

RGC Ref. No.: UGC/FDS24/H02/19 <p>(please insert ref. above)</p>
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**RESEARCH GRANTS COUNCIL  
COMPETITIVE RESEARCH FUNDING SCHEMES FOR  
THE LOCAL SELF-FINANCING DEGREE SECTOR**

**FACULTY DEVELOPMENT SCHEME (FDS)**

**Completion Report**  
*(for completed projects only)*

<p><b><u>Submission Deadlines:</u></b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Auditor's report with unspent balance, if any: within <b><u>six</u></b> months of the approved project completion date.</li> <li>2. Completion report: within <b><u>12</u></b> months of the approved project completion date.</li> </ol>
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**Part A: The Project and Investigator(s)**

**1. Project Title**

A Grammar of Niesu, a Southeastern Dialect of Nuosu in Sichuan

(四川凉山彝蘇語參考語法)

**2. Investigator(s) and Academic Department(s) / Unit(s) Involved**

Research Team	Name / Post	Unit / Department / Institution
Principal Investigator	DING Hongdi / Lecturer (former), Research Assistant Professor (now)	<i>formerly</i> School of Professional Education and Executive Development, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, <i>now</i> Department of Chinese language studies, The Education University of Hong Kong
Co-Investigator(s)	LAMA, Ziwo Qiu-fuyuan / Professor	College of Yi Studies, Southwest University for Nationalities, China
Others		

### 3. Project Duration

	<b>Original</b>	<b>Revised</b>	<b>Date of RGC / Institution Approval (must be quoted)</b>
Project Start Date	01/01/2020	01/01/2020	7 September 2022
Project Completion Date	31/12/2022	30/09/2022	7 September 2022
Duration ( <i>in month</i> )	36 months	33 months	7 September 2022
Deadline for Submission of Completion Report	31/12/2023	30/09/2023	7 September 2022

4.4 Please attach photo(s) of acknowledgement of RGC-funded facilities / equipment.  
N.A.

### **Part B: The Final Report**

### 5. Project Objectives

#### 5.1 Objectives as per original application

1. To describe the grammar of Niesu and publish a reference grammar of the language with a major international publisher (e.g., Brill, De Gruyter, Routledge). The Niesu reference grammar should include an introductory profile, segmental phonology, suprasegmentals, lexical categories, morphology, the noun phrase and its grammatical functions, the verb phrase, grammatical categories, clauses and sentences, complex predicates, and information structure.
2. To produce and publish a glossed text collection. 8 to 12 traditional stories, in about 40 minutes, will be transcribed, glossed and translated. The Niesu text collection, preceded by an introductory chapter summarizing the main typological features of the language, is planned to be submitted to the book series, LINCOM Languages of the World's Text Collections by Lincom Europa.
3. To reveal the Niesu grammatical features which result in the unintelligibility with Nuosu, a major dialect of Nuosu proper, and to enhance the understanding and recognition of the linguistic diversity within Nuosu proper.
4. Finally, one to two papers will be submitted to high-quality peer-reviewed journals within the project duration, such as *Linguistics of the Tibeto-Burman Area*, *Journal of Chinese Linguistics and Language and Linguistics*. Three conference presentations are expected to be delivered, such as at the International Conference on Sino-Tibetan Languages and Linguistics, and Himalayan Languages Symposium.

## 5.2 Revised objectives

Date of approval from the RGC: N/A

Reasons for the change:

1.

2.

3. ....

### 5.3 Realisation of the objectives

*(Maximum 1 page; please state how and to what extent the project objectives have been achieved; give reasons for under-achievements and outline attempts to overcome problems, if any)*

**Objective 1.** To describe the grammar of Niesu and publish a reference grammar of the language with a major international publisher (e.g., Brill, De Gruyter, Routledge). The Niesu reference grammar should include an introductory profile, segmental phonology, suprasegmentals, lexical categories, morphology, the noun phrase and its grammatical functions, the verb phrase, grammatical categories, clauses and sentences, complex predicates, and information structure.

Achievement: All target aspects of the grammar have been studied. A draft of the reference grammar has been written up. The reference grammar has 8 chapters, namely Chapter 1 Introduction, Chapter 2 Niesu phonology, Chapter 3 Lexical categories, Chapter 4 Morphology, Chapter 5 Noun phrase and its grammatical functions, Chapter 6 Grammatical categories of verbs, Chapter 7 Clauses and sentences, and Chapter 8 Information structure. The current draft consists of all the 8 chapters, requiring further revision and data cross-checking.

