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The Qiangic Subgroup from an Areal Perspective: A Case Study of Languages of Muli
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Abstract: In this paper, I study the empirical validity of the hypothesis of “Qiangic” as a subgroup of Sino-Tibetan, that is, the hypothesis of a common origin of thirteen little-studied languages of South-West China. This study is based on ongoing work on four Qiangic languages spoken in one locality (Mûlî Tibetan Autonomous County, Sichuān), and seen in the context of languages of the neighboring genetic subgroups (Yî, Na, Tibetan, Sinitic). Preliminary results of documentation work cast doubt on the validity of Qiangic as a genetic unit, and suggest instead that features presently seen as probative of the membership in this subgroup are rather the result of diffusion across genetic boundaries. I furthermore argue that the four local languages currently labeled Qiangic are highly distinct and not likely to be closely genetically related. Subsequently, I discuss Qiangic as an areal grouping in terms of its defining characteristics, as well as possible hypotheses pertaining to the genetic affiliation of its member languages currently labeled Qiangic. I conclude with some reflections on the issue of subgrouping in the Qiangic context and in Sino-Tibetan at large.

Keywords: Qiangic, classification, areal linguistics, Sino-Tibetan

Abstract: 在这篇文章中，我研究了“Qiangic”这一假设的实证有效性，即认为这些语言起源于中国西南地区的一个小语族。这项研究基于对四个Qiangic语言进行的持续工作，这些语言在某一个特定区域内（Mûlî Tibetan Autonomous County, Sichuān），并考察这些语言与周边的遗传语族（Yî, Na, Tibetan, Sinitic）之间的关系。初步的研究结果表明，Qiangic作为一个遗传语族的假设可能值得怀疑，而且这些特征可能更多地是扩散的结果，而不是遗传关系的体现。我进一步讨论Qiangic作为一个地域语族的定义特征，以及可能的遗传归属的假设。最后，我在这个语族的上下文中以及在整个Sino-Tibetan语系中对这个问题进行了反思。

Keywords: Qiangic, classification, areal linguistics, Sino-Tibetan
The designation "Na" derives from the fact that the relevant ethnic groups all have "Na" as their group Chinese classification, the eastern dialect of both comprise Lizu, is spoken in Gúshí, Sìchuán Province. The four studied languages are: (1) Shíxīng (spoken in Shuílùo 水洛 township), (2) Lizu [a.k.a. Érsū] (spoken in Kālā 卡拉 and Luòbō 裸波 townships), (3) Nàmùzī [a.k.a. Nàmùyī] (spoken in Luòbō 裸波 township), and (4) Pūmī [a.k.a. Prinmi] (spoken in the central part of the county). Pūmī is the language of the ethnic majority of Mùlī and a local lingua franca. These four Qiangic languages are studied in the context of the local Tibetan dialect (Kami Tibetan), the local Chinese dialect (South-Western Mandarin), and the local Na languages (with a special focus on the little-studied Laze language, spoken in Xiàngjiāo 項腳 township of Mùlī and locally known as Mùlī Shuǐtián 木里水田 or Lārē 拉热).  

1 Lizu is held to be the western dialect of the Érsū language.  
2 While Shíxīng is restricted in distribution to Mùlī, the remaining three languages are also spoken beyond the borders of this county. Nàmùzī is also spoken in Mānníng 桑寧, Xīchāng 西昌, Yányuán 盐源 and Jiǔlóng 九龙, all in Sichuán Province. Pūmī is further spoken in the neighboring Yányuán and Jiǔlóng, in Sichuán Province, as well as in Lánping 兰坪, Ninglàng 寧蒗, Yǒngshēng 永勝, Líjīng 麗江, Yúnxuán 雲縣, Wéixī 維西, all in Yúnán Province. Finally, the Érsū language, which appears to be closely related to Lizu, is spoken in Gānlùo 甘洛 and Yùxī 越西 of Liángshān Prefecture, as well as in Gānžī dkar mdzes 甘孜 Tibetan Autonomous Region and Yā'ān 雅安 District, all in Sichuán Province.  
3 The term "Na languages" is an alternative to the term "Nàxī language" in Chinese linguistic classification. Both comprise Nàxī proper (or in Chinese classification, the western dialect of Nàxī) and Moso (or in Chinese classification, the eastern dialect of Nàxī) (Hé and Jiāng 1985:104-116, Gài and Jiāng 1990:70). The designation "Na" derives from the fact that the relevant ethnic groups all have "Na" as their group Chinese classification.
The goals of the project are: (1) in-depth documentation of the selected languages; and on that basis (2) reflection on the validity of Qiangic as a phylogenetic unit (i.e. stressing genetic relationship and common inheritance over surface similarities) and as a monophyletic unit (i.e. assuming a single common ancestor for all subgroup languages).

This paper is organized as follows. Section 1.1 provides a brief overview of the essential features and challenges of the Qiangic hypothesis (Qiangic as a genetic unit). Section 2 summarizes the first results of documentation work. It essentially focuses on the synchronic similarities observed between the languages under study. Based on these data, I argue that features presently held as probative of membership in the Qiangic subgroup are rather indicative of a linguistic area, as these features are also found in the local varieties of the languages of other genetic subgroups (e.g. the local Tibetan dialect) and are absent from their nearest relatives outside of the area. Given that the reason for salient similarities shared by the languages of Mûlî is demonstrably due to diffusion across genetic boundaries, I furthermore argue that, contrary to the received view, the four local languages currently labeled Qiangic are highly distinct. That is, they are not likely to be closely genetically related. Section 3 discusses the defining characteristics of Qiangic as an areal grouping. It also reviews alternatives for drawing genetic conclusions about the areal languages of uncertain affiliation, currently labeled Qiangic. Section 4 concludes this paper with some reflections on the issue of subgrouping in the Qiangic context and in Sino-Tibetan at large.

1.1. Qiangic as a genetic unit: Summary and challenges

Qiangic is the hypothesis of a common origin of thirteen, geographically adjacent and little-studied Sino-Tibetan languages of South-West China. Twelve of these languages are still spoken, one is extinct (Tangut).

The idea that some languages of the Chinese Southwest cohere to form a Sino-Tibetan subgroup can be traced to F. W. Thomas (1948:88-109), who proposed a “Hsifân group” based on wordlists of Qâng, rGyalrong, Pümî, Érgöng, Érsü and Námûyî. The label “Qiangic”, under which the group is currently known, was introduced by the eminent Chinese linguist Sûn Hông-kâï in the 1960s as an umbrella term for the Qâng, Pümî, and rGyalrong languages (Sûn 1962:561; 1982; for the history of Qiangic subgroup, see Sûn 2001b:160-164). The Qiangic group was expanded in the 1970s, when new languages discovered and explored in pioneering work by Sûn Hông-kâï in Western Sichuân (e.g. Shîxîng, Guiqióng, Nâmûyî and Érsü) were also seen as Qiangic (Sûn 1983a, 1983b, 2001; further elaborated in Huáng 1991). Finally, Tangut was added to the group in the 1990s (Sûn 1991).
After Sün (1983a, 2001b), the thirteen Qiangic languages are subdivided, mainly on geographical grounds, into (1) a more phonologically and morphologically complex, and relatively better-studied northern branch, and (2) a less phonologically and morphologically complex, and virtually unexplored southern branch. The northern branch includes Qiang proper, Pú, Múx, Érgong (Horpa), rGyalrong, Lavrong and Tangut. The southern branch comprises Zhābā, Quèyù, Guiqióng, Êrsū, Nàmyī and Shīxīng.

The Qiangic languages occupy a compact, contiguous geographical area in the borderlands of Tibet. Chinese historiographic sources claim that this area was historically populated by a host of nomadic tribes, traditionally labeled “Hsifan” and closely linked to Tibetan culture and religion. The Qiangic hypothesis entails that Qiangic languages share a number of common features due to their descent from a (recent) common ancestor.

The Qiangic hypothesis essentially relies on shared lexical items and typological similarities, of which directional prefixes (topography-based spatial deixis) is de facto the essential feature probative of Qiang-ness (e.g. Matisoff 2004:105). After Sün (2001:166-170), a complete list of Qiangic features probative of the membership in this subgroup includes: (1) shared vocabulary, (2) large number of consonant clusters, (3) large consonant and vowel inventories, (4) uvular phonemes, (5) contrast between prenasalized and plain initials, (6) three medials: i, y, u, (7) vowel harmony (mostly in languages of the northern branch), (8) few or no consonantal codas, (9) tones, (10) reduplication as important means of word formation, (11) singular-dual-plural distinction in nouns, (12) diminutive formation with a suffix derived from the morpheme for ‘child’ or ‘son’, (13) numeral classifiers, (14) case forms of personal pronouns, (15) dual and inclusive-exclusive forms of personal pronouns, (16) person and number agreement in verbs (in languages of the northern branch), (17) directional prefixes, (18) reciprocal forms, (19) differentiation of existential (locative) verbs, (20) rich inventories of case markers.

