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*The Category of Engagement in Chhitkul-Rākchham (West-Himalayish): The Post-Verbal Clitic =niη*

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### ABSTRACT

Chhitkul-Rākchham features a postverbal marker, =*niη*, denoting “engagement”, a recently proposed category that encodes the relative accessibility of a state of affairs to both speaker and addressee. Statistically rare (60 instantiations in an 8-hour corpus consisting of monologues, conversations and stimuli tasks) and with its occurrence entirely pragmatically motivated, =*niη* is constrained to contexts where the speaker confidently assumes that the interlocutor shares knowledge of the situation expressed by the clause to which it is attached. As such, it differs from two additional members of the same category, the tags *man=ta* and *ne=te*, which convey a lesser degree of assertiveness in comparison. Marking of engagement is found to be incompatible with unexpectedness and common knowledge. The clitic =*niη* may otherwise index an audience, whether physically present or temporally displaced (e.g., a future viewer of a video recording). Accordingly, the addressee need not be overtly specified nor synchronously co-present in the speech event. These observations underscore the necessity of reconceptualizing engagement as a category that encodes intersubjectivity beyond the confines of real-time dialogic interaction.

### KEYWORDS

knowledge management, evidentiality, epistemic modality, common knowledge, engagement, intersubjectivity, Tibeto-Burman, Chhitkul-Rākchham

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# *The Category of Engagement in Chhitkul-Rākchham (West- Himalayish): The Post-Verbal Clitic =niŋ*

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## 1 Introduction

Intersubjectivity in language, the explicit (but not obligatory) coding of coordination of cognitive systems – joint attention – between speakers and hearers (Verhaegen 2005; Traugott 2010), is more often than not encoded by means of prosody, gesture, restatement, or the use of lexical expressions such as ‘actually’, ‘right?’ and ‘you know’. Yet, it may also be encoded in the grammar. This is how Evans et al. (2018) have recently proposed a new category, “engagement”, the main function of which is to signal knowledge discrepancy (or convergence) between the interlocutors. Seen from this perspective, an engagement marker, be it an inflectional category, a clitic, or a particle, indicates whether the knowledge content is restricted to the speaker, to the addressee, shared by both, or by none, thus expanding on Labov and Fanshel’s (1977) basic typology of A- and B-events where the former type are exclusively known to the speaker and the latter exclusively known to the addressee.

Engagement, found to “express the speaker’s assumptions about the degree to which their attention or knowledge is shared (or not shared) by the addressee” (Evans et al. 2018: 110; see also Landaburu 2007, from whom the term is originally borrowed), is rarely reported in Tibeto-Burman (TB)<sup>1</sup>. So much so that Hyslop (2014: 213) concludes her paper on Kurtöp (Bodish) in the following manner: “I hesitate to introduce a new name for the category [under another name, speaker expectation of interlocutor knowledge] until we have more examples from more languages”. However, there is evidence for this category in several parts of the Kurtöp grammar, in the perfective, where the contrast is between *-shang* (the hearer is unexpected to share knowledge) and *-pala* (the hearer is expected to do so), in tags, where the contrast is between *=mi* and *=wu* respectively, and in interrogatives – the particle *shu*, only used if there is no expectation of interlocutor knowledge.

Broadening the perspective, South American languages offer a fertile ground to the investigation of inter-subjective markers in postverbal position. Kakataibo (Zariquiey 2015) encodes what is ‘proximal’ to the addressee by means of *-in*, “(i) events that are potentially perceivable by the

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<sup>1</sup> See the non-shared information suffix *-go* in Eastern Geshiza (Honkasalo 2019: 592-595) for an example.

addressee; (ii) events that are assumed by the speaker to be known by the addressee; (iii) events that have already been introduced in discourse; or/and (iv) events that are assumed by the speaker to involve the addressee on an emotional level and, therefore, be relevant from his or her perspective” (2015: 145). Alternatively, *-a* indicates that the content is either not accessible to the addressee or that “the speaker does not have any assumptions about addressee’s perspective (or does not want to be precise about it)” (2015: 152). In the Bolivian isolate Yurakaré, Gipper (2011: 96) describes *=ya* as “an intersubjective component indicating an assumption of the speaker that the addressee should take the same epistemic stance, “the moment-by-moment expression of social relationships toward the proposition” (Heritage 2012: 6). Hintz and Hintz (2017) discuss mutual and individual knowledge and conjecture in South Conchuchos and Huamalies Quechua. Pastaza Quichua encodes “the variable voices of ‘the other’” (Nuckolls 2008: 77), not just the addressee, by means of *-shi*. Landaburu’s (2007) seminal work on the Columbian language Andoke lifts the veil on a four-value knowledge system: speaker-only (*kẽ-*), addressee-only (*k-/d-*), shared (*b-*), and known to neither (*bã-*).

The tracking of information in the Common Ground, defined as “the presumed background information shared by participants in a conversation” (Stalnaker 2002: 701), is by no means restricted to South American languages. The Kiwarian language Urama (New Guinea), has a clause-final particle, *ka*, that marks “speaker-knowledge and what the speaker assumes the addressee to know” (Brown et al. 2016: 432). Constructions exhibiting this type of markers are referred to as ‘multiple-perspective’, “encoding potentially distinct values, on a single semantic dimension, that reflect two or more distinct perspectives or points of reference in the utterance” (Evans 2005: §3.1), where the hearer may be left unspecified.

By providing an account of the category of engagement in Chhitkul-Rākchham (West-Himalayish), this paper contributes to the growing documentation of the phenomenon within the Tibeto-Burman language family and beyond. Additionally, it situates engagement within the broader domain of ‘knowledge management’<sup>2</sup> (as discussed in Martinez 2021, 2023), also referred to as ‘epistemicity’, which pertains to the various dimensions of knowledge in conversation (Stivers and al. 2011: 9). Finally, the Chhitkul-Rākchham case discussed here leads to a refinement of Evans et al.’s (2018) definition of engagement.

The pragmatic dimension found in the Chhitkul-Rākchham *=nij* discussed in this paper highlights the necessity of drawing on extensive corpora covering different types of discourse genres and the need to collect “rich metadata sets” (Nathan and Austin 2004). The only way to ascertain with whom knowledge is shared and to disentangle socio-cognitive factors from perceptual ones in the addressee’s access to knowledge is to pay attention to the immediate context of the speech event – see §3 for a discussion.

This paper is structured as follows. §2 provides background information on the language and the community. §3 introduces some methodological considerations. §4 outlines the knowledge management system found in Chhitkul-Rākchham. §5 provides an account of its occurrence in postverbal position. §6 looks at *=nij* from a diachronic perspective. §7 offers a brief comparative

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<sup>2</sup> In this paper, the term knowledge management is equivalent to that of epistemicity, “how knowledge is encoded in language and grammar” (Grzech et al. 2020), cutting across several conceptual-semantic domains: source of information (evidentiality), judgements upon the reliability of the information (epistemic modality), attitude towards the information. As many languages around the world provide evidence for, a clear-cut distinction between these domains is not always tenable.

perspective. §8 discusses how engagement in Chhitkul-Rākchham can help us refine Evans et al.'s (2018) definition of engagement. Finally, §9 provides some concluding remarks.

## **2 Chhitkul-Rākchham: background information and sociolinguistic context**

Chhitkul-Rākchham (ISO code cik) is a Tibeto-Burman language spoken in two remote villages, Chhitkul (population 700, altitude 3,450 m) and Rākchham (population 750, altitude 2,900 m), situated in the Kinnaur District of Himachal Pradesh, Northern India. It serves as the language of the high caste in both villages. Members of the lower caste speak an Indo-Aryan variety (Western Pahari), known as amro boli (“our language”).

Chhitkul-Rākchham has often been described as a dialect of Kinnauri, the neighbouring language and local lingua franca, but Bailey's (1909: 662) observation on mutual unintelligibility and the available descriptive data (Sharmā 1992; Martinez 2021) indicate that these two are distinct languages. Chhitkul-Rākchham belongs to the West-Himalayish subgroup, which consists of 15 languages (Widmer 2018: 3, 2021: 265), all of them spoken in Northern India. These languages are divided into a Western branch, consisting of the Kinnaur subgroup (Kanashi, Lower Kinnauri, Standard Kinnauri, Chhitkul-Rākchham, Jangrami, and Shumcho) and the Lahaul subgroup (Tinan and Manchad), and an Eastern branch, consisting of the Pithauragarh subgroup (Chaudangsi, Byangsi, Darma, and Rangkas) and the Central subgroup (Rongpo, Sunnami, and Bunan). Sharmā (1994: 5) and van Driem (2001: 934) take Rangkas to be extinct, but Willis (2007: 23) contends that a language closely related to Darma is still spoken in Milam Valley, the homeland of the Rangkas community. Widmer (2021: 275-6) provides evidence for taking the extinct language Zhangzhung as West-Himalayish. The list sometimes includes a few languages from Nepal (Shafer 1974: 145).<sup>3</sup>

The Kinnaur district (see Figure 1) is an area characterized by intense language contact between Tibeto-Burman (TB) and Indo-Aryan (IA) languages. In addition to Hindi<sup>4</sup> and Sanskrit, the two official languages of Himachal Pradesh, Pahari, Dogri, Kangri, Bihari, Punjabi, and Nepali are part of the language ecology. Bihari, Punjabi, and Nepali are increasingly spoken due to the recent surge in the number of migrant workers in the area.

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<sup>3</sup> Raji-Raute (‘Džangali’), Thangmi (‘Thami’), Barām (‘Bhram’) and Dhuleli.

<sup>4</sup> All Chhitkul and Rākchham inhabitants are now fluent in Hindi, which serves as the main medium of instruction in Himachal and is taught from elementary school onwards. The disruption of intergenerational transmission, coupled with a process of code-mixing, puts Chhitkul-Rākchham under severe strain.



Figure 1. Kinnaur district, Himachal Pradesh;  
<http://himachalpradeshtravel.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Tourist-Map-Kinnaur.jpg>

The Chhitkul-Rākchham community exhibits many of the attributes of a ‘society of intimates’ as defined by Givón (2002: Ch.9), at least until very recently: it consists of only 1,000-1,500 members, is restricted in territorial distribution, and has a consensual leadership structure. In addition, social cooperation is based on kinship ties. In such a context, information tends to be shared equally among members. Givón points out that “new information spreads rapidly and soon becomes universal, due to proximity, intensive daily contact and small group size” (2002: 307). Community members have a deep familiarity with each other, and this social factor has undoubtedly paved the way for the emergence of the postverbal clitic =*nij* as discussed in this paper.