Under-achievement: The original aim of getting the reference grammar published within around 3 years is not achieved. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic and cross-border travel restriction, it became almost impossible to travel to China to do fieldwork during 2020-2022. It caused a huge delay in data collection. The first fieldwork was only done in mid-2021 after 21-day quarantine in China. Therefore, the publication had to be postponed until the draft is ready.

Solution: Since all data are collected and the whole grammar has been drafted, I can make the full book ready to be submitted for review within another 12 months.

**Objective 2:** To produce and publish a glossed text collection. 8 to 12 traditional stories, in about 40 minutes, will be transcribed, glossed and translated. The Niesu text collection, preceded by an introductory chapter summarizing the main typological features of the language, is planned to be submitted to the book series, LINCOM Languages of the World's Text Collections by Lincom Europa.

Achievement: A text collection of 9 folk stories, after having been transcribed, glossed and translated, was published by Lincom Europa. This is the first publication of Niesu texts in the literature.

Ding Hongdi, Misi Rymga. 2020. *Texts of Niesu, a Southeastern Dialect of Nuosu: Analyzed Spontaneous Narratives and Grammatical Notes*. Munchen: Lincom Europa.

**Objective 3:** To reveal the Niesu grammatical features which result in the unintelligibility with Nuosu, a major dialect of Nuosu proper, and to enhance the understanding and recognition of the linguistic diversity within Nuosu proper.

Achievement: The draft chapter *Niesu phonology* addresses Objective 3. Meanwhile, the following publication out of this project also addresses Objective 3. They are the only references available in the literature, which compare between Nuosu and Niesu.

Ding, Hongdi, & Lama, Ziwo. (2021). Aspect markings of Niesu, a dialect of Nuosu in Sichuan, China, *Himalayan Linguistics* 20(1): 1–27.

**Objective 4:** one to two papers will be submitted to high-quality peer-reviewed journals within the project duration, such as *Linguistics of the Tibeto-Burman Area*, *Journal of Chinese Linguistics* and *Language and Linguistics*. Three conference presentations are expected to be delivered, such as at

the International Conference on Sino-Tibetan Languages and Linguistics, and Himalayan Languages Symposium.

*Achievement*: the following 4 peer-reviewed papers were published or accepted as outcomes of the project:

- Ding, Hongdi. (2023). Language Contact in an Asymmetrical Sociolinguistic Environment: The Case of Nuosu, a Tibeto-Burman Language of Sichuan, China. In Elia Dal Corso and Soung-U Kim (eds.), *Language Endangerment and Obsolescence in East Asia*, pp. 156–192. Leiden: Brill.
- 丁泓棣、拉玛兹偓, (in press). 凉山彝语的桥接重复：一种口语文化的叙述特点 (Bridging repetition in Liangshan Yi: A narrative feature of oral culture) 《语言科学》 (*Linguistic Sciences*).
- Ding Hongdi. (2022). Interrogatives of Liangshan Yi, *Linguistics of Tibeto-Burman Area* 45(1), 116–158.
- Ding, Hongdi, & Lama, Ziwo. (2021). Aspect markings of Niesu, a dialect of Nuosu in Sichuan, China, *Himalayan Linguistics* 20(1): 1–27.

The following 4 conference presentations were made as outcomes of the project;

- Oct. 2021, *Cause and purpose interrogatives in Liangshan Yi*, presented at The 54th International Conference on Sino-Tibetan Languages and Linguistics, Southwest Jiaotong University, Chengdu, China;
- Dec. 2020, *Place names in Liangshan Yi (Tibeto-Burman): Their structures and semantics*, presented at Annual Research Forum 2020 of Linguistic Society of Hong Kong, The Chinese University of Hong Kong;
- Nov. 2020, 《再論凉山彝語的示證標記》, presented at 第三屆中研院語言學論壇：漢藏語言比較研究的回顧與前瞻, Institute of Linguistics, Academia Sinica, Taiwan;
- Oct. 2020, *Tail-head linkage in Liangshan Yi*, presented at The 53rd International Conference on Sino-Tibetan Languages and Linguistics, University of North Texas, U.S.;