Yet, the Qiangic subgroup has been controversial since it was first proposed, for these four reasons:

(1) The restricted nature of the supporting evidence. This evidence is essentially limited to typologically common features, which are also found with considerable frequency in non-Qiangic languages of the area (see §2 for discussion). The probative value of the evidence is furthermore substantially outweighed by the conspicuous absence of cognacy among the shared systems. This has led some scholars to straightforwardly identify some putative Qiangic features as parallel developments (e.g. LaPolla 2003:30 for case marking and existential verbs) or areal phenomena (e.g. Shirai 2009 for directional prefixes).

(2) The small percentage of shared common vocabulary. While this feature, in contrast to the typological characteristics above, could provide more reliable support for the

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4 In Chinese historiographic sources, the label “Hsifan” mostly points to peripheral groups in the circumference of ethnic Tibet, sharing with ethnic Tibetan their religions and culture, but speaking their own languages. The same label is also occasionally used as a collective name for everything that is non-Chinese in the western periphery. The term is non-committal as to the genetic relationship between the groups in question, which, while most likely all Sino-Tibetan, are therefore for all purposes to be considered as not closely genetically related.
hypothesis of a common origin of these languages, the percentage of shared vocabulary is relatively small. It ranges from 25% between any two random Qiangic languages in more optimistic estimations (Sùn 1983a:103-105) to less than 20% in more conservative assessments (Hùáng 1991:355). In addition, this percentage includes many widespread Sino-Tibetan cognates and there is considerable overlap with other subgroups of the area (most notably, Yí, Na, and Tibetan). To compare, a geographically adjacent non-Qiangic language Moso (Na) shares no less than 26.9% of cognates with Qiāng (estimation based on a sample of 1,017 basic vocabulary items, excluding 141 Chinese loanwords, in Gài and Jiāng 1990:71).

(3) The absence of common innovations. The Qiangic subgroup has so far not been supported by common innovations, i.e. unique events common to the histories of all the languages in the subgroup, as distinct from (a) diffusion across language boundaries, (b) independent, parallel developments, (c) retention from an earlier state or, finally, (d) chance. Common innovations are held to be the only reliable basis for a linguistic subgroup (e.g. Thurgood 2003:5). In other words, the Qiangic subgroup is essentially based on synchronic features, rather than on evidence from historical comparison.5

(4) The historical, ethnic and linguistic complexity of the geographical area occupied by Qiangic languages.

Historically, the area of distribution of the Qiangic languages lies in the zone of mixed Tibetan and Chinese influence, at the intersection of three superpowers that became dominant in the 7th and 8th centuries AD:

• the Tibetan Empire, instituted by Srong-btsan sgam-po (620-649 or 650)
• the Táng Chinese court (618-907)
• the Nánzhāo kingdom (730-902) with its capital in Dàlǐ, later succeeded by the Dàlǐ kingdom (937-1253), related to modern Yí and Bái groups.

These three superpowers were succeeded by a federation of small tribal states, kingdoms, and dependent districts (such as the kingdoms of Nângchen, Lithang, rGyalthang, or

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5 The only (phonological) innovation for the Qiangic subgroup proposed so far is brightening, that is, a strong tendency for the Proto-Sino-Tibetan rhyme *-a to be raised and fronted to -i or -e in Tangut and modern Qiangic languages, as proposed by James A. Matisoff (2004). Matisoff discusses this development essentially in relation to Tangut, but he also points out a number of parallels in modern Qiangic languages. He argues that this development is unusual in the Sino-Tibetan context, and it is therefore a valuable criterion for membership in the Qiangic group. At the same time, Matisoff (2004:350) notes that modern Qiangic languages do not display brightening to the same degree, and that the phenomenon is not regular, either within the same language or cross-linguistically. The following observations regarding this development can furthermore be made. Relatively few items shared by both Tangut and modern Qiangic languages have so far been proposed (33 words in total, Matisoff 2004). Of these, even fewer are shared by more than four Qiangic languages at a time. Conversely, those that are shared by most Qiangic languages, such as ‘salt’ (in 12 languages) and ‘rabbit’ (in 9 languages) appear to be good candidates for cultural loanwords, and are hence inconclusive as to the genetic relatedness between the languages in question. Finally, this phenomenon is equally attested in non-Qiangic languages of the area, such as Na and Yí. For example, both ‘salt’ and ‘rabbit’ also display the effects of brightening in Nâxî and Moso as well as in Nosu (Northern Yí): ‘salt’, Nâxî and Moso, both ts’e33; Moso ts’u33 (Zhû 2005:236); ‘rabbit’: Nâxî t’o53’e33, Moso t’o53’u33; Nosu t’u24’u2 (Zhû 2005:162).
rMili), some of which maintained a de facto independent status until well into the 20th century.

Ethnically and linguistically, the area lies at the intersection of, most importantly, Bodic and Yi-Burmese, as well as some unclassified groups, such as Na and Báí. The area of distribution of Qiangic languages is characterized by long-standing multilingualism. Long-standing multilingualism suggests diffusion as key factor in the formation of the languages of the area. It equally poses an important challenge to the subgrouping of local languages as based on common innovations and shared cognates, as no objective criteria have yet been found either to distinguish independent innovations from shared retentions, or to factor out parallel developments or effects of diffusion (see Harrison 2003:232-239 for discussion).

Not surprisingly, in view of the problems above, the membership of the Qiangic subgroup is fluid and has many times been adjusted and remains undecided for some languages.

The Báimá language (also known as Báimá Tibetan) of Northern Sichuán and Southern Gánsù provinces was added to Qiangic in the 1980s, because it displays features that are held to be typical of this subgroup, such as directional prefixes (Sún 1980). Currently, opinions are split between Báimá being a separate Bodic language (e.g. Nishida and Sún 1990, Sún et al. 2007:207-223) and an aberrant Tibetan dialect (Huáng and Zhāng 1995, Zhāng 1994a, 1994b).

The relationship of the Tangut and rGyalrong languages to Qiangic is equally a matter of ongoing debate. LaPolla (2003:30), for instance, argues that the relation of rGyalrong to the Rawang and Kiranti groups is much clearer than to the Qiangic group, and that similarities shared by rGyalrong and Qiangic may simply be areal influence. Notably, three northern Qiangic languages, rGyalrong, Lavrong and Horpa-Shangzhai (Érgōng or Dàofú 道孚 in different classifications) have been demonstrated by Jackson T.-S. Sun (2000a, 2000b) to be an independent and coherent subgrouping in its own right, namely, rGyalrongic.

The Nàmùyí language, held as one of Southern Qiangic languages, is argued to be genetically related to Yi and Na languages, rather than to Qiangic languages (Lámá 1994; Huáng 1997:13-15). This conclusion is essentially based on the large amount of related words between Yi, Na and Nàmùyí. Notably, the same conclusion has been reached on the basis of historical, cultural, and anthropological evidence (Yáng 2006).

The Shìxīng language is likely to be related to Na languages, given that speakers of Shìxīng are considered by Nàxī historians as part of the Na ethnos (Guō and Hé 1994:8-9).  

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6 Inferences that can be drawn from lexical comparisons of some local languages of uncertain affiliation with Yi and Na are complicated by the lack of well-defined diagnostic criteria to distinguish between Yi and Na groups, that share much lexical material. Hence some local languages of Múlì, e.g. Nàmùyí (Lámá 1994; Huáng 1997:13-15) or Laze (Huáng 2009), are ambivalent between these two groups in terms of their respective shared vocabulary.

7 Notably, Sún (2001:167) also points to a large percentage of shared lexical items between Shìxīng and Na languages, which he argues to be borrowings in Shìxīng. In a similar vein, Sún interprets numerous lexical sharings between Ërsū and Yi languages as results of contact (ibid.)
All in all, the Qiangic hypothesis remains problematic. The two major inter-related challenges are: (1) establishing an objective foundation for subgrouping in an area that is historically, ethnically, and linguistically complex, and whose languages have not been previously documented; and (2) gathering sufficient evidence to generate and evaluate hypotheses related to the genetic affiliation of those local languages (currently held as Qiangic) that cannot be straightforwardly integrated into the neighboring genetic subgroups.

2. Qiangic as a genetic unit, as examined on the basis of four Qiangic languages of Müli

The project “What defines Qiang-ness” takes on the challenging task of assessing the validity of the Qiangic hypothesis. The approach is to focus on little-studied Qiangic languages spoken in one locality, Müli Tibetan Autonomous County, and to view these languages in the context of equally little-known local varieties of the Tibetan and Na languages. Given that one of the major challenges of the Qiangic hypothesis is the historical, ethnic and linguistic complexity of the area occupied by Qiangic languages, the choice of one locality allows one to restrict to a manageable size the scope of the contact situation and the number of involved languages in order to coherently assess the impact of both internal (genetic) factors and external (contact) factors. The choice of Müli as the single locality to be studied is additionally supported by these factors: (1) Müli displays one of the highest concentrations of Qiangic languages; combining within its borders several Southern Qiangic languages (Shixing, Lizu, Namuzi) and one Northern Qiangic language (Pumi); (2) Müli is a historically stable administrative entity (the semi-independent kingdom of rMili), which guarantees recoverability of relevant sociolinguistic and historical information.

Müli is a multi-ethnic and multi-lingual county. Speakers of the four Qiangic languages of Müli are officially classified, together with the local ethnic Tibetans (Kami Tibetans), as members of the Tibetan nationality. Together, they account for 32.59% of the county population (Müli Zàngzú Zizhixiàn Zhi Biānzuàn Wěiyuánhuì forthcoming). Their most important historical neighbors include Nosu (28% of the county population) and Na groups (Nàxì and Moso together 9.96%). Historically more recent new comers to this area are Sinitic (South-Western Mandarin) (21.32%), Miáo (6.96%), as well as Bùyī, Zhuàng, Bái and some other groups (altogether ca. 1.17%).

The project initially operated under the assumption that the four Qiangic languages of Müli are closely genetically related. In line with practices of mainstream historical linguistics, the initial goals were accordingly set: (1) to stratify loanwords in the four studied languages from languages whose historical development is well-documented and understood (most importantly in the areal historical and cultural context, Tibetan), (2) to find regular sound correspondences over sets of putative cognates, and (3) to search for common phonological and lexical linguistic innovations between the surveyed Qiangic languages.

In contrast to the original assumption of relatedness, the first results of documentation work reveal diversity as a salient feature of the Qiangic languages of Müli. In fact, contrasts between the languages are so sharp that they cast considerable
doubt on the assumed genetic relationship between them (see discussion below). This warrants a closer investigation of newly collected data to further evaluate this diversity, prior to proceeding with work that relies on the assumption of relatedness of the group.

The following subsections (2.1-2.4) discuss similarities between the four Qiangic languages of Mülü, as seen in the context of their most important genetic neighbors (Tibetan, Yi, Na, Sinitic). The proposed comparison is based, on the one hand, on available data on well-described varieties of Tibetan, Yi, Na and Sinitic, and, on the other hand, on newly collected data on the local Mülü varieties of these languages (for the time being, excluding the local variety of Nosu (Northern Yi)). Lexical data are not included in the present overview, suffice it to say that the four languages share relatively few lexical items in their basic vocabulary. Overall, the percentage of shared lexical items is estimated around the customary Qiangic threshold of 20%, with cultural (Tibetan) lexicon accounting for a sizeable part of related words between the four languages.  

2.1. Similarities between the four Qiangic languages of Mülü

The present list of similarities is not intended to be exhaustive or final, but rather represents work in progress that will have to be modified when more comparative data become available. The list was initially intended as an overview of all shared features between the four Qiangic languages studied in the project (Shixīng, Lizu, Nāmùzī, Púmī). Coincidentally, the shared features turned out to be essentially restricted to features postulated as characteristic of the membership in the Qiangic subgroup (such an overlap is indicated below as “Qiangic feature”). Notably, the list does not include such common features shared by the majority of local genetic subgroups (excluding only the later arrival into the area, Sinitic), as SOV or Noun-Adjective word orders. I have also omitted some relatively non-committal Qiangic features, such as “large consonant and vowel inventories”, especially because those of the four examined languages do not appear to be significantly larger than those of their generic neighbors. And in order not to detract from the main line of argument, illustrative examples are deferred to the appendix at the end of the paper.

Features shared by the four Qiangic languages of Mülü include:

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8 Consider some examples from basic vocabulary: ‘man, person’: Púmī ʰlma, Lizu ʰtso, Nāmùzī ʰtseo, Shixīng ʰπi; ‘food; cooked rice’: Púmī ʰlab, Lizu ʰk’a, Nāmùzī ʰdzə, Shixīng ʰbə. Some examples from more culturally oriented vocabulary include: ‘deity’ (WT lha), Púmī ʰla, Lizu ʰla, Nāmùzī ʰlæ, Shixīng ʰgi-əa, ‘flag’ (WT dar), Púmī ʰtir, Lizu ʰta, Shixīng ʰtir. A side observation is that Tibetan loans in the four Qiangic languages appear to derive from distinct donor dialects. For example, ‘flower’ is ʰlñbru in the local Tibetan dialect (Kami), but ʰmetro or ʰmetro in Lizu, and ṭñbə in Nāmùzī, all related to WT me tog.

9 For example, Púmī has a total of 42 initials (40 initial consonants and 2 consonant clusters) and 34 rhymes (7 oral vowels, 5 nasal vowels, 22 diphthongs). To compare, Nosu has 44 initial consonants and 10 rhymes (8 syllabics, 2 non-syllabics) (Li and Mā 1983:83-84). Bātāŋg 巴塘 ‘ba’ thang Tibetan has 48 initials (42 initial consonants, 6 consonant clusters) and 31 rhymes (9 oral and 8 nasal vowels, 5 diphthongs and 9 rhymes ending in a glottal stop) (Gēsāngg 1989:16, 20).

The Qiangic feature “case forms of personal pronouns” is not included in the present list, as in the surveyed languages, these forms are transparent combinations of a relevant personal pronoun and a case marker. For this reason, this feature is subsumed on the list under “case marking”. The Qiangic feature “reciprocal” is included on the list under “reduplication”.

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(1) Pronunciation of the vowel /u/ (in Pûmî ǝ) as a syllabic bilabial trill after bilabial and apical stops

(2) Uvular phonemes: (a) contrastive with velars, as in Shîxîng, Lizu, Nâmûzî, or (b) allophones of velar phonemes, as in Pûmî (Qiángic feature)

(3) Common principles of prosodic organization: tone systems characterized by culminativity—a restriction of not more than one pronounced lexical tone per prosodic word with one tonal assignment (mostly restricted to the first syllable of the word) affecting much or all of the prosodic word (Qiángic feature “tones”, see Evans 2008 for discussion)

(4) Identical principles of word-formation, including: (a) extensive use of reduplication (Qiángic feature), (b) compounding and (c) affixation. The latter comprises:
   (i) Kinship prefix a- (for older kin)
   (ii) Diminutive suffix derived from the morpheme for ‘child’ or ‘son’ (Qiángic feature, non-related forms)
   (iii) Gender suffixes for animals

(5) Numeral classifiers (Qiángic feature, for the most part non-related forms, see §2.2 for discussion)

(6) Directional Prefixes (Qiángic feature, for the most part non-related forms)

(7) Past/non-past distinction (suppletive forms) in some high frequency verbs and nominalization markers (for the most part non-related forms)

(8) Multiple existential verbs (Qiángic feature, for the most part non-related forms)

All in all, similarities (phonological, morphological, syntactic) between the four languages are strikingly few. Furthermore, given the apparent non-relatedness of relevant markers in shared systems, the majority of similarities are symptomatic of parallel developments. The observed phenomena can also be interpreted as pattern-borrowings, that is, replications of the abstract organizational pattern of the model construction of an external source using suitable elements in the replica language (Matras and Sakel 2007). Put differently, the structural similarities observed between the four languages are likely to be instances of grammaticalization, where only the patterns of the other language are replicated (i.e. the organization, distribution and mapping of grammatical or semantic meaning), while the form itself is not borrowed. Overall, this type of grammaticalization is typical for linguistic areas.

2.2. Differences between the four Qiángic languages of Mûlî
The range of differences between the four surveyed languages is far more extensive and involves virtually all linguistic sub-systems. Differences can further be divided into two types: (1) overall dissimilarities (non-overlapping systems), and (2) dissimilarities among overlapping systems (non-cognate marking).

The former type of differences can be illustrated by distinct orders of demonstrative and noun in the four languages. The four Qiangic languages of Műlì have no less than three distinct orders for demonstrative and noun, namely:10

1. Dem-N (Pũmì and Lizu), e.g. Pũmì callee lřmœ ‘that woman’, Lizu ³kù°⁴tê ¹hjaœ ‘this child’
2. N-Dem (Nàmùzï), e.g. ju³ tœ⁵⁵=ly⁵⁵ ‘this house’
3. Dem-N-Dem (Shixïng), e.g. ³hœ œtœpi ³hœ ‘this story’, ³hœ œhœ œtœpi ‘that man’. Notably, Shixïng also has an alternative order, N-Dem, as in ³hœ pu-mi ³hœ ‘this frog’, ³hœ tœpi ‘that man’. There appears to be a semantic distinction between the two variant orders, with the latter rather more specifically denoting definiteness of the modified noun, e.g. ³bo œp’u-tei-tei œlœpi ‘the (or that) white yak’ (Chirkova 2009).11

As to the latter type of differences (dissimilarities among overlapping systems), none of the overlapping structural features listed in §2.1, has cognate marking in all four languages (see the appendix at the end of the paper). In addition to the apparent non-relatedness of relevant markers, the structural features shared by the four languages vary widely with respect to specific semantic and syntactic contexts and the degree of grammaticalization per language. Let us take numeral classifier systems in the four languages as an example. (I will restrict the comparison to a more grammaticalized category of classifiers, namely sortal classifiers, i.e. those that individuate whatever they refer to in terms of the kind of entity that it is.) Based on the overall number of classifiers and their morphosyntactic environments and functions, the following patterns emerge.

Nàmùzï has the most developed system among the four languages. In terms of the overall number of sortal classifiers, Nàmùzï has most classifiers of the four compared languages (ca. 10 in the collected data). Some frequent forms include: (a) mo for people and large animals, (b) pœœ for cattle, (c) jœœ for small animals, (d) po for trees, plants, (e) ly, general classifier for inanimate entities. Classifiers in Nàmùzï can directly modify nouns, which use serves to increase precision of reference. This is to say that if a classifier occurs as the only determinative of the noun, it expresses singularity and referentiality (specificity or definiteness). For example, bu⁵⁵=phœ⁵¹ ‘(that, definite) yak’, Nbre⁵¹=mo⁵⁵ ‘(that, definite) wife, woman’. Finally, nouns in Nàmùzï cannot be modified by numerals without an accompanying classifier, and Nàmùzï classifiers are obligatory with both numerals and demonstratives.

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10 Pũmì data are from Guillaume Jacques (p.c.) and Lû (2001); Lizu and Shixïng data are from personal research; Nàmùzï data are from Huáng and Rênzêng (1991) and from personal research.
11 The demonstrative pronouns in the four languages are as follows: Pũmì ⁴tœbie ‘this’, ⁴hœbie ‘that’; Lizu ³kù°⁴tê ‘this’, ³wo°⁴tê ‘that’; Nàmùzï tœ⁵⁵=ly⁵⁵ ‘this’, tœhœ⁵¹=ly⁵⁵ ‘that’; Shixïng ³hœ ‘this’, ³hœœ ‘that’. Demonstrative pronouns in Nàmùzï are obligatorily followed by the general classifier ly, the etymology of the second syllable of Lizu demonstratives is uncertain.
Púmì also has relatively many sortal classifiers (9 listed in Lù 2001:151-152). For example, \( \text{LH} \text{ŋa}=\text{Ht}=\text{Hts} \) ‘one beggar’, \( \text{LH}s\text{kə}=\text{Hts} \) ‘one stick’, \( \text{H} \text{zə}=\text{Ht}=\text{Hpt} \) ‘one axe’. As a rule, Púmì classifiers cannot modify a noun without an accompanying numeral and numerals cannot modify a noun without an accompanying classifier. A classifier is not required with a demonstrative.

Quite dissimilar to the relatively well-developed classifier systems in Nàmùzí and Púmì, those of Lizu and Shìxìng are fairly restricted and consist of only two shape-based sortal classifiers. These two classifiers are furthermore only used with numerals and are not required with demonstratives.

In Lizu, the two sortal classifiers are: (1) ka ‘strip’, a classifier for elongated objects, e.g. \( \text{H} \text{dz} \text{e}=\text{ka} \) ‘river’, \( \text{H} \text{bə}=\text{ka} \) ‘one rope’; and (2) pu, a more general classifier, widely used with non-human and, more specifically, flat objects, e.g. \( \text{H} \text{rwa} \text{=pu} \) ‘one chicken’, \( \text{H} \text{lb} \text{uto}=\text{pu} \) ‘one knife’. A classifier is not required to follow a numeral in Lizu, if the noun that it modifies is animate, e.g. \( \text{H} \text{ldz}=\text{Ht} =\text{one Chinese} \), \( \text{H} \text{ts}=\text{Hlz} \) ‘four people’. In the case of inanimate nouns, a classifier is not required with the numeral \( \text{Ht}=\text{one} \), e.g. \( \text{H} \text{se}=\text{dzum} \) ‘one log’.

Finally, the two sortal classifiers in Shìxìng are (1) the general classifier ku ‘item’, e.g. \( \text{LH} \text{jə}=\text{ku} \) ‘two hands’, \( \text{LH} \text{də}=\text{ku} \) ‘nine pans’; and (2) the classifier for elongated objects rē ‘strip’, e.g. \( \text{LH} \text{lə}=\text{rdz}=\text{rē} \) ‘one arrow’, \( \text{LH} \text{ŋə}=\text{jə}=\text{rē} \) ‘two sticks’. A classifier in Shìxìng cannot modify a noun without a numeral, whereas the numeral \( \text{H} \text{dz} \) ‘one’ can co-occur with nouns without a classifier, to denote indefiniteness and singularity. The following table summarizes the observed patterns:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Can a classifier modify a noun without a numeral? (Related function)</th>
<th>Can a numeral modify a noun without a classifier? (Related function)</th>
<th>Are classifiers obligatory with demonstratives?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nàmùzí</td>
<td>many (singularity, definiteness)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Púmì</td>
<td>many</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lizu</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>some can (singularity, definiteness)</td>
<td>(mostly with animate nouns; numeral ‘one’, indefiniteness)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shìxìng</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>(numeral ‘one’, indefiniteness)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Number, morphosyntactic environments and functions of sortal classifiers in the four Qiangic languages of Mùli

The observed degree of variation between the four Qiangic languages of Mùli (both in terms of overall disparity of their respective lexical, phonological, morphological and syntactic organization and of scalability and non-cognacy of shared systems) is unusual for a low-level subgroup, which Qiangic is purported to be, especially given the contiguity of the geographical area occupied by the four surveyed languages.\(^\text{12}\) In contrast

\(^\text{12}\) Conversely, a comparable degree of variation is possible in geographically discontinuous groups. For instance, in relation to the order of demonstrative and noun and differences in classifier use as evoked above, comparable examples can be found, respectively, among Chin languages, which combine Dem-N,
Let us now turn to an examination of the similarities between the four Qiangic languages of Mülī in an areal context

2.3. Similarities between the four Qiangic languages of Mülī in an areal context

Let us now turn to an examination of the similarities between the four Qiangic languages of Mülī from an areal perspective, as compared to their genetic neighbors Yí, Na, Tibetan, and Sinitic (South-Western Mandarin). I will compare the four Qiangic languages first to well-documented varieties of these latter languages and then to newly-documented varieties of these languages spoken in Mülī. On the whole, the majority of similarities between Lizu, Nâmúzí, Pûmî, and Shîxîng are non-specific to the Qiangic languages of Mülī and, instead, are shared with their genetic neighbors.

All in all, among the similarities shared by the four Qiangic languages of Mülī, as considered in the context of their neighboring languages, three types of situations can be distinguished: (1) similarities shared across several local subgroups, (2) similarities shared by the four Qiangic languages with only one of the local subgroups (either Yí, Na or Tibetan), and (3) features more specific to the languages of Mülī (both Qiangic and non-Qiangic) and not shared with the languages spoken in the neighboring areas.

The first type includes features that are shared with most neighboring subgroups, essentially with Yí, Na, and Sinitic. These include: extensive use of reduplication in word formation, gender suffixes for animals, diminutive formation with the morpheme for ‘child’ or ‘son’, kinship prefix α- and numeral classifier systems.

The second type includes features that are shared either with the southern genetic neighbors of the four Qiangic languages (i.e. Yí and Na languages), or with their northern genetic neighbor (Tibetan). Features shared with Yí and Na include (1) pronunciation of /u/ as a bilabial trill after bilabial and apical stops, as characteristics of all Northern Yí varieties as well as of Na languages (see Lî and Mâ, 1983:52-53, 77 for Northern Yí; and

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13 One possible explanation of the striking diversity of the Qiangic languages of Mülī, if these are taken to be members of one lower genetic subgroup, would be a recent abrupt migration. This, however, does not appear to be the case, according to the respective oral histories of the groups (as outlined in Xiè 1992:48).
Yang, 2009:3, for Yōning Na), and (2) multiple existential verbs (see Zhū, 2005:160-161 for Northern Yī; and Hé and Jiāng, 1985:51-53, for Na). The feature shared with Tibetan is the past/non-past distinction in some high frequency verbs. Finally, while held to be essentially exclusive to Qiangic languages and not typical in well-documented, standard varieties of Yī, Na and Tibetan, uvular phonemes are equally attested in Moso (Gài and Jiāng 1990:71-72), in some varieties of Nosu (Lāmā 1994:51), as well as in a number of Tibetan dialects spoken in the zone of distribution of Qiangic languages (for example, Yājiāng 雅江 nyag chu kha, Acuo, 2008; Shibāzi 右壤子 kun sngon, Huá and Gāzàngtā, 1997; Zhōng 热務溝 zho ngu, J. Sun, 2003:782-783).

The third type comprises: (1) tone systems characterized by culminativity, and (2) directional prefixes. These are features that appear exclusive to the local linguistic varieties of Múlí (both Qiangic and non-Qiangic).

Let us now examine the similarities between the four Qiangic languages in the context of the previously unrecorded local varieties of Tibetan, Na, and Sinitic, spoken in Múlí, as studied in the context of the Qiang-ness project. These local varieties are, respectively, Kami Tibetan (data from personal research, Chirkova forthcoming), Laze (based on Huáng 2009), and the local Chinese dialect (based on Li 2010).

Kami Tibetan is spoken by the historically oldest inhabitants of Múlí. This dialect appears to possess almost the precise combination of similarities, as shared by the four Qiangic languages of this county, including even those that are generally held to be exclusive to Qiangic languages (such as directional prefixes), and only excluding pronunciation of /u/ as a bilabial trill after bilabial and apical stops and the precise categorization of existential verbs (see Appendix for examples). In fact, spoken in the geographic zone occupied by Qiangic languages, the Kami Tibetan dialect appears to possess almost an entire set of features which are held as diagnostic of the membership in the Qiangic subgroup. It even exhibits such strikingly non-Tibetan features as extensive use of reduplication in word formation and an incipient classifier system.

