'I'm not a ghost!': semantic analyses of some 'emotional adverbs' in Mandarin Chinese

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1. Introduction

This paper constitutes a first attempt to carry out a systematic and in-depth semantic analysis of a selected set of *qing2gan3 fu4ci2* ('emotional adverbs') in Mandarin Chinese, an area that has received little attention in Western linguistic discussion.[1] It shows that, as elusive as their meanings are, with a rigorous semantic tool, the core meanings of *qing2gan3 fu4ci2* can be uncovered and stated in a clear and precise manner, making this category and its semantic contents accessible to both linguists and learners of the Chinese (Mandarin) language. The structure of the paper is as follows: in section 2, the category of *qing2gan3 fu4ci2* is introduced with a general discussion of its grammatical features; section 3 introduces the analytical framework to be used in the analysis—Natural Semantic Metalanguage; and section 4 is where detailed semantic analyses, discussions and justifications are carried out.

2. What are *qing2gan3 fu4ci2*? Their semantic and grammatical features

The term *qing4gan3 fu4ci2* ('emotional adverbs', hereafter QF) was first introduced in the book *Zhongguo Xiandai Yufa* [Modern Chinese Grammar] by Wang Li (1985/[1947]: 231), who states that

> We can see that the Chinese language has a number of convenient devices for expressing emotions [*qing2gan3*], because it not only has emotional particles, but emotional adverbs as well. In expressing emotions, Western Languages, apart from using several intonations or a few interjections, rely only on special forms, such as a particular lexicon item or a particular word order. (my translation)

Wang Li (ibid) further explains the characteristics of QF by citing examples from *Hongloumeng* [The Dream of Red Mansions]:

> All words that are usually in adverbial positions, yet do not have an equivalent adverb in Western languages (such as English), are most likely to be emotional adverbs. We know that emotional particles in Chinese do not have their equivalents in Western languages. The subtlety of emotional adverbs is by no means inferior to emotional particles, therefore, they too do not have equals in Western languages. The *you4* in *'Wo3 you4 bu4shi4 gui3.'* [*1SG-you4-NEG-be-devil*] ('I'm NOT a devil as you would have thought.') cannot only be translated as 'again'. 'At all' does not match its nature either.

The *pian1* in *'Ta1 pian1 song4 zhe4ge lai2 le.'*[*3SG-pian1-deliver-this-CL-come-PFV*] ('He chose to deliver this among all things.')*,* can neither be translated as 'unexpectedly', nor 'unfortunately', for their meanings are too concrete and the emotions far less strong than those conveyed by *pian1*. (my translation)

In terms of their grammatical features, QF belong to the category of *xu1ci2* (lit. 'empty words'; 'function words'), as opposed to *shi2ci2* (lit. 'full words'; 'content words'). They would be included in any Chinese dictionaries of 'function words', grouped under *fu4ci2* ('adverbs').[2] Other linguists (e.g. Chao 1968:781) call this group of words (QF) 'adverbs of evaluation'. I am inclined to adopt the use of QF, because of the emotive meaning components that they possess.

Words like 'unfortunately' and 'unexpected' seem to suggest that QF bear some resemblance to sentential adverbs in English, which are used to express the speaker's opinion or attitude 'towards the proposition that the sentence expresses or the situation that the proposition describes' (Lyons 1977:451-452). In terms of their functions for encoding modality, QF and sentential adverbs in English share certain similarities. However, QF have a broader usage, and are much more subtle and elusive in their meaning than sentential adverbs in English. Most importantly, sentential adverbs may express the speaker's 'epistemic stances'(cf. Biber & Finegan 1988; Palmer 1986), but not necessarily the speaker's emotions. For QF, the affective component is an invariant core. It is probably because of this fact that QF are used mostly in colloquial and direct speech. They appear to behave more like communicative particles. Thus, Alleton's term 'adverbial words'(Alleton 1972) seem to be more appropriate.

Curiously, this group of words is not mentioned in the chapter on adverbs in Li and Thompson's (1981) grammar book on Mandarin Chinese. The reason for such an omission is not known. It might fall under the category of 'movable adverbs of attitude' (ibid:321-322). However, as we will see, some QF are movable, and some are not.

