The language of the Na (Mosuo) is estimated at 40,000 speakers (Yang Zhenhong, to appear), split between three dialects: Yongning, Beiquba, and Guabie (He and Jiang 1985:4). Na itself is categorized as an eastern variety of Naxi, which linguists variously characterize as an un subgrouped Tibeto-Burman language (Thurgood 2003:19–20); on the periphery of Loloish (Matisoff 1986:47); close to but not part of Lolo-Burmese (Bradley 1975:93); and both classified as Yiish (Lolo-Burmese) by Beijing linguists and typologically extremely similar to Loloish languages, yet perhaps not actually Loloish (Ramsey 1987:265–266). This work focuses on Yongning Na (hereafter, YN Na), as spoken in the area around Lugu Hu in Yunnan Province. Yunnan Province is located in southwestern China, and is north of Laos and Vietnam, east of Myanmar (Burma), southeast of Tibet, and west of Sichuan Province.

This presentation provides an overview of the key features of Yongning Na, including the structure of noun phrases, the sortal classifier system, verb phrases, existential verbs, grammaticalization, the aspectual system, and evidentials; additionally, a short description of the computing environment is given. Data presented are taken from audio- and video-recordings of oral narratives such as folklore and mythology which I recorded with the aim of documenting the culture of the Na linguistic community, their natural speech patterns, as well as important aspects of Na belief systems and the Daba religion. This methodology, the discourse-centered approach to language documentation (Urban and Sherzer 1988, Sherzer 1987, Sherzer and Woodbury 1987), also captures casual speech not obtained through formal elicitation and grammaticality judgments, thus yielding a more well-rounded data set.

The computing environment consists of a commercially available Unicode-compliant relational database and operating system (Microsoft Access XP and Windows XP) and Unicode-compliant fonts to customize a database that allows the user to: 1. enter data in multiple writing systems (here, English, IPA, and Chinese characters); 2. sort data by stipulated grammatical categories; 3. interlinearize a narrative text with multiple language glosses from a lexicon file; and 4. export the data in XML, a non-proprietary format. The use of Unicode-compliant software and fonts allows the database to operate in multiple languages without misinterpretation of the language encoding of the data. The fact that the data may be exported from the database in XML, a non-proprietary format, means that researchers running other database software or operating systems can use the data. Additionally, the XML format is convenient for distributing data over the Internet. This system is in line with the E-MELD recommendations for digital language documentation (E-MELD 2004).


# List of Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1SG PRO</td>
<td>1st person singular pronoun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1PL PRO</td>
<td>1st person plural pronoun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1INC PRO</td>
<td>1st person plural inclusive pronoun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1EXC PRO</td>
<td>1st person plural exclusive pronoun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2SG PRO</td>
<td>2nd person singular pronoun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2PL PRO</td>
<td>2nd person plural pronoun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3SG PRO</td>
<td>3rd person singular pronoun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3PL PRO</td>
<td>3rd person plural pronoun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DL</td>
<td>Dual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADV MAN</td>
<td>Adverbial (manner)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADV PRTCL</td>
<td>Adverbial particle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGT</td>
<td>Agentive marker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASP</td>
<td>Aspect marker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLS</td>
<td>Classifier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMKN</td>
<td>Common knowledge/assumed evidential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMP</td>
<td>Complementizer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COP</td>
<td>Copula</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSM</td>
<td>Change of state marker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRS</td>
<td>Currently relevant state marker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAT</td>
<td>Dative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EXIST</td>
<td>Existential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EXPER</td>
<td>Experiential aspect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FUT</td>
<td>Future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMP</td>
<td>Imperative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INFR</td>
<td>Inference evidential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTERJ</td>
<td>Interjection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOC</td>
<td>Locative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEG</td>
<td>Negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOM</td>
<td>Nominalizer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOM Agr</td>
<td>Agentive nominalizer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOM Loc</td>
<td>Locative nominalizer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOM Purp</td>
<td>Purposive nominalizer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PERF</td>
<td>Perfective aspect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PL</td>
<td>Plural</td>
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<tr>
<td>POSS</td>
<td>Possessive</td>
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<td>POSTP</td>
<td>Postposition</td>
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<tr>
<td>PROG</td>
<td>Progressive aspect</td>
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<tr>
<td>PRTCL</td>
<td>Particle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REF</td>
<td>Reflexive pronoun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REL</td>
<td>Relativizer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REP</td>
<td>Reported/hearsay evidential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QM</td>
<td>Question marker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QUOT</td>
<td>Quotative evidential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QW</td>
<td>Question word</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A Synopsis of Yongning Na (Mosuo) ¹

The 39th International Conference on Sino-Tibetan Languages and Linguistics
University of Washington, Seattle
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1. Introduction

- The language of the Na (Mosuo)²: categorized as an eastern variety of Naxi, which in turn has been characterized as:
  - an un subgrouped Tibeto-Burman language (Thurgood 2003:19–20),
  - on the periphery of Loloish (Matisoff 1986:47),
  - close to but not part of Lolo-Burmese (Bradley 1975:93), and
  - typologically very similar to Loloish languages, yet perhaps not actually Loloish (Ramsey 1987:265–266)

- Eastern Na (Mosuo) has three dialects:
  - Yongning
  - Beiquba
  - Guabie

- Eastern Na has an estimated 40,000 speakers (Yang Zhenhong, to appear); no data for the number of speakers of Yongning Na

- Also different lexical items preserved in the Daba (Na religion) oral tradition

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¹ This material is based upon fieldwork supported by the National Science Foundation under Doctoral Dissertation Improvement Grant No. 0345862 (PI Tony Woodbury), as well as grants from the NSF OISE and the University of Texas at Austin ASSSA and IEFS. Thanks for extremely helpful comments on previous versions of this research and lively discussion go to: Tony Woodbury, Nora England, Randy LaPolla, Tami Blumenfield, Roberto Zavala, and Christina Willis. Of course, remaining misanalyses, inaccuracies, and mistakes are mine alone. Constructive comments are always warmly welcomed and should be directed to: libertylidz@mail.utexas.edu.

² Although the term “Mosuo” is useful for information technology reasons (it is the term standard in the Chinese system of designating ethnic groups and is in common usage), it has several distinct disadvantages: 1. Na people state a preference for the use of the autonym Na rather than the exonym Mosuo, which they associate with opportunistic portrayals of the Na in the pop anthropology books and VCDs created by Han outsiders for the tourist market; 2. non-specificity: “Mosuo” was used to refer to the Naxi until the official designation of the ethnicities by the Chinese government in the mid-1950s; and 3. the Guabie Na are officially designated as “Mongolian” due to socio-historical circumstances.
Southwestern China

2. **Language typology**

- Tends toward analycity
- Grammatical relations mainly indicated by:
  - Word order
  - Lexical choice
  - Pragmatics
- Word order most common in unmarked, non-idiomatic, pragmatically neutral constructions: SOV
- Agreement is not marked by inflection, although person often can be extrapolated because of the conjunct/disjunct system as in Tibetan (Agha 1993, Bickel 2000, and DeLancey 2001)

3. **The noun phrase: Many typical TB features**

- N + ADJ + ADV + NUM + CLS word order
- Classifier system

4. **The verb phrase: Many typical TB features**

- Verb-final, although aspect markers, interjections, and evidentials can follow the verb
- Aspectual system
- Conjunct/disjunct system

5. **Other characteristics:**

- Rampant grammaticalization: (8) processes found so far
- Evidentiality
6. Grammaticalization

Overview

a. xi33 ‘person’ => xi33 NOM_Agt => xi33 NOM
b. di33 ‘place’ => di33 NOM_Loc => di33 NOM_Purp
c. ki33 ‘give’ => ki33 BEN => ki33 DAT
d. dzɔ33 EXIST/LOC => dzɔ33 PROG
e. bi33 lexical verb => bi33 AUX (movement to a location) => bi33 AUX (no movement to a location) => bi33 FUT
f. xo33 (desire) => xo33 (willingness) => xo33 (intention) => xo33 (prediction)
g. ku13 AUX (ability) => ku13 FUT (prediction)
h. xo33 AUX (movement to a location) => xo33 FUT (remote)

a. xi33 ‘person’ => xi33 NOM_Agt => xi33 NOM

xi33 means ‘person/people’:

(1)  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>xi33</th>
<th>tʰi33</th>
<th>tʰi33 ni13</th>
<th>ku13</th>
<th>zo33</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>person</td>
<td>this</td>
<td>this way</td>
<td>FUT</td>
<td>CRS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This type of person will be like this.
这样人会这样的。
Tsodeluyizo103

xi33 ‘person’ => xi33 NOM_Agt => xi33 NOM

(2)  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>li33</th>
<th>yi33</th>
<th>-xi33</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>labor</td>
<td>-NOM_Agt</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tsodeluyizo4
yak ride, tiger ride, horse ride,
牦牛 骑, 老虎 骑, 马 骑

the yak rider, the tiger rider, the horse rider,
牦牛骑的人, 老虎骑的人, 马骑的人

yongzhutser12

xi33 ‘person’ => xi33 NOMAgt => xi33 Nom

la33 zuu33 -xi33
ADV MAN say -NOM

words
说

Fangzi63

b. di33 ‘place’ => di33 NomLoc => di33 NomPurp

di33 means ‘land, earth, place’:

na13 za33 la33 zl33 za33 di33-ku33 bu33 mu33 za33 ga33
Refl son ADV MAN take CSM earth-LOC Poss young woman with

She said, “It is not possible for my son to court
她说他们家的儿子不可能和
gemu26

se33 se33 ts31 mu33- yi33 pi33.
court okay NEG- can QUOT

恋爱行会

a regular girl.”

