

## Class clitic > class prefix in Australian languages

Harvey & Mailhammer (2017) reconstruct nominal classification in Proto-Australian [PA] as the prefixal system in Table 1.

Table 1: PA Nominal class prefixation

	Demonstrative	Adjective	Gender-variable noun	Other nominals
Masculine	*ci-	*ci-	*na-	*Ø-
Feminine	*cip-	*cip-	*ŋal-	*Ø-
Animal	*ta-	*ta-		*Ø-
Plant	*ma-	*ma-		*Ø-
Other	*ku-	*ku-		*Ø-

As shown in Table 1, this is an agreement system where nouns do not take prefixation. Harvey & Mailhammer (2017: 474) propose that reflexes of the prefixes in Table 1 appearing on nouns and in verbal prefix complexes are examples of recurrent Headward Migration in daughter languages (Nichols 1986: 86). However, Harvey & Mailhammer do not propose specific HM pathways.

Further, Osgarby (2018) provides evidence that verbal prefixation in the Mirndi languages derives from a clitic complex which was an independent prosodic word in Proto-Mirndi. The change from independent clitic complex > verbal prefix complex conforms to standard grammaticalization patterns. There is no evidence to suggest that pathways from PA to Proto-Mirndi involved an unusual prefix complex > clitic complex change. Therefore, the best supported reconstruction is that PA also had an independent clause-level clitic complex. There are no evident pathways for migration of nominal prefixes into a clausal clitic complex.

Rather, we propose that the morphemes in Table 1 are better reconstructed as optional clitics which could appear either in the clitic complex or as proclitics on all types of nominals. We propose that the function of these optional clitics was to delimit potential reference domains (Baker 2002; Merlan et al. 1997: 65). This reconstruction provides straightforward pathways to synchronic systems. Delimitation of potential reference is a greater issue with adjectives and demonstratives than with nouns, and restriction of reflexes to adjectives and demonstratives in synchronic reflexes is therefore motivated.

With verbs, delimitation of reference can relate either to Absolutive arguments or to the heads for clausal subordination. Marking of clausal subordination appears in initial position, whereas marking of Absolutive arguments tends to be non-initial, in accordance with general considerations of scope (Dixon 2002: 372; Reid 1997: 202–208). Verbal reflexes of class marking are initial in some languages, e.g. Gaagudju (Harvey 2002: 225–226), and medial in others, e.g. Wubuy (Heath 1984: 347–368).

Reconstruction of the morphemes in Table 1 as optional clitics also provides better motivated pathways for the fact that reflexes of the originally derivational clitics \*ŋal= ‘Feminine’ and \*na= ‘Masculine’ become general Feminine and Masculine class markers in a number of languages, displacing reflexes of \*cip= and \*ci=. Under the reconstruction in Table 1, gender-variable heads have different marking from their modifiers: e.g. \*ŋal-cousin cip-big. Spread of the derivational morphemes requires innovation of new modifier forms \*ŋal-big and these innovated forms displacing existing forms \*cip-big. The optional clitic model predicts that \*Ø= marking of modifiers would be common in gender variable NPs, as the gender marked head would delimit potential reference, i.e. \*ŋal=cousin Ø=big. The first step in the spread of the derivational markers requires only extension of the \*ŋal= ~ \*Ø= to modifiers, giving \*ŋal=cousin ŋal=big.

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