

## Morphological and Cultural Linguistic Approaches to the Lexicon ‘Mama’ in the Dengka Dialect

Efron Erwin Yohanis Loe<sup>1✉</sup> and Dian Rahmani Putri<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Universitas Citra Bangsa Kupang

<sup>2</sup>Institut Teknologi dan Bisnis STIKOM Bali

✉Jl. Manafe No.17, Kayu Putih, Kec. Oebobo, Kota Kupang, Nusa Tenggara Tim. 85111

✉E-mail: erinihase74@gmail.com

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### ABSTRACT

The Dengka dialect is spoken in Rote Northwest District, Rote Ndao Regency, East Nusa Tenggara Province. Dengka is one of eighteen Rote dialects. This study focuses on the Dengka dialect spoken by the Oetutulu villagers. The research goal is a language documentation of the Dengka dialect and an understanding of the mama culture. The research questions concern the use of the lexicon 'mama' based on morphology and the value of the lexicon 'mama' based on cultural linguistics. In the Rote Dengka Society, the verb 'mama' is exclusively used to describe the subject's behaviour, which is to chew sirih-pinang, a herbal chew made from areca nut, betel, lime, and tobacco. The use of morphology and cultural-linguistics theoretical approaches is designed to obtain the best possible results in analysis. The research method includes careful observation and interaction with each technique. The descriptive qualitative technique is used to describe all data. Data collection is obtained from an Oetutulu Villager. The findings of this study reveal that the lexicon 'mama' can be used in morphology in several ways, including a) as a free morpheme, b) by affixation, and c) through full and partial reduplication. Meanwhile, in cultural linguistics, the researchers discovered nine domains that apply the lexicon 'mama': a) marriage domain, b) death domain, c) family domain, d) mutual assistance domain, e) government domain, f) togetherness domain, g) reconciliation domain, h) social domain, and i) figurative language domain. The result of this research is cultural documentation related to 'mama culture' (budaya makan sirih) as a heritage for the next generation in the Dengka society, for readers, and for further research exploring similar topics in other cultures.

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### INTRODUCTION

Language is spoken as an introductory and unifying language in the social, religious, and government domains. Rote language native speakers are known as Rote ethnic, and they are also referred to as Rote people. Rote language speakers use two terms: Rote language or Lote language. Rote language speakers are also known as Lote people, and the language is sometimes called the Lote language. This ethnic group lives on Rote Island, the southernmost island in Indonesia, which also contains the country's southernmost zero point. Rote language includes eighteen sub-dialect variants, with each dialect representing a certain place and speaker. There are currently 18 sub-dialect variants (Loe, 2018:68). Termanu, Korbafo, Landu, Ringgou, Oepao, Bilba, Diu, Lelenuk, Bokai, Talae, Keka, Ba'a, Lelain, Dengka, Oenale, Dela, Tii, and Lole are the names of the former Dutch Kingdom of Rote Island.

The primary emphasis is on one of the eighteen dialects of Rote, specifically the Dengka dialect. The goal is to analyse a particular lexicon within the Dengka dialect from both micro-linguistic and macro-linguistic perspectives. The lexicon chosen for analysis in the Dengka dialect is '*mama*'. This term is distinctive as it can be evaluated through both morphological and cultural linguistics frameworks. The lexicon '*mama*' is commonly found in the phrase 'umahita mama' in the Rote Dengka society. This phrase is closely associated with the cultural practice of chewing *sirih-pinang* (referred to as '*mama nda?e*' in Dengka dialect). The tradition of chewing *sirih-pinang* is practised either individually

or in groups during gatherings, where participants partake of this herbal chew, composed of betel, areca nut, lime, and tobacco. This cultural practice is well-known in Rote Dengka society and continues to be practised today. Chewing *sirih-pinang* can occur among young men, older men, and women, either in groups or privately, during various social occasions.

Some research related to this research is about morphology and cultural linguistics. Morphology articles according to Loe (2019), Metaphor Compounding in the Dengka Dialect of the Rote Language Found in the Name of Animals and Plants (A generative morphology approach), and *Kata Majemuk Dalam Istilah Uang Pada Masyarakat Rote Dengka* (Compounding in the terms of Money in Rote Dengka Society, 2023). Fanggidae, et.al. (1998) *Morfologi Bahasa Rote* (Morphology in Rote Language), focusing on Central Rote, Muskananfolo (2010) Morphophonemics in Termanu Dialect of the Rote Language, Culture linguistics article according to Wijaya and Sartini (2020), The Cultural Meaning of The Saulak Ritual in The Community of Mandar Village, Banyuwangi Regency: Etnolinguistic Study. This study aims to describe the cultural meaning within the Saulak ritual discourse. This research is conducted in Kampung Mandar village, Banyuwangi, East Java. This research is an ethnographic research by data collecting method (1) participant observation; (2) interview by taking some notes and recording. The analysis is conducted on the lexical structure of the code, collected from the Saulak ritual discourse, and the data are connected to the cultural meaning of the society. The code in this research is, namely, offering sand, the mantra of the Saulak ritual. Lutfianasari, Yusuf, Iribaram, Muhandy, and Kadir (2025). Betels as a Contact Tool for the Papuan Community in Arso Swakarsa, Keerom Regency. All research done by researchers in morphology and cultural linguistics is useful for analysing the lexicon 'mama' in this research from a morphological and Cultural-Linguistic point of view.

The researchers intend to observe the use of the lexicon '*mama*' in micro- and macro linguistics because of its uniqueness and to expose the public to the meaning of the lexicon '*mama*' related to culture and morphology. The researchers' goal is to introduce and document the Dengka dialect and the chewing of *sirih-pinang* culture in the Rote Dengka society to the public. The next target of this research is to create a reference for future researchers in another culture and region.

## METHODS

Observation and interlocution methods used are based on Sudaryanto (1993:13) to observe the use of language by speakers. Observation method has four techniques to support data collection, namely: tapping, observing, and conversation-free observation, writing and recording technique (see Sudaryanto 2015, Mahsun 2005, Ghony, Djunaidi, M., Almansur Fauzan 2012, and Moeleong 2014).

The tap conversation technique is used to record a conversation. The technique involves direct participation in dialogue, either actively or receptively, with speakers. As observers, the researchers listened to what the people said. The researchers do not influence the topic of discussion and only observe naturally occurring speech using the research technique. Writing and recording techniques are used to get adequate data related to the topic. This process has a convention between the researchers and the informant to get data.

The interlocution method is used to expose much information about research data to support data analysis in research through direct conversation with an informant, using conversation. Sudaryanto's (1993:137-140) interlocution method is a contact conversation between the informant and the researchers. To support the interlocution method, the technique is applied to get much information that is closely related to empirical data. Interlocution methods have four techniques, namely: stimulus technique, direct interview technique, indirect interview technique, and writing and recording technique. The stimulus technique is used to encourage one or more participants to speak so that the researchers can obtain target linguistic data. The direct interview technique involves face-to-face conversations between the researchers and informants. The researchers introduce topics related to the research problem to elicit relevant empirical data.

The indirect interview technique is a technique that is used by researchers to interview informants indirectly, not face-to-face, but only through a list of questions. Writing and recording techniques are used to make recordings of data and

to write data by the researchers about many things that have been gathered, and then to classify the data and to write it into a card.

The use of observation and interlocution method and its technique is to get data that is closely related to the function of the lexicon '*mama*' from the morphological point of view. Meanwhile, from a cultural linguistic perspective, the researchers aim to analyse the use of the lexicon '*mama*' in the phrase '*uma hita mama*' in the chewing '*sirih-pinang*' culture of the Rote Dengka society. Lexicon '*mama*' in the morphology approach has a function: a) as a free morpheme, b) it can produce new words through affixation, and c) through full reduplication and partial reduplication. In culture linguistics point of view the researchers find nine domains using of lexicon '*mama*' in Rote Dengka society namely: a) marriage domain, b) death domain, c) family domain, d) mutual assistance domain, e) government domain, f) togetherness domain, g) reconciliation domain, h) social domain and i) figurative language domain.

The researchers apply the informant requirements according to Samarin (1998:65) to get the research data, which is related to morphology and cultural linguistics.

1. As a native speaker
2. Educated
3. Man or Woman
4. Adult
5. Having a good understanding of the data
6. Well and healthy
7. Willing to be an informant

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data analysis on the lexicon '*mama*' is based on morphological and cultural linguistic points of view.

### Lexicon '*mama*' in the Morphological Point of View

Morphology is the branch of linguistics that studies how morphemes combine to create new morphemes according to word formation rules. It is found that the lexeme '*mama*' can be analysed in morphology through the following perspectives: a) The lexicon '*mama*' functions as a free morpheme, b) The lexicon '*mama*' generates new words through prefixation, and c) It can also form new words through full and partial reduplication. These three topics will be discussed individually in the following sections.

#### *Lexicon 'mama' as a Free Morpheme*

Lexicon '*mama*' is a free morpheme. It can stand on its own and has an independent meaning. It consists of two syllables. The meaning of the lexicon '*mama*' is to chew *sirih-pinang*, a herbal chew consisting of areca nut, betel, lime, and tobacco.

Free Morpheme	Meaning	Syllable
Mama	to chew <i>sirih-pinang</i> ; an herbal chew consisting of areca nut, betel, lime, and tobacco	ma.ma

Table 1: Free Morpheme lexicon Mama  
 Primary Data by Researcher (2025) [source]

For example, how to apply the lexicon [mama] in simple sentences:

- Maria mama sa dapu*  
**Maria makan sirih PREP dapur**  
**Maria sedang makan sirih di dapur.**  
**Maria is chewing in the kitchen.**

Based on how it produces the independent meaning, the conclusion is that lexicon [mama] is a free morpheme.

**Lexicon ‘mama’ can generate new words through the addition of prefixes.**

The lexicon ‘mama’ is used to produce new words by adding prefixes, for example, /mana-/ to produce the polymorpheme ‘manamama’. Prefix /mana-/ has the same grammatical meaning as the prefix /PeN-/ with the variant allomorph /Pem-/. For example: prefix /Pem-/ in the polymorpheme *pemukul* in Indonesia. The meaning of the polymorpheme *pemukul* is the agent to assault and arbitrarily someone or a tool that is used by the agent to do something. The meaning of the polymorpheme ‘manamama’ is a man chewing *sirih-pinang*. The process of the new word ‘manamama’ can be seen in the following table.

Prefix	Rooted in the Dengka dialect	Process	Result	Meaning
/mana- /	[mama]	[mana + mama] Pref+ Root	Manamama	To describe a man or woman as an actor is chewing <i>sirih-pinang</i> , a herbal chew consisting of areca nut, betel, lime, and tobacco.

Table 2: Prefix  
 Primary Data by Researcher (2025) [source]

For example: how to apply prefix /mana-/ and root [mama] in a simple sentence:

**Marce mana-mama dafu**

**Marce PREF-mama suka**

**Marce paling suka makan sirih.**

**Maria really likes to chew.**

**Lexicon ‘mama’ generates new words through full reduplication and partial reduplication**

The lexicon ‘mama’ is utilised to generate new words by full and partial reduplication processes. Full reduplication involves repeating the root, resulting in ‘mama-mama’. The reduplication ‘mama-mama’ is used to refer to the act of chewing ‘sirih-pinang’ continuously. On the other hand, partial reduplication entails taking the initial syllable of the root to create a new term, such as ‘mamama’. The meaning of the partial reduplication ‘mamama’ is equivalent to that of full reduplication, which also signifies the act of chewing *sirih-pinang*, a type of herbal chew. (Refer to the process in Table 3).

Full Reduplication	Result	Meaning	Partial Reduplication	Result	Meaning
mama + mama Root + Fullred	mama- mama	to explain the chewing of <i>sirih-pinang</i> ; the herbal chew is more than once	ma + mama Pared + root	mamama	to explain the chewing of <i>sirih-pinang</i> ; the herbal chew is more than once

Table 3: Full Reduplication  
 Primary Data by Researcher (2025) [source]

For example: how to apply full reduplication of lexicon [mama] in a simple sentence:

**Elias mama-mama sa mole**

**Elias ROOT-RED PREP sawah**

**Elias makan-makan sirih di sawah.**

**Elias makan-makan siri kalau bekerja di sawah.**

**Elias chews when he is working in the rice field.**

For example, how to apply partial reduplication of the lexicon [mama] in a simple sentence:

**Elias ma-mama sa mole**

**Elias REDPAR-ROOT PREP sawah**

**Elias makan-makan sirih di sawah.**

**Elias makan-makan siri kalau bekerja di sawah.  
Elias chews when he is working in the rice field.**

Based on two examples of full reduplication and partial reduplication in the Rote language of the Dengka dialect above, namely [*mama-mama*] and [*ma-mama*], the actor repeatedly chews in the rice field.