民间的女孩子恋爱。

di33 ‘place’ => di33 NomLoc => di33 NomPurp

zu33- di33 tu33 mu33- ni31 na33 wu33-di33 tu33 t'ul33- x33 pi33.
warm- NomLoc plant NEG- COP 2SG PRO mountain- NomLoc plant NEG- go QUOT

热的地播种 是你 山地 播种不去

The heavens said, “If it’s not a warm place you can’t plant them, in the mountains, you can’t plant them.”

说, “除了热的地方以外, 高山的地方, 你不可以种。”

Tsodeluyizo254
di33 ‘place’ => di33 NOMLoc => di33 NOMPurp

(7)   dzi33  -di33          eat                      -NOMPurp.
      吃
      吃东西 to eat
      吃的

muphadaba12

c.  ki33 ‘give’ => ki33 BEN => ki33 DAT

- This grammaticalization conforms to cross-linguistically observed patterns of grammaticalization, as in Lord et al. (Lord et al. 2002:218–219) following Newman 1996.

- LaPolla notes that the grammaticalization of ‘give’ to benefactive is quite common specifically in Tibeto-Burman languages, and has occurred independently in Jinghpaw, Tamang, Tsangla, Camling, Belhare, and Lahu (LaPolla 2003a:33).

(8)  tʰ33  n33  pinguo (loan)  ɲa33     ki33        ki33.
     3PS PRO  AGR3 apple  1PS PRO  give an apple.

     3PS PRO 给我苹果。

versus

(9)   ɲa33           tʰ33            ki33        ki33.  pinguo (loan)  ki33.
     1PS PRO  3PS PRO  dat  apple  give  an apple.

     我他给我苹果。

ki33 ‘give’ => ki33 BEN => ki33 DAT

(10)  du33  ni33  sɔ33  tʰɔɔ33  dzɔ33  æ33  pʰɣ33  a33  ʐ33  -æ31  ki33  tʰu33  du31…
     one   day  three meal  EXIST ancestors  -PL  BEN “chudu”

     一天三顿饭要给祖先和神灵作chudu…

     一天三顿饭都要给祖先和神灵作chudu…

     Fangzì24

3 In YN Na, usually the indirect object precedes the direct object in constructions with the verb ki33. However, when the agentive marker nɩ33 is employed, the word order changes so that the direct object precedes the indirect object (examples (8) and (9)).
ki33 ‘give’ => ki33 BEN => ki33 DAT

He went to Apato’s place.
到了 Apato 那里。

Grammaticalization from locative to progressive is cross-linguistically very common—Bybee et al. go as far as to say, “… aside from movement sources, reduplications, and constructions with verbs meaning ‘to keep on’, all progressives derive from locative constructions.” (Bybee et al. 1994:131)

There was a type of bird that says, “cheeper cheeper cheeper cheeper.”
有一种鸟说，“tcʰi pʰuə tcʰi pʰuə tcʰi pʰuə tcʰi pʰuə”。

There was a fish caught in the cave;
有一条鱼卡在山洞里头;

the boy was roasting the fish to eat.
这个小孩儿正在烧鱼肉吃。
This path of grammaticalization also adheres very closely to the patterns of grammaticalization found by Bybee et al., here, for verbs of movement (Bybee et al. 1994:267–270).

(14) tʰæ33 tʰ33 ni13 my31 tɕ33 bi33 mu33- tɕʰuu33.
    经常 这样 下边 go NEG- 准
    Often in this way he was not allowed to go down to earth.
    gemu28

bi33 lexical verb => bi33 AUX (movement to a location) => bi33 AUX (no movement to a location) => bi33 FUT

(15) pʰæ31 tɕʰi33 mu33 zɔ33 -tʰæ31 5i33 bu33 lɔ33 yi33 bi33 mu33- zɔ33.
    男 娘娘 -们 自己 劳动 去用
    Men and women don’t need to go labor (in the fields).
    Change9

bi33 lexical verb => bi33 AUX (movement to a location) => bi33 AUX (no movement to a location) => bi33 FUT

(16) tʰi13 nɔ33 bu33 tʰa33 ɕ31 dzɔ33 bi13 ɕi13 pɔ33 la33 ku33 ni31
    所以 你 的 书 猪皮 用 做 是
    So he said, “Your book is made from pig skin, so
   所以说, “你的书是猪皮做的，
    muphadaba14

