**Title**
A brief introduction to Zlarong, a newly recognized language in Mdzo sgang, TAR

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**Citation**

**Issue Date**
2018-09

**URL**
http://hdl.handle.net/2433/235318

**Type**
Conference Paper

**Textversion**
author

Kyoto University
A brief introduction to Zlarong, a newly recognized language in Mdzo sgang, TAR

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(Sun Yat-sen University)

Zlarong (/la55rʊn55/, Tibetan /la55ruɲ55/) is the autonym for Tibetan people living in Renguo Township, Mdzo sgang County, TAR. Their language /mə31ke53/ (Tibetan /ma31ke53/) is provisionally considered as a member of Qiangic languages. This paper provides an outline of this newly recognized language.

**Phonology overview**

- **Consonants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>p</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>ts</th>
<th>te</th>
<th>tɕ</th>
<th>k</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>pʰ</td>
<td>tʰ</td>
<td>tsʰ</td>
<td>teʰ</td>
<td>tɕʰ</td>
<td>kʰ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b</td>
<td>d</td>
<td>dz</td>
<td>dz</td>
<td>dz</td>
<td>g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mb</td>
<td>nd</td>
<td>ndz</td>
<td>ndz</td>
<td>ndz</td>
<td>ŋ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>ŋ</td>
<td>ŋ</td>
<td>s</td>
<td>ɕ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>w</td>
<td>r</td>
<td>l</td>
<td>l</td>
<td>z</td>
<td>ɣ</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Vowels**

  i, y, e, e, ə, o, y, u, ɔ, i

  +nasalization (ɻ)

- **Tone**

  Three-way word tone system: High (55), Falling (53) and Low (31, 13)

  E.g. /me55/ ‘name’ /me53/ ‘medicine’

  /re53/ ‘horse’ /re51/ ‘cloth’

- **Syllable structure**

  Maximum syllable structure: CV.

  No cluster nor checked syllable are attested.

  E.g. /ndza55/ ‘ice’

**Zlarong shares cognates with Qiangic languages**

Despite of the large amount of Tibetan loan words, Zlarong shares many cognates with Qiangic languages. Below are some examples.

Data of Qiangic languages collected from Huang (1992), Jacques (2008) and Sun (2016).
Surrounded by Tibetan-speaking areas, Zlarong has a large amount of Tibetan loan words.

### Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Zlarong</th>
<th>Minyag</th>
<th>Taoping Qiang</th>
<th>Japhug Rgyalrong</th>
<th>WrT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>you</td>
<td>nə^55</td>
<td>ne^53</td>
<td>ne^55</td>
<td>nyo^</td>
<td>khjo^d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>horse</td>
<td>re^53</td>
<td>yui^35</td>
<td>zhi^55</td>
<td>mbro</td>
<td>rta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>road</td>
<td>r^13</td>
<td>dzu^35</td>
<td>le^33</td>
<td>tʂ^33</td>
<td>lam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>one</td>
<td>ti^13</td>
<td>k^55</td>
<td>t^35</td>
<td>z^31</td>
<td>gte^9q</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>four</td>
<td>y^13</td>
<td>z^35</td>
<td>d^55</td>
<td>ku^fd</td>
<td>bzi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>seven</td>
<td>ne^13</td>
<td>n^35</td>
<td>ei^35</td>
<td>k^u^m^us</td>
<td>bdun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ten</td>
<td>a^35</td>
<td>ko^55</td>
<td>fi^35</td>
<td>z^31</td>
<td>sqi^</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>blood</td>
<td>se^53</td>
<td>sa^33</td>
<td>sa^33</td>
<td>ts^33</td>
<td>khrag</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>meat</td>
<td>te^61</td>
<td>nd^65</td>
<td>t^=Integer</td>
<td>ea^</td>
<td>ea^</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>urine</td>
<td>pi^13</td>
<td>bi^35</td>
<td>bie^2^4I</td>
<td>tnu^rmbi^</td>
<td>gtei^n^ pa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>snow</td>
<td>w^13</td>
<td>vu^35</td>
<td>m^31 p^65</td>
<td>t^j^p^a</td>
<td>kha^ ba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>water</td>
<td>te^55</td>
<td>teu^55</td>
<td>tsu^13</td>
<td>tuci^</td>
<td>teh^u</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>smoke</td>
<td>mu^55</td>
<td>k^65</td>
<td>m^1^3 kh^u^55</td>
<td>t^k^h^u^</td>
<td>du^ ba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wind</td>
<td>m^a^3</td>
<td>m^1^5</td>
<td>m^1^3 ma^1^3</td>
<td>q^al^e^</td>
<td>l^h^a^ g^a^ pa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cloud</td>
<td>nd^a^5</td>
<td>ro^55</td>
<td>nd^u^1^3 z^3^5</td>
<td>z^d^u^m^</td>
<td>sp^r^i^n^ pa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>belly</td>
<td>w^u^1^3</td>
<td>vu^3^5</td>
<td>lo^3^3</td>
<td>pu^3^</td>
<td>t^u^x^t^u^</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some words (e.g. ‘blood’, ‘urine’, ‘smoke’) show apparent correlation with Qiangic languages, instead of Tibetan. Moreover, like in some Qiangic languages, qualitative adjectives are often reduplicated syllables, as shown in the table below.

### Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Zlarong</th>
<th>Minyag</th>
<th>Zhaba</th>
<th>Stau</th>
<th>Choyu</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>white</td>
<td>t^3^1</td>
<td>t^3^1</td>
<td>t^3^3</td>
<td>p^t^i^5^5</td>
<td>p^t^h^o^5^5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>black</td>
<td>n^3^1</td>
<td>n^3^1</td>
<td>n^3^3</td>
<td>n^a^5</td>
<td>n^3^3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>red</td>
<td>n^5^3</td>
<td>n^3^1</td>
<td>n^3^3</td>
<td>n^3^3</td>
<td>n^3^3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yellow</td>
<td>n^3^1</td>
<td>n^1^5</td>
<td>n^3^3</td>
<td>n^3^3</td>
<td>n^3^3</td>
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<tr>
<td>short</td>
<td>w^3^1</td>
<td>w^3^1</td>
<td>t^3^3</td>
<td>n^d^a^3</td>
<td>n^d^o^5^3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wide</td>
<td>p^a^5</td>
<td>p^a^5</td>
<td>d^3^3</td>
<td>n^j^i^</td>
<td>n^j^i^</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>thick</td>
<td>m^b^o^1</td>
<td>m^b^o^5</td>
<td>m^b^o^1</td>
<td>m^b^o^5</td>
<td>v^e^3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Tibetan loan words

Surrounded by Tibetan-speaking areas, Zlarong has a large amount of Tibetan loan words.

### Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Zlarong</th>
<th>WrT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>fish</td>
<td>nə^1^3</td>
<td>nə</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sand</td>
<td>te^3^1</td>
<td>bje^ ma^</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>doctor</td>
<td>m^e^5^5</td>
<td>sman^ pa^</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ground</td>
<td>se^5^3</td>
<td>sa</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A notable feature of Zlarong is that an /-a/ rhyme in Written Tibetan often corresponds to /-e/ in Zlarong.

### Zlarong numerals
Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th>+20</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>le 5</td>
<td>kɔ 5</td>
<td>a 5 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>ti 3</td>
<td>k' i 5</td>
<td>a 5 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>ne 3</td>
<td>ji 5</td>
<td>a 5 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>sɔ 1</td>
<td>o 5</td>
<td>sɔ 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>yɔ 1</td>
<td>o 5</td>
<td>yɔ 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>nə 1</td>
<td>a 5 5</td>
<td>nə 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>teu 1</td>
<td>o 5 5</td>
<td>teu 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>ne 1</td>
<td>o 5 5</td>
<td>ne 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>ngo 1</td>
<td>e 5 5</td>
<td>ngo 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<p>| | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100</td>
<td>dze 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Numerals above 30 are all Tibetan loan words.

**Copulative verbs**

Egophoric copulative verb: /ŋo 13/

Non-egophoric copulative verb: /xe 13/

The function of which resembles copula in Tibetan.

1. a. ŋo 55 gi 31 ge 55 ŋo 13
   1SG teacher COP
   ‘I am a teacher.’

   b. ji 33 gi 31 ge 55 xe 13
   3SG teacher COP
   ‘He is a teacher.’

**Existential verbs**

Existential verbs are used to express existence, possession and location. Usually they express different evidentiality in Zlarong.

- **Existence**
  Sensory: /ŋa 13/
  Egophoric: /kʰu 13/
  Inferential: /kʰu 13 xo 13/ (morphologically EXT+COP)

2. a. teu 55 tsir 53 wo 55 ti 55 ji 31 ki 53 ta 31 ŋa 13
   table above book one EXT
   ‘There is a book on the table.’ (I saw a book laid by someone)

   b. teu 55 tsir 53 wo 55 ti 55 ji 31 ki 53 ta 31 kʰu 13
   table above book one EXT
   ‘There is a book on the table.’ (The book was laid by me)
There is a book on the table. (I think there should be a book)

**Possession**

/kʰu¹³/

/ndzā⁵⁵/, /ndzo⁵³ xo¹³/

(3)  a. ŋa⁵⁵ a¹³ tɔ⁵⁵ tɔ³¹ kʰu¹³

lSG:LOC brother one EXT

‘I have a brother.’

b. ŋa⁵⁵ pi⁵⁵ tsi⁵³ ti³¹ kʰi⁵⁵ ndzā⁵⁵

lSG:LOC cup one EXT

‘I have a cup.’

c. tse⁵⁵ xi⁵⁵ pi⁵⁵ tsi⁵³ ti³¹ kʰi⁵⁵ ndzo⁵³ xo¹³

Bkrashis cup one EXT COP

‘Bkrashis has a cup.’

The /kʰu¹³/ in (3).a. cannot be replaced by /ndzā⁵⁵/. The difference between /kʰu¹³/ and /ndzā⁵⁵/ may concern the animacy or alienability of the object. It still awaits further study.

**Location**

/kʰɔ̃¹³/, /kʰy¹³/

/ŋa¹³/

/kʰu¹³ xo¹³/

(4)  a. ŋo⁵⁵ ɕɛ̃-na⁵³ kʰɔ̃¹³

lSG county.town-LOC EXT

‘I am in county town.’

b. ŋo⁵⁵ tse³¹ ɕɛ̃-na⁵³ kʰy¹³

lPL county.town-LOC EXT

‘We are in county town.’

c. tse⁵⁵ xi⁵⁵ ɕɛ̃-na⁵³ ŋa¹³

Bkrashis county.town-LOC EXT

‘Bkrashis is in county town.’ (I saw him)

d. tse⁵⁵ xi⁵⁵ ɕɛ̃-na⁵³ kʰu¹³ xo¹³

Bkrashis county.town-LOC EXT COP

‘Bkrashis is in county town.’ (I think he should be there)

**Direction marking**

There are 6 directional prefixes.
/AV-/ ‘upward’  /nV-/ ‘downward’
/kV-/ ‘upstream, inward’  /a/- ‘downstream, outward’.
/rV-/ ‘toward’  /tV-/ ‘away from’

The vowel of prefix shows harmony with the vowel of the verb. Directional prefixes are employed in forming perfective and imperative.

- **Perfective**

(5) a. ŋo₅₅ ɕɛ̃₁₃-na₅₃  th₃₁-xa₅₅
   ISG county.town-LOC DIR:PFV
   ‘I went to the county town.’

b. ŋo₅₅  kʰa₅₅-la₅₅  rɨ₃-wa₃₁
   ISG meal  DIR-eat:PFV
   ‘I had meal.’

- **Imperative**

(6) a. tũ₃₁-xũ₃₁       c. kʰu₅₃-xũ₃₁
   DIR-go:IMP  DIR-go:IMP
   ‘Go up!’  ‘Go upstream!’ or ‘Go into (the room)!’

b. nũ₅₃-xũ₃₁       d. a₅₁-xũ₃₁
   DIR-go:IMP  DIR-go:IMP
   ‘Go down!’  ‘Go downstream!’ or ‘Go out (of the room)!’

**Evidentiality**

(7) a. tse₄₅-xi₅₅  ɕɛ₁₃-na₅₃  tʰi₃₁-le₅₅
   Bkrashis county.town-LOC  DIR-go:PFV-SENS
   ‘Bkrashis went to the county town.’ (I witnessed him leaving)

b. tse₄₅-xi₅₅  ɕɛ₁₃-na₅₃  tʰi₃₁-le₅₅-sɨ₃₁
   Bkrashis county.town-LOC  DIR-go:PFV-INF
   ‘Bkrashis went to the county town.’ (It can be inferred)

Sensory is unmarked whereas inferential is marked by /sɨ₃₁/.

**Imperative and prohibitive**

Imperative is formed in verb prefixed by directional marker. Verb stem may show alternation according to person.

(8) a. a₃¹-ndzũ₇₃       c. a₃¹-tʰũ₅₃
   DIR-eat:IMP.2SG  DIR-drink:IMP.2SG
   ‘Eat!’ (you singular)  ‘Drink!’ (you singular)
b. a₃¹-ndza₅³  
   DIR-eat:IMP.2PL  
   ‘Eat!’ (you plural)

d. a₃¹-tʰə̃₅³  
   DIR-drink:IMP.2PL  
   ‘Drink!’ (you plural)

In forming prohibitive, the vowel of directional prefix changes into /-a/, and the tone changes into a high 55.

(9)  
a. kʰu₅³-xu₃¹  
   DIR-go:IMP  
   ‘Go!’

c. nji₅³-jì₃¹-pa₃¹  
   DIR-sleep:IMP  
   ‘Sleep!’

b. kʰa₅₅-xu₅₅  
   DIR-go:PROH  
   ‘Don’t go!’

d. na₅₅-jì₅₅-pə₃¹  
   DIR-sleep:PROH  
   ‘Don’t sleep!’

Anticausative

Two pairs that show consonant alternation in forming anticausative are attested.

- /kα/ ~ /ŋɡa/  ‘break (something soft)’
- /kɔ/ ~ /ŋɡa/  ‘break (something hard)’

(10)  
a. ɕe₅³ ŋɡə₅₅-ɛ₅₅-sɨ₃¹  
   rope  break-PERF-INF  
   ‘The rope is broken.’

b. ʨe₅₅-xi₅₅  kə₃¹  ce₅³  a₅³-kə₃¹  
   Bkrashis  AGT  rope  DIR-break:PFV  
   ‘Bkrashis broke the rope.’

c. pi₅₅-tsi₅³  ŋɡɔ₅₅-ɛ₅₅-sɨ₃¹  
   cup  break-PERF-INF  
   ‘The cup is broken.’

d. ʨe₅₅-xi₅₅  kə₃¹  pi₅₅-tsi₅³  nə₅₅-kə₃¹  
   Bkrashis  AGT  cup  DIR-break:PFV  
   ‘Bkrashis broke the cup.’

Case

The basic word order of Zlarong is SV/APV. Its case marking system resembles Tibetan.

- Agentive and absolutive

(11)  
kʰy₅³-kə₃¹  ŋo₅₅  nə₃¹-ndʒə₅₅  
   dog-AGT  1SG:ABS  DIR-bite:PFV  
   ‘Dog bit me.’

The agentive marker is /kə₃¹/ and the absolutive is unmarked.
The agentive marker is not always obligatory, the condition of its occurrence awaits further study.

- **Dative**

(12) ŋo₅₅ ji³¹si³³ t₃e⁵⁵xi³⁵₃-ka³¹ ta³¹ji³⁵₃ d₃zₑ³₃ t₃a³¹-r₃₅₃
1SG yesterday Bkrashis-DAT money hundred DIR-give:PFV
‘I gave Bkrashis a hundred yuan yesterday.’

The dative marker is /ka³¹/. Pronouns don’t need a marker, some of which are realized by vowel alternation. See Table.5 below.

- **Genitive**

The genitive marker is /ko³¹/.

- **Instrumental**

The instrumental marker is /ko³¹/.

- **Locative**

The locative marker is /na³¹/.

- **Ablative**

The ablative marker is /re³¹/.

- **Case of pronoun**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table.5</th>
<th>ABS</th>
<th>DAT</th>
<th>GEN</th>
<th>LOC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1SG</td>
<td>ŋo₅₅</td>
<td>ŋa₅₅</td>
<td>ŋa₅₅</td>
<td>ŋa₅₅</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2SG</td>
<td>ŋo⁴₃</td>
<td>ŋa⁴₃</td>
<td>ŋa⁴₃</td>
<td>ŋa⁴₃</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3SG</td>
<td>ji⁵₅</td>
<td>ji⁵₅</td>
<td>ji⁵₅</td>
<td>ji⁵₅</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Person marking**

Due to the lackness of detailed study, I couldn’t summarize the person marking system of Zlarong yet. I’ll exemplify it with sentences I know at this point.

- **Intransitive**

(13) a. ŋo₅₅ cᵢ³¹-na₅₃ t₃a³¹-xa³₅₅
1SG county.town-LOC DIR-go:PFV
‘I went to the county town.’

b. ŋo₅₅t₃e⁵¹ cᵢ³¹-na₅₃ tᵢ³¹-xᵢ³₅₅
1PL county.town-LOC DIR-go:PFV
‘We went to the county town.’
c. ʈʂɛ̃55-xi55 ɕɛ̃13-na53 ʈʰi31-le55
   Bkrashis county.town-LOC DIR-go:PFV
   ‘Bkrashis went to the county town.’

The conjugation of intransitive involves verb stem alternation as well as suppletive.

- Transitive

(14) a. ɲo55-ka55 ɲu53 ta31-jì55 dze53 ʈʰe31-re53
   1SG-AGT 2SG:DAT money hundred DIR-give:PFV
   ‘I gave you a hundred yuan.’

b. ɲo55-ka55 ʈʂɛ̃55-xi55-ka31 ta31-jì55 dze53 ʈʰa31-ra53
   1SG-AGT Bkrashis-DAT money hundred DIR-give:PFV
   ‘I gave Bkrashis a hundred yuan.’

c. ʈʂɛ̃55-xi55-dzo31-ma53-ka31 ta31-jì55 dze53 ʈʰa31-ra53
   Bkrashis-AGT Sgrolma-DAT money hundred DIR-give:PFV
   ‘Bkrashis gave Sgrolma a hundred yuan.’

The conjugation of transitive seems to resemble that of Stau, which concerns both A and P (Jacques, Lai et al. 2017). But still it awaits detailed study.

[Abbreviation]

1SG: 1st person singular   EXT: existensial
2SG: 2nd person singular   GEN: genitive
3SG: 3rd person singular   IMP: imperative
1PL: 1st person plural     INF: inferential
2PL: 2nd person plural     LOC: locative
ABS: absolutive            PERF: perfect
AGT: agentive              PFV: perfective
COP: copulative            PROH: prohibitive
DAT: dative                SENS: sensory
DIR: directional

[Reference]