

## **Lalo regional varieties: Phylogeny, dialectometry, and intelligibility**

Lalo is a Central Ngwi (Loloish) language cluster spoken in western Yunnan, China by fewer than 300,000 speakers. The purpose of this talk is to present a new classification of Lalo regional varieties that synthesizes results from comparative linguistics, dialectometric measures of phonetic distance, and intelligibility tests. Previous research has focused on only one variety of Lalo, spoken in western Weishan County (Björverud 1998; Chen et al. 1985), and Lalo was thought to have only two minor dialects. However, a sociolinguistic survey conducted in 2008 in eighteen Lalo villages reveals a large degree of dialect diversity. Wordlists of 1,000 items were collected and analysed using the comparative method to identify shared innovations that occurred after the Proto-Lalo stage. Phonetic distance between varieties was measured by applying a string edit distance algorithm to cognates, and the resulting distance matrix was analysed with NeighborNet network analysis and multi-dimensional scaling. Intelligibility was tested using Recorded Text Testing, in which speakers from one variety listen to a narrative from another variety and retell it in their own words.

Based on shared innovations, Lalo can be phylogenetically classified as having three major dialect clusters, Eastern, Western, and Central, which together comprise the Core Lalo group and are located in the traditional Lalo homeland of southern Dali Prefecture. Xuzhang, located on the periphery of the Lalo homeland, is grouped together with Core Lalo to form Greater Lalo. There are also three other geographically peripheral varieties, Mangdi, Eka, and Yangliu, whose ancestors migrated out of the Lalo homeland at different times. Dialectometric analysis also uncovers the three dialect clusters and four peripheral varieties, with minor discrepancies due to contact, but fails to identify most higher-level subgroups. Intelligibility test results, which have a strong, significant correlation with phonetic distance, show that cross-cluster comprehension is low. Integrating results from historical linguistics, dialectometry, and intelligibility, this paper shows that the previous classification of Lalo is inadequate, and presents a more complex picture of the inter-dialectal relationships of Lalo varieties, many of which are endangered.

## **References**

- Björverud, Susanna.** 1998. *A grammar of Lalo*. Lund: Lund University PhD dissertation.
- Chen, Shilin, Shiming Bian & Xiuqing Li.** 1985. *Yiyu jianzhi [Outline of the Yi language]* (Zhongguo shaoshu minzu yuyan jianzhi congshu). Beijing: Minzu Chubanshe.