3. Methodological tool

How do we access the semantic and emotional information encoded in QF if, as noted by Wang Li, they do not have their equivalents in English (or in other languages)? The many monolingual dictionaries of 'function words' available in the Chinese language bear testament to the 'unruly' and 'ungraspable' nature of words of this kind.[3] I shall depart from the conventional approaches, where without any exceptions, a few glosses are given along with some examples to illustrate their use. I shall try to capture the central components of the meanings of the words in question by examining their range of use. To achieve this goal, I will use Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) as the analytical framework to state and verify the meanings of selected words. The basic idea behind the theory of NSM, which was developed by Anna Wierzbicka and her colleagues, is that one

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[2] It is not an exaggeration to say that the distinction between *shi2ci2/shi2zi4* ('full words') and *xu1ci2/xu1zi4* ('empty words') is the most fundamental grammatical distinction in the Chinese linguistic tradition. This tradition, however, appears to be overlooked in Western linguistic discussion of the Chinese language, and increasingly so among Chinese scholars. Chinese lexicographic tradition has always had dictionaries of 'empty words'. It is generally believed that *shi2ci2* ('full words') are about referents, while *xu1ci2* ('empty words') are about meaning.

[3] Dictionaries of function words are arranged largely according to the so-called part of speech—interjections, adverbs, conjunctions, prepositions, particles, onomatopoietic words.

can isolate, in any natural language, a small set of lexical meanings which cannot be defined language-internally without circularity, and which has precise equivalents in all other languages. Empirical investigation has identified 60 semantic primes such as PEOPLE, SAY, TRUE, DO, THINK, WANT, GOOD, BAD, IF, BECAUSE. These primes also share a universal grammar of combination, valency, and complementation. Meanings of numerous other words and grammatical constructions can be explicated as configurations of these semantic primes, thus avoiding definition circulation.[4]

4. The semantic analyses

In this paper, I will focus only on the two words that Wang Li mentioned in his earlier quote: *pian1* and *you4*.[5] The examples are mainlydrawn from *Hongloumeng* (*A Dream of Red Mansions*, the novel that Wang Li's comments refer to) and other dictionaries. With its language regarded as the cornerstone of modern standard Chinese, *Hongloumeng*, the most popular novel in China, has been a rich source of examples for linguistic discussion and lexicographic work in modern Chinese.[6]In the following analysis and discussion, analysis by other linguists is also evaluated.

4.1 *you4*

You4 has a wide range of applications. The *you4* to be discussed in this section appears only in negative sentences, signaled by a negative marker such as *bu4, mei2,* or *mei2you3*.[7] The syntactic structure in which *you4* occurs can be represented as PRON+you4+VP$_{NEG}$.

Between *you4* and the negative marker, no other constituents can be inserted. Let us start the discussion with the followingexample, which Wang Li used in his quote.

(1) '*Wo3 you4 bu4shi4   gui3, ni3   jian4-le wo3 bu4shuo1*
   1SG   YOU   NEG:be   demon 2SG   see-PFV 1sg   NEG:say
   gui1gui1ju1ju1 zhan4-zhu   zen3me dao4   wang3qian2 pao3?'
   well-behaved:RDP stand-stay how   instead:PART towards:front run
   'I am not a ghost,'(snapped Xifeng) 'Why didn't you stand to attention when you saw me? Why run away instead?[8]

Without *you4*, '*Wo3 bu4shi4 gui3*' would simply be an expression of *a fact*. If *you4* does not mean *again*, (which is its most basic meaning—a repetition of some past action or event) or *at all*, then what does it mean?

Wang Li (1985:252) attributes to *you4* a meaning of 'expressing firm denial'. In my view, Wang's observation is fundamentally correct, because 'denial' includes references to what

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[4] See Wierzbicka 1996, Goddard & Wierzbicka 1994, 2002 for detailed information on the NSM theory and how these 60 semantic primes have been identified across typologically different languages. See also Chappell 2002 for the Chinese exponents of NSM, and Chappell 1991 for a detailed study of the meaning of word-final particle *me* in Mandarin Chinese using NSM framework.

[5] For reasons of space, further comparisons with other words are not made here. See Ye (forthcoming) for a more complete study of QF with a larger scope.

[6] For instance, two seminal grammars of modern Chinese, *Zhongguo Wenfa Yaolue* (Lü 1941) and *Zhongguo Xiandai Yufa* (Wang 1947), based their discussion largely on examples from *Hongloumeng*.

