The Prinmi copula and existentials are grammatically quite similar to auxiliary verbs. Like auxiliary verbs, they tend not to take directional prefixes, and do not host verbal clitics other than the interrogative and the negative ones. The copula and existentials arguably function as auxiliary verbs in such periphrastic constructions as the obligatory construction and the potentiive construction. Thus they are addressed together with auxiliary verbs in this chapter.

All Prinmi auxiliary verbs take a complement clause that does not receive any morphosyntactic marking. Auxiliary verbs differ from verbs of cognition, which can also take a morphosyntactically unmarked complement clause (see §11.3.2), in that the complement clause of auxiliary verbs is compulsory; it cannot be replaced or substituted by a noun phrase. Compare the complement (the part in boldface in examples) of the verb of cognition in (9.1) with that of the causative verb in (9.2):

9.1  

9.1a təʰbo^r^ təʰ mɨʰ=geʰ təʰ=əoʰ tʰ3^l^-tf^fʰ kʰeʰ=boʰ 
then this person=TOP this=PL TLC-see;3 time=FRM
‘Then when this guy saw all these, …’

9.1b  
əʰdʒeʰ niʰtfʰj̥oʰ tiʰ n3ʰ-l-dzəʰ 
there boy one down-sit TLC-see;3=PFV
‘(she) saw a young fellow sit there.’

9.2  
pə³^j^l^ tʃə⁴=ge³=bo³ sj̥ə³bə³H=gə³H b^v^R po³ n3ʰ-l-dzi³ ke³ 
brother big=TOP=FRM tree=M bottom down-sit let
‘As for big brother, let (him) sit at the bottom of the tree.’

While the verb of cognition may take a nominal argument, as seen in (9.1a), or a complement clause, as in (9.1b), the auxiliary verb can only take a complement clause, shown in (9.2). (Variation on dzəʰ and dzᵽ ‘to sit’ in the examples is due to dialectal difference, and is irrelevant to the syntactic structure.) Based on this characteristic, distinguishing auxiliary verbs from verbs of cognition is quite straightforward.
The complex syntactic structure built with the complement clause of auxiliary verbs will be addressed in §11.3. This chapter focuses on meanings and functions of auxiliary verbs, covering a variety of auxiliary verbs in Prinmi: deontic modals (§9.2), epistemic modals (§9.3), the verbs-to-do (§9.4), aspectual auxiliaries (§9.5), and some minor types of auxiliary verb (§9.6). The causative auxiliary will be discussed under causative construction in §11.2.1. The copula and existentials are discussed first in what follows.

9.1. The copula and existentials

Prinmi has only one copula, and a set of etymologically unrelated existentials. The existentials do not convey possession, which is expressed by the verb bõ’H ‘to have’. The possessive verb behaves like other bivalent verbs; it is not included for detailed description here (its inflections can be found in Table 5-5). This subsection first investigates the copula and two related periphrastic constructions. The set of existentials and the potentive construction are then examined.

9.1.1. The copula dziF

The copula dziF ‘to be’ has a total of four variants, which agree in person and number with the argument:

Table 9-1: The paradigm of the copula

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>First person</th>
<th>Second person</th>
<th>Third person</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Singular</td>
<td>1SG djẽF</td>
<td>2SG dawF</td>
<td>3/root dziF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plural</td>
<td>1/2PL diF</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The copula does not take any directional prefix. Only the interrogative a and the general negator ma can be attached to it.

The copula is used mainly in ascriptive sentences and, to a lesser extent, in equational sentences to link a nominal predicate to the Theme, e.g.: