Therefore, it is not necessary to record the above lexical items in the lexicographical documentation of the VMWEs. On the other hand, the fact that some VMWEs choose specific intensifying adverbs (e.g. χοντρά, 'fatly', άγρια 'wildly') or adjectives (e.g. ανήμερο, 'untamed', βαριά, 'heavy') makes their lexicographic record necessary as it is indicative of idiosyncratic behavior. In addition, it would be useful to record the simultaneous modification of some VMWEs by both $\pi o \lambda i$ 'very' and $\epsilon v \tau \epsilon \lambda i \omega \zeta / \tau \epsilon \lambda i \epsilon i \omega \zeta$ 'perfectly/completely', because it indicates that the intensity of the emotion can not only be enhanced but also maximized despite the fact that VMWEs are inherently intensifying lexical elements. Undoubtedly, the present study could be expanded to cover more VMWEs of the same or different semantic fields in order to shed more light to the idiosyncratic way(s) in which degree

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modification is expressed and enriches their lexicographic documentation. Finally, further study of the phenomenon could include classification of the modifiers according to their distribution.

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