[7] *Bu4* as a negative maker can be used in most cases, except for clauses with perfective predicates (Cf. Chappell 2002:304-305).

[8] The examples taken from *Hongloumeng* are noted with (H: chapter number). Their English translations are based on Yang & Yang 1978 with modification.

other people think and what 'I' think by declaring something as untrue, as suggested in example (1).

However, Wang Li's statement is incomplete in two respects. First, the above example suggests that what the speaker denies is not what was explicitly said to the speaker, but is inferred from the addressee's action. *You4* is a denial of an unstated message on the part of the speaker. Example (2) illustrates this point.

(2)   *Gou3er   leng3xiao4 dao4*: '*wo3men   you4   mei2you3   shou1sui4-de*
       name   cold:smile   say   1PL You   do not have   collect:tax-LIG
       qin1qi4,   *zuo4guan1-de*   *peng2you*,   *you3   shen3me   fa2zi*
       relative   make:official-LIG   friend   have   what   way
       ke3   xiang3-de."
       can   think-NOM   (H, 6)
       ['You should think of some way, otherwise money will not find its way to our family.']'There are no tax-collectors in my family and no mandarins among my friends. What way could there be of laying my hands on some money?'sneered Gouer.

In this example, the denial of having rich relatives and friends was directed at the addressee's suggestions of borrowing money from them. It involves a process of inference. The fact that what *you4* denies is an unstated and implied message explains why it can also respond to someone's action, as reflected in example (1). Therefore, the function of *you4* is to counter an unstated expectation. It spells out the addressee's intention, and expresses the speaker's disapproval or disgust at such a thought. Without *you4*, the speaker simply states an objective fact without conveying any emotion.

The second aspect where Wang Li's analysis is incomplete lies in the fact that the element of denial (the notion of 'not true') is, more or less, embodied in the negation. As its meaning cannot be understood independently from the syntactic construction, the meaning of the whole syntactic construction in which *you4* occurs should be explicated, as follows:

       YOU   (PRON + YOU + VP$_{NEG}$)
       (a) I know now: you think something (X)
       (b) I think: this (X) is not true
       (c) I did not think someone like you could think something like this (X)
       (d) I feel something bad because of this

Component (a) indicates that the speaker's knowledge of somebody's intention is not explicitly expressed by the person, but is inferred by the speaker. It implies that 'I know this not because you said so'. Component (b) indicates the speaker's denial of the speaker's assertion of something being untrue. Components (c) and (d) expresses a bad feeling on the part of the speaker, and a ridiculing tone. This makes *you4* compatible with *leng3xiao4* (lit. 'cold laugh'; 'sneer') in example (2).

In her dictionary of function words, which is targeted at Chinese language learners, Wang Huan explains *you4* as 'used in a negative sentence to indicate that since the fact is so, the conclusion will naturally be as expected' (H Wang 1996: 349). Her explanation seems to provide an explanation as to why the use of *you4* often leads to a self-explanatory

rhetorical question, as suggested in the above examples. Wang's point is sufficiently accounted for by components (c) and (d). However, her focus is not quite right.

It is important to note that the explication is framed in the first-person format. QF convey a subjective attitude, which has illocutionary force. To some extent, they are like intonations, which inherently have a first-person meaning (cf. Wierzbicka 1991:163). This subjective attitude can best be reflected in the first-person format, which models the attitude either conveyed through first-person utterances or attributed to the speaker.

4.2   *PIAN1*

In the next section, I will focus on *pian1*, which was also mentioned by Wang Li. The syntactic behaviour of *pian1* in an affirmative sentence differs from that in a negative sentence. In the affirmative sentence, its reduplicated form *pian1pian1* or other variations such as *pian1sheng2* can replace the monosyllabic *pian1*. Thus, the following discussion will be divided into two parts *pian1$_1$/pian1pian1* and *pian1$_2$.* The distinction between *pian1$_1$* and *pian1$_2$* will be discussed in 4.2.2.

4.2.1   *pian1$_1$/pian1pian1*

(3)   '*Ai!   Jin1er pian1pian1   lai2-le   ge   Liu2lao3lao.*'
       INTJ today PIANPIAN   come-PFV CL   name:granny (H, 7)
       'Ai! Granny Liu would choose today to call [and I put myself out running here and there for her].'

Pian1$_1$/pian1pian1 can occur in sentence-initial position preceding the topic, as well as after the topic of a sentence. The meaning of *pian1$_1$/pian1pian1* will be proposed first, followed by the justification of the explication.

> *pian1$_1$/pian1pian1*
> (a) I think: something happened
> (b)   this is bad
> (c)   I don't want things like this to happen
> (d)   I know that it did not have to happen like this
> (e) when I think about this, I feel something bad

Component (a) and (b) together reflect a strong evaluative element, which suggests that what happened is perceived as a bad event in the view of the speaker. A component such as 'something bad happened' would narrow the focus to 'something that happened'. In most cases, the event has a specific agent as a reference point. However, a component of 'someone did something (bad)', does not cover a death situation, as exemplified in (4):

(4)   '*Zhi3 ke3lian2 wo3 zhe4 mei4mei   zhe4yang4   ming4 ku3,*
       only   pity   1SG this   younger sister this:way   fate   bitter
       zen3me ta1 ma1 pian1 jiu4   qu4shi4-le.'
       how   3SG mother PIAN emphatic:PART leave:world-PFV   (H, 5)
       'But poor little cousin! What a cruel fate to lose your mother so young'[with that she dabbed her eyes with a handkerchief].

Neither does it include a more general situation where specific agents are absent, as in (5).

(5)   '*Zhe4xie*   *shi4*   *wo3*   *cong2lai2*   *mei2you3*   *ting1shuo1-guo,*
         this-CL:PL   matter   1SG   never   NEG:PAST   hear:say-EXP

         wei3she2me   *pian1pian1*   *peng4zai4*   *za2men*   *liang2ren2*
         why   PIANPIAN   bump-LOC   1PL (INC)   two:person
         shen1shang4.'
         body:on   (H 112)
         [Xi Chun cried]: 'These things, I have never heard of before, why do they have to choose to happen to us two!'

Component (c) indicates the volitional rejection of the event in general: I would want that something like this not to have happened ('would' however is not a universal concept). Note that it is 'I do not want things like this to happen', not 'I DID not want something like this to happen'. The latter indicates a situation that is against one's expectation. There may well be such cases. However, there are other times where there are no expectations involved. The rejection of the event is not so much due to the fact that the event is opposite to what is expected; rather it is due to its being contrary to one's *will* or *wish*. This distinction is captured in example (6), wherein the speaker is not in a position to have expectations.

(6)   "*Ke3ken4*   *wo3*   *pian1* *shen1yu2*   *qing1han2*   *zhi1*   *jia1.*"
         regrettable   1SG   PIAN   be born:LOC   simple:poor   LIG   family (H, 7)
          'Why did I have to be born into a poor family [and so unable to have him as an intimate friend?]'

The sting of *pian1pian1* comes from component (d). It indicates that what happened could have been avoided because there were other alternatives ('something else could have happened'). The availability of other choices is also evident in example (7):

(7)   '*Pian1* *you4* *pai4*   *ta1*   *zuo4* *shen3me,*   *fang4-zhe*   *zhe4xie*
         PIAN again   send   3SG   do   what   put-DUR   this-CL:PL
         xiao3zimen   *na3*   *yi1-ge4*   *pai4bu4de2* *pian1pian1*   *yao4*
         guy:PL   which   one-CL   send:NEG:get PIANPIAN   want
         re3   *ta1*   *qu4.*'
         provoke   3SG   go   (H, 7)
         'But why send him?' protested Madam Yu and Keqin. 'We've all those young fellows who could go. Why pick him?'

'Like this' in component (d) basically means 'in this way'. The examples show a predominant tendency of 'at that time' as a particular way in which events choose to happen. The following example from Chao (1968) also illustrates this point.

(8)   '*Ta1* *pian1pian1er* *tiao1* *zhe4* *shi2hou4er* *hai4qi3* *bing4* *lai2le.*'
         3SG PIANPIAN   pick   this   time   harm:rise disease come:INC
         'He would now of all times start to get sick.'(Chao 1968:781)

But 'like this' also includes 'at this particular place' (example (6)) or 'to a particular person'(example (4)). *Pian1$_{1}$/pian1pian1* may express the speaker's emotional attitude towards certain aspects of the proposition.

