CHAPTER THREE

SOURCE OF INFORMATION AND UNEXPECTED INFORMATION IN !XUN—EVIDENTIAL, MIRATIVE AND COUNTEREXPECTATION MARKERS

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1 INTRODUCTION

The following is based on the W2 dialect of !Xun (in short W2), formerly called Northern Khoisan, now called either !Xun (Heine and König forthc.) or Ju (as e.g. by Güldemann and Vossen 2000). !Xun, as a cover term for the dialect cluster, consists of three major dialect groups, namely the Northwestern dialects, among them the W2 dialect, the Central dialects, and the Southeastern dialects, among them Ju’Hoan (see Dickens 2005). The W2 dialect is spoken in northern Namibia near the Angolan border. With roughly ten to fifteen thousand speakers, !Xun is among the traditional forager languages of the Khoisan area with the largest speaker community (see König 2008).

!Xun has a basic AVO-constituent order (see 1.a), with an isolating structure. In all !Xun dialects, serial verb constructions (SVC) are of importance. W2 has an asymmetrical SVC-type which comes close to verb compounding. Asymmetrical SVCs can be seen as a salient feature of the area, it occurs also in the !Ui-Taa languages (formerly called Southern Khoisan). There is no cross-referencing on the verb, core participants such as subject and object can be omitted. Grammatical information is mostly expressed by clitics or particles. Unlike most other !Xun dialects, W2 has a rich system of tense, aspect, and modality, expressed by clitics preceding the verb stem. Most of them are omissible (see König and Heine 2001, and König 2008). A transitive clause in W2 shows the structure given in (1.a):

The subject, A or S, precedes the verb, while the object follows. As (1.a) illustrates, no encoding of any temporal or modal information is necessary, no cross-referencing on the verb is possible. !Xun is a highly context dependent language, which means that although the language provides a considerable amount of grammaticalized markers, usually expressed by clitics or particles, hardly any of them is obligatory. It also means that
the meaning of an utterance depends to a certain amount on information
given in the linguistic and extra linguistic context.

I will briefly introduce a few markers which are of importance in the
coding of the information structure as discussed in the present paper.
Among them are the topic marker *má*, the question marker *kwá*, and the
negation markers *lōā* or *nllän*.

In the W2 dialect, the topic marker *má* is obligatory in certain clause
types. Among them are declarative clauses, such as (1.a). The topic marker
*má* has been grammaticalized to a kind of subject case marker. It is
still used as a productive topic marker, in that a topicalized participant
appears clause initially with *má* being placed at the end of the topicalized
participant (see 1.d). In certain areas which are more connected to the
focal domain, the topic marker does not appear, among them are impera-
tives (see 1.e), other expressions of deontic modality, questions (see 1.b),
and subordinate clauses preceding the main clause. The topic marker is
expanding its use in that these restrictions are being given up by some
speakers.¹

Sentence questions are formed by the question marker *kwá* (often
reduced to *dı*), which appears in the second position of a clause (see 1.b).
Tense and aspect information, if expressed, appears before the verb in the
order ADVERB—NEGATION—ASPECT—TENSE—VERB (see 1.c).

(1.a) Càālò má cĩ̠́ gllú
    Calo TOP drink water
    Calo is drinking water

(1.b) Càālò á ā cĩ̠́ gllú
    Calo Q PROG drink water
    Is Calo drinking water?

(1.c) Càālò má xāŋ̏ lōā a cĩ̠́ gllú
    Calo TOP then NEG PROG drink water
    Calo is then not drinking water

(1.d) gllú má Càālò cĩ̠́
    water TOP Calo drink
    as for the water, Calo drinks it

(1.e) cĩ̠́
    drink
    drink!

¹ The topic marker *má* is a salient feature of the Northwestern !Xun dialects, particu-
larly W1 and W2, the two western dialects. Most of the remaining dialects do not have any
grammaticalized topic marker.