## 5.4 Summary of objectives addressed to date

<b>Objectives</b> (as per 5.1/5.2 above)	<b>Addressed</b> (please tick)	<b>Percentage Achieved</b> (please estimate)
1. To describe the grammar of Niesu and publish a reference grammar of the language with a major international publisher (e.g., Brill, De Gruyter, Routledge). The Niesu reference grammar should include an introductory profile, segmental phonology, suprasegmentals, lexical categories, morphology, the noun phrase and its grammatical functions, the verb phrase, grammatical categories, clauses and sentences, complex predicates, and information structure.	√	100%
2. To produce and publish a glossed text collection. 8 to 12 traditional stories, in about 40 minutes, will be transcribed, glossed and translated. The Niesu text collection, preceded by an introductory chapter summarizing the main typological features of the language, is planned to be submitted to the book series, LINCOM Languages of the World's Text Collections by Lincom Europa.	√	100%
3. To reveal the Niesu grammatical features which result in the unintelligibility with Nuosu, a major dialect of Nuosu proper, and to enhance the understanding and recognition of the linguistic diversity within Nuosu proper.	√	100%
4. Finally, one to two papers will be submitted to high-quality peer-reviewed journals within the project duration, such as Linguistics of the Tibeto-Burman Area, Journal of Chinese Linguistics and Language and Linguistics. Three conference presentations are expected to be delivered, such as at the International Conference on Sino-Tibetan Languages and Linguistics, and Himalayan Languages Symposium.	√	100%

## 6. Research Outcome

### 6.1 Major findings and research outcome

*(Maximum 1 page; please make reference to Part C where necessary)*

The grammatical system of Niesu (Adur), a Tibeto-Burman language in Sichuan, southwest China, comprises 7 parts: phonology, lexical categories, morphology, noun phrase and its grammatical functions, grammatical categories of verbs, clauses and sentences, information structure.

Regarding the phonology, phonemically, there are 41 consonants, 10 monophthongs and 1 diphthong in Adur Niesu. All Adur Niesu syllables are open. Its segmental changes mainly happen to the vowels, featuring high vowel fricativization, vowel lowering, vowel centralization, vowel assimilation and vowel fusion. It is common for Adur Niesu syllables to be reduced in continuous speech, with floating tones left. Adur Niesu employs tones as an important means for lexical contrast, namely, high-level tone 55, mid-level tone 33, and low-falling tone 21. There is also a sandhi tone 44. There are two types of tonal alternation: tone sandhi and tone change. Some seeming tonal alternation is the result of a floating tone after syllable reduction.

Regarding the lexical categories, nouns, verbs and adjectives are the open lexical categories in Adur Niesu. Besides the mono-functional nouns, verbs and adjectives, there are four multi-functional word groups: N/A, V/N, V/A, and N/V/A, in Adur Niesu. Only a number of words in Adur Niesu can be identified as canonical mono-functional adjectives, which form a closed class. The other closed lexical categories in Adur Niesu are pronouns, interrogatives, demonstratives, numerals, classifiers, ideophones, adverbs, onomatopoeia, interjection, auxiliaries, and postpositions.

Adur Niesu morphology is largely isolating. Affixation, compounding and reduplication are the major morphological processes found in Adur Niesu. Derivation via tone change is also found, but not productive. All the morphological processes are mainly applied to nouns and verbs.

The modifying elements that appear in Adur Niesu noun phrase can be schematized as below, according to their positions relative to the head noun: POSS. PRO + clausal modifier + Nominal + Head Noun + Adj. + restrictive relative clause + DEM + NUM + CLF + ATTR/NMLZ -ʃi<sup>33</sup>.

Nouns and noun phrases in Adur Niesu can function as the following semantic roles: Agent, unmarked; Patient, unmarked or marked by ko<sup>33</sup>; Theme, unmarked or marked by ko<sup>33</sup>; Experiencer, unmarked; Recipient, unmarked or marked by bi<sup>33</sup>; Goal, marked by ko<sup>33</sup> and teo<sup>44</sup>; Beneficiary, marked by bi<sup>33</sup>; Source, unmarked or marked by ta<sup>33</sup>; Locative, unmarked or marked by ta<sup>33</sup>; Temporal, unmarked; Comitative, marked by sa<sup>44</sup>; Instrument, marked by ei<sup>21</sup>.

Grammatical categories in Adur Niesu are mainly expressed by auxiliary constructions. Except for the perfective o<sup>44</sup>, which is an enclitic, all other aspectual markings are auxiliary. Unlike the simplex markers, the complex aspectual markers are formed through compounding or modification, making them further analyzable regarding the internal structure. Adur Niesu future actions are conveyed through volitive modality. In most cases, it co-occurs with the quotative marker di<sup>44</sup> and the progressive ku<sup>44</sup>, namely mo<sup>33</sup>di<sup>44</sup> and mo<sup>33</sup>ku<sup>44</sup>.