### 3 Methodology

The data provided in this paper stem to a large extent from a collection of video recordings deposited in the ELAR archive (Martinez 2020) following a ten-month field trip to Northern India (Sept. 2018-June 2019). Fieldwork was based on a small grant from the Endangered Languages Documentation Programme (ELDP). The materials follow an open access policy (<https://www.elararchive.org/dk0544>). Table 1 provides a list of recordings from the corpus where =*nij*, which is not obligatory for the grammaticality of sentences, is attested. To understand the rather infrequent use of the clitic (its number of occurrences is limited to 60 in an 8-hour corpus), context rich data is required, hence the necessity for drawing on a corpus. In addition to ‘monologues’, the latter includes ‘staged communicative events’ (Himmelman 1998), interactive events typically restricted to a topic (debatable or non-debatable, the distinction being made clear in Table 1) introduced prior to recording, and two picture-based tasks, *Jackal and the Crow* (Carroll et al. 2011) and *The Family Story* (San Roque et al. 2012), centered on a set of instructions also delivered prior to recording.

Number	File name	Topic	Speech genre	Duration
1	JAC_cik03-NB2-2019-03-065	Jackal and the Crow	Stimulus task	03:16
2	JAC_cik04-BSN2-2019-03-06	Jackal and the Crow	Stimulus task	06:15
3	JAC_cik05-YS1-2019-03-07	Jackal and the Crow	Stimulus task	09:55
4	JAC_cik06-BS1-2019-03-07	Jackal and the Crow	Stimulus task	04:00
5	JAC_cik07-RK-2019-03-09	Jackal and the Crow	Stimulus task	07:04
6	JAC_cik08-JC-2019-03-09	Jackal and the Crow	Stimulus task	04:13
7	JAC_cik09-MSN-2019-03-09	Jackal and the Crow	Stimulus task	06:21
8	JAC_cik10-SD1-2019-03-10	Jackal and the Crow	Stimulus task	06:18
9	NDB_cik04-MK-SD1-2018-11-24	Childhood	Conversation	10:28
10	NDB_cik03-SB1-RD2-2018-11-21-29	Local food	Conversation	02:50
11	NDB_cik06-BS1-AD-2019-03-07-12	Climate change	Conversation	08:55
12	NDB_cik07-AKP-KSN-2019-04-12	The Panchāyat <sup>6</sup>	Conversation	11:33
13	NDB_cik08-RKT-BSN1-2019-04-13	The Dhumti road	Conversation	06:00
14	DEB_cik07-RKKF-SS3-2019-05-27	Should the language be taught at school?	Conversation	05:30
15	DEB_cik01-RK-BSN1-2018-10-15	Is tourism a good thing?	Conversation	06:58
16	TRD_cik03-JL-2018-11-25	Mata Devi's origins	Monologue	02:35
17	TRD_cik09-SS1-2019-04-11	Interpreter	Monologue	07:50
18	TRD_cik10-SS1-2019-04-11	Gunsā <sup>7</sup>	Monologue	04:25
19	TRD_cik12-RKT-2019-04-13	Māng festival	Monologue	03:47
20	AUT_cik09-YS1-2018-11-22	YS's family and job	Monologue	06:53
21	AUT_cik10-JL-2018-11-25	Mata Devi's Oracle	Monologue	04:19
22	AUT_cik12-JC-2018-11-25	School and jobs	Monologue	02:15
23	TFS_cik03-MK-SD1-2019-04-14	The Family Story	Stimulus task	25:04

Table 1. Recordings<sup>8</sup> from the corpus where =*nij* is attested (20 different speakers, 2h 45m total)

<sup>5</sup> The label refers to *Jackal and the Crow*, the first recording of the type, the speaker's initial are DSN, and the recording date is 29-12-2018. NDB = non-debatable (conversation); DEB = debatable; TRD = traditional; TOP = topic ('monologue'), AUT = autobiographical; TFS = *The Family Story*.

<sup>6</sup> The term refers to a form of local council. Its function is to run government schemes (public property, sanitation, construction, administrative records such as population, births, marriages and deaths, judicial functions, etc.) at the village level.

<sup>7</sup> The term refers to transhumance to lower (warmer) places during winter.

<sup>8</sup> All transcribed and translated into English and Hindi, recording 23 excepted (English only).

As shown in Table 1, the marker =*niŋ* occurs in the above-mentioned genres. However, it does so more frequently in stimuli (picture-based) tasks (39 instantiations out of 60), which suggests a knowledge-building function (as the stimuli tasks part of this paper involves building a story based on pictures). The first task, *Jackal and the Crow*, involves a single speaker and consists of three stages: 1/ a description of all nine pictures one by one; 2/ a narration of the story based on these nine pictures; and 3/ the retelling of the story from the perspective of one of the two protagonists, using first person. The second task, *The Family Story*, is more complex and involves two speakers. It consists of a set of 16 pictures that the speakers describe one by one (stage 1), rearrange to construct a coherent narrative (stage 2) and retell from the perspective of one of the protagonists (stage 3). This type of discourse genre is richer in terms of perspective taking. In contrast, =*niŋ* occurs less frequently in so-called ‘monologues’ (9 instantiations only) and very sparingly in autobiographical accounts, which illustrates the interactive essence of the marker. All conversations (12 instantiations) involve speakers who know each other well.

This paper primarily relies on corpus data. I complement my own introspective or intuitive interpretation by that of my main consultant, Dhian Singh Negi. In so doing, I attend to what Mithun (2020) refers to as ‘speaker consciousness’, a type of data collected through introspective judgements and co-analysis. In this regard, the coding process resulted in the identification of a handful of cases featuring =*niŋ* that Dhian judged infelicitous (I discuss these examples in detail in §5.3), i.e., not pragmatically well-formed and inappropriate for the context of utterance according to a set of conditions discussed in Austin (1962).

As =*niŋ* was not the locus of data collection, the approach followed in this paper is marker-based (semasiological), which entails that it primarily focuses on the analysis of =*niŋ* when it occurs. One shortcoming tied to this approach, especially when its occurrence is pragmatically motivated, is that those contexts where =*niŋ* does not occur are not given as much attention. In §5.3, I nevertheless describe those environments where the clitic is infelicitous. In so doing, I provide some negative evidence that strengthens the analysis in terms of semantics. Whenever possible, I also discuss the syntagmatic combination of =*niŋ* with other types of knowledge management markers – see §4.

Throughout this paper, I take =*niŋ* to be an enclitic, a characterization consistent with the observation (as in e.g., Zwicky and Pullum 1983) that clitics do not stand alone phonologically (= *niŋ* occurs without any pause after the last verb inflection), do not select their hosts (= *niŋ* may attach to any verbal inflection, the habitual *-ts* excepted), function at the clause level syntactically, and may be deleted.

#### **4 The Chhitkul-Rākchham knowledge management system**

As pointed out by Evans et al. (2018), engagement interacts in complex ways with closely related categories. This section therefore provides some background on knowledge management in Chhitkul-Rākchham, which is expressed by means of a scattered system comprising copulas – some of which also function as auxiliaries – and a set of postverbal clitics.

As shown in Table 2, these copulas and clitics can be arranged along an epistemic scale. Evidentiality understood as conveying source of information (Aikhenvald 2004) is expressed by two

copulas, the perceptual *ta*<sup>9</sup> and the ‘egophoric’ (Tournadre 1996: 201) *to*,<sup>10</sup> both of which having intermediate epistemic value. The egophoric *to* follows two inflectional patterns, *to*-(IMPV)-(AGR) and *to*-ASS (*tɔ*-*ts*), the functional difference between them relating to degree of certainty. In future-oriented constructions, the primary epistemic distinction is marked by the irrealis-dubitative (dubitative as “indicating doubt” (Nida 1949: 169; Bybee 1985: 179)) suffix *-no* versus the assertive (the speaker is certain about the content of the proposition) suffix *-ts*. In the present tense, *a:ts* conveys a type of common knowledge that ties it to intersubjectivity. Emphasis as assertiveness finds an illustration in the copula *hɛn*, occurring in complementary distribution with the common knowledge *a:ts*, and the postverbal clitic *=no*. Among the postverbal clitics (*=no*, *=ne*, *=niŋ*, and *=na*), only *=na* – discussed in example (5) – does not convey epistemic meaning.

Certainty



Dubitative	Perceptual	Egophoric	Assertive
<i>fiun-no</i>	<i>ta</i>	<i>to</i>	<i>tɔ</i> - <i>ts</i> (egophoric)
<i>a-no</i>			<i>fiun</i> - <i>ts</i>
<i>a:-no</i>			<i>tu</i> - <i>ts</i>
			<i>a:-ts</i>
			<i>hɛn</i> (emphatic)
			<i>=no</i> (emphatic)
			<i>=ne</i>
			<i>=niŋ</i> (engagement)

Table 2. morphosyntactic expression of knowledge management in Chhitkul-Rākchham arranged on an epistemic scale

Epistemic judgements are paramount and the entire system rests upon a self vs. ‘other’ dichotomy. The following two examples illustrate the role of intersubjectivity in the copula system. In (1), both inflectional patterns associated with the copula *to* are perfectly grammatical. The speaker is reminiscing about living conditions in Chhitkul decades ago, harnessing some old knowledge accessed through his own memory. The selection of *tɔte* (the inflectional pattern *to*-IMPV-AGR) reflects his solipsistic world: ‘I know this personally’ could be added to the translation. By contrast, the selection of *tɔts* (the inflectional pattern *to*-HAB) signals that the speaker strives to reach a more objective stance by assuming that the content is known to the people of the community. ‘I know this personally, other people can confirm it’ could be added to the translation and reflects a knowledge that is still personal, but tinged with inter-subjectivity (*-ts*).

<sup>9</sup> The perceptual *ta* bears the semantic extensions of surprise, inference, non-involvement (or impersonal knowledge) and non-integrated knowledge.

<sup>10</sup> Cross-linguistically, egophoric marking revolves around the notion of ‘epistemic authority’ (Bergqvist & Kittilä 2020: 2), negotiated in discourse, which the speaker may even relinquish to the addressee in questions (Hale 1980).

- (1) sjana-tʃaŋ rampur=tʃi raʃan=∅ tutʃ-a tɔ-te-∅ /  
 elder-PL Rampur=ABL foodstuffs=ABS bring-PROG AUX.EGO-IMPV-3 /

**tɔ-ts**

**AUX.EGO-HAB**

‘(The) elders were bringing foodstuffs from Rampur’ – Martinez (2021: 286)

The intersubjective dimension associated with *tɔts* is reminiscent of the Oksapmin “participatory” category, which encodes a “personal-factual” distinction (Loughnane 2009: 249-253) and is assumed to reflect knowledge shared with the external world. Similarly, Van Driem (2005: 548) notes a “personal vs. public” opposition linked to egophoric marking in certain Central Asian languages. These observations underscore the potential for egophoric markers to encode a collective or intersubjective perspective, thereby complicating any strict separation between evidentiality and engagement.

