CHAPTER EIGHT

GRAMMATICAL CATEGORIES OF VERBS

Grammatical categories in Prinmi are largely expressed by clitics and, to a lesser extent, copular auxiliary constructions. This chapter studies verbal clitics in detail.

According to their functions, verbal clitics are classified into four groups: (1) the aspect group, which encompasses aspectual and modal clitics, (2) the sentence-type group, which comprises negative and interrogative clitics, (3) the evidential group, and (4) the attitudinal group. The latter two provide additional information beyond the proposition of sentences, largely related to the speaker’s attitude.

Verbal clitics impart a new meaning such as marking a question or a surprise to a clause. Their use, while largely motivated by communicative need rather than syntactic consideration, is essential to effective communication in Prinmi.

8.1. Aspect and Modality

Tense is not a grammatical category in Prinmi. Habitual actions and past events are often (but not always) encoded through imperfective and perfective aspects, respectively; future actions are conveyed through modality. After describing aspectual and modal categories in Prinmi, this subsection will discuss the issue of temporal implication arising from aspectual and modal marking.

8.1.1. Aspect

Aspect is expressed primarily by enclitics in Prinmi. There are four aspect categories: experiential, perfective, imperfective and durative. The perfective and the imperfective, each with several variants, are sensitive to subtle contrast in terms of volitionality and controllability. On the surface they are reminiscent of person agreement. Based on available data, however, it is evinced that the seeming pattern of person agreement is an epiphenomenon. Directional prefixes (discussed in §5.2.1) show a certain amount of correlation with perfectivity in Prinmi. This correlation is addressed in §8.1.1.5.
8.1.1.1. *Experiential tʉ*

The experiential *tʉ* is one of two clitics with a transparent etymology (the other being the quotative, see §8.3.1).¹ It is grammaticalized from the verb meaning ‘to pass through’, which is still in use, e.g. (8.1). Used as a concrete verb, *tʉ* ‘to pass through; to thread’ is often affixed with a directional prefix.

8.1 bo¹ tʰqʰeq¹ beʰ=boʰ poʰ ti¹ tʰʒu¹ tʃʰtsʰɨ=qoʰ
dsc one:sid at=frm loop one tlc-make finger=ins
go¹-tuʰ
out-thread
‘Then at one side, make a loop and pass the finger through (it).’

While the experiential clitic can combine with the interrogative clitic or the general negator (see Table 8-4), it lacks the morphological ability for prefixation. Furthermore, it must co-occur with a verb, suggesting its dependent status as a clitic.

The experiential in Prinmi is not used for marking completion of an act/event. It simply signifies that the Agent has gained particular experience through (or not engaging) in an event. Its use is restricted to ACTION verbs. For instance:

8.2 a ʰhʰ ʑʰ=boʰ njᵃʰ=qjᵃʰ dzʰ=maʰ=tuʰ

INT 1SG=FRM 2SG;M=E eat=N=EXP
‘Huh, I haven’t eaten yours.’

b ʰpʰ ʑjᵃʰ pu¹=ⁿdʰ ťjᵃʰ toʰ ťʃʰjɔʰ

grandpa last.year=dsc now on appear
ɕʰʦʰ¹ kʰpʰ ťi¹ ťʰjɛʰ=maʰ=tuʰ

alcohol bottle:one drink=N=EXP
‘Grandpa hasn’t drunk any alcohol since last year.’

c ʒʰ ʃʰkʰə ʃʰtʃʰ wuʰ kʃʰ njᵃʰ dʒʰ dʒʰ ʃʰ=tuʰ

1SG before school in Yi: script learn=exp
‘In the past, I had the experience of learning the Yi script in school.’

¹ In Lánping Prinmi the experiential marker is grammaticalized from the verb *maʰˌstʰ* ‘to know’ (cf. Fu 1998). The meaning ‘to know’ as the source for developing experiential is also found in Southern Min, although most Chinese topolects, such as Mandarin and Cantonese, have grammaticalized the experiential marker from a verb meaning ‘to pass’.