

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

Haoliang Zhao

(Sun Yat-sen University)

Zlarong (/la⁵⁵rɔ⁵⁵/, Tibetan /la⁵⁵ruŋ⁵⁵/) is the autonym for Tibetan people living in Renguo Township, Mdzo sgang County, TAR. Their language /mə⁵⁵kə⁵⁵/ (Tibetan /ma³¹ke⁵³/) is provisionally considered as a member of Qiangic languages. This paper provides an outline of this newly recognized language.

Phonology overview

- Consonants

p	t	ts	tɕ	tʂ	k
p ^h	t ^h	ts ^h	tɕ ^h	tʂ ^h	k ^h
b	d	dz	dʒ	dʐ	g
mb	nd	ndz	ndʒ	ndʐ	ŋg
m	n		ɲ		ŋ
		s	ɕ	ʂ	x
		z	ʑ		ɣ
w			j		
	r				
	ɭ				
	l				

- Vowels

i, y, e, ɛ, a, ɔ, o, ʊ, u, ə, ɨ
+nasalization (ĩ)

- Tone

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

E.g. /me⁵⁵/ ‘name’ /me⁵³/ ‘medicine’
/re⁵³/ ‘horse’ /re¹³/ ‘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).

Table.1

	Zlarong	Minyag	Taoping Qiang	Japhug Rgyalrong	WrT
you	ŋo ⁵³	ne ⁵³	no ⁵⁵	nɾzo	khjod
horse	re ⁵³	yui ³⁵	zu ⁵⁵	mbro	rta
road	rə ¹³	dze ³⁵ le ⁵³	ko ³³ dze ³³	tʂu	lam
one	ti ³¹ kʰi ⁵⁵	tə ³⁵	a ³¹	ci	gteig
four	ɣə ¹³	zə ³⁵	dʒɿ ⁵⁵	kuβde	bzi
seven	ŋe ¹³	ŋyi ³⁵	eiŋ ³³	kuɛnuus	bdun
ten	a ⁵⁵ kɔ ⁵⁵	ɦe ³⁵ kɔ ⁵⁵	χa ³¹ dy ³³	sqi	bteu
blood	se ⁵³	sa ⁵³	sa ³³	tɾse	khrag
meat	tɛ ^h i ¹³	ndo ⁵⁵	tʃɦ ⁵⁵	ea	ea
urine	pi ¹³	bi ³⁵	bie ²⁴¹	tu-rmbi	gtein pa
snow	wi ¹³	vu ³⁵	mə ³¹ pa ⁵⁵	tɾjpa	kha ba
water	tei ⁵⁵	tew ⁵³	tsuə ³³	tu-ci	tehu
smoke	mu ⁵⁵ kʰu ⁵⁵	mu ³⁵ khu ⁵⁵	mə ³¹ khuə ⁵⁵	tɾkhu	du ba
wind	ma ³¹ mi ⁵⁵	mə ⁵⁵ me ³³	ma ³³ ku ⁵⁵	qale	lhag pa
cloud	nda ⁵⁵ rə ⁵⁵	ndu ³³ ze ³⁵	χde ³³	zdum	sprin pa
belly	wu ¹³	vu ³⁵ lə ⁵³	pu ³³	tu-xtu	grod khog

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

	Zlarong	Minyag	Zhaba	Stau	Choyu
white	tʂʰɿ ³¹ tʂʰɿ ⁵³	tʂhə ⁵⁵ tʂhə ³³	ptʂi ⁵⁵ ptʂhi ⁵⁵	phru phru	ptʂho ⁵⁵ ptʂho ⁵⁵
black	ŋi ³¹ ŋi ⁵³	ŋi ⁵⁵ ŋi ³³	na ⁵⁵ na ⁵⁵	ŋa ŋa	ŋe ⁵⁵ ŋe ³³
red	ne ⁵⁵ ne ⁵³	ŋi ⁵⁵ ŋi ³³	ŋi ⁵⁵ ŋi ³³	ŋgi ⁵⁵ ŋgi ⁵⁵	ŋe ⁵⁵ ŋi ³³
yellow	ne ⁵⁵ ne ⁵³	nu ⁵⁵ nu ³³	ʂɿ ⁵⁵ ʂɿ ⁵⁵	—	—
short	we ³¹ we ⁵³	tshə ⁵⁵ tshə ⁵³	ndʌ ³³ ndʌ ⁵⁵	lji lje	tsʰo ⁵⁵ tsʰo ³³
wide	pʰa ⁵⁵ pʰa ⁵³	de ³³ de ⁵⁵	fi ³³ fi ⁵⁵	ge lo	spɛ ⁵⁵ spɛ ³³
thick	mbo ³¹ mbo ⁵⁵	mbə ³¹ mbə ⁵⁵	ve ³¹ ve ⁵⁵	—	—

