CHAPTER SEVEN

STRUCTURE OF NOUN PHRASES

Six types of modifying element may appear in a Prinmi noun phrase. According to their positions relative to the head noun, the structure of noun phrase can be formulated as follows:

7.1   NP = Modificator + Demonstrative + Noun + Head Noun + Adjective + Numeral expression + Postposition/Clitic

As shown in (7.1), the first three kinds precede the head noun which they qualify, while the other three follow it. Their word order in the noun phrase is such that single words are situated closer to the head and other elements, clitics or larger constituents, distributed at the two edges. Given the quasi-clitic status of Prinmi postpositions (§4.3.9), they are treated as clitics in a noun phrase. Complexity of noun phrase is mainly realized with the modificator, whose structure ranges from a single word to a relative clause. This chapter starts with a detailed study of the modificator, followed by a description of nominal clitics and discussion of the overall structure of noun phrase.

7.1. The modificator

The ‘modificator’ refers to a special type of modifier, typically signified by the modificatory clitic ɑ or one of its variants in such complex forms as gja, ɑa, si=a and so forth. This term should be distinguished from other more general modifiers such as lexical or compound attributes. Through the modificatory clitic, the modificator is related to the head of a noun phrase as follows:

7.2   Modificator + Modificatory clitic + Head Noun

The clitic marking is often omissible. According to the environment of occurrence, the meaning of a modificator can usually be pinpointed to one of the following: (a) a genitive expression, (b) a restrictive expression/relative clause, (c) a relational expression, and (d) a temporal expression. These are studied after examining the modificatory clitic.
7.1.1. The modificatory clitic

The modificatory clitic α tends to occur in a complex form such as ɡja (fused with the topic clitic ɡe), ɹɑ (with the plural clitic ɹə, or with the imperfective ɹju), si=ɑ [ʃja] (with the perfective si) and ʃjɑ (with the mirative clitic ʃɨ). Phonologically, the modificatory clitic always triggers some change on the vowel of the preceding morpheme (as discussed in §2.5.1.2). Consequently, all these complex forms are monosyllabic.

In such complex forms the meaning of the topic and the imperfective clitics has been weakened to the extent of virtual emptiness; they mainly serve to provide a separate dummy-like syllable for the modificatory clitic to cling to. Consider the following instances:

7.3 a  lq̱eH m3lɑL ɡɑL-tʰɡ̱eL=siL=ɡjaL  lq̱eF
    ash:soup out-drink;3=PFV=M  ash
    ‘the ash in the ash soup that (she) drank’

    b  doR  tʰ3l- ɑ̃pʰɑL pʰɑH  bjɛL=ʃoH=ɑdH  niL  tʰ3l-pɑL
    wing TLC-spread fly=OPT=IPFV;M like TLC-do
    ‘(Magpie) opened his wings and was just about to fly, …’

The modificatory clitic could have fused with the perfective si in (7.3a). In contrast, no alternative to ɑa is available in (7.3b), as the optative clitic does not occur in such complex form as *ʃa.

In the case of a single-noun modificator, the complex form ɡja is often employed to mark the modificatory relation, e.g.:

7.4  pɔjLtɔjH=ɡjaH  kʰɔH
    brother:big=M  foot
    ‘Big Brother’s feet’

If a modificator ends with a noun marked with the plural clitic ɻə, the modificatory clitic is simply fused with it, and ɡja cannot be used. For instance:

7.5  tʃjH=ɻaH  wuL  but * tʃjH=ɻəH=ɡjaL  wuL
    house=PL;M inside  house=PL=M inside
    ‘in the houses’

When a modificator ends with a postposition, ɑ is attached directly to the postposition, causing a glidization of its vowel to yield a monosyllable. For example: