Tshangla morphemes can be usefully categorised as either lexical or grammatical. Lexical morphemes will be defined here as those which are not phonologically bound to any other morpheme, may take stress, and may be uttered in isolation (for example as a one word reply to an information question). The unbound lexemes often occupy the role of the head of a phrase, in which case they determine the syntactic role of the phrase.

Grammatical morphemes, by contrast, will be defined as phonologically bound to an adjacent item, unable to take stress or be uttered in isolation, and expressing primarily a relational or grammatical meaning.

By means of various morphological and syntactic criteria, four major lexical classes can be distinguished: the larger open classes of nouns and verbs, as well as the smaller closed lexical classes of adjectives and adverbs. In addition to these four classes and fewer yet in number, are the postpositions, a class which consists entirely of grammaticalised items, most apparently developed from nouns, but a few from verbs. Finally, the smallest class of items which can still be considered lexical morphemes are the pronouns.

This chapter will describe only the lexical classes. Grammatical morphemes will be discussed together with the particular grammatical construction in which they have a part.

Of all the lexical classes, only verbs show affixation (as distinct from cliticisation). Thus, in the case of verbs, both morphological as well as syntactic criteria can be used to distinguish the class from all others. The other classes may, however, be distinguished by syntactic criteria, i.e. by the type of phrase in which they occur, and the position in turn of that phrase in the structure of the clause. Nouns do not undergo affixation, but included in their syntactic description are a number of clitic particles, so called because while phonologically bound to an adjacent item, their position is defined not in relation to that adjacent word, but to the phrase as a whole.

### 3.1 Nouns

Tshangla nouns are those lexical items which, occurring alone and uninflected (i.e. in their bare root form without any affixation), may make reference to an entity or participant in discourse, and occur as a syntactic
argument of a verb (Schachter 1985: 7). The syntactic argument is a typically referential element which bears a grammatical relation (such as subject or object) to the verb (Payne 1997: 170). Nouns are distinguished from verbs by the fact that a verb must first be nominalised by means of the addition of one of the ‘participial’ suffixes -wa, -la, -lu, or -le (cf. section 3.2.1.2) in order to make reference and occur as a syntactic argument. Nouns are distinct from other noun phrase constituents (cf. Chapter 5) in that only nouns may occur as head of the noun phrase. A head is the element which determines the syntactic function of the entire phrase (Payne 1997: 31) and governs, i.e. requires or licenses, the possibility of occurrence of the other elements in the phrase (Nichols 1986: 57). These other elements (dependent, or non-head) may occur in a noun phrase in the absence of a nominal head only in a discourse context where the identity of the referent has already been established in the prior context (cf. section 5.1), or is established by being shared with a conjoined noun phrase. Adjectives (to be described in section 3.3), as well as other smaller closed classes of items such as demonstratives and quantifiers, are examples of elements of the noun phrase which may instantiate the noun phrase in the absence of a noun when the referent of the noun phrase has been established previously. For examples of this, cf. section 5.1.

Nouns in Tshangla do not undergo affixation. The noun phrase in which they occur, however, may take one of the post-nominal clitic particles such as the pluraliser -ba, and case markers (cf. section 5.3 below).

3.2 Verbs

3.2.1 Verb morphology

Syntactically, in Tshangla, every finite clause must have a predicate, which must contain a verb or a copula. Predicate nominal or adjectival clauses, which do not contain a verbal predicate, must contain a copula ca or gila.

Morphologically, Tshangla verbs are distinguished by a set of affixes only applicable to verbs. These will be the topic of the remainder of this section. Verb affixes may be divided into three basic types, 1) prefixes, of which there is only one, namely the negative prefix ma-, 2) participial suffixes, of which there are four, and 3) all other verbal suffixes, which includes various particles and grammaticalised morphemes, some used in non-final contexts, and some in non-declarative sentence moods.