Tibetan loan words

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

Table.3

	Zlarong	WrT
fish	ŋe ¹³	ŋa
sand	tɛy ³¹ me ⁵³	bje ma
doctor	mɛ ⁵⁵ pe ⁵³	sman pa
ground	se ⁵³	sa

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

Zlarong numerals

Table.4

	+10		+20		
0	le ⁵⁵ kɔ ⁵⁵	a ⁵⁵ kɔ ⁵⁵	na ⁵³	100	dze ⁵³
1	ti ¹³ kh ⁵⁵	a ⁵⁵ ti ⁵⁵	na ⁵⁵ ti ¹³		
2	ne ³¹ ji ⁵³	a ⁵⁵ ɲi ⁵³	na ⁵⁵ ne ³¹ ji ⁵³		
3	sɔ̃ ¹³	o ⁵⁵ sɔ̃ ⁵³	na ⁵⁵ sɔ̃ ¹³	30	sũ ⁵⁵ teu ⁵³
4	ɣə ¹³	o ⁵⁵ ɣə ⁵³	na ⁵⁵ ɣə ¹³	40	zi ⁵⁵ teu ⁵³
5	ɲa ¹³	a ⁵⁵ ɲa ⁵³	na ⁵⁵ ɲa ¹³	50	ɲa ⁵⁵ teu ⁵³
6	te ^h u ¹³	o ⁵⁵ te ^h u ⁵⁵	na ⁵⁵ te ^h u ¹³	60	tɕu ³¹ teu ⁵³
7	ɲe ¹³	o ⁵⁵ ɲe ⁵³	na ⁵⁵ ɲe ¹³	70	dẽ ⁵⁵ teu ⁵³
8	ɛe ¹³	o ⁵⁵ ɛe ⁵⁵	na ⁵⁵ ɛe ¹³	80	dzo ⁵⁵ teu ⁵³
9	ɲgo ¹³	e ⁵⁵ ɲgo ⁵³	na ⁵⁵ ɲgo ¹³	90	gu ⁵⁵ teu ⁵³

Numerals above 30 are all Tibetan loan words.

Copulative verbs

Egophoric copulative verb: /ɲo¹³/

Non-egophoric copulative verb: /xe¹³/

The function of which resembles copula in Tibetan.

- (1) a. ɲo⁵⁵ gi³¹gẽ⁵⁵ ɲo¹³
 1SG teacher COP
 ‘I am a teacher.’
- b. ji³³ gi³¹gẽ⁵⁵ xe¹³
 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: /ɲa¹³/
 Egophoric: /k^hu¹³/
 Inferential: /k^hu¹³ xo¹³/ (morphologically EXT+COP)

- (2) a. tɕɔ⁵⁵tsi⁵³ wɔ⁵⁵ti⁵⁵ ji³¹ki⁵³ tə³¹ ɲa¹³
 table above book one EXT
 ‘There is a book on the table.’ (I saw a book laid by someone)
- b. tɕɔ⁵⁵tsi⁵³ wɔ⁵⁵ti⁵⁵ ji³¹ki⁵³ tə³¹ k^hu¹³
 table above book one EXT
 ‘There is a book on the table.’ (The book was laid by me)

- c. tɕə⁵⁵tsi⁵³ wɔ⁵⁵ti⁵⁵ ji³¹ki⁵³ tə³¹ k^hu¹³ xo¹³
 table above book one EXT COP
 ‘There is a book on the table.’ (I think there should be a book)

- Possession

/k^hu¹³/

/ndzã⁵⁵/, /ndzo⁵³ xo¹³/

- (3) a. ŋa⁵⁵ a³¹ tə⁵⁵ tə³¹ k^hu¹³
 1SG:LOC brother one EXT
 ‘I have a brother.’
- b. ŋa⁵⁵ pi⁵⁵tsi⁵³ ti³¹k^hi⁵⁵ ndzã⁵⁵
 1SG:LOC cup one EXT
 ‘I have a cup.’
- c. tɕe⁵⁵xi⁵⁵ pi⁵⁵tsi⁵³ ti³¹k^hi⁵⁵ ndzo⁵³ xo¹³
 Bkrashis cup one EXT COP
 ‘Bkrashis has a cup.’

The /k^hu¹³/ in (3).a. cannot be replaced by /ndzã⁵⁵/. The difference between /k^hu¹³/ and /ndzã⁵⁵/ may concern the animacy or alienability of the object. It still awaits further study.

- Location

/k^hɕ¹³/, /k^hy¹³/

/ŋa¹³/

/k^hu¹³ xo¹³/

- (4) a. ŋo⁵⁵ ɕɛ¹³-na⁵³ k^hɕ¹³
 1SG county.town-LOC EXT
 ‘I am in county town.’
- b. ŋə⁵⁵tɕe³¹ ɕɛ¹³-na⁵³ k^hy¹³
 1PL county.town-LOC EXT
 ‘We are in county town.’
- c. tɕe⁵⁵xi⁵⁵ ɕɛ¹³-na⁵³ ŋa¹³
 Bkrashis county.town-LOC EXT
 ‘Bkrashis is in county town.’ (I saw him)
- d. tɕe⁵⁵xi⁵⁵ ɕɛ¹³-na⁵³ k^hu¹³ 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.

/tV-/ ‘upward’	/nV-/ ‘downward’
/k ^h V-/ ‘upstream, inward’	/a-/ ‘downstream, outward’.
/rV-/ ‘toward’	/t ^h V-/ ‘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. ηo^{55} $\epsilon\tilde{e}^{13}$ -na⁵³ $th a^{31}$ -xa⁵⁵
 1SG county.town-LOC DIR-go:PFV
 ‘I went to the county town.’
- b. ηo^{55} kha^{55} la⁵⁵ ri^{53} -wa³¹
 1SG meal DIR-eat:PFV
 ‘I had meal.’

- Imperative

- (6) a. $t\ddot{u}^{53}$ -x $\ddot{u}^{31}$ c. $k^h\ddot{u}^{53}$ -x $\ddot{u}^{31}$
 DIR-go:IMP DIR-go:IMP
 ‘Go up!’ ‘Go upstream!’ or ‘Go into (the room)!’
- b. $n\ddot{u}^{53}$ -x $\ddot{u}^{31}$ d. a^{53} -x $\ddot{u}^{31}$
 DIR-go:IMP DIR-go:IMP
 ‘Go down!’ ‘Go downstream!’ or ‘Go out (of the room)!’

Evidentiality

- (7) a. $t\dot{\zeta}e^{55}$ xi⁵⁵ $\epsilon\tilde{e}^{13}$ -na⁵³ thi^{31} -le⁵⁵
 Bkrashis county.town-LOC DIR-go:PFV.SENS
 ‘Bkrashis went to the county town.’ (I witnessed him leaving)
- b. $t\dot{\zeta}e^{55}$ xi⁵⁵ $\epsilon\tilde{e}^{13}$ -na⁵³ thi^{31} -le⁵⁵-si³¹
 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 /si³¹/.

Imperative and prohibitive

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

- (8) a. a^{31} -ndz $\ddot{u}^{53}$ c. a^{31} -t $^h\ddot{u}^{53}$
 DIR-eat:IMP.2SG DIR-drink:IMP.2SG
 ‘Eat!’ (you singular) ‘Drink!’ (you singular)

- | | | | |
|----|-------------------------------------|----|------------------------------------|
| b. | a ³¹ -ndzə ⁵³ | d. | a ³¹ -tʰə ⁵³ |
| | DIR-eat:IMP.2PL | | DIR-drink:IMP.2PL |
| | ‘Eat!’ (you plural) | | ‘Drink!’ (you plural) |

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

- | | | | |
|--------|-------------------------------------|----|---|
| (9) a. | kʰũ ⁵³ -xũ ³¹ | c. | ŋi ¹³ -ji ⁵³ pə ³¹ |
| | DIR-go:IMP | | DIR-sleep:IMP |
| | ‘Go!’ | | ‘Sleep!’ |
| b. | kʰa ⁵⁵ -xũ ⁵⁵ | d. | na ⁵⁵ -ji ⁵⁵ pə ³¹ |
| | DIR-go:PROH | | DIR-sleep:PROH |
| | ‘Don’t go!’ | | ‘Don’t sleep!’ |

Anticausative

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

- /kə/ ~ /ŋgə/ ‘break (something soft)’
 - /kɔ/ ~ /ŋgɔ/ ‘break (something hard)’
- | | | | | |
|---------|------------------------------------|--|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| (10) a. | ɕe ⁵³ | ŋgə ⁵⁵ -ɛ ⁵⁵ -si ³¹ | | |
| | rope | break-PERF-INF | | |
| | ‘The rope is broken.’ | | | |
| b. | tɕe ⁵⁵ xi ⁵⁵ | kə ³¹ | ɕe ⁵³ | a ⁵³ -kə ³¹ |
| | Bkrashis | AGT | rope | DIR-break:PFV |
| | ‘Bkrashis broke the rope.’ | | | |
| c. | pi ⁵⁵ tsi ⁵³ | ŋgə ⁵⁵ -ɛ ⁵⁵ -si ³¹ | | |
| | cup | break-PERF-INF | | |
| | ‘The cup is broken.’ | | | |
| d. | tɕe ⁵⁵ xi ⁵⁵ | kə ³¹ | pi ⁵⁵ tsi ⁵³ | nɔ ⁵³ -kə ³¹ |
| | Bkrashis | AGT | cup | DIR-break:PFV |
| | ‘Bkrashis broke the cup.’ | | | |

Case

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

- Agentive and absolutive
- | | | | |
|------|-------------------------------------|------------------|--------------------------------------|
| (11) | kʰy ⁵³ -kə ³¹ | ŋo ⁵⁵ | nə ³¹ -ndzə ⁵⁵ |
| | 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) ηo^{55} $ji^{31}si^{53}$ $t\check{se}^{55}xi^{55}-ka^{31}$ $ta^{31}ji^{55}$ dze^{53} $tha^{31}-ra^{53}$
 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 /kə³¹/.

- Instrumental

The instrumental marker is /kə³¹/

- Locative

The locative marker is /na³¹/

- Ablative

The ablative marker is /re³¹/

- Case of pronoun

Table.5

	ABS	DAT	GEN	LOC
1SG	ηo^{55}	ηa^{55}	ηa^{55}	ηa^{55}
2SG	ηo^{53}	ηa^{53}	ηa^{53}	ηa^{53}
3SG	ji^{55}	ji^{55}	ji^{55}	ji^{55}

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. ηo^{55} $\text{ẽ}^{13}-na^{53}$ $tha^{31}-xa^{55}$
 1SG county.town-LOC DIR-go:PFV
 ‘I went to the county town.’
- b. $\eta a^{55}t\check{se}^{31}$ $\text{ẽ}^{13}-na^{53}$ $thi^{31}-xi^{55}$
 1PL county.town-LOC DIR-go:PFV
 ‘We went to the county town.’

- c. tɕe⁵⁵xi⁵⁵ ɕɛ¹³-na⁵³ tɕi³¹-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-kə⁵⁵ ɲa⁵³ ta³¹jɿ⁵⁵ dze⁵³ tɕe³¹-rɛ⁵³
 1SG-AGT 2SG:DAT money hundred DIR-give:PFV
 ‘I gave you a hundred *yuan*.’
- b. ɲo⁵⁵-kə⁵⁵ tɕe⁵⁵xi⁵⁵-ka³¹ ta³¹jɿ⁵⁵ dze⁵³ tɕa³¹-rã⁵³
 1SG-AGT Bkrashis-DAT money hundred DIR-give:PFV
 ‘I gave Bkrashis a hundred *yuan*.’
- c. tɕe⁵⁵xi⁵⁵-kə³¹ dzɔ³¹ma⁵³-ka³¹ ta³¹jɿ⁵⁵ dze⁵³ tɕa³¹-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:	existential
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]

- Huang, Bufan, ed. *Zangmianyu Yuyan Cihui*. Beijing: zhongyang minzu xueyuan chubanshe, 1992.
- Jacques, Guillaume. *Jiarongyu Yanjiu*. Beijing: minzu chubanshe, 2008.
- Jacques, Guillaume, Yunfan Lai, Anton Antonov, and Lobsangnima. "Stau (Ergong, Horpa)." In *The Sino-Tibetan Languages*, edited by Graham Thurgood and Randy J. LaPolla. Oxon: Routledge, 2017.
- Sun, Hongkai. *Zangmianyu Qiangyuzhi Yanjiu*. Beijing: zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2016.