



# Comparative, equative, and simulative constructions in Lizu (Tibeto-Burman)

Katia Chirkova

## ► To cite this version:

Katia Chirkova. Comparative, equative, and simulative constructions in Lizu (Tibeto-Burman). 2018.  
hal-01684115v1

**HAL Id: hal-01684115**

**<https://hal.science/hal-01684115v1>**

Preprint submitted on 15 Jan 2018 (v1), last revised 20 Mar 2020 (v2)

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

# Comparative, equative, and similitive constructions in Lizu (Tibeto-Burman)

Katia Chirkova

*Abstract:* This paper focuses on the morphosyntax and typology of comparative, equative, and similitive constructions in Lizu (Tibeto-Burman). These three types of constructions are demonstrated to show strong resemblance in their formal make-up, sharing basic structure (in which the standard NP is constructed as an adverbial phrase) and one standard marker (/pɛ/). The goals of the paper are (1) to provide a detailed synchronic description of the three types of constructions, and (2) to place their distinctive characteristics within a larger typological context. Given that Lizu comparative constructions belong to the Particle Comparative type, which is argued to be an areal phenomenon in the regions where it is attested (Stassen 1985, 2013; Heine 1997), Lizu comparative constructions (but also equative and similitive constructions) are examined in the local areal context, and compared to corresponding constructions in the linguistic neighbors of Lizu: Tibetan, Pumi, Namuzi, Nuosu, and Mandarin. It is argued that Lizu's comparative constructions are unique among its linguistic neighbors. The implications of the findings are discussed in typological, areal, and diachronic perspective.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Lizu is a Tibeto-Burman language spoken in three counties in Sichuan Province in the People's Republic of China: Jiulong (Written Tibetan [hereafter WT] *brgyad zur*), Muli (WT *rmi li*), and Mianning (see Map 1). The total number of Lizu speakers is estimated at ca. 7,000 (Wang 2010: 3).<sup>1</sup>

<INSERT MAP 1>

Map 1: Distribution of the Lizu language (Map by Franz Huber)

The Lizu people (/lî-zû/ or /lÿ-zû/ 'white people') traditionally reside along the Yalong or Nyag Chu River and its tributary in Jiulong County, the Jiulong River. The group has the longest history of residence in Jiulong and Mianning counties, whereas migration to Muli is more recent, dating from the turn of the 20th century. The Lizu language is currently classified as member of the putative Qiangic subgroup of the Tibeto-Burman language family. However, it is grammatically and lexically quite distant from other Qiangic languages. The

---

. CNRS-CRLAO, E-mail : [katia.chirkova@gmail.com](mailto:katia.chirkova@gmail.com)

<sup>1</sup> Lizu are officially classified as members of the Tibetan nationality. Their total number is known by estimation only, as no official census data on the group are available.

closest relatives of Lizu include the Duoxu and Ersu languages, which, together with Lizu, are classified as