5i33 -z31 lɔ33 dzɔ33 ɕ31 bi33 pi33.
    自己 吃 吗 go QUOT
    why don’t we eat it up?”
    我们两个要不要把它吃掉了？”
bi33 lexical verb => bi33 AUX (movement to a location) => bi33 AUX (no movement to a location) => bi33 FUT

(17)  

la33 s13 bi33 ze33 pi33 ni31.  
ADV MAN kill FUT CRS QUOT COP  

副词 杀 去了 是  
He said he was going to kill him.  
说是去杀掉他。  
Tsodeluyizo138

f.  xo33 (desire) => xo33 (willingness) => xo33 (intention) => xo33 (prediction)

(18)  

zu33 mi33 ci33 xo33 suæ33 s133 suæ33 -xì33 da13.  
wife find xo33 want (type of tree)4 tall -NOM cut down  
老婆 找 要 (树的一个种类) 高 砍  
If he wanted to find a wife, he should cut down the tallest shuae si tree.  
要找老婆的话, 要砍最高的 shue si 树。  
Tsodeluyizo49

xo33 (desire) => xo33 (willingness) => xo33 (intention) => xo33 (prediction)

(19)  

my33 dzɔ33 ki33 xo33 ni31.  
girl EXIST give FUT COP  
女儿 是 给 是  
They would give their daughter to him.  
女儿是会给他的。  
Tsodeluyizo146

4 In an interview with another daba, the daba reported that suæ33 s131 in the modern language refers to a type of rhododendron or azalea. However, he was not certain whether this was what suæ33 s131 meant in the older form of the language preserved in the daba canon. Indeed, the semantics would be a bit strange, given the thinness of the trunks of rhododendrons/azaleas: in this text, Apato instructs the protagonist to cut down a suæ33 s131 tree, bury it in the sand for nine years, and it would take on the appearance of a person. The protagonist could then take this magically-created woman as his wife.
(20)  a33 pa33 tɔ3i ki33  tʰu33 nɔ33  tʰi13 zu33 mi33  cɔ33  xɔ33 ni31.
   Apato  DAT  arrive  then  so  wife  find  FUT  COP
   Apato 到 了 才  所以  老婆  找 是
When he arrived at Apato’s place, then he would go find a wife.
到了 Apato 那里,才去找老婆。

(21)  tʰɩ33 kʰuu33 lu33 pi33 dzɔ33 my33 la33 di33 laɔ33  tɔ3i pi13  xɔ33.
   this  CLS  till  if  heaven and earth  ADV  MAN  turn over  FUT
   这 量词  耕  的话  天  和  地  翻转
If this piece of land is tilled, heaven and earth will switch places.
如果这块儿地耕种的话，天和地会翻转。

(22)  tʰɩ33 ni13  zɔ33  xɔ33 gu33  5i33 saɔ33 ku31  e31 ki31  zoɔ33 pa33
   this way  PERF  shuttle for weaving hemp cloth  IPL  PRO  isn’t that right  shuttle
   这样 了  织麻布的槽  咱们  是不是  槽
This way, don’t we have a kind of shuttle for weaving hemp cloth,
我们有一个织麻布的槽，是不是，

9/22/2006 7:26:23 PM  10
C:\Documents and Settings\Liberty\Desktop\Diss\2006icstl139\lidzhandout.doc
ku13 AUX (ability) => **ku13 FUT (prediction)**

(23)  

泉水洞  这  一  量词  有

It is said that there would be a spring there.

听说会有一个泉水站在那里。

Tsodeluyizo107

h.  **xa33 AUX (movement to a location) => xa33 FUT (remote)**

(24)  

everyday  pig  feed  and  this  way

Everyday he went to feed the pigs and such.

每一天去放猪阿这些。

cinami14

xa33 AUX (movement to a location) => **xa33 FUT (remote)**

If there were intermediary stages in the grammaticalization from auxiliary indicating movement to a location to remote future marker, these are no longer attested in the language.

(25)  

so  2PS PRO  AGT  good  one  bless  illness  and  such

To ask, “Please carefully protect the child so that illness and such

muphadaba36

得到  NEG-  FUT  QUOT

won’t come.”

不要让他得到。
7. Conclusion

One of the most striking aspects of these data is that judging by cross-linguistic studies of available paths of grammaticalization, in several cases, all or many of the stages along the grammaticalization path in YN Na are co-present. Lexical items change into grammatical markers, and yet each usage remains in the language and each retains its phonological shape. For example, processes e. and f. each have four stages, and yet all of these stages can still be attested for YN Na. This is fortunate, because as YN Na is not a written language, and there are no written records of previous incarnations of the language.
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