Adur Niesu clauses can be divided into transitive clauses and intransitive clauses. The predicate can be one verb or a series of verbs, describing one event probably consisting of multiple sub-events. Copula clause and verbless clause are also found in Adur Niesu. Complex sentences in Adur Niesu consist of more than one clause linked together (or adverbial clauses plus main clause) or embedded within one another. Relative clauses must be placed after the head noun and non-relative clauses, or clausal modifier, must be nominalized by -ʃi<sup>33</sup> and placed before the head noun in Adur Niesu. Clausal modifier covers a range of pre-head noun-modifying clause (NMC) construction in Adur Niesu, viz. non-restrictive relative clause, noun complement clause, and relational noun NMC.

Regarding the information structure, Adur Niesu is topic-prominent, and frequently employs topic-comment constructions. Subject is not a readily identifiable grammatical relation in Adur Niesu. There are no overt coding features in Adur Niesu to be supportive of the existence of subjecthood. Neither the order of the NPs relative to the verb can indicate which is the subject and which is object, due to be a SOV language. Bridging repetition or tail-head linkage is a frequent discourse phenomenon in Adur Niesu. The structure is [...[reference clause]]<sub>sentence 1</sub>[[bridging

clause]...]<sub>sentence 2</sub>. It is a clause combining strategy with the function of ensuring discourse cohesion in narratives through the repetition of the verbal predicate at the beginning of the adjacent sentence.

## 6.2 Potential for further development of the research and the proposed course of action (Maximum half a page)

There are two main directions of further research development: (1) a series of in-depth typological studies, such as the interrogative systems, lexical typology, and bridging repetitions; (2) phylogenetic study about Lolo-Burmese languages.

A series of in-depth typological studies have been and will be conducted. Firstly, based on the understanding of Niesu interrogative systems, another FDS grant was funded (2022-2024), entitled *The Interrogative Systems in Tibeto-Burman Languages of the Cool Mountain Area*. The purpose is to understand how languages at the Sichuan-Yunnan border ask questions and why they do so. Data collection is ongoing. Secondly, based on the understanding of the lexical expressions in Niesu, a quantitative study about weather expressions in Tibeto-Burman languages was conducted and published in *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications* in 2023, the only Nature series journal dedicated to Humanities and Social Sciences, with 2-year Impact Factor of 3.5. Thirdly, based on the understand of Niesu bridging construction, a paper entitled *Towards a typology of bridging repetition in Sino-Tibetan languages* is being written up by me and Dr. Katia Chirkova, a scholar based in France. The aim is to investigate the types of bridging repetition in Sino-Tibetan languages and the reason why such feature is used in these languages. The target is to finish the paper by the end of 2023.

Another direction of further research is to understand the phylogeny of Lolo-Burmese languages. Based on the phonological study of Niesu, it is known that Adur Niesu and Suondi Niesu should be the first group to branch off from Proto-Nuosu proper. By working on the basic vocabularies and lexical semantics of Lolo-Burmese languages and Sino-Tibetan languages, it is possible to decide the time of divergence among the Lolo-Burmese languages. This may be a topic for grant application in 2025 or 2026.

## 7. Layman's Summary

(Describe in layman's language the nature, significance and value of the research project, in no more than 200 words)

This project describes the grammatical system of Adur Niesu, a Tibeto-Burman language spoken by 662,922 people in Sichuan, southwest China. It covers the following aspects: sound, word formation, lexical classes, phrase structure, clause and sentences, information structure, and meaning. Therefore, Adur Niesu is a syllable-tone language with isolating morphology. Grammatical function is mainly expressed by using clitics, postpositions and auxiliaries. Adur Niesu is a verb-final language. Property-denoting modifiers follow the head noun; noun and genitive modifiers precede the head noun. Adur Niesu is topic-prominent, and frequently employs topic-comment constructions. Outcomes of the project contribute to the understanding of Niesu grammar, as well as the study of Tibeto-Burman languages of China. Among the five publications out of the project, four of them are the first contributions to the grammar of Adur Niesu in the literature. Although Adur Niesu is not endangered, it is vulnerable under the threats of Mandarin Chinese and Nuosu, a close dialect of Adur Niesu with larger population. Adur Niesu documentation and description under the project paves the path towards the preservation and maintenance of the language.



**Part C: Research Output****8. Peer-Reviewed Journal Publication(s) Arising Directly From This Research Project**

(Please attach a copy of the publication and/or the letter of acceptance if not yet submitted in the previous progress report(s). All listed publications must acknowledge RGC's funding support by quoting the specific grant reference.)

The Latest Status of Publications				Author(s) (denote the correspond-ing author with an asterisk*)	Title and Journal / Book (with the volume, pages and other necessary publishing details specified)	Submitted to RGC (indicate the year ending of the relevant progress report)	Attached to this Report (Yes or No)	Acknowledged the Support of RGC (Yes or No)	Accessible from the Institutional Repository (Yes or No)
Year of Publication	Year of Acceptance (For paper accepted but not yet published)	Under Review	Under Preparation (optional)						
2023				Ding Hongdi	Language Contact in an Asymmetrical Sociolinguistic Environment: The Case of Nuosu, a Tibeto-Burman Language of Sichuan, China. In Elia Dal Corso and Soung-U Kim (eds.), <i>Language Endangerment and Obsolescence in East Asia</i> , pp. 156–192. Leiden: Brill.	No	Yes (Appendix 1)	Yes	No
2022				Ding Hongdi	Interrogatives of Liangshan Yi, <i>Linguistics of Tibeto-Burman Area</i> 45(1), 116–158.	No	Yes (Appendix 2)	Yes	No
2021				Ding Hongdi, Lama Ziwo	Aspect markings of Niesu, a dialect of Nuosu in Sichuan, China, <i>Himalayan Linguistics</i> 20(1): 1–27.	No	Yes (Appendix 3)	Yes	No
	2021			丁泓棣、拉玛兹屋	凉山彝语的桥接重复：一种口语文化的叙述特点 (Bridging repetition in Liangshan Yi: A	No	Yes (Appendix 4)	Yes	No

The Latest Status of Publications				Author(s) (denote the corresponding author with an asterisk*)	Title and Journal / Book (with the volume, pages and other necessary publishing details specified)	Submitted to RGC (indicate the year ending of the relevant progress report)	Attached to this Report (Yes or No)	Acknowledged the Support of RGC (Yes or No)	Accessible from the Institutional Repository (Yes or No)
Year of Publication	Year of Acceptance (For paper accepted but not yet published)	Under Review	Under Preparation (optional)						
					narrative feature of oral culture) 《语言科学》 (Linguistic Sciences).				

### 9. Recognized International Conference(s) In Which Paper(s) Related To This Research Project Was / Were Delivered

(Please attach a copy of each conference abstract)

Month / Year / Place	Title	Conference Name	Submitted to RGC (indicate the year ending of the relevant progress report)	Attached to this Report (Yes or No)	Acknowledged the Support of RGC (Yes or No)	Accessible from the Institutional Repository (Yes or No)
10/2021, Chengdu, China	<i>Cause and purpose interrogatives in Liangshan Yi</i>	The 54th International Conference on Sino-Tibetan Languages and Linguistics	No	Yes (Appendix 5)	Yes	No
12/2020 Hon Kong	<i>Place names in Liangshan Yi (Tibeto-Burman): Their structures and semantics</i>	Annual Research Forum 2020 of Linguistic Society of Hong Kong	No	Yes (Appendix 6)	Yes	No
11/2020 Taiwan	《再論凉山彝語的示證標記》	第三屆中研院語言學論壇：漢藏語言比較研究的回顧與前瞻	No	Yes (Appendix 7)	Yes	No
10/2020 Texas	<i>Tail-head linkage in Liangshan Yi</i>	The 53rd International Conference on Sino-Tibetan Languages and Linguistics	No	Yes (Appendix 8)	Yes	No

# 10. Whether Research Experience And New Knowledge Has Been Transferred / Has Contributed To Teaching And Learning

*(Please elaborate)*

The project provided research experience to three ethnic minority students who worked as transcribers of the language data. All of them continued their further studies in the master programs.

The new knowledge gained from the project was transferred to the students learning linguistics courses. A new course, named *Language typology*, was developed at SPEED, PolyU. Renowned linguists were invited to delivered talks at SPEED, PolyU, because of the connections established from this project: Dr. Lai Yunfan from Trinity Centre for Asian Studies, Trinity College Dublin, The University of Dublin, and Dr. Zhang Shuya from Tokyo University of Foreign Studies.

# 11. Student(s) Trained

*(Please attach a copy of the title page of the thesis)*

Name	Degree Registered for	Date of Registration	Date of Thesis Submission / Graduation
N/A			

# 12. Other Impact

*(e.g. award of patents or prizes, collaboration with other research institutions, technology transfer, teaching enhancement, etc.)*

N/A

**13. Statistics on Research Outputs**

	<b>Peer-reviewed Journal Publications</b>	<b>Conference Papers</b>	<b>Scholarly Books, Monographs and Chapters</b>	<b>Patents Awarded</b>	<b>Other Research Outputs (please specify)</b>	
<b>No. of outputs arising directly from this research project</b>	3	4	2	0	Type	No.
					0	0

**14. Public Access Of Completion Report**

*(Please specify the information, if any, that cannot be provided for public access and give the reasons.)*

<b>Information that Cannot Be Provided for Public Access</b>	<b>Reasons</b>
N/A	