Laze, which is likely to be closely related to Na languages, is said to have arrived in Múlí approximately six generations ago from the neighboring Yányuán County (Guō and Hé 1994:6-7). It likewise exhibits a number of diagnostic Qiangic features. For example, (1) directional prefixes, namely: (a) ge- ‘upward’, (b) a more general prefix tǐa- or tǐe- that can indicate several distinct directions, and (c) a perfective prefix lo-; and (2) case forms of personal pronouns distinguished by tonal alternation. For example, the first person pronoun: absolutive form ŋa53 ‘I’, ergative/agentive form ŋa31, genitive form ŋa33 ‘mine’; the second person pronoun: absolutive form nʊ33 ‘you’, ergative/agentive form nʊ31, genitive form nʊ33 ‘your’ (Huáng 2009).

Similar to Laze, the local dialect of Chinese arrived into the area relatively recently (estimated as ca. 2-3 centuries ago). Nevertheless, this local Chinese dialect has demonstrably undergone considerable restructuring. The most striking non-Sinitic morphosyntactic features acquired by this dialect in Múlí, as compared to its kin varieties

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14 According to Kessler (1986:20, 46), Múlí has been settled by Tibetans since ca. 680 AD, i.e. after the unification of the Tibetans with the Hsifan nomadic tribes, who settled in the areas to the East of Tibet between 618 and 906 AD. However, it was only after 1253 that Múlí formed the southeastern corner of the at that time still existing Tibetan empire.
outside Mûlî (including even those spoken in the neighboring counties of Yányuán and Xīchāng, Lì 2010), are a variant verb-final word order, accompanied by the Noun-Numeral-Classifier order, and the development of several cases marked by postpositions.  

15 Case marking in the Mûlî dialect of Chinese is yet another example of pattern-borrowing, in which one native Chinese morpheme, "san" or "xan", is used to denote various relations within the noun phrase, approximating those of cases in the local languages, most importantly, animate patient (primary object or anti-ergative), instrumental and locative cases. The ongoing restructuring of Chinese and Laze, witness of the intensity of language contact situation in Mûlî, are equally remarkable for their evident rapidity, which is quite contrary to the assumption that processes of convergence take millennia to complete.

In sum, a preliminary comparison of the four Qiangic languages of Mûlî in an areal context yields diversity as the most characteristic feature of these languages and no features that are exclusively shared by these languages as opposed to the neighboring genetic subgroups. At the same time, the process of contact-induced restructuring, as observed in the latter languages, is suggestive of Mûlî as a zone of active contact-induced structural convergence.

### 2.4. Some preliminary conclusions

The following conclusions to the discussion in this section can be made.

First, the Qiangic hypothesis in its southern end is based on insufficient evidence. Notably, it overlooks the fact that features postulated as probative of Qiang-ness are equally attested in the local varieties of languages of the neighboring genetic subgroups (Yí, Na, Tibetan, Sinitic).

Second, the profound restructuring of the local non-Qiangic languages (e.g. the Tibetan and Chinese dialects of Mûlî) indicate that Mûlî is an active convergence area, that includes languages that are genetically unrelated, but share a number of distinctive traits. In other words, the fact that genetically unrelated local languages share a number of distinctive traits is precisely because of contact-induced diffusion.

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15 Consider the following example of the S-O-Num-Clf-V word order in this dialect:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>i21</th>
<th>tʰjan⁴⁴</th>
<th>ten⁵³</th>
<th>lao⁵³</th>
<th>ʂl</th>
<th>tʰa⁴⁴</th>
<th>tɕiau⁴⁴</th>
<th>tʂu⁴⁴</th>
<th>tso₂¹³tən⁴⁴</th>
<th>i2¹</th>
<th>ko²¹³</th>
<th>ɕian⁵³</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>天</td>
<td>了</td>
<td>等</td>
<td>是</td>
<td>他</td>
<td>就</td>
<td>豬</td>
<td>坐墩兒</td>
<td>一</td>
<td>個</td>
<td>想</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>one</td>
<td>day</td>
<td>wait</td>
<td>PRF</td>
<td>be</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>just</td>
<td>pig</td>
<td>Rump</td>
<td>one</td>
<td>item</td>
<td>think</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

lao²¹³.

Want

‘He waited one whole day, he really wanted to buy a piece of pig’s rump.’

16 For example, (1) animate patient marking: ȵo⁵³men⁴⁴ ɲi⁸³ ʂan²¹³ tɑn⁴⁴ ʢan⁴⁴i²¹ ‘我們你上當翻譯‘we will translate for you.’; (2) instrumental marking: tɕiau²¹³ ken⁴⁴ ȵo⁵³men⁴⁴ nian⁵³ ko²¹³ tʃei²¹³ nian⁵³ tɕian⁴⁴ tʰiau²¹³ken⁴⁴ ʂan²¹³ tʂ⁴¹ʢan²¹³ i²¹ ‘就跟我們兩個這兩天調養上吃飯樣的‘just like the two of us were eating with a spoon this couple of days’, (3) locative marking: xan²¹³ tʰi⁴⁴ ʂan²¹³ loŋ⁵³ lao⁵³ ʂl²¹³ 半梯上襬了‘reached half the stairs’. 
Third, given the intensity and extent of the convergence process, as glimpsed through the local varieties of languages of known affiliation, convergence cannot be excluded as a (non-genetic) factor which has contributed to the formation of the little-known and highly distinct languages of Müll, currently labeled Qiangic. Furthermore, given that cross-linguistically, no cases of completely isolated structural interference in just one linguistic subsystem have so far been attested (e.g. Thomason and Kaufman 1988:60), the degree of restructuring as observed in languages of Müll is symptomatic of comparable interference affecting a range of linguistic subsystems of the languages labeled Qiangic, including also their respective lexicon (cf. Thomason and Kaufman 1988:207). In this context, the diagnostic value of lexical comparisons, if lexical correspondences are taken to be the only or the weightiest indication of genetic relatedness, is at best uncertain.

In sum, in view of the salient dissimilarities in all linguistic subsystems and the demonstrable similarities with genetically unrelated local languages, it appears prudent to err on the side of caution and, hence, to consider these four Qiangic languages of Müll as not closely genetically related.

3. Qiangic as an areal grouping: Defining features and member languages

The preceding discussion suggests that the initial research goals and the related methodology of the Qiang-ness project are in need of adjustment. In my personal work, the main objective of the project remains related to the Qiangic hypothesis, albeit in a new understanding, that is, as an areal grouping. I propose to investigate the history and the (respective) affiliation of the languages currently labeled Qiangic as critically related to the history of the area in which they are spoken, and which is typified by a number of salient traits. The two newly formulated objectives, namely, (1) studying the Qiangic area, and (2) inferring the relationship between its little-studied member languages currently labeled Qiangic, are discussed in turn below.

Linguistic or convergence areas (such as Müll or, broader, Qiangic) have been argued to be essentially analogous to geographical dialect continua, with different features (isoglosses) extending over different areas (e.g. Dahl 2001, Bisang 2004, 2006:88). Given this parallel, convergence areas can be profitably studied using methods and major insights of dialectology, of the latter, most importantly, a contrast between the typologically more consistent core and more diverse periphery. The relevant approach consists in: (1) defining characteristic local features, (2) describing their geographical distribution and local configurations, (3) adducing reasons for this distribution: arriving at an understanding of the (socio)linguistic mechanisms that lie behind the geographical distribution of linguistic phenomena, the location of isoglosses, and the diffusion of linguistic innovations.

In the area under discussion, the defining areal features considerably overlap with those established for the Qiangic subgrouping hypothesis (Qiangic as a genetic unit), but they are not limited to them. A new understanding of Qiangic as an areal grouping naturally entails that a coherent understanding of its linguistic history as well as that of its member languages necessitates moving beyond the current practice of restricting the scope of examined languages to those labeled Qiangic. Increasing the scope of languages
naturally increases the number of relevant characteristic traits. For example, characteristic features of Mülü are essentially those outlined for Shixing, Lizu, Nàmùzì, and Pūmī in §2, but not limited to these. When all local languages are taken into account, a complete list of features is likely to be larger, with some features non-overlapping for some languages. For instance, pronunciation of /u/ as a syllabic bilabial trill after bilabial and apical stops is equally common for Nosu, Shixing, Lizu, Nàmùzì, and Pūmī (after ə), but this feature is not attested in Kami Tibetan. Also, an egophoric-non-egophoric (conjunct-disjunct) system is shared by Kami, Lizu and Pūmī (and possibly, Laze), but not by Nàmùzì or Nosu.

As pointed out in §2, features shared by Lizu, Nàmùzì, Pūmī, and Shixing can be further divided into those shared by these languages (1) with several neighboring genetic groups, (2) with either the southern or the northern genetic neighbors of these languages, and (3) those, mostly restricted to the languages of Mülü (of all local genetic subgroups). Discarding the non-committal first type, the second and the third types appear most telling as to the linguistic history of the local Mülü languages. Namely, the second type is suggestive of a link (either genetic or through contact) with either Yi, Na, or Tibetan, whereas the third type that is essentially restricted to the Qiangic area (exemplified by directional prefixes, and, possibly, also uvulars) is potentially indicative of some features that may originate in the local languages, that are unrelated to any of the better known local genetic subgroups (Yi, Na, Tibetan).