For the bad event to have happened the way it did among all choices, there seems to be unseen external forces *deliberately* setting themselves against the speaker's wish. Chao (1968:781) glossed *pian1₁/pian1pian1* as 'one-sidedly, wilfully, would of all things'. This is consistent with the explication proposed here,and also indicates the tension between the inexplicable force behind the event, which determines the way the event happens among all possible alternatives, and against the will of the speaker.

Much perplexity often accompanies *pian1₁/pian1pian1*. One cannot help but ask *why*—why things had to happen the way they do. It seems that in a life-and-death situation, Chinese people assign the answer to the predestined *ming4* ('fate', cf. Lin 1998/[1935]; Ye 2001a, b), as we have already seen in example (4). Example (9) points to the same direction:

(9)   *Ying2chun1   ku1   dao4*: '*wo3   bu2xin4   wo3de ming4 na4me*
        name   cry   say   1SG   NEG:believe   my   MING so

        bu4hao3!   Cong2xiao3   mei2-le   niang2, ru2jin1   pian1   you4
        NEG:good   from:small   NEG:PAST-CSC mother   now   PIAN   again
        shi4   zhe4-ge jie3guo2!'
        be   this-CL result   (H, 80)
        Yingchun cried: 'I do not believe that my fate [ming4] could be so bad: losing mother when I was little,… and now again it has to be such a result!'

It is exactly this 'one-sideness' behind the event that breeds a general bad feeling on the part of the speaker (component (e)), be it pity, dissatisfaction, discontent, complaining, blaming, resentment, or even anger. Note that 'when I think about this' (in contrast to 'because of this') in component (e) refers to a standard situation, where a particular thought leads to the feeling of *pian1₁/pian1pian1*.

The English word *unfortunately* seems to be more factual, detached and less varied in its meaning than that condensed in *pian1₁/pian1pian1* (if *unfortunately* does contain an emotive component at all).[9] It does not imply other choices and alternatives, and lacks the perplexity of why things like this happened. The detached tone explains why *unfortunately* is often used in formal writings.

The closest semantic equivalent in English of *pian1₁/pian1pian1* might be suggested by the underlined part from the following quote:

(10)   No one knew where she came from—that is, she had vouchsafed no information-or how she could afford to build a real house, or <u>why of all places she had chosen to do it here</u>, or… (Malouf 1994:83)

Pian1₁/pian1pian1 could be considered suitable translation (except that the original English sentence conveys more perplexity than bad feelings).

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[9] Scholars do not have a unified view as to whether *unfortunately* carries emotional meaning or not (cf. Hübler 1998:9).

4.2.2 *pian1₂*

Pian1 and *pian1pian1* are not interchangeable in all situations. Where the agent of the event and the speaker are the same person, *i.e.* 'I', and where it refers to a future action, *pian1* cannot be replaced by *pian1pian1*. In this situation only, *pian1* can be used in an independent clause, and between 'I' and verbs or auxiliary verbs. The syntactic structure in which *pian1* can occur is WO$_{1SG}$ + PIAN1/*PIAN1PIAN1 + (BU$_{NEG}$) + VP.

In both the affirmative and the negative structures, *pian1pian1* cannot replace *pian1*. Based on their different syntactic behaviour, polysemy is posited here to distinguish *pian1₂* from *pian1₁.* Let us look at some textual examples:

(11)   *Ta1   ma1   qi4-de   bu4de2liao3   bian4   ku1-zhe   ma4-zhe*
          3SG   mother angry-EXT   terrible   then   cry-DUR   swear-DUR
          shuo1: '*ni3   shi4   wo3de nü3er, wo3   pian1 bu4   gei3   ni2   gan3*
          say   2SG   be   my   daughter 1SG PIAN NEG give   you   dare
          zen3meyang4?'
          how   (H, 92)
          Her mother was extremely angry. Crying and swearing, she said, 'You are my daughter. I *will not* have you married to him. What do you dare to do!'

(12)   '*Pian1 shuo1 si3,   wo3   zhe4   hui3zi   jiu4   si3.*'
           PIAN say   die   1SG   this   moment   part   die (H, 20)
          ['It is not lucky to say death words during the New Year time.'] 'I'll talk about death if I like. Death! Death! I am going to die this minute.'