In (2), the copula *ta* pragmatically implies the speaker’s non-involvement. The speaker, one of my informants, an English teacher particularly sensitive to the documentation and preservation of Chhitkul-Rākchham, backgrounds his knowledge and own assessment of the topic, adopting a more impersonal stance that could be taken by anyone not conversant with the topic of the preservation of endangered languages. In this context, *ta* ceases to refer to the self as it does when denoting perception<sup>11</sup> and the speaker fades behind a content to which everyone could subscribe. As such, *ta* in (2) illustrates the inter-subjective use of an evidential:

- (2) fiɔjo lo batʃea-saŋ bafut dʒaruri ta  
 DEM.DIST also preserve-INF INT necessary COP.IMPER  
 ‘To preserve that [Chhitkul-Rākchham] is also very necessary (said in an impersonal way)’  
 Martinez (2021: 186)

The role of intersubjectivity in the copula system extends beyond evidentiality. Lyons (1977) presciently observes that epistemic modality can be divided into a subjective and an objective (or inter-subjective in the sense of common knowledge, as discussed in Martinez 2023) component. All copulas listed in Table 2 can thus be classified according to subjective vs. objective and according to their function (self vs. ‘other’) depending on their inflectional morphology. This detail is important because it suggests that the whole knowledge management system is fundamentally deictic.

Beyond the copula system, knowledge management in Chhitkul-Rākchham involves a set of clitics optionally occurring in postverbal position. These clitics, which are used with variable frequency by different speakers, are all n-forms: =*ne* (assertive), =*no* (emphatic, as one type of assertion, ‘expressives’, in Searle (1969)), =*na* (querying) and =*niŋ* (speaker’s expectation of interlocutor knowledge). The latter often occurs in clause-final position unless the verb complex features the querying =*na*<sup>12</sup> and/or the hearsay (evidential) =*e*.

<sup>11</sup> From a mind-body perspective, perception points to the self but differs from egophoric to the extent the latter conveys an internal (mental) type of knowledge. *Ta* conveys an external (physical) one.

<sup>12</sup> There is only one instance in the corpus where =*niŋ* and =*na* co-occur and the former precedes the latter. Although there are no examples of =*niŋ* attaching to =*ne* or =*no*, my main consultant confirms the validity of this ordering.

Table 3 provides the morphological template of the Chhitkul-Rākchham finite verb. An auxiliary, possibly inflected for TAM and AGR and expressing an evidential (*ta*, *to*) or a purely epistemic (*ano*, *hɛn*) distinction, may occur in slots 5-8:

Root	Slot 1	Slot 2	Slot 3	Slot 4	Slot 5	Slot 6	Slot 7	Slot 8
	Transitivity markers	Inflectional suffixes			Clitics			
	Middle class Transitive (limited set of verbs)	Object AGR	TAM	Subject AGR	=no (EMPH) =ne (ASS)	=niŋ (ENG)	=na (QUER)	=e (HSY)

Table 3. The morphological template of a Chhitkul-Rākchham finite verb (excluding the negative and prohibitive prefixes *ma-* and *tʰa-* and non-productive derivational morphology)

If we go back to the set of clitics from slot 5 to 8, the case of *=ne* is straightforward. In (3), the speaker refers to his contacts with the Tibetan plateau prior to the 1962 Indo-Chinese war. The assertive clitic found in postverbal position indicates that he vouches for the reliability of the information conveyed. The assertive *=ne* may never follow an auxiliary because it would either be redundant (after *hɛn* or *tɔts*), or it would be at odds with the epistemic value conveyed by other auxiliary members (after *ano*, *ta*, or *to*).

(3)    *ɦu-i*                                    *raŋ=tʃi*                                    *tʰa*    *niŋ*                                    *ni-ɦi*                                    *mi:=∅*  
 DEM.PROX-MODIF    mountain=ABL    now    1PL.EXCL    1PL.EXCL.DU    man=ABS

*ɦun-i*                                    *ɦe*    *si=*                                    *ma-ro-i*                                    *raŋ=tʃi=ne*  
 stay-PTCP                                    like    anyone=CKB<sub>2</sub>                                    NEG-go-PFV                                    mountain=ABL=ASS  
 ‘Now we are two people alive, no one (else) went beyond that mountain, for sure’ –  
 Martinez (2021: 386)

As a clitic, *=no* is exclusively emphatic: it does not alter in any way the knowledge management distinction conveyed by the main verb suffix (here the dubitative *-no*) or the auxiliary it may follow:

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Finally, *=niŋ* may attach to any subject agreement marker, in main verb and auxiliary constructions, and to the question particle *ā*.

- (4)      fiɔjo          tse    batəŋ=Ø    ɛk<sup>h</sup>e                      lat-i    lut-i                      ɛ:k  
             DEM.DIST all    thing=ABS together                      do-PFV do.REDUP-PFV one
- ni:ti:=Ø                      ʈəŋ-na                      kjaŋ                      deʃəŋ=Ø                      dʒo fi:                      age  
             regulation=ABS                      make-COND                      1PL.INCL.POSS village=ABS                      IND                      later

ro-no-Ø=no

go-IRR.DUB-3=EMPH

‘Having looked at these issues, if one set of regulations is made, then our village may make headway [I can tell you] DEB\_cik01-RK-BSN1-2018-10-15-58

The example below features both the querying =*na* and the hearsay =*e*, in this order. In (5), a conversation between two close friends about their childhood, one participant comments on the irreversibility of time, drawing other people into the conversation to shed doubt as to whether she can go back in time and return to her childhood. The querying =*na* is intended to prompt a reaction from part of the addressee and as such, it is inter-subjective:

- (5)      ma-tu-ts                      ʈ<sup>h</sup>a    ma-tu-ts                      ma-tu-ts  
             NEG-come-ASS                      now    NEG-come-ASS                      NEG-come-ASS
- batʃpan=Ø                      mā    batʃpan=Ø=ta                      wa:pas    ma-tu-ts  
             childhood=ABS                      REFL    childhood=ABS=IND                      back    NEG-come-ASS
- kab<sup>h</sup>i:                      lo                      ma-tu-ts=**na**=e  
             never                      neither                      NEG-come-ASS=QUER=HSY
- ‘Now it will not come (back), it will not come (back), (our) own childhood will not come back, it will never come back (I hear), will it?’ – Martinez (2021: 335-6)

We now turn to =*niŋ*, the final element of the Chhitkul-Rākchham knowledge management system. First, it is important to note that =*niŋ* occurs in two positions in the clause, at the phrasal level (where it is a different morpheme) and post-verbally.

## 5 An analysis of =*niŋ* in postverbal<sup>13</sup> position

This section is devoted to =*niŋ* in postverbal position. §5.1 provides contextualized examples of =*niŋ* across clause types, organized according to their functions. §5.2 provides additional observations on the clitic, notably its relationship with reported speech. §5.3 discusses negative evidence, thus reinforcing the analysis of =*niŋ* as an engagement marker. Finally, §5.4 introduces two tags, *man=ta* and *ne=te*, that are subsequently added to the category of engagement. With *man=ta* and *ne=te*, the pragmatic function of engagement is conveyed through evidential means.

<sup>13</sup> At the phrasal level, =*niŋ* serves as locative case marker as part of a complex system involving several additional ones. Oblique marking on O arguments is also expressed by =*niŋ* with a very small number of intransitive verbs.

### 5.1. Occurrence of =*nij* by functions

The clitic =*nij* appears in a wide range of clause types, including imperatives and hortatives. The following sections present examples of =*nij* across different clause types, organized according to their functions. Particular attention is paid to the context in which the clitic is used. By “context”, I refer both to the speech setting (for instance, a picture-based task involving two participants typically implies that one of them is the addressee) and to the discourse type (for example, when the speaker impersonates the jackal during stage 3 of *Jackal and the Crow*, using the first person and directly addressing the crow, we can reasonably infer the intended addressee of =*nij*).

#### 5.1.1. Shared knowledge

Across most types of clauses, the clitic =*nij* serves the straightforward function of shared knowledge. Example (6) is from the very end of stage 2 of *Jackal and the Crow*, a task that involves a single participant. The speaker crafted a cohesive narrative based on his initial descriptions of the nine pictures. By insisting that ‘there is nothing else’, the speaker alludes to the last picture of the story where the crow is alone and visibly affected, having dropped and lost his food. The use of the copula *ta* indicates that the speaker’s assessment of the situation is based on perceptual (visual) clues. By using =*nij* at the end of the existential copula clause, the speaker confidently assumes that his knowledge is shared by the viewers. Such an assumption is made because the same picture had been displayed to the camera prior to the speaker embarking on stage 1 and describing it. In that sense, ‘viewers’ refers to anyone who has witnessed the picture being shown to the camera, in this case, me and my consultant:

- (6)    tʰa   da   kʰetso           ma-ta=**nij**                   upasaŋ           fiun           to  
          now AL   something   NEG-COP.PE=ENG without food   stay.live   AUX.EGO  
          ‘There is nothing else [as I expect you to know], (he) is left without food’  
          JAC\_cik06-BS1-2019-03-07-18

Example (7) is an autobiographical account stemming from the Oracle of Chhitkul’s deity, Mata Devī. The speaker is recounting his experience in fulfilling this ritual function. Having served in this role for sixty-seven years, he holds full epistemic authority over the topic. Consider the speaker’s choice of copula in (7). He could have chosen the copula *to*, conveying the idea that the knowledge content is personal. Instead, the speaker chose *ta*, which here bears the semantic extension of non-involvement or impersonal statement, as in (2), thus foregrounding the interlocutor. Example (7) illustrates how the selection of an evidential can attune itself to the explicit intersubjective dimension conveyed by =*nij*. It also shows that the selection of =*nij* is not conditioned by the speaker having perceptual evidence for the knowledge conveyed. Rather, (7) suggests that =*nij* is linked to the speaker having epistemic authority over the conveyed information and relinquishing it.

