CHAPTER FIVE

VERBAL MORPHOLOGY

Lepcha has no elaborate conjugational morphology. There is no verbal agreement morphology and actants are not morphologically indexed in the verb. Tense, mood, aspect and other meanings of the verb are expressed by the use of postpositions and auxiliary verbs. Whilst the verbal system of Lepcha may lack the formal complexity of some Himalayan languages, the interest of Lepcha verbal morphology lies in the semantics of the grammatical categories expressed by the Lepcha repertoire of endings and auxiliaries.

5.1 Verb stems

All Lepcha verbs have two stem forms, viz. a regular and an inflected stem. The majority of Lepcha verbs end in a consonant, and for these verbs the regular and the inflected stem are one and the same. In other words, all of the verbs with a closed stem and a minority of the verbs with an open stem are invariable. The majority of the verbs which regularly show an open or vowel-final stem, however, additionally exhibit an inflected stem with a final consonant before auxiliary verbs.

The final consonant preserved in the inflected stem of those verbs which show stem alternation may reflect a lost segment or, alternatively, the remnant of some now defunct morphological or morphophonological process. The consonants which occur as finals in such inflected stems are /t/, /n/ and /m/. If the open stem ends in /i/ or /o/, these vowels in the inflected stem systematically change to /í/ and /ó/ respectively. In the glossary, the longer, inflected stem of verbs that show stem alternation is specified because the inflected stem cannot be predicted on the basis of the short stem of the verb.

The question arises as to how the finals /t/, /n/ and /m/ occurring uniquely in inflected stems, such as inflected ฏ ฏ lin vs. regular ฏ li ‘say’, ฎ zóm vs. ฎ zo ‘eat’ and ฎ dit vs. ฎ di ‘come’, differ histori-
cally from the finals /t/, /n/ and /m/ of invariable closed verb stems, e.g.  помощи  ‘let, allow’,  помощь  ‘walk’,  помощь  ‘do’. Light is shed on this question by the indirect relationship between a final consonant uniquely occurring in an inflected stem and the final consonant occurring in a corresponding deverbative nominal. For example, the final /n/ in the inflected stem  помощи  of the verb  помощи  ‘say’ corresponds to a final /n/ in the old deverbative form  помощи  ‘tongue’, whereas the final /n/ in the inflected stem  помощи  of the verb  помощи  ‘carry’ corresponds to an /m/ in the nominal derivative  помощи  ‘heavy’. Some other examples of regular closed stems of verbs ending in /m/, /n/ or /t/ are  помощи  ‘hold, retain’,  помощи  ‘meet’,  помощи  ‘attach’,  помощи  ‘remain’,  помощи  ‘tell, narrate’,  помощи  ‘become’,  помощи  ‘cut, sever’,  помощи  ‘do’ and  помощи  ‘snatch’.

Auxiliary verbs are a set of verbs which can be distinguished on the basis of both semantic and morphological criteria. Lepcha auxiliary verbs not only exhibit meanings which in other languages are often expressed by modal verbs, e.g.  помощи  ‘be able, can’, the set of auxiliary verbs can also be defined morphologically in that they combine with the inflected stems of verbs and that they may be negated. Auxiliary verbs differ from particles, which combine with the regular stem or citation form of the verb and may not be negated. Example sentences (140) and (141) are related in that they form part of a narrative and illustrate the inflected and regular stem of the verb  помогаю  ‘come out, come up, rise’. In this narrative, the ants are personified, note the use of the human plural suffix  помощи sang. Examples (143) and (144) are both responses to the statement made in (142), and these three sentences offer examples of the inflected and regular stem of the verb  помогаю  ‘know’.

140  помощи  помощи  помогаю  помогаю  помогаю

тукфыл–сэнг  помощь–вам

ант–ПЛ.М  помощь–ПРГ

‘Ants are coming out of it.’

141  помощи  помощи  помогаю  помогаю  помогаю

помогаю–кён

помогаю–кён

‘Let them come out.’