(13)   '*Wo   pian1 chi1,   kan4   ta1   zen3meyang4.*'
            1SG   PIAN eat   see   3SG   how
          ['If I drink one little bowl full of his milk—cow's milk—he's going to be angry with me?] Well, I will drink it, so there! See what he dares to do.'

Interestingly, if *pian1₁* (4.2.1) indicates that the way that the event happens goes against the speaker's will, examples (11)-(13) present an opposite picture. It is the speaker who actively sets himself or herself against the will of 'other minds' by wanting to do the opposite of what the other person wants or does not want to do. In most cases, the addressee seems to be the person that the speaker is opposed to, example (13) shows quite clearly that it does not have to be 'you' that 'I' am against; it can be a third party. The explication of the meaning of *pian1₂* is as follows:

> *Pian1₂*
> (a) I know: someone does not want something (Y) to happen
> (b) I feel something bad because I want Y to happen
> (c) I know that Y cannot happen if I do not do thing Z
> (d) I can not do Z
> (e) I will do Z

Component (a) shows the speaker's awareness of the other person's intention. It cannot be replaced by 'I know: someone wants me to do something', because the latter would exclude the situation in which someone's volition is not directed at 'me', but directed at the happening of a particular event (in which 'I' can also be instrumental in the realisation of

the event'). Component (b) shows that the ill feeling on the part of the speaker stems from his or her own 'wants' which are the opposite of the other person's.

Instead of helping to realise the other person's wish, in the case of *pian1₂,* the speaker chooses to be a stumbling block, deliberately setting himself or herself against the other person by declaring their will to do the opposite of what the other person does not want to. Components (d)-(e) convey a sense of 'deliberate opposition' (H Wang 1996:236), 'challenge' (L Wang 1985:232), and 'a toujours une nuance d'antagonisme, parfois agressif' (Alleton 1984:29). By not complying with one's wish and deliberately being the obstacle to someone's wish, one essentially becomes the 'enemy'. The provocative tone can be observed in (11) and (13). Also a strong sense of *yu3qi4* ('tone/modality') expressed by *pian1₂* can be read throughout the explication.

It is all the more interesting to note that although there is an element of opposition from the speaker, the result of the speaker's action is positively 'do', as evidenced by examples (12) and (13). This is why the explication adopts the valency option as it does. It might be said that in *pian1₂*, there is an unmarked sense of 'doing the opposite to what one does not want to happen'. The sense of 'not doing what one wants to happen' is marked by the negation marker *bu4*.

The availability of other choices ('I can not do Z') seems to link *pian1₁* and *pian1₂*. They are like two sides of the same coin. In *pian1₁* the sense of 'one-sidedness' resides in some inexplicable force unknown to the speaker. In *pian1₂* the 'one-sidedness' comes from'I', who deliberately chooses to block others' will.

4. Summary

In this paper, I have introduced a characteristic feature of the Chinese language-- *qing3gan3fu4ci2* ('emotional adverbs') by examining both their grammatical features and their usage. Though their meanings are reputedly difficult to pin down, the detailed semantic analysis of a selected set, *you4* and *pian1*,has nonetheless shown that their meanings could be fully explicated. The analysis of *you4* reveals that it is not simply a 'denial', as commonly understood, but a denial to an unstated message, which involves an inference. *Pian1₁* suggests certain perplexity towards an event that could have been avoided because of the availability of other choices, but nonetheless happened as if deliberately against the speaker; while in *pian1₂*, the speaker goes against the other's wish. The explications framed in NSM can not only make it easy for learners to grasp their full meanings, but also reveal the interconnections between the meanings of words.

The paper has also attested that taking into consideration of grammatical constructions is indispensable in establishing polysemy and obtaining a full and comprehensive understanding of all sides of the meanings of words under discussion.

Abbreviations

(Notation is based on Chappell 2002:317 with modification)
EXT　　marker of a postverbal extent complement
EXP　　experiential
CL　　classifier
DUR　　durative aspect marker

INC   inceptive or change of state marker
INTJ   interjection
LIG   marker of ligature in dependency relations—*de*
LOC   locative
NEG   negative marker
NOM   nominalising use of the particle *de*
PART   particle (including adverbs)
PFV   perfective aspect marker
PL   plural
PL:INClusive form of 1st person plural
RDP   reduplication
SG   singular

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