- (7)    ts<sup>h</sup>ats            zoi    ta                    fakti    zoi    ta=**niŋ**                    fie  
          knowledge    good   COP.PE.IMPR   power   good   COP.PE.IMPR=ENG       like
- manea-Ø  
          respect-PROG  
          ‘Knowledge is good, power is good [as I expect you to know], hence the respect (for Mata Devi)’ AUT\_cik10-JL-2018-11-25-10

Example (8) is again derived from *Jackal and the Crow*. The speaker is in stage 3 of the task, retelling the entire story from the perspective of the shrewd jackal. In other words, the intersubjective coordination does not take place between the speaker and whoever is witnessing his description of the pictures and his cohesive narrative, it is about the protagonists of the story, the jackal and the crow, with the speaker impersonating the former by using first person throughout stage 3. The jackal praises the crow in five consecutive copula clauses, adding =*niŋ* to the last two ones right after he says that his voice is regarded by everyone based on perceptual (hearing) clues. The jackal uses =*niŋ* to draw the crow into the conversation, assuming that, since the state of affairs discussed is about him (the crow), he (the crow) is well placed to know about (and vouch for) its content:

- (8)    te            e                    riŋ-de            kã                    kat    man man  
          then    3SG.NHON    say-IMPV    2SG.NHON.POSS    voice   INT
- zoi    ta                    kan                    tɔ-n                    kã                    kat    du:r  
          good   COP.PE            2SG.NHON    COP.EGO-2SG.NHON 2SG.NHON    voice   far
- du:r tak       mi:-tʃaŋ            tse    kan    man man    zoi    mi:-tʃaŋ  
          POST        people-PL all    2SG.NHON    INT            good    people-PL
- tse-tʃi ma:ni-fi    ta    zo    mi:    to=**niŋ**                    kã                    kat  
          all-ERG consider-PFV AUX.PE good man    COP.EGO=ENG       2SG.NHON    voice
- man man       baɖhia            ta=**niŋ**  
          INT            good            COP.PE=ENG

‘Then he said: “your voice is very good, you are good, your voice is regarded from far away by everyone, you are a good person [as I expect you to know], your voice is good [as I expect you to know]” JAC\_cik05-YS1-2019-03-07-60

In the example below, =*niŋ* attaches to a serial verb construction. Importantly, this excerpt from *Jackal and the Crow* corresponds to the last utterance uttered by the speaker in stage 3, when he retells the entire story from the crow’s perspective. Viewers have therefore had two opportunities, at the end of stage 1 and stage 2, to acquaint themselves with the outcome of this story. By using =*niŋ*, the speaker indicates his expectation that those listening already know how the story ends:

- (9) ka:=Ø      pəst-i-te      ga:=Ø      sinda: banda gret      ta-ŋi  
crow=ABS      repent-E-IMPV      1SG=ABS      vainly      song      put-PF
- a:      matʰli:=Ø      ɦalta      o-ĩ      ro-de-Ø=**niŋ**  
1SG.POSS      fish=ABS      right now      come.out-PFV go-IMPV-3=ENG
- ‘The crow repented: “I sang unnecessarily, my fish was taken from me [as I expect you to know]’ JAC\_cik08-JC-2019-03-09-24

Examples of =*niŋ* in interrogatives include (10) and (11). Example (10) provides an illustration of =*niŋ* in a wh- question where the speaker, looking at picture four from *Jackal and the Crow*, impersonates the jackal asking himself (self-quotation) about when he will be able to eat the fish. In this context, the only possible addressee is the narrative audience. Although we are in stage 1 of the task, the audience (me and my consultant) has had the opportunity to have a look at each and every picture of the story prior to recording. Thus, =*niŋ* indicates in this context, “I expect you to know that the jackal would be wondering when the fish will come in his mouth”.

- (10) po      ɦame      ʃeli=Ø      matʰli:=Ø      ai      a:r=o      ɦame  
down when      fox=ABS      fish=ABS      1SG.POSS      mouth-E=LOC      when
- tu-no=**niŋ**  
come-IRR.DUB=ENG
- ‘[I expect you to know that] the fox below [would be wondering]: “when will the fish come to my mouth?” JAC\_cik03-NB2-2019-03-06-4

Example (11) involves two participants discussing the accomplishments of the Panchāyat, or local council. The clitic =*niŋ* is used by the oldest of the two participants, a former member of the council, to solicit the agreement of the interlocutor, a current member hereof. The intersubjective orientation of the clitic is inferable when listening to the recording as the hearer reacts to what the speaker is saying with a backchannel response right after the latter uses =*niŋ*. The participants share a common ground and the function of =*niŋ* is to make this more explicit.<sup>14</sup>

- (11) mā      kamaŋ      baɖʰia      lan-na      mā=o      baɖʰia=no      ja:d  
REFL      work      well      do-COND      REFL=FOC      well=EMPH      remembrance
- mi:=no      la-tsə      baɖʰia      dʒoi      kamaŋ      la-te      ai      ɦe  
people=EMPH      do-ASS      well      good      work      do-IMPV      CONN      like
- la-te      ā=**niŋ**  
do-IMPV      QP=ENG
- ‘If (we) do our own work ourselves, it is good, will people remember the good work that has been accomplished, as we did it [as I expect you to know]?’  
NDB\_cik07-AKP-KSN-2019-04-12-159

<sup>14</sup> The shared knowledge may be seen as being under the scope of the interrogative, which suggests =*niŋ* means something like “don’t you agree?”.

Chhitkul-Rākchham has a Differential Object Indexing (DOI) system found with a restricted set of verbs whereby first and second-person objects bearing the semantic roles of undergoer or beneficiary are indexed by means of a periphrastic construction consisting of VROOT V2 (an inflected form of ‘come’) and an optional AUX. Example (12) is from stage 1 of *Jackal and the Crow* where the speaker describes the set of pictures one after the other. Through the use of =*niŋ*, the speaker assumes that viewers are aware that the jackal is praising the crow from the outset of stage 1 (segment 8) based on perceptual (visual) clues as all the pictures from the set are available to all interlocutors and they have already seen them, the same reasoning applying to e.g., example (9):<sup>15</sup>

- (12)    bola            bala    ka:    bitfara            fiē    b<sup>h</sup>uk<sup>h</sup>a            ʃɛli=tʃi  
           gullible        EDUP    crow    poor                    COMP    hungry                fox=ERG
- t<sup>h</sup> t<sup>h</sup>əgja-i    igja-i                    fiē    mi-ʃ-i                    e                    man man  
           dupe-PTCP    REDUP-PTCP    COMP    think-MID-PFV            3SG.NHON        INT
- ta:rif            lat        to-a                    to=**niŋ**  
           praise        do        come-PROG    AUX.EGO=ENG
- ‘The gullible and poor crow, duped by a hungry fox, thought this way: “he is praising me very much” [as I expect you to know]’ JAC\_cik09-MSN-2019-03-09-8

Example (13) is from *The Family Story* (San Roque et al. 2012) where two participants are collaborating in the description of each of the sixteen pictures the task consists of. This time the indexed object is overtly expressed. The speaker is describing the picture where a woman who was beaten up is talking to two policemen. The use of =*niŋ* here indicates that the speaker expects the interlocutor – her close friend – and the audience to know about what is going on in this picture as both the interlocutor and the audience have access to the exact same visual clues:

- (13)    polis=sea=tiŋ fiē    lo-a                    a-no                    e                    ga:    fiē  
           police=AGT=DAT    like    tell-PROG            AUX-IRR.DUB    3SG.NHON        1SG    like
- t<sup>h</sup>at    tu-te=**niŋ**  
           beat    come-IMPV=ENG
- ‘(S)he may be telling something like: “he beat me like this” [as I expect you to know] to the police’ TFS\_cik03-MK-SD1-2019-04-14-70

In example (14), one of the two participants describes a situation where the man who beat up his wife is sitting in jail, regretful and frightened. As in (13), the shared knowledge between the speaker and the interlocutor stems from the shared visual information in the picture task.

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<sup>15</sup> This raises the question of why the speakers chose to use =*niŋ* in this example and not on every utterance. My surmise is that the use of the marker is meant to emphasize elements of the story the speaker finds particularly salient.

- (14) e                    fojo                    nejotʃ=o=ta                    tʰa                    sunts-ea                    dzɛl=o  
 3SG.NHON                    DEM.DIST                    RN.after=LOC=IND                    now                    think-PROG                    jail=LOC
- ro-i                    nejotʃ=o                    hɛ=ta                    tʰappaɖ                    e=ta  
 go-PFV                    RN.after=LOC                    like=IND                    slap                    3SG.NHON=IND
- pareʃa:n                    as-i=e=no                                       ha:tʰkaɖi                    pʰɛt-i                    pʰut-i  
 disappointed                    become-PFV=FILL=EMPH                    handcuffs                    send-PFV                    send-PFV
- hɛ    sunts-ea                    ta=ne                    te                    tʰat                    tu-no=**niŋ**  
 like    think-PROG                    AUX.PE=ASS                    then                    beat                    come-IRR.DUB=ENG
- ‘After that, having been put in jail, he is now thinking: “what a slap”; he became sad about being handcuffed, thinking: “(I) may be beaten up” [as I expect you to know]’  
 TFS\_cik03-MK-SD1-2019-04-14-391

Example (15) is an autobiographical narrative in which the speaker recounts both personal (familial) experiences and professional pursuits. Despite the characterization of this recording as a ‘monologue’, there is room for interaction: through the use of =*niŋ*, the speaker indicates his expectation for me to possess prior knowledge of the details provided, specifically, the availability of a teacher position since he had introduced himself to me as a teacher several days before recording time. The speaker’s confidence in his expectation of my knowledge state is based on a content that I have had sufficient time to integrate – this knowledge is therefore not new:

- (15) teari:                    lat-ʃi                    lut-ʃi                    te                    pɔta                    lag-i-te  
 preparations                    do-PFV                    do.REDUP-PFV                    then                    knowledge                    get-E-IMPV
- ki                    dʒua                    ti:tʃɛr=e                    post                    o-ĩ                    ta=**niŋ**  
 COMP                    here                    teacher=GEN                    position                    be.available-PFV                    AUX.PE=ENG
- ‘Having prepared myself, it then came to my knowledge that a teacher position was available here, [as I expect you to know]’ AUT\_cik09-YS-2018-11-22-4

The clitic =*niŋ* may also scope over causal dependent clauses. In (16), the participants are discussing about a road between Chhitkul and Dhumti the construction of which is motivated by recurring tensions with China. None of the two participants has any direct stake in the construction which happened to be the topic I suggested. The speaker heard that the road is now open and in this biclausal sentence the use of =*niŋ* at the end of the causal clause shows that he expects the addressee to have full knowledge of this event as already discussed from the second segment of this recording onwards. The clitic =*niŋ* in the causal clause highlights that the interlocutors share knowledge on this point.