**Lexicon [*mama*] based on the Cultural Linguistic Approach**

Each ethnicity within a region possesses its own distinct characteristics and ways of interpretation that are important to maintain. Culture is preserved; it cannot be detached from the symbols and signs that embody it, including both objects and animals used within cultural practices. Every object, whether living or non-living, consistently signifies a symbol and a sign, particularly when these items are employed in cultural rituals.

The symbols and signs invoked during cultural ceremonies by a particular group are believed to bring the finest outcomes and benefits to their community. In understanding each symbol and sign of culture, the tools utilised function as means of communication, inherently linked to the sounds of language, especially words. The terminology employed in cultural practices and ceremonies is closely tied to their belief systems. The language, as a communication tool, is also referenced in cultural activities and ceremonies, and is utilised by the Rote Dengka community to enhance their cultural rituals.

One of the cultural activities that is well known and unique in the Rote Dengka society is chewing sirih-pinang, an herbal chew. The cultural activities are covered in Lexicon *Mama*. The meaning of lexicon *mama* in the Rote Dengka dialect is '*makan sirih pinang*'. The culture '*makan sirih pinang*' was conducted by an old man and a young man.

The use of the lexicon "*mama*" is prevalent in nine domains within the Rote Dengka cultural activities: a) marriage, b) death, c) family, d) mutual assistance, e) government, f) togetherness, g) reconciliation, h) social interactions, and i) figurative language. The use of "*mama*" in these nine domains is distinctive for its descriptive meaning. All nine symbols are explained using the theoretical approach according to Koentjaraningrat (2004), who defines culture as a system of ideas, behaviour, and a human creation system in the purposes of social living that is owned by human beings through learning. "*Kebudayaan sebagai satu keseluruhan sistem gagasan, tindakan, dan hasil karya manusia dalam rangka kehidupan masyarakat yang dijadikan milik dari manusia dengan belajar.*"

All nine domains can be encapsulated in the phrase "*uma hita mama*," which is interpreted as an invitation for someone to chew sirih-pinang, a traditional herbal chew. However, the cultural meaning and moral message conveyed by the phrase "*uma hita mama*" vary across each domain. Below, we will explore the significance of the phrase in each context:

***Marriage Domain***

Before explaining more details about the usage of the lexicon *mama*, in the phrase '*uma hita mama*' within the context of marriage in the Rote Dengka community, it is necessary for the researchers to first outline the marriage procedures in this society. The marriage procedures are closely linked to the application of the lexicon *mama* in the Rote Dengka community. These marriage procedures comprise four steps, which are: 1) Introduction, 2) Proposal submission, 3) Church marriage or Marriage Ceremony, and 4) Accompanying the bride to her partner's home.

**1. Introduction**

In the introduction phase, the groom candidate, along with his family and a spokesperson, visits the bride candidate's home. This introduction signifies that the man's family is interested in the daughter-in-law candidate and acknowledges her as a potential match. They hope that the lady in the family will accept him, paving the way for the next step: the proposal submission.

**2. Proposal submission**

During the proposal phase, the groom's family is expected to provide various symbols of marriage culture that are important to the Rote Dengka society. These symbols include: a) a Bible and a candle, b) a specified amount of money, c) rings, d) a set of clothing for the parents of the bride, e) a set of cosmetics and clothing for the bride, and

f) areca nut, betel, lime, and tobacco. After the proposal submission ceremony, the next step is the marriage ceremony.

### 3. Church Marriage or Marriage Ceremony

The Marriage ceremony phase is the domain of the pastor, the government, and the man's family.

### 4. Escorting the bride to her couple's house

After the marriage ceremony, the next step is to escort the bride to the groom's house. This marks the final phase of the proposal submission process for marriage in the Rote Dengka society.

In the four phases of the marriage ceremony, the term "*mama*" is used frequently in the phrase "*uma hita mama*". When the spokesperson and his group arrive at the prospective daughter-in-law's house, the female relatives allow them to enter and sit down. Before the spokesperson explains their purpose, he requests the mother or sister of the son-in-law candidate to present the "tempat sirih," a betel chew canister (referred to as "*nduna?*" in the Dengka dialect), to the female relatives. This container is filled with areca nut, betel leaves, lime, and tobacco, and is traditionally made from papyrus trees.

Once the female relatives accept the betel chew canister from the son-in-law candidate's family, the next step is for them to offer their own "tempat sirih," also filled with areca nut, betel leaves, lime, and tobacco. The female relatives then invite the spokesperson and his group to chew the sirih-pinang together, using the phrase "*uma hita mama,*" which translates to "let us all enjoy chewing the sirih-pinang together."

The term "*mama*" within the phrase "*uma hita mama*" possesses significant cultural meaning, indicating that the kinswomen have formally accepted the spokesperson and his group to articulate their intentions for visiting the kinswomen's household. In the context of marriage customs within Rote Dengka society, "*mama*" functions as an introductory term utilised by two families to discuss their objectives and purposes.

The subsequent phase involves the submission of a marriage proposal. In this phase, the spokesperson, accompanied by the prospective son-in-law candidates, is expected to present several cultural items, including: a) a Bible and a candle, b) a monetary gift, c) rings, d) garments for the parents of the prospective bride, e) a set of cosmetics and clothing for the bride, and f) areca nut, betel leaves, lime, and tobacco. Once the kinswomen have received all designated cultural items, the spokesperson will request all attendees to participate in chewing sirih-pinang collectively, while repeating the phrase "*uma hita mama.*" The cultural connotation of this phrase during the proposal submission indicates that the two families have united to form a single, larger family.

The usage of "*mama*" in the phrase "*uma hita mama*" persists when the bride's family, alongside their spokesperson, escorts the bride (referred to as "*veto venus*" in the Dengka dialect) to the residence of the groom. Upon arrival, the kinswomen and their spokesperson convene, and the bride's aunt and female relatives present a "tempat sirih" (known as "*nduna?*" in the Dengka dialect) to all guests, inviting them to chew *sirih-pinang* together while repeating the phrase "*uma hita mama.*" The cultural significance of this phrase in this context underscores the union of the two families, with the bride becoming the daughter of the groom's family and the groom (designated as "*mone veus*" in the Dengka dialect) becoming the son of the kinswomen's family.

### *Death Domain*

The essence of the lexicon "*mama*" in the death domain within the Rote Dengka society carries a cultural message of empathy. When a neighbour has experienced grief, the surrounding community comes together to offer support and consolation to the affected family. In return, the grieving family provides a "*tempat sirih*" (known as "*nduna?*" in the Dengka dialect), which is a betel chew canister containing areca nut, betel leaves, lime, and tobacco, to those who have offered their condolences. They express their gratitude and communal spirit with the phrase "*uma hita mama,*" which signifies "deep empathy" towards the grieving family. This expression of thanks helps the distraught family feel appreciated for the presence and support of their neighbours and often leads to a shared experience of chewing *sirih-pinang* together while repeating the phrase "*uma hita mama.*"

### ***Family Domain***

The Rote Dengka society has a custom of gathering with siblings and cousins for meetings to discuss various programs before they are finalised. For instance, they may come together to plan a marriage or express gratitude to God. The host typically prepares a '*tempat sirih*' (known as *nduna* in the Dengka dialect), which is a container for betel chews that includes areca nut, betel leaves, lime, and tobacco. When all the siblings and cousins have arrived, the host invites them to chew *sirih-pinang* together using the phrase '*uma hita mama.*' The cultural significance of '*uma hita mama*' within the family domain emphasises a strong sense of clannishness and unity among siblings and cousins.

### ***Mutual Assistance Domain***

In the Rote Dengka society, mutual assistance activities are well-known and include a) building houses, b) cleaning gardens, c) maintaining rice fields, d) planting corn and rice, and e) harvesting corn and rice. When a mutual assistance activity commences, the host prepares the first offering, which consists of areca nut, betel, lime, and tobacco. The host invites each participant to join in chewing the *sirih-pinang* together. During this gathering, the host expresses a phrase: "*uma hita mama.*" The cultural significance of the phrase "*uma hita mama*" reflects strong mutual assistance values. It emphasises the bond and collaboration shared among participants as they engage in the activity of chewing areca nut, betel, lime, and tobacco together.

### ***The Government Domain***

The phrase "*uma hita mama*" is commonly used in the government domain as a welcoming greeting for administrative guests. Culturally, it signifies the closeness and familiarity between the government and society. This traditional greeting still serves as an important cultural value within the Rote Dengka community. For instance, when the Governor, Regent, Sub-district Head, or Village Chief makes administrative visits, the community leaders prepare areca nut, betel, lime, and tobacco in a place called "*tempat sirih.*" They then invite the administrative guests to partake in chewing "*sirih-pinang,*" which is a herbal chew made from areca nut, betel, lime, and tobacco.

### ***Togetherness Domain***

Togetherness is a common practice in the Rote Dengka society, often manifested through cultural events. These events typically occur among neighbours or community members when someone is chewing *sirih-pinang* at home. For instance, if a person passes away on the road, those chewing *sirih-pinang* may invite others to join them. During these gatherings, the host provides a betel chew canister filled with areca nut, betel leaves, lime, and tobacco, and encourages everyone to chew *sirih-pinang* together while saying the phrase "*uma hita mama.*" This phrase symbolises unity and togetherness, reflecting the cultural significance of sharing areca nut, betel, lime, and tobacco among participants as they enjoy the experience together.

### ***Reconciliation Domain***

The use of the term "*mama*" in the phrase "*uma hita mama*" within the context of reconciliation in the Rote Dengka society is both unique and humanitarian. The researchers discovered a noteworthy case where a man was falsely accused of assaulting a woman's chastity. When the victim learned of the accusations, she reported the incident to the police, stating that it was untrue. The individuals responsible for the false accusations approached the victim and his family to resolve the matter informally. When the victim and his family agreed to settle the issue through common law, the accuser brought a pig, which they butchered for a communal meal. The victim's family invited the pastor, the police chief, the village chief, prominent villagers, and neighbours to join them in resolving the conflict. Before the meal, the pastor led a prayer, and then the accuser presented a betel chew container filled with areca nut, betel leaves, lime, and tobacco to the victim's family, asking them to engage in the phrase "*uma hita mama.*" After they chewed the betel together, the pastor encouraged them to shake hands, and then they all shared a meal, alongside the pastor, police chief, village chief, and other guests. In this context, the phrase "*uma hita mama*" carries the cultural significance of reconciliation.

### ***Social Domain***

The phrase "*uma hita mama*" conveys a moral message of harmonious brotherhood that transcends social status in the Rote Dengka community. The researchers discovered that this message is deeply rooted in the rich culture. For instance, during community events or family gatherings that involve mutual assistance, all guests—regardless of their social

status—are given a betel chew canister containing areca nut, betel leaves, lime, and tobacco, rather than a typical treat like delicious food or a glass of coffee. This practice creates an atmosphere of enthusiasm and joy, where everyone enjoys chewing betel together without regard for their social status. The purpose of using the phrase *"uma hita mama"* in the social context is to eliminate barriers related to social status.

### **Figurative Language Domain**

The phrase *"uma hita mama"* is an example of litotes, a literary term for a figure of speech that employs negative terms to express a positive statement. This form of figurative language serves to make speech more polite and refine its intent. The researchers identified the use of *"uma hita mama"* in specific contexts, such as birthday parties and graduation ceremonies, where it is often used during speeches of thanks to guests. When all the guests have arrived, the host typically makes a speech to express gratitude for their presence. Following this, the host might say, "We will chew areca nut, betel, lime, and tobacco together" (translated into the Dengka dialect as *"uma hita mama sama-sama"*). Although the speech refers to chewing these items together, the host has prepared a delicious meal for all the guests. In this context, the phrase *"uma hita mama"* carries a cultural meaning of a "modest attitude" from the host towards the guests, fostering a joyful atmosphere.

### **CONCLUSION**

The lexicon *'mama'* has a deep meaning according to the Dengka Rote culture, which can be developed in morphological research, including a) as a free morpheme, b) by affixation, and c) through full and partial reduplication. Meanwhile, in cultural linguistics, there are nine domains discovered of the application of the lexicon *'mama'*, namely a) marriage domain, b) death domain, c) family domain, d) mutual assistance domain, e) government domain, f) togetherness domain, g) reconciliation domain, h) social domain, and i) figurative language domain. This research is relatively short and can be developed widely from other linguistic points of view by using the same object of study.

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### **ABBREVIATIONS**

REDPAR	= Partial Reduplication
ROOT	= Lexem Base
PREP	= Preposition
RED	= Reduplication
PREF	= Prefix

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