CHAPTER FOUR

PHRASE LEVEL ANALYSIS

4.1 Verb phrase

The verb phrase in Rabha has a very straightforward structure and may consist of just the verb root (which may be simple, compound or derived) or may have one or more of the inflectional affixes. Hence the analysis of the verb phrase amounts to the analysis of the verb formation. Still more precisely, it amounts to the analysis of the various inflectional affixes. The inflectional affixes typically form the outer layer of the verb formation, the inner layer being the derivational affixes discussed in 3.2.2.1. Before discussing the morphological behaviour of verbs, some groups of verbs with special functions need to be singled out.

4.1.1 Modal verbs

The following roots have been termed ‘modal verbs’:

jaŋ ‘to be able, can’
lagi ‘to need, must’
múŋ ‘to feel a desire to’
goŋ ‘to be willing’
tiri ‘to dare or feel good about’

From the point of view of affixal morphology they behave in a regular fashion like the other verb roots except that they do not have imperative forms (which is true also of other verb roots like muk ‘to see’). The verb tiri ‘to dare, to feel good about’ represents a specific exception in that it takes only the pres -a and neg -ca morphemes. These features alone can hardly be held as distinguishing the two verbs in any specific manner.

What sets the modal verbs apart is the meaning that they engender syntactically rather than their behaviour morphologically. They generate both epistemic modal meanings involving a notion of possibility, probability and necessity (Palmer 1986: 18–19, 51) as well as
deontic modal meaning involving notions of permissions, obligation and requirement, all of which contain an element of will (Palmer 1986: 19, 96). This distinction has not been systematically pointed out in all instances. Moreover, when used modally they have the following common syntactic pattern:

\[
V_1\text{-INF} \quad V_{\text{finite}}
\]

where \( V_{\text{finite}} \) is a modal verb and \( V_1 \) a lexical verb.

\[
dimdaki-an \quad \text{rēŋ-a} \quad \text{jaŋ-o}
\]
\[
\text{all-EMPH} \quad \text{go-INF} \quad \text{able-FUT}
\]

‘all can go’ (epistemic modality of possibility)

‘all may go’ (deontic modality of permission)

\[
dimdaki-an \quad \text{rēŋ-a} \quad \text{lagi-no}
\]
\[
\text{all-EMPH} \quad \text{go-INF} \quad \text{need-FUT}
\]

‘all must go’ (deontic modality of imperative)

‘all need to go’ (epistemic modality of necessity)

\[
dimdaki-an \quad \text{rēŋ-a} \quad \text{mūŋ-o}
\]
\[
\text{all-EMPH} \quad \text{go-INF} \quad \text{desire-FUT}
\]

‘all will wish to go’

\[
sak-sa-ba \quad \text{kami rā-na} \quad \text{goŋ-ca}
\]
\[
\text{cl-one-also} \quad \text{work-INF} \quad \text{willing-NEG}
\]

‘no one is willing to work’

\[
amen \quad \text{u-o} \quad \text{do-bōŋ-a} \quad \text{tiri-ca}
\]
\[
\text{I(DEF)} \quad \text{he-ACC} \quad \text{CAUS-meet-INF} \quad \text{dare-NEG}
\]

‘I don’t feel good (dare) to meet him’

Like the other lexical verbs these five verbs can occupy the \( V_1 \) slot of the pattern:

\[
V_1\text{-INF-ba} \quad \text{to-a}
\]

generating modal meaning of possibility and probability (see 4.2.2-liii), and in the \( V_1 \) slot of the related pattern in the negative:

\[
V_1\text{-INF} \quad \text{toŋ-ca}
\]

generating the meaning of negation of the future.