- (16) de=na          tʃajna=tʃaŋ      ɔʃa      dʒe          tu-tse          rəʊd      kʰul-i=ti  
 Then=QUER China=PL      quick      DEM.PROX      come-ASS      road      open-E-PFV

ta=niŋ=e          ja  
 AUX.PE=ENG=HSY      friend

‘Because the road has opened (I hear) [as I expect you to know], China will soon come to this side, (my) friend’ NDB\_cik08-RKT-BSN1-2019-04-13-33

The example below again features a biclausal sentence where the causal clause is embedded into the main one. The speaker performs stage 2 of the picture-based task *Jackal and the Crow*, crafting a cohesive story having described all nine pictures one after the other. Through the use of =niŋ, at the end of the causal clause, she assertively anticipates that the viewers of this recording know about what the jackal said to the crow for him to feel so elated – a point (the jackal shrewdly praising the crow) that she previously addressed in stage 1 segment 9 of the task. Intersubjective coordination or alignment between the interlocutors is, as in (16), centered on the cause, not the consequence:

- (17) te      fojo          ka:=ta          ʃeli=tʃi          kʰe      riŋ-de-Ø=niŋ  
 then      DEM.DIST      crow=IND      fox=ERG      what      say-IMPV-3=ENG

kʰusi          ta-ĩ  
 happy          feel-PFV

‘because of what the fox said [as I expect you to know] then that crow felt happy’  
 JAC\_cik10-SD1-2019-03-10-27

### 5.1.2 *Call to action (imperative clauses)*

In imperatives clauses, =niŋ serves the specific function of ‘call to action’. Example (18) is from *Jackal and the Crow* and involves a light verb construction (Martinez 2021: 558-9) consisting of N + V (‘to put, keep’). In (18), we are in stage 1 of the task and the speaker describes picture five where the shrewd jackal carries out his plan to make the crow drop his food. Since the non-honorific imperative form of the verb is used here, =niŋ has no connection with politeness. A possible interpretation has to do with what the jackal is uttering right before using =niŋ. ‘Your voice is beautiful’ indicates that it should not be necessary for him to use the imperative, but that he does so, adding =niŋ to it, because the crow still has to react to the situation (by singing). In that sense, =niŋ signals a ‘request for action’ as it is to be expected that the crow having a beautiful voice, he will sing:

(18) ʃɛli=tʃi ka:=Ø p<sup>h</sup>ɔsea ta-se i: kan ta k<sup>h</sup>ai  
fox=ERG crow=ABS catch AUX.PE-IMPV one 2SG.HON see black

kā kat man man bant<sup>h</sup>ini kan i: gret  
2SG.NHON.POSS voice INT beautiful 2SG.HON one song

tau=**niŋ**

keep.2SG.NHON.IMP=ENG

‘The fox was setting a trap to the crow: “one, you are black to see, your voice is very beautiful, sing me a song [as I expect you to know that I am urging you!]’ JAC\_cik08-JC-2019-03-19-6

This interpretation is supported by (19), elicited from my main consultant. Since the addressee has been told to hurry up for a certain amount of time, the information should now be integrated, but it is not: the addressee does not seem to know how to proceed and the speaker has to remind them of the situation by using the imperative form followed by =*niŋ*:

(19) ga:=Ø nei=tʃi kin=tiŋ rĩ ɔʃa  
1SG=ABS yesterday=ABL 2SG.HON=DAT tell.PFV quick

la-ĩ=**niŋ**

do-2SG.HON.IMP=ENG

‘Since yesterday, I have been telling you: “hurry up! [as I expect you to know that I am urging you!]” Elicited Dhian Singh Negi

The only imperative example from the corpus that is not involving the command ‘sing a song’ is (20), from a traditional narrative on the origins of Chhitkul’s deity, Mata Devī, told by her Oracle for more than sixty years. The narrative describes how Mata Devī visited all seven villages over which she exerts her authority, giving orders and appointing her nephews as sentries (local deities) in one village after the other. Utterance (20) is when she reaches her final destination, Chhitkul village, convening a meeting with people from all seven villages. The authority to which they respond, Lord Krishna, enjoins them to serve the people and the use of =*niŋ* is a request to action as it has been made clear previously in the narrative that the deities’ functions to protect the people.

- (20)    kriʃan        b<sup>h</sup>agwan=tʃi        tsu-i                    p<sup>h</sup>etʃ-i        kan                devi:  
          Krishna    Bhagwan=ERG        distribute-PFV        send-PFV        2SG.HON        goddess
- devta        koelas=o            ro                            kan                b<sup>h</sup>a:g  
          Devta        Kailash=LOC        go.2SG.IMP.NHON    2SG.HON        responsibility
- tsu-i        tsa-i            dau                    pəblik=e            seva        la-ĩ=**niŋ**  
          distribute REDUP    outside            peblian=GEN            service do.2SG.HON=ENG  
          ‘Lord Krishna instructed the deities, allocating their areas: “you go to Mount Kailash to  
          serve the people! [as I expect you to know that I am urging you!]” TRD\_cik03-JL-2018-  
          11-25-25

As shown in Table 2 (see §4), =*niŋ* is an epistemic expression insofar as it is used when a speaker confidently assumes the interlocutor to share the knowledge being conveyed. This makes =*niŋ* typologically interesting, as epistemic marking is generally rare in clause types such as imperatives. As Boye (2012: 201) notes, “there seems to be a strong crosslinguistic tendency for epistemic expressions to be excluded from imperatives. In fact, I will claim that all uncontroversial cases of imperatives – genuine imperatives – exclude epistemic expressions”. According to Boye, this is because epistemic meanings have propositional scope whereas imperatives express commands that do not involve propositions, but rather refer to state-of-affairs.

Aikhenvald (2004: 250-3) does, however, mention the use of “evidentials in commands” in a few languages. Yet Boye dismisses these as genuine imperatives on two grounds: 1/ in the case of so-called “secondhand imperative” (Aikhenvald 2004: 250), the command originates from a third party rather than the speaker; and 2/ some imperatives involve quotative markers that introduce a verbatim report of someone else’s speech (2004: 394), which Boye excludes from the domain of epistemic justification. While neither of these two cases directly align with the examples discussed here, case 2/ is relevant here as examples (18), (19) and (20) all involve the verbatim rendering of someone’s speech – the speaker’s own in (18) and (19), or someone else’s in (20), though without an overt quotation marker. In such instances of reported speech, imperatives reflect indirect commands and therefore do not count as genuine imperatives in Boye’s sense.

Examples (18), (19), and (20) allow us to see =*niŋ* as marking a particular kind of intersubjective stance: the speaker is not introducing new information, nor merely giving a command, but activating shared knowledge or presuppositions in order to elicit a response. In example (18), =*niŋ* contributes to the utterance not simply by indicating that the speaker (the jackal) believes the addressee (the crow) knows what action is relevant, but also by subtly prompting that action based on that knowledge. That is, =*niŋ* presupposes that the addressee can be expected to recognize the next appropriate move in a given frame – here, singing because he has a beautiful voice. This ties into the notion of engagement (Boye 2012) as well as the broader idea of territory of information (Kawanishi 1994: 446; Kamio 1997), where =*niŋ* operates at the boundary between what is known and what is expected to follow from that knowledge. In such cases, =*niŋ* can be read as bridging epistemic alignment and pragmatic activation: because you know (and I know you know), you should

act. The force is not grounded in politeness or authority (as would be the case in conventional imperatives), but in expectation – grounded in mutual knowledge.<sup>16</sup>

### 5.1.3 Addressee’s participation – mutual understanding (hortative clauses)

The clitic is also attested with hortative mood, homophonous with imperfective aspect. (21) is the only example from the corpus involving the hortative *-te* and *=niŋ*. This example is taken from the beginning of stage 2 of *Jackal and the Crow* where the speaker is retelling the entire story from scratch. The crow just found some fish and *=niŋ* here indexes the narrative audience, shifting out from speaker as character to speaker as narrator, a kind of ‘sociopragmatic effect’ (DeLancey 2018) that emphasizes the addressee’s participation:

- (21)    tʰa    ga:=ta            matʰli:=Ø    pər-i-tə-k            fiɔjo            kwən=Ø  
           now 1SG=IND        fish=ABS        get-E-IMPV-1SG        DEM.DIST        food=ABS
- pər-i-te=**niŋ**  
           get-E-HORT=ENG  
           ‘I got the fish, now, let’s eat that meal [as I expect you to know this can now be done!]  
           JAC\_cik05-YS1-2019-03-07-28

The clitic *=niŋ* in the context of example (21) signals that the speaker (the narrator, through the voice of the crow) assumes the narrative audience to be epistemically aligned – i.e., to know or recognize the next logical action given the narrated situation (“I got the fish, now let’s eat”). This presumes a shared frame of reference, not between characters (there is no one beside the crow that would be eating that meal) but between narrator and listener. The stance, therefore, is metapragmatic and performative: the speaker invokes mutual knowledge as a basis for inviting alignment and action, even in a fictional or one-sided setting. In short, *=niŋ* in (21) conveys an engagement-based stance that is not about asserting authority or issuing a direct command, but rather about activating mutual understanding. Referring to the discussion on genuine imperatives (§5.1.2), one may claim that example (21) does not involve a genuine hortative to the extent the speaker – the crow – is the only actual participant while hortatives are generally addressee-directed or inherently dialogic.

### 5.1.4 Deference

Example (22) is a conversation between two community members on the Panchāyat, or ‘assembly of five’, a village council and a form of local government that was introduced in Chhitkul village during the 1950s. The participants know each other very well. At the time of recording, the first participant was a member (vice-president) of the assembly, while the second participant is a former member of the same. Reflecting over the accomplishments of the Panchāyat over the years, the most recent member first makes a positive assessment. By acknowledging the interlocutor’s knowledge of the improvements, and possibly even his role in contributing to them over the years, the speaker is here being deferential<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>16</sup> On a comparative note, a similar use of a shared knowledge marker, *=mari*, is described with imperatives in Upper Napo Kichwa (Grzech 2021: 218). Grzech characterizes these specific uses of *=mari* as “request for action”.

<sup>17</sup> The choice of the imperfective aspect precludes the use of evidentials and thus prevents further involvement from part of the speaker.

- (22)    pantʃa:ʃat=tʃi        tʰi:k        la-te=**niŋ**  
         Panchāyat=ERG    good        do-IMPV=ENG  
         ‘The Panchāyat did well [as I expect someone like you to know]’  
         NDB\_cik07-AKP-KSN-2019-04-12-62

In addition to signaling shared knowledge or calling for action, =*niŋ* can also function as a marker of deference or politeness, especially in contexts where the speaker aligns themselves with the assumed epistemic stance or authority of the addressee. This is particularly salient in situations where there is an asymmetry in age, status, or expertise, and the speaker wishes to soften the force of an assertion or request by appealing to shared understanding or by presenting the information as uncontroversial or already familiar to the addressee.

By invoking =*niŋ*, the speaker effectively positions themselves as not claiming superior knowledge, even if they are the source of the information. Instead, they treat the information as jointly accessible or already within the addressee’s territory of information (cf. Kamio 1997), thereby reducing the imposition or the risk of appearing overly assertive. This deferential stance enhances interpersonal harmony and can be seen as a form of positive politeness, wherein the speaker seeks to affirm common ground and respect the addressee’s perspective.