Furthermore, the precise inventory and the scalability of the structural (typological) features that are shared by the languages of Mülü are symptomatic of a transition in the area between two widely divergent typological types, namely (1) Tibetan and (2) Yi and Na. Of these two types, Tibetan is agglutinative with complex suffixal morphology (e.g. well-developed case marking systems). It does not have numeral classifiers or multiple existential (locative) verbs. Tibetan has template word-tone systems (J. Sun 1997). The typologically close Yi and Na, on the other hand, are predominantly isolating. Yi expresses syntactic relations essentially by means of a rigid word order, whereas Na makes restricted use of case marking. Both Yi and Na have well-developed systems of numeral classifiers and multiple existential (locative) verbs. The two groups have omnisyllabic tonal systems. In addition, the recent arrival into the area, Sinitic, represents yet another typological type. Similar to Yi and Na, Sinitic is isolating, it has omnisyllabic tones, and a well-developed numeral classifier system. On the other hand, Sinitic has a predominant verb-medial word order and no multiple existential verbs.

Language contact in the research area leads to the mutual rapprochement of these distinct types, yielding a number of transitional subtypes in the languages of Mülü. This development can be clearly detected in the local languages of known genetic affiliation. For example, Kami Tibetan acquires such a non-Tibetan trait as an incipient classifier system, whereas the local Chinese dialect develops such a non-Sinitic feature, as a system of postpositional case markers. Notably, in Sino-Tibetan at large, those structural features that are common in the languages of Mülü (e.g. numeral classifiers, multiple existential verbs) are held to be recent, largely independent and subject to contact effects from nearby languages (e.g. LaPolla 1994, Bradley 2005:224 for classifier systems). This entails that in local Mülü languages of uncertain affiliation, these linguistic systems are
likewise likely to have been affected by language contact, potentially obscuring the relationship of these languages with their possible relatives outside of the area.

Let us now turn to the issue of inferring the genetic affiliation of the local phylogenetically more obscure languages (Shixīng, Lizú, Nàmùzī, Pūmī). Two possibilities are conceivable:

(1) These languages are related to the neighboring genetic subgroups and are considerably restructured through contact in the area to obscure the original relatedness.

(2) These languages are genetically unrelated to the neighboring genetic subgroups and, possibly, also to each other, with a further possibility of distinct subgroups among them, similar to rGyalrongic, and/or isolates. These languages may likewise be considerably restructured through contact to make them more similar to their non-genetic areal neighbors.

Reliance on areal characteristic features confounds the two types (the current Qiangic hypothesis, Qiangic as a genetic unit). Conversely, differentiation between the two possibilities necessitates new subgrouping that will take into account (1) areal tendencies, as gleaned through restructuring of local varieties of languages whose genetic affiliation is not disputed, and (2) typological profiles of the neighboring genetic subgroups to serve as reference points for comparison. In sum, it calls for an interdisciplinary approach, combining studies on language typology, language contact, and comparative-historical linguistics.

The conventional subgrouping procedure based on prioritizing a limited number of similarities that may be indicative of common ancestry (common innovations) and essentially favoring one linguistic subsystem (lexicon), in the absence of objective criteria to factor out diffusion, cannot guarantee objectivity of results in an area of considerable historical, ethnic and linguistic complexity (such as the one discussed presently), especially in the absence of previous attestations of its languages. A reliable alternative consists of subgrouping based on a maximum large number of synchronic similarities, that are further not prioritized as to their historical significance, that is, overall synchronic similarities, whatever these similarities may signify (genetic inheritance or results of diffusion). Overall similarity between any two languages or groups of languages is a function of the similarity of the many traits in which they are being compared. (Note that the use of a broad range and variety of correlated similarities, both in structure and form, effectively eliminates chance and parallel developments as their possible origins.) Distinct subgroups can be constructed because of diverse trait correlations in the groups under study. Notably, this procedure yields natural groups, that is, groups whose members share many correlated features and which are, for that reason, likely to be monophyletic. Finally, overall synchronic (or phenetic) similarity and phylogenetic history are treated as formally independent of one another, and phylogenetic information is obtained by conjecture from synchronic type of evidence.\footnote{The approach is that of numerical taxonomy in biology, based on the ideas of Michel Adanson and developed in Sokal and Sneath (1963). Applied in linguistics, this approach is an excellent candidate for quantitative methods, such as NeighbourNet, which is argued to favor a phenetic, rather than a cladistic
A natural objection to this approach may be that reliance on synchronic similarities runs the risk of confounding among similarities those due to genetic inheritance and those due to convergence. Fortunately, in linguistics, as in biology, phenetic groups are usually monophyletic and there is as yet no acceptable evidence that overall convergence or convergence in phenetic resemblance does take place to any marked extent (e.g. Sokal and Sneath 1963:97). Furthermore, in linguistics, mixed languages, such as pidgins and creoles (e.g. Ma’a [Mbugu] or Media Lengua), whose origins are non-genetic, represent an extremely rare and unusual effect of societal contact, so that, in most cases, it is possible to distinguish mixed languages, whose origins are non-genetic, from languages whose development has followed a more common genetic line (cf. Thomason and Kaufman 1988:3). The local Tibetan dialect of Mûlî is a case at hand. While considerably restructured due to areal convergence (acquiring many non-Tibetan features and loanwords), its lineage is beyond dispute (given overall clear continuity in its phonology, morphology, lexicon and syntax with its nearest relatives outside of the area).

I propose to use this procedure as a hypothesis-generating tool in connection to the (respective) affiliation of Shîxîng, Lizu, Nâmûzî, and Pûmî. This procedure can rely on existing hypotheses based on impressionistic or more systematic and grounded assessments of the overall respective similarities of these languages with their various neighbors. According to these previous hypotheses, Pûmî is conceivably related to Qiăng and Mûyà, as argued to be fully substantiated by cognate sets (Thurgood 2003:17). Shîxîng, on the other hand, is likely to be related to Na languages (Guó and Hé 1994:8-9). Finally, on the strength of, for the time being, impressionistic lexical and structural similarities, Lizu and Nâmûzî may be more closely related to Yi languages than they are to their remaining linguistic neighbors (for Nâmûzî, see Lâmâ 1994; Huáng 1997:13-15).\(^18\) Needless to say, at this stage, these are merely working hypotheses, to be either confirmed or falsified by systematically taking into account a variety of linguistic subsystems and features.

In the following section, I will elaborate on the hypothesized close relationship between Shîxîng and Na languages, as this relationship appears to be most straightforward among all aforementioned cases. This relationship is assessed against the background of areal typological tendencies, as discussed above.

### 3.1. On the similarity between Shîxîng and Na languages

\(^{18}\) For example, Lizu shares with Yi many lexical items (cf. Sûn 2001:167). It also shares with Nosu many grammaticalizations (both form and function), such as (1) grammaticalization from ‘man, person’ (Lizu sù, Nosu sù) to a nominalizer, e.g. Lizu ṭê-tê-sù-sù ‘blacksmith’ (from ṭê ‘iron’, ṭê-sù ‘to forge’), or (2) that from the verb ‘to make’ (Lizu ṭh-mù, Nosu ṭh) to an adverbalizer, e.g. Lizu ṭh-sa-mu ṭh-jì ‘take care’, literally ‘go slowly’, a conventional expression of farewell. Overall, many Lizu function words have formally and functionally close counterparts in Nosu (based on Hû 2002).
Shîxîng displays significant similarity with Na languages in all its linguistic subsystems and no comparable similarity with any other local language or group of languages. Most importantly, there is substantial continuity between Na languages and Shîxîng in terms of their morphology and syntax (as a productive combination of meaning and form), namely:


2. Aspectual marking:
   (a) progressive aspect marker (grammaticalized in Moso and Shîxîng from the locative verb ‘to exist’), i.e. Yōngning Na dzō³1; Shîxîng dzō. Compare, ‘to exist’: Yōngning Na dzō³3, Shîxîng ãdzō
   (b) perfective aspect marker: Nâxî si³⁵3, se³³; Yōngning Na ze³³; Shîxîng ʂj. For example, ‘have eaten’: Nâxî ndzu³³se³³; Yōngning Na dzu⁵⁵ze³³; Shîxîng ãdz-dz³³=³s⁵³j (with the perfective prefix ãz-)
   (c) possibly, also the experiential marker: Nâxî dži³³, Yōngning Na dži³³, Shîxîng dzj. For example, ‘have once eaten’: Nâxî ndzu³³džj³³, Yōngning Na dzu⁵⁵džj³³, Shîxîng ãdz³³=³dž³³

3. Nominalizer, grammaticalized in Moso and Shîxîng from the morpheme for ‘person’. For example, ‘wood-cutter’: Yōngning Na sw³³dɔ³³y³³5 (from x³³ ‘person’), Shîxîng ãls-št-hî (from ãhî ‘person’).