## 5.2 *Additional observations on =niŋ*

Whether the “addressee” of a given use of =*niŋ* is situated in real life (as in most cases discussed in this paper) or within the narrative itself can be inferred from the surrounding context of the utterance. I pay particular attention to this context in all the examples provided in §5.1 as it helps explain why one possible deictic frame of reference is preferred over another, even in contextually similar utterances. For instance, examples (8) and (9) both show quotes within a narrative in stage 3 of the same task (*Jackal and the Crow*), yet (8) reflects the shared knowledge of the characters in the narrative, while (9) reflects the knowledge of the storyteller and listener. This difference arises because in (8) the speaker impersonates the jackal as part of stage 3 of the task, using first person and directly addressing the crow. The intended addressee of =*niŋ* is thus inferable from this impersonation and results from a deliberate stylistic effect. In contrast, in (9) the crow is addressing himself; the jackal is not involved in his reflection. Moreover, the crow would not have addressed the jackal using =*niŋ* that way. This suggests that the use of =*niŋ* in (9) is directed toward a broader, real-life audience. Similarly, examples (13) and (14) illustrate the sharing of knowledge between the real-life speaker and interlocutor, both of whom are working on the same task and relying on visual clues to interpret the pictures. By contrast, in (21), the knowledge is embedded within the narrative itself. As in (8), the speaker impersonates one character from the story – here Lord Krishna – and the use of =*niŋ* marks shared knowledge between characters in the story (Lord Krishna and the local deities). It is thus crucial to distinguish between narrative and non-narrative contexts. In narrative contexts, the speaker may impersonate a character from the story, which can temporarily shift the speaker-addressee dynamic: the real-life speaker and listener may be momentarily replaced by characters within the narrative.

This contrast between narrative and non-narrative contexts sets the stage for a more general observation about the environments in which =*niŋ* occurs, namely, its consistent alignment with direct rather than indirect speech. A substantial part of the examples discussed in this paper (see (8),

(9), (12), (13), (14), (18), (19), and (20)) involve reported speech. Among these examples, all feature direct speech showing a person’s exact words. The reason why =*niŋ* tends to exclusively occur with reported speech expressed through direct speech, and not with indirect speech, likely lies in its function as an epistemic marker of shared or intersubjective knowledge – specifically, its anchoring in the deictic frame of the original speaker. When a speaker uses direct speech (i.e., verbatim quoting), they momentarily step into the role of the original speaker. This makes it pragmatically and epistemically plausible to reproduce the assumptions and stance of that original utterance. In contrast, indirect speech shifts the perspective to the current speaker. When using indirect speech, the speaker paraphrases or summarizes the original utterance in their own words, and the epistemic anchoring is re-evaluated in light of the current speaker’s assumptions, not the original speaker’s. Since =*niŋ* encodes the speaker’s confident assumption of shared knowledge with the addressee, it requires careful management of who the speaker is, and who the addressee is. In direct speech, the roles are clearly assignable (even if fictional), whereas in indirect speech, the boundaries blur, and the assumption of shared knowledge may no longer hold. In other words, =*niŋ* naturally occurs with direct speech because the original deictic and epistemic frame is preserved and the speaker can legitimately assume the same knowledge alignment as in the original utterance. Conversely, it tends not to occur with indirect speech because the epistemic stance must be recalibrated and the speaker is no longer quoting, but paraphrasing, and thus cannot as readily project the original speaker’s assumptions.

### 5.3 Contexts where =*niŋ* is infelicitous (negative evidence)

A first environment where the occurrence of =*niŋ* is infelicitous is given in (23), a conditional clause. The speaker is not in position to expect the interlocutor to know about him regretting having been fooled by the crow’s words if we analyze this type of clause in terms of epistemic control (Langacker 2017). The information is here non-factual and considered unreliable, and the speaker marks his lack of epistemic control by using the conditional. The speaker can only expect the interlocutor to have knowledge of the content if he has full epistemic control:

(23)	te	ka:	bitfara	nejaŋ	ε:k	paŋ=du	pəs-i	pas-i
	then	crow	poor	again	one	tree=LOC	sit-PFV	REDUP-PFV
	suntsea	ka:f	ka:=e	gosa:=du	ma-p <sup>h</sup> əs-i-ti			
	think.PROG	INTERJ	crow=REFL	conversation=LOC	NEG-catch-E-PFV			

fiɛn-na \*=**niŋ**

CVB-COND

“Then the poor crow is thinking, sitting on a tree: "alas! If only I had not been caught by (his) words!"” Martinez (2021: 671)

The example below illustrates the close interaction between the categories of speaker’s expectation of interlocutor’s knowledge and evidentiality. The speaker was instructed to picture himself in his workplace in company with somebody else, suddenly inspecting the content of his own pocket and realizing that there is some money in it. Here the perceptual copula *ta* bears a mirative connotation as the speaker unexpectedly finds some money in his pocket. In this context, =*niŋ* cannot

occur in clause-final position: the speaker being surprised by his own discovery, the knowledge content is new to him and he cannot expect the interlocutor to already know about it:

- (24) ai kjusu=Ø=du=ta rupe ta \*=niŋ  
 1SG.POSS pocket=ABS=LOC=IND money COP.SURP  
 ‘Oh, there is (some) money in my pocket!’ – Dhian Singh Negi (elicited) Martinez (2021: 406)

In (25), the speaker has gone through all stages from *Jackal and the Crow* and decides to add a general comment on what can be learned from the whole story. The speaker used =niŋ in this example when telling the story in connected discourse. It is only later in discussing these examples that he judged this to be infelicitous and thought the sentence to be better without it. This is so because the clause content bears universal truth: the moral of the story belongs to the sphere of common knowledge. As such, it cannot be restricted to speaker and hearer as the use of =niŋ would otherwise suggest.

- (25) fuju kahani:=e fuju kahani:=e fie sabak=no  
 DEM.PROX story=GEN DEM.PROX story=GEN like lesson=EMPH  
  
 ki su:lo dzuṯha ta:rif=niŋ mā ma-rɔ-ŋ \*=niŋ  
 COMP everyone false praise=LOC REFL NEG-go-INF  
 ‘The moral of this story is that (one) should not be deceived by anyone’s false praise’ JAC-cik01-DSN-2018-12-29-31

This interpretation finds confirmation in the example below, where the content belongs to the sphere of common knowledge and where =niŋ is equally infelicitous. In fact, the 60 instantiations of the clitic involve various verbal configurations, e.g., V-INF=niŋ, V-no-AGR=niŋ; V-IMPV-AGR=niŋ, V-PFV ta=niŋ, V1 V2=niŋ, V-INF ano=niŋ, V-PROG to=niŋ, VSTEM tu-IMPV=niŋ, VSTEM to-PROG to=niŋ, etc., but none with a copula (or a main verb)<sup>18</sup> inflected for the habitual suffix -ts:

- (26) mura-tʃaŋ=e pə bɔŋ=Ø a:-ts \*=niŋ  
 cow-PL=GEN four leg=ABS COP-HAB  
 ‘Cows have four legs’ – Elicited Dhian Singh Negi (Martinez 2021: 176)

The previous examples show that for =niŋ to occur, the speaker must have full epistemic authority (which excludes conditional clauses), and the knowledge content must not refer to common knowledge and must be integrated by the speaker, otherwise (s)he cannot assume it is shared by the interlocutor.

<sup>18</sup> In *saṯəɾ ɔfa ɔfa tʰuri-ts* (snow leopard fast run-HAB), =niŋ is also infelicitous.

#### 5.4 The clitic =niṅ and other postverbal markers

As seen in §4, =niṅ is part of a set of n-forms, the assertive =ne, the emphatic =no (sometimes surfacing as =njo) and the querying =na, all components of the Chhitkul-Rākchham knowledge management system. An example of each clitic is provided in (27), (28) and (29).

- (27)    fiu-i                      raṅ=tʃi                      tʰa    niṅ                      ni-ʃi                      mi:=∅  
           DEM.PROX-MODIF        mountain=ABL            now    1PL.EXCL    1PL.EXCL.DU man=ABS

fiun-i                      fie                      si=o                      ma-ro-i                      raṅ=tʃi=ne  
 stay-PTCP                like                      anyone=FOC            NEG-go-PFV            mountain=ABL=ASS

‘Now we are two people alive, no one (else) went beyond that mountain’

AUT\_cik10-JL-2018-11-25-4

- (28)    baki                      uts=∅                      tʰom-i                      neotʃ=o                      hojo                      neotʃ=o  
           CONN                      flowers=ABS            accept-ACT            after=LOC            DEM.DIST            after=LOC

matʰa=e                      rol=∅                      a:-ts=njo  
 interpreter=GEN            role=ABS            COP-HAB.ASS=EMPH

‘Once the flowers have been accepted (by the deity), the rest is up to the Interpreter’

TRD\_cik09-SS1-2019-04-11-21

- (29)    attʰ-a:                      attʰ-a:                      bafut    taim=∅  
           well-MASC.SG            well-MASC.SG INT    time=ABS

as-e-∅=na                      ma-tʰukʃ-i                      kjaṅ-ʃi  
 become/happen-IMPV-3=QUER    NEG-meet-PFV            1PL-DU

‘Well, well, a lot of time went by since we met, don't you think?’

NDB\_cik04-MK-SD1-2018-11-24-3

All these forms convey the speaker’s attitude towards the knowledge content. Whereas =ne and =no occur on a purely subjective basis, =na arguably draws the interlocutor into the conversation. However, with the use of =na, the speaker is querying the interlocutor’s opinion. In other words, =na does not imply expectation of interlocutor knowledge, which means, this clitic, similarly to =ne and =no, does not belong to the category of engagement as =niṅ does. The latter does not contrast with these forms. Rather, =niṅ may co-occur with them. There are no instances in the corpus, but my main consultant is adamant that the order would be *ta=no=niṅ* (COP=EMPH=ENG) and *ta=niṅ=na* (COP=ENG=QUER). The divergent pattern observed with =na suggests a borrowing from Hindi. A key observation in Jabbar (2023: 1) is that “na signals the speaker’s belief that the content of na’s containing clause is a reasonable inference, given what’s common ground”. Jabbar adds that the notion of reasonable inference is “quite similar to the notion of speaker expectation” (2023: 2) that I use in this paper. In addition, like =niṅ, na occurs with imperatives (2023: 13-4) and exclamatives in Hindi. However, =na in Chhitkul-Rākchham does not signal expectation of interlocutor knowledge per se.

From the point of view of inter-subjectivity, *=niŋ* conversely shares defining features with a pair of ‘interpersonal markers’ (Maschler 2012) negotiating relations between the interlocutors in discourse, the tags *man=ta* and *ne=te*. In both cases, *=ta* (or the alternant *=te*) lessens the high degree of assertiveness conveyed by *man* (emphasis as certainty, *man* is an alternant of *mahɛn*) and *=ne*.<sup>19</sup> In both cases, these interpersonal markers, just like *=niŋ*, do not modify the evidential (or epistemic) distinction expressed by the verb construction. Rather, they draw the interlocutor into the conversation.

In (30), the interlocutors are discussing the idea of teaching Chhitkul-Rākchham to children one hour a week at the village council house. By using *ne=te*, the speaker draws the addressee into the conversation, anticipating that he shares the knowledge content because the interlocutors know each other very well – both are members of the local council. The tag *ne=te* also occurs in (31) and confirms the inclusive reading. In (31), the participants are reminiscing about their childhood in Rākchham. They have always been close friends. In (32), the speaker has been asked prior to recording to cook a tasty meal. She comments on it, selecting the common knowledge copula *a:ts* to indicate that locally, everyone takes it to be tasty. By using *man=ta* the speaker again draws the audience into the conversation, anticipating that the knowledge content is not shared as my grasp of local food is limited. In that sense, *man=ta* is used when the interlocutors do not know each other very well. The tag *man=ta* also occurs in (33), confirming the exclusive reading. The conversation involves a couple discussing the most important events that take place in Rākchham on a yearly basis. Yet, from the beginning of the recording the husband takes the role of an interviewer, pretending not to know about the topic, here the duration of a specific festival, Usko.

(30)    *fiuʃ-i-ts*            **ne=te**  
 learn-E-ASS        ASS=COP.INFR  
 ‘(They) will learn, won't they?’  
 DEB\_cik07-RKKF-SS3-2019-05-27-56 (Martinez 2021: 374)

(31)    *kjaŋsa:=ta*            *kjaŋ-sa:*            *maza:*            *kwɔlea*        **ne=te**  
 1PL.INCL-PL=IND    1PL.POSS-PL    pleasure        feel.PROG    ASS=COP.PE  
 ‘We made our own fun, didn't we?’  
 NDB\_cik04-MK-SD1-2018-11-24-154

(32)    *ba ma*        *nim-i*            *a:-ts*            **man=ta**  
 INT            tasty-MODIF    COP-HAB.ASS    CVB.NEG.EMPH=COP.INFR  
  
*bras=u*            *fiɔt=∅*  
 bitter buck=GEN    chilta=ABS  
 ‘Bitter buck chilta is very tasty, isn't it?’  
 TRD\_cik04-GD-2018-11-26-26 (Martinez 2021: 373)

<sup>19</sup> Two additional converbs, *fiɛt=ta* ‘likely, possibly’ and the negative *mat=ti* (which serves a copula function) consist of the same morphological template but do not bear any interpersonal function – (Martinez 2021 Ch. 7).

- (33) homo dear man=ta usko  
 three day CVB.NEG.EMPH=COP.INFR usko  
 ‘Usko is of three days, isn’t it?’  
 NDB\_cik05-BD1-BD2-2019-03-07-74

In all the above cases, the speaker makes a reasonable inference about the addressee’s perspective, although (s)he cannot be entirely certain that the addressee fully concurs, hence the use of *ta* or its alternant. It is thus clear that *=niη* differs from *man=ta* and *ne=te* in terms of degree of assertiveness: *=niη* is more assertive than *man=ta* and *ne=te* (with *=niη*, the speaker is entirely certain that knowledge is shared with the addressee whereas it is not the case with *man=ta* and *ne=te*) as it is not followed by *ta* or any alternant. Nevertheless, referring to Maschler and Schiffrin’s definition of ‘interpersonal’ discourse markers as “negotiating relations between speaker and hearer” (2015: 196), all three (*=niη*, *man=ta* and *ne=te*) belong to the same category. Their distribution confirms this orientation: *=niη*, *man=ta* and *ne=te* never co-occur.

To sum up, engagement in Chhitkul-Rākchham encompasses *=niη*, *man=ta*, and *ne=te*. Both tags involve an epistemic (*man* and *ne*) base and an alternant of the evidential *ta* in the case of *=ne=te*. This therefore illustrates that engagement can overlap with other knowledge management categories. Among all engagement markers, *=niη* is the only one that is distinguishable from evidentiality. However, it is not independent from judgement upon the reliability of the knowledge conveyed.

## 6 The marker *=niη* from a diachronic perspective

The marker *=niη* is homophonous with the first-person exclusive dual and plural pronoun *niη(-sa:)* ~ *ni(-sa:)*<sup>20</sup> (Martinez 2021: 542), which I take to be its most likely diachronic source. Seen from this perspective, the post-verbal clitic is a straightforward case of grammaticalization defined as “consisting in the increase of the range of a morpheme advancing from a lexical to a grammatical or from a grammatical to a more grammatical formant” (Kuryłowicz 1975 [1965]: 52) and reflecting a path free > bound morph.

Personal pronouns are sometimes characterized as “diachronically fairly stable” (Heine and Song 2011: 587) cross-linguistically, but this does not apply here as *niη* cannot be reconstructed in Proto-Tibeto-Burman:<sup>21</sup> it has therefore been innovated. DeLancey (2019) looks at the history of non-singular pronouns in Tibeto-Burman, observing that “most languages in the family have innovative compositional forms for all plurals” and that “two plural forms, *#i* 1SG and *#ni* 2SG, are securely reconstructed for the verb agreement system” where “we would expect to find a pronominal origin for them, and we do”. From this perspective, *niη* looks like *ni* (2PL) to which the first-person subject agreement *#-η* is suffixed and this is consistent with the ‘you’ as addressee or audience that *=niη* indexes in the examples provided in this paper.

Among the parameters of grammaticalization discussed in Heine and Kuteva (2002), extension, i.e., “when linguistic expressions are extended to new contexts that invite the rise of grammatical functions (context-induced reinterpretation)” is useful to cast light on the path taken by *niη*. Extension is described as pragmatic in nature and this is entirely consistent with the parsimonious and highly contextual use of the postverbal clitic in conversation. Heine and Song

<sup>20</sup> The suffix *-sa:* is an optional plural marker.

<sup>21</sup> Matisoff (2003: 639) only reconstructs two second person forms, *nang* and *na*.

(2011: 592) identify three components of extension: 1/ sociolinguistic: grammaticalization stems from an individual innovation that subsequently spreads through the entire speech community (the social mechanism of propagation in Croft (2000: 4-5)); 2/ text-pragmatic (extension from an initial ('usual') context to a new (or new ones); 3/ semantic, from one existing meaning to another.

Example (34) illustrates what makes an individual innovation that subsequently spreads to the entire community possible. In (34), the post-verbal placement of the pronominal is similar to the clitic and allows grammaticalization to occur. In this autobiographical narrative, *nij* is repeated twice for stylistic effects. Arguably, (34) bears some ambiguity, but we know that *nij* is a pronoun and not the clitic denoting engagement because we need a pronoun to appear in this example to contrast with "the rich". In other words, the function of the postposed pronoun in this example is to explicitly note the contrast with the referents of "the rich".<sup>22</sup>

- (34) saukar=tʃi rin ma-da-na kwɔn=o mat=ti  
 Rich=ERG loan NEG-give-COND food=FOC CVB.NEG=COP.PE
- fi biti-ʃi **nij** biti-ʃi **nij**  
 like spend-PFV 1PL.EXCL spend-PFV 1PL.EXCL  
 'If the rich did not provide any loan, we had no food, we spent (time) like this'  
 AUT\_cik10-JL-2018-11-25-15

From a functional interactional perspective, the concept of metalanguaging (Maschler and Schiffrin 2015: 194), where languaging is "an ongoing process", sheds light on what is taking place next. As a discourse marker, *=nij* bears a "metalingual interpretation" in that it is a product of interpersonal relations between the participants and their state of mind. In interactional contexts, the participants managing turns, *nij* eventually grammaticizes into a discourse clitic through repetition, the result of metalanguaging as a semantic-pragmatic process in line with Hopper's notion of 'emergent grammar' (1987) and with Boye and Harder's (2012) view of grammaticalization as 'conventionalisation of discursively secondary status'. *Nij* acquires a new context of use, this is *=nij* as an engagement marker.

Now, the real question is semantic. The pronoun *nij* as the diachronic source of the postverbal clitic raises the question of why it is the exclusive pronoun that underwent grammaticalization and not the inclusive one. Given the dialectic nature of the speaker-addressee relationship in the category of engagement, a first-person plural inclusive pronoun would make more sense. A surmise is, as further discussed in §8, that the notion of addressee in those environments where *=nij* occurs is such – the clitic indexing the audience and leaving the addressee unspecified in some contexts – that the exclusive form was selected. Another possible explanation has to do with knowledge management. From this perspective, a crucial piece of information is that *=nij* is incompatible with common knowledge – see the discussion in §8. In other words, the clitic marks what is shared by the speaker and the hearer to the exclusion of all those contexts where both are included, but as part of the broader domain of common knowledge.

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<sup>22</sup> It is interesting to note that *=nij* as an engagement marker also creates a contrast, with all the knowledge that is not shared by the interlocutors.

The path taken from *nij* to *=nij* reflects a move from concrete to a more abstract (the notion of expectation of knowledge, with an attentional dimension) meaning (Heine & Kuteva 2007: 34), but the inter-subjective dimension is retained, from source to target meaning.

## 7 A comparative perspective

According to Huber (personal communication), Shumcho (West-Himalayish) has a cognate, the suffix *-nij*, also serving as first-person EXCL plural and dual pronoun and occurring frequently on nouns and verbs. Huber interprets the suffix as similar to an echo mark conveying meanings such as “and stuff”, “and such things”, “and everything that belongs with it”, “and the like”, and “et cetera”, a strategy likely borrowed from Indo-Aryan<sup>23</sup>.

### Shumcho – Huber (personal communication)<sup>24</sup>

(35)	dotuŋk <sup>h</sup>	tu-u-nij	dotuŋk <sup>h</sup>	dze-u-nij	oɕi-o
	sometimes	come-PERF-etc	sometimes	go-PERF-etc,	like_this-FOC

wāũ (<waŋ-u)

happen/become-PERF

“Sometimes he came or so/etc., sometimes he went or so/etc., it happened like this.”

At first glance, the Shumcho suffix may appear completely distinct from the Chhitkul-Rākchham clitic discussed here, but the inter-subjective dimension found in echo-formations (EF) should not be overlooked. As Abbi (1992: 8) notes, “EFs are heavily used in conversation for pragmatic reasons of making the addressee comfortable and relaxed. It is hence always a feature of informal spoken language. Because EFs are always part of informal conversation they are avoided when the dyads are in asymmetrical relation”. Still according to Abbi, EFs also have a social cohesion function. A similar context of occurrence has been described for *=nij* (§3). Thus, the same diachronic source in both languages would have developed in two distinct (but overlapping) grammatical categories sharing the same inter-subjective dimension<sup>25</sup>.

Markers with the form *=nij* and carrying related meanings are found in a number of Tibeto-Burman languages farther afield. They are interesting to note and almost surely represent independent developments in these languages (DeLancey 2013). In Trung (Dulong, Nungish), *-nij* indexes 1→2 request forms (Sūn 1982: 108-10)<sup>26</sup>. In Dhimal, *-nij* indexes “imperious” 1SG→2 (King 2002: 49-55). In Hakha Lai, *-nij* indexes the cohortative (Peterson 2003: 414-5)<sup>27</sup>. According to DeLancey (2018), 1→2 is motivated by ‘sociopragmatic effects’, “issues of social interaction which automatically exist between two individuals who are talking to one another” (2018: 347), such as politeness or empathy while in the specific case of the cohortative, he argues (2018: 370) that the

<sup>23</sup> “A formation with *-nij* seems to have a similar effect as echo formations in Hindi in that it brings about a semantic shift that expands the notion associated to a lexical item so as to include related notions (see Montaut 2004: 161, 2008: 38-39)” Huber [personal communication].