4. Reduplication in adjectives with the prefix a- (to signal intensification). For example, Lîjîâng mbe³³ ‘thin’ vs. ø³³me³³mbé³³ ‘very thin’; Guâîê bi³³ ‘thin’ vs. ø³³bi³³bî³³ ‘very thin’, Shîxîng ãbê ‘thin’ vs. ãb-a-bê ‘very thin’.

5. Suppletive forms of the verbs ‘to come’ and ‘to go’:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Lîjîâng Nâxî</th>
<th>Yōngning Na</th>
<th>Shîxîng</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>past</td>
<td>ts¹w³¹</td>
<td>ts¹w³¹</td>
<td>ãl³c³⁵</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>non-past</td>
<td>ts¹w³¹, lw³³, le³³</td>
<td>zi³³, zu³³</td>
<td>ãl³j, ãl³jú</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>imperative</td>
<td>lu³³</td>
<td>zu³³</td>
<td>ãl³jú</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘to go’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>non-past</td>
<td>bu³³, bo³³</td>
<td>bi³³</td>
<td>ãl³bî</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>past</td>
<td>k³w⁵³, xu³³, xø³³</td>
<td>k³xe³³, xu³³</td>
<td>ãl³xø</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>imperative</td>
<td>fa³³</td>
<td>xu³³</td>
<td>ãl³xu</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

19 This overview is based on the list of diagnostic morphological and syntactic similarities between Nâxî and Moso in Jiâng (1993), to which I added my Shîxîng data. Some additional features shared by Nâxî, Moso and Shîxîng are cited, for Nâxî and Moso, from Hè and Jiâng (1985), Lidz (2006), and Yang (2009). Some similarities between Shîxîng and Na languages are also discussed in Chirkova (2009).
(6) Some continuity in the system of existential verbs (even though that in Shìxīng is more elaborate than those in Nàxī and Moso, with some unrelated forms), namely: ‘to have, to possess; to exist’: Lìjiāng Nàxī dzy\textsuperscript{33} (inanimate entities), ndzy\textsuperscript{33} (animate entities); Yōngnìng Na dz\textsubscript{o}33; Shìxīng \textsuperscript{1}dzō (inanimate entities), \textsuperscript{1}jī (animate entities); ‘to exist (inside a container)’: Lìjiāng Nàxī zi\textsuperscript{33}, Yōngnìng Na zi\textsuperscript{33}, Shìxīng \textsuperscript{H}k\textsuperscript{u}3; ‘to exist (attached to an entity)’: Lìjiāng Nàxī dz\textsubscript{u}31, Yōngnìng Na \textsuperscript{d}i\textsuperscript{31}, Shìxīng \textsuperscript{L}dzì.

Some additional features include:

(1) grammaticalization of the verb ‘to make’ into an adverbializer, e.g. Lìjiāng tʂ\textsuperscript{u}31 be\textsuperscript{33} ndzi\textsuperscript{33} ‘go quickly’ (from be\textsuperscript{33} ‘to make’), Shìxīng tʂʰō t\textsubscript{b}3=\textsuperscript{H}si \textsuperscript{L}p\textsuperscript{æ} ‘precipitously escape’ (from \textsuperscript{L}b3 ‘to make’, followed by the clause connector \textsuperscript{si})

(2) deliminative verbal prefix related to the numeral ‘one’, Yōngnìng Na \textsuperscript{d}i\textsuperscript{33}- from d\textsuperscript{33} ‘one’ (Lidz 2006), Shìxīng dz\textsubscript{i}- from \textsuperscript{L}dzī ‘one’. For example, Yōngnìng Na \textsuperscript{d}i\textsuperscript{33}-\textsuperscript{d}i\textsubscript{13} ‘to follow (for a while)’; Shìxīng \textsuperscript{L}dzī-\textsuperscript{cī ‘to have a look’.

At the same time, internal divergence between Shìxīng and Na languages is manifested in the lack of agreement between lexical and some grammatical subsystems.\textsuperscript{20} Divergences between grammatical subsystems are furthermore essentially restricted to those systems that appear to be particularly prone to restructuring in the Mùlì area, as observed in its languages of known genetic affiliation, or to those salient phenomena that are exclusive to the area, namely:

(1) Shìxīng’s system of case markers is more developed than that in other Na languages. More precisely, Shìxīng has more cases than Nàxī and Moso; and case markers that overlap between these languages appear unrelated.

(2) Shìxīng has a highly reduced classifier system with only two sortal classifiers (one general and one for elongated entities, see §2.2). The development of its classifier system furthermore fits within the context of the overall south-north gradual reduction of classifier systems in Na languages. Thus, Nàxī has slightly over 40 sortal classifiers (as counted from Pinson 1998:245-251), Yōngnìng Na has approximately 15 sortal classifiers (Lidz 2006:8-14, Yang 2009:24-25), whereas Laze has only 5 to 10 sortal classifiers (Huáng 2009, Alexis Michaud, p.c.). This transition appears further

\textsuperscript{20} While systematic lexical comparison between Shìxīng and Na languages is yet to be undertaken, pending also a rigorous phonological analysis of Shìxīng, two observations regarding shared lexical items between Shìxīng and Na languages can be made. First, on an impressionistic level, lexical similarities between these languages are substantial, but they are expected to be significantly fewer than 60%, as shared between Nàxī and Moso. Notably, in comparison to the latter languages, Shìxīng has an extensive number of Tibetan and Pāmī loans. Second, some diagnostic regular correspondences between Nàxī and Moso (such as that between a prenasalized initial in Nàxī and a non-nasal initial in Moso) may be paralleled in Shìxīng (a non-nasal initial followed by a nasalized vowel). For example, ‘bridge’: Nàxī ndz\textsubscript{o}31, Moso dz\textsubscript{o}33, Shìxīng \textsuperscript{H}zē; ‘to sit; to live’: Nàxī ndz\textsubscript{u}31, Moso dz\textsubscript{u}13, Shìxīng \textsuperscript{H}dz\textsubscript{u}; ‘short’: Nàxī nd\textsuperscript{33}, Moso d\textsuperscript{33}, d\textsuperscript{33}; Shìxīng \textsuperscript{L}d \textsuperscript{ě}.
accompanied by that (also south to north) from omnisyllabic tone systems (Nàxī) to restricted tone systems, characterized by neutralization of tonal contrasts (Yǒngnìng Na, Laze). A correlated development is that of classifiers: from free forms (Nàxī) to bound forms (enclitics to numerals, as in Laze).

(3) Shìxīng also has a better developed (than in other Na varieties) system of existential (locative) verbs.

(4) Shìxīng has directional prefixes.

(5) Shìxīng has a tone system characterized by culminativity (as discussed in detail in Chirkova and Michaud 2009).

The reason for these dissimilarities between Shìxīng and its supposed Na relatives outside of the area is likely to be contact influence from the areal neighbors of Shìxīng, most importantly, its closest geographical neighbors in Shułów Tibet and Púmí. So, as a first approximation, Shìxīng can be hypothesized to be a Na language that has undergone considerable restructuring in Mùlī.21

More fine-grained studies, including the largest possible range and number of similarities between Shìxīng and Na, accompanied by careful lexical comparisons, will reveal whether these languages form one natural group and will further lead to the conclusion of the precise nature of the relationship between them (genetic or contact-induced).

4. Subgrouping in the Qiangic area and Sino-Tibetan at large

It is a lasting contribution of Sūn Hóngkāi to the field of Sino-Tibetan studies to single out the Qiangic area, and to identify some of its key features, while focusing on its languages of uncertain affiliation. Follow-up investigations, such as the ongoing work on the languages of Mùlī, as discussed presently, suggest that the initial interpretation of the nature of similarities between the more obscure languages of the Qiangic area as genetic requires adjustment, and that a coherent understanding of the relationship between these languages critically relies on that of the complex multi-lingual area, in which they are spoken. To adduce an explanation to the many salient areal features, some of which are truly unique in the Sino-Tibetan context, we will need to move beyond the usual practice of restricting the scope of studied languages to those labeled Qiangic. This new approach will increase both the number of concerned languages and the number of relevant areal features. As a result, Báimā Tibetan will rightfully reclaim its place as a valid and telling member of the Qiangic Sprachbund.

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21 Notably, the two putative Na languages of Mùlī, Laze and Shìxīng, both exhibit salient areal Mùlī features and differ essentially in their respective degree of restructuring. Namely, Shìxīng is more profoundly (lexically, prosodically and syntactically) restructured than Laze. As a first approximation, this may be simply due to a longer time of residence in Mùlī, and consequently, a longer time of exposure to convergence: ca. 500 years for the Shìxīng group (Xiè 1992:48) vs. ca. 200 years for the Laze (Guó and Hé 1994:6-7).
Needless to say, the unique features of the Qiangic area are likely to provide new insights into the history of Sino-Tibetan at large. Not surprisingly, related comparative and reconstruction work can only be revealing, if it is performed on coherent, natural groups, whereas the issue of the precise subgrouping in the complex Qiangic area is far from resolved, as I have tried to show.