<sup>24</sup> FOC = focus, PERF = perfective.

<sup>25</sup> The ‘etc’ semantics actually implies shared knowledge.

<sup>26</sup> In Trung, the first-person plural pronoun is *ij*, the second-person plural is *nu-nij* (Sun 1982: 73).

<sup>27</sup> In Anal Naga (Ozerov 2019: 27), *-nij* indexes 1st-person objects.

pattern “is to mark the category 1→2 in a way that emphasizes the addressee’s participation”. As discussed in §5.1, *=niŋ* may occur in similar environments, with expectation of interlocutor knowledge as yet another type of sociopragmatic effect that, according to DeLancey, motivates historical changes in the indexation of the “local” categories (1→2 and 2→1) in some Tibeto-Burman languages.

## 8 Discussion

The Chhitkul-Rākchham *=niŋ* provides a clear illustration of the category of engagement in Tibeto-Burman languages. What remains to be assessed is how Chhitkul-Rākchham enables us to refine the authoritative views of Landaburu (2007) and Evans et al. (2018) on the category. If we consider Evans et al.’s definition of engagement as expressing “the speaker’s assumptions about the degree to which their attention or knowledge is shared (or not shared) by the addressee” (Evans et al. 2018: 110), a first point can be made.

The notion of addressee must be construed broadly. In purportedly monologic contexts – such as example (15), the marker *=niŋ* indexes not a conversational interlocutor, but an audience. That is, the addressee need not be overtly specified or synchronously co-present in the speech act. While ‘speech act participants’ (SAPs) conventionally refer to speaker and hearer, certain uses of *=niŋ* reveal the limitations of this designation: the addressee may be an audience member rather than a conversational participant, and the audience itself may be shifting or even non-present – such as a future viewer of a video recording. Moreover, the addressee need not be a real-world interlocutor at all; narrative, stylistic, or performative frames may temporarily reconfigure the speaker-addressee relationship, embedding it within a fictional or constructed discourse context.

Another key point in Evans et al.’s approach is that “the relation of engagement to epistemic categories means that it borders on many more familiar linguistic categories: evidentiality, miratives, focus, mood, and modality” (2018: 119). By observing that “pure evidentiality is about sources, whereas engagement is about the presumed presence or absence of intersubjective sharing, whatever the source” (2018: 114-5), they also imply that it is possible to draw a clear-cut distinction between engagement and evidentiality.

While answering the question of whether engagement and evidentiality constitute distinct categories was not the primary aim of this paper, the data nonetheless raise important issues about how these categories interact in Chhitkul-Rākchham. From a language-internal perspective, the boundary between engagement and evidentiality is not always clear-cut, especially when evidential markers appear to serve pragmatic functions typically associated with engagement. This observation aligns with the broader discussion in Evans et al. (2018), who are more concerned with the conceptual distinction between these categories as comparative concepts, rather than language-specific categorizations.

From a conceptual standpoint, there are objective reasons why drawing a clear-cut distinction between engagement and evidentiality is difficult. To begin with, the notion of access plays a central role in Evans et al.’s account of engagement, and also figures prominently in Tournadre and LaPolla’s (2014: 240) definition of evidentiality as “the representation of source and access [emphasis added] to information according to the speaker’s perspective and strategy.” Tournadre and LaPolla explicitly

include access in their definition to account for egophoric marking<sup>28</sup>, which does not indicate the source of information but rather a type of cognitive access – a feature also observed in engagement. The similarities between engagement and the egophoric go even further. Kittilä (2019: 10) contends that “engagement is related more generally to epistemic authority,” echoing Bergqvist and Knuchel’s (2017: 359) observation that despite the considerable crosslinguistic variation in egophoric marking, “the one remaining variable that appears constant is the epistemic authority of the speech-act participants”. Finally, the conceptualization of evidentiality as ownership of knowledge (Bergqvist and Grzech 2023) rather than source of information, along with the use of evidentials to index the epistemic rights and responsibilities of speech-act participants, significantly blurs the boundary between evidentiality and engagement.

Additionally, it is very clear that engagement is not independent from reliability judgements and this seems to be a firm rule cross-linguistically. Evans et al. are on the same page when they observe that “they [the speakers] can only assume to varying degrees of certainty” (2018: 121). The non-shared suffix *-go* in Eastern Geshiza is consistent with this observation as Honkasalo (2019: 593) takes good note that “the use of the engagement suffix reflects the speaker’s subjective evaluation; the addressee possibly already knows the information, yet the speaker expects this certainly not [emphasis added] to be the case”. In the same vein, the category Hyslop describes in Kurtöp is intricately linked with degree of certainty – as evidenced by Fig. 1, where *-shang* (the hearer is not expected to share knowledge) and *-pala* (the hearer is expected to do so) are part of an epistemic scheme.

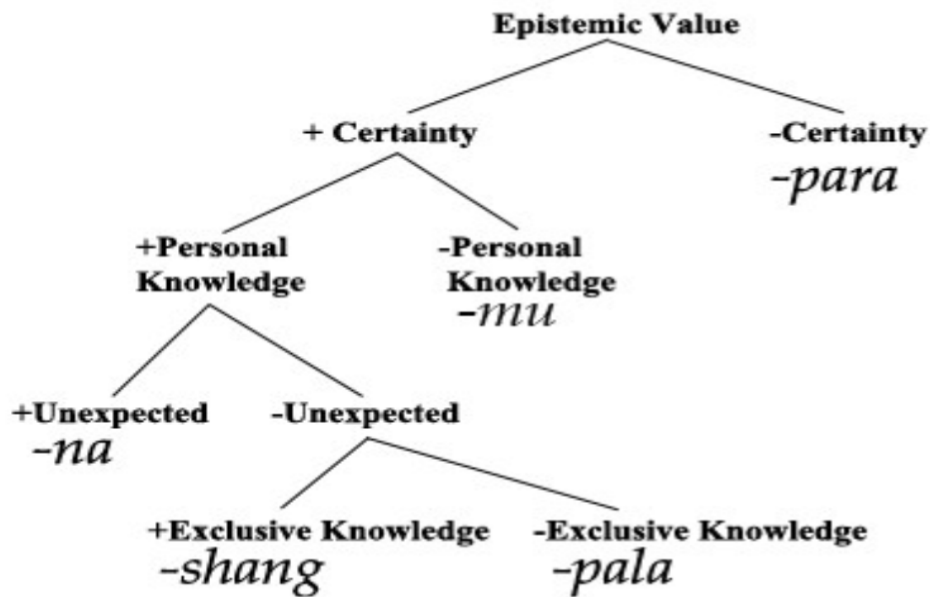


Figure 1: Kurtöp perfective aspect markers (Hyslop 2014: 204)

<sup>28</sup> Egophoric marking is sometimes referred to as ‘egophoricity’, that is, a specific category distinct from evidentiality per se, see e.g., Widmer (2020). I do not take a stance on this issue in this paper.

## 9 Concluding remarks

If we consider Heritage’s notion of epistemic status “in which persons recognize one another to be more or less knowledgeable concerning some domain of knowledge as a more or less settled matter of fact” (Heritage 2012: 32), Chhitkul-Rākchham lies at one end of the spectrum. The clitic =*niŋ* is used exclusively to mark those situations where the interlocutors share access to knowledge content. In that respect, engagement in Chhitkul-Rākchham is much less intricate than the four-value system – speaker-only (*kē-*), addressee-only (*k-/d-*), shared (*b-*), and known to neither (*bā-*) – found in Andoke. Yet, besides highlighting that language inherently caters to a listener (see Bakhtin’s (1981, 1986) concept of ‘addressivity’), it also shows that knowledge management<sup>29</sup> is not reducible to source of information and judgements upon its reliability: it is a broader domain where the context of utterance is key.

The clitic =*niŋ*, as an intersubjective marker, can be insightfully linked to the notion of ‘territory of information’, that is, the conditions that determine which participant holds epistemic authority over a given piece of information (Kawanishi 1994: 446; Kamio 1997). Crucially, example (22) suggests that such authority is not solely determined by access to knowledge, but also shaped by social relationships between interlocutors. This underscores that engagement is not a purely propositional-level phenomenon: sociopragmatic factors such as deference, expectation of action, or the degree of the addressee’s involvement play a central role in the distribution and interpretation of =*niŋ*.

By examining =*niŋ* across a variety of clause types and discourse contexts, I have shown that its functions extend beyond temporal or modal marking to include expectations about the interlocutor’s knowledge, calls to action, and expressions of deference. These findings support a shift from a strictly TAME-based understanding to one that incorporates engagement as a core dimension – what we might call TAMEE, where the second E stands for engagement. It is hoped this paper will stimulate further research on engagement in interactional and narrative contexts.

### ABBREVIATIONS

1	first person	HORT	hortative
2	second person	HSY	hearsay
3	third person	IMP	imperative
ABL	ablative case	IMPER	impersonal
ABS	absolutive case	IMPV	imperfective
ADV	adverb	INCL	inclusive
AGR	agreement	IND	individuation
AGT	agentive	INF	infinitive
AL	alienable (possession)	INFR	inference
ANIM	animate	INSTR	instrumental case
APPL	applicative	INT	intensifier
ASS	assertive	INTERJ	interjection
ATT	attentional	IRR	irrealis

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<sup>29</sup> I use the term ‘knowledge management’ rather than ‘epistemicity’ throughout this paper because the former term better conveys the idea of a subjectivity at play.

ATTR	attributive	LOC	locative case
AUX	auxiliary	MID	middle voice
CAUS	causative	MOD	modal
COND	conditional	MODIF	modifier
CONN	connective	NEG	negation
COMP	complementizer	NHON	non-honorific
COP	copula	NHYP	non-hypothetical
CVB	converb	NMZ	nominalizer
DAT	dative case	OBJ	object
DEM	demonstrative	PE	perceptual
DIST	distal	PFV	perfective
DU	dual	PL	plural
DUB	dubitative	POSS	possessive
E	epenthetic	POST	postposition
EGO	egophoric	PROG	progressive
EMPH	emphatic	PROX	proximal
ENG	engagement	PTCP	participle
ERG	ergative case	QNT	quantifier
EVD	evidential	QP	question particle
EXCL	exclusive	QUER	querying
FILL	filler	REDUP	reduplication
FOC	focus	REFL	reflexive
GEN	genitive case	RN	relator noun
HAB	habitual	SG	singular
HON	honorific	SURP	surprise

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