On a broader scale, the problem of subgrouping, as discussed in relation to Qiangic, is emblematic for Sino-Tibetan at large, where the precise subgrouping of constituents remains in many cases controversial. In addition to outstanding challenges of subgrouping in historical linguistics in general, such as lack of objective criteria to distinguish retentions from innovations or absence of objective criteria to factor out diffusion or identical independent change (see Harrison 2003:232-239 for discussion), added challenges to subgrouping in the Sino-Tibetan context comprise (Handel 2008:426, 431, 435):

1) absence of a complete reconstruction of Proto-Sino-Tibetan, that makes it difficult to identify shared innovations with certainty between proposed subgroups (at the same time, a complete reconstruction in turn requires a clear subgrouping, without which it is difficult to properly weight and evaluate data from the daughter languages)

2) insufficient documentation of many Sino-Tibetan languages

3) complex migration histories and areal convergence, obscuring recognition of genetic relationships (e.g. LaPolla 2001)

4) existence of many languages with monosyllabic roots that increases the probability of chance resemblances leading to the false identification of cognates.

Yet one more momentous challenge of the Sino-Tibetan family is the pervasive absence of previous attestations (direct historical evidence) of many of its languages. Solutions to these fundamental problems may or may not be found. For instance, no previous attestations of genetically obscure languages of the Qiangic area are in all likelihood forthcoming. While steadily working towards solutions and hoping that some obstacles can eventually be overcome, in my opinion, studies on the linguistic history of Sino-Tibetan languages have in the meantime everything to gain by turning to a broad range and variety of available and steadily growing body of empirical evidence, including that which is normally discarded by the conventional comparative method (such as typological features) for many clues that they can provide on specific scenarios of diachronic change.

The initial phase of classifying Sino-Tibetan languages now appears to be complete. It consists of “classification from above” (family into subgroups) and is based on a small number of criteria (cognate vocabulary, common innovations). This allows scholars to isolate groups of a manageable size for study. Due to the use of a small number of criteria, this type of classification unavoidably runs the risk of yielding groups that are not natural (not monophyletic), and hence are neither complete nor sufficiently discrete to be used for precise purposes, such as reconstruction work. The next logical
step to be taken is to refine proposed subgroups to ensure completeness and accuracy of information that can be obtained from each of them on their respective ancestral states. In my opinion, this can be profitably done by changing the approach to that of “classification from below” (languages to subgroups), especially at the often fuzzy boundaries of already proposed subgroups, to arrive at groups that are defined by overall synchronic similarities, in other words, groups that are likely to be monophyletic. An added bonus of the classification from below is that definition of each natural group is intrinsically relational to that of its kin. Consequently, pursuit of boundaries of each and every natural group is bound to shed light on the nature, scope, and history of many of its areal neighbors.

Appendix: Features shared by the four Qiangic languages of Mûlî (Pûmî, Lizu, Nâmûzî, Shîxîng) exemplified and compared to Kami Tibetan (related to §§2.1 and 2.3)


(3) Common principles of prosodic organization: tone systems characterized by culminativity—a restriction of not more than one pronounced lexical tone per prosodic word with one tonal assignment (mostly restricted to the first syllable of the word) affecting much or all of the prosodic word, see Chirkova and Michaud (2009) for the prosodic organization of Shîxîng, Chirkova (2008) for the prosodic organization of Lizu, and Chirkova (forthcoming) for the prosodic organization of Kami.

(4) Identical principles of word-formation, including:


directional prefix ʨe-); Shixing ᴨtsʰ-ʰao ‘salty’, from ᴨtsʰ- ‘salt’, ᴨqʰ-ʰaošó ‘bitter’ (the initial q- in ‘bitter’ undergoes lenition in the intervocalic position, see Chirkova 2009)

(3) Affixation. This type comprises:
   (i) Kinship prefix a- (older kin), e.g. Lizu, ṣa- ‘older sibling (brother or sister)’, Nâmùzì: ᵙa55-ja-55 ‘older sibling (brother or sister)’, Shixing and Kami: ᴨha-ju ‘older brother’, ᴨha-zì ‘older sister’
   (ii) Diminutive suffix derived from the morpheme for ‘child’ or ‘son’:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diminutive suffix</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Púmì ᴨtsø</td>
<td>‘son’</td>
<td>ᴨmatsø ‘cat’; ᴨmatsø-ʦø ‘kitten’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lizu 1. je</td>
<td>‘small’</td>
<td>ᴨtɕe ‘dog’; ᴨtɕe-je ‘pup’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. ᴨjaŋŋ</td>
<td>‘child’</td>
<td>ᴨmutsø ‘cat’; ᴨmutsø jaŋŋ ‘kitten’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nâmùzì zo55</td>
<td>‘child’</td>
<td>jo55 ‘sheep’; jo55-za55 ‘lamb’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shixing ᴨzó</td>
<td>‘child, male’</td>
<td>ᴨmaol ‘cat’; ᴨmaol-ʒó ‘kitten’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kami 1. ka</td>
<td>‘child’</td>
<td>ᴨʧa ‘dog’; ᴨʧa-ka ‘pup’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. ᴨba (WT phrug)</td>
<td>‘child’</td>
<td>ᴨwu-li ‘cat’; ᴨwu-ka ‘kitten’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(iii) Gender suffixes for animals (in Kami, prefixes):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Púmì mā</td>
<td>pu</td>
<td>ᴨmatsø ‘cat’; ᴨmatsø-mā ‘female cat’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lizu mæ</td>
<td>1. ᵙp</td>
<td>ᴨtɕe ‘dog’; ᴨtɕe-ma ‘bitch, female dog’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. bu</td>
<td>ᴨmutsø ‘cat’; ᴨmutsø bu ‘male dog’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nâmùzì nie</td>
<td>1. (N)p</td>
<td>ᵙa55 ‘chicken’; ᵙa55-mie ‘hen’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. (ʦa55-)p</td>
<td>ᵙa55 ‘chicken’; ᵙa55-mie55 ‘hen’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shixing mi</td>
<td>ʦp</td>
<td>ᴨʧa ‘dog’; ᴨʧa-ʦ ‘male dog’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kami mu (WT mo)</td>
<td>ᵙp</td>
<td>ᴨʧa ‘dog’; ᴨʧa-mi ‘female cat’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(5) Numeral classifiers (see §2.2)
Kami has an incipient system of numeral classifiers, in which classifiers are optional and restricted to animate nouns. Consider, for instance, the optional use of the (incipient) classifier ᵙŋu (WT mgo ‘head’) in the expression ᵙŋu-ʨi (WT mi mgo geig) ‘one person’.

(6) Directional Prefixes:
whereas the non-egophoric forms are and the non-
that do not. For example, for the verb ‘to exist; to be’, the egophoric form
belong to the personal sphere of the speaker (egophoric), and, on the other hand, those
Existential verbs in Kami
(edibles, things to eat’.
(b)
forms, namely, in Lizu
In addition, patient nominalizers in Lizu and Sh
Multiple existential verbs
past distinction (suppletive forms) in some high frequency verbs and
nominalization markers. Consider, for instance, past and non-past stems of the verb ‘to
go’:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Past stem</th>
<th>Non-past stem</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Púmí</td>
<td>Hlšā</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lizu</td>
<td>LHda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nàmùzī</td>
<td>hő3 optics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shixing</td>
<td>LHxə</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kami</td>
<td>Hș5 (song)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition, patient nominalizers in Lizu and Shixing have distinct past and non-past
forms, namely, in Lizu: (a) past -mi, e.g. LHne-dzj=LHmi ‘those that have been eaten’, and
(b) non-past -ly, e.g. LHdzj-ly ‘edibles, things to eat’. In Shixing: (a) past -li, e.g. Hdz=li
Hțô ni LHbi-ts3 ‘rice and bacon that he used to have’, and (b) non-past -g3, e.g. LHdz3=g3
‘edibles, things to eat’.

(8) Multiple existential verbs:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Existential verb</th>
<th>Púmí</th>
<th>Lizu</th>
<th>Nàmùzī</th>
<th>Shixing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>to have, to possess</td>
<td>HLbő51</td>
<td>LHbo</td>
<td>bo55</td>
<td>LHdzô</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| to exist (of animate entities) | HLţće | HDţo | dţo55  | LHjavascript
| to exist (of inanimate entities) | LHţa | ndţa31 |        | LHjavascript |
| to exist (of movable entities) | LHdzwa | ţe31 |        |         |
| to exist (inside a container) | HLkui or HL-tekii | HLdţće |        | Hk’u3    |
| to exist (attached to an entity) | HLdţi |        |        |         |
| to exist (of abstract entities) | LHći | LHnc | dţa55-gi55 |         |

Existential verbs in Kami fall into two contrastive types, on the one hand, those that
belong to the personal sphere of the speaker (egophoric), and, on the other hand, those
that do not. For example, for the verb ‘to exist; to be’, the egophoric form is 1Ndţe (‘dug)
and the non-egophoric form is Hțô (snang); for the verb ‘to have, to possess’, the
egophoric forms are ț3u (yod) (old knowledge) and ț3a (yod.? (new knowledge),
whereas the non-egophoric form is again Hțô (snang).
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Evans, Jonathan. 2008. Structured privativity and the complexity of simplicity, or the ups and downs of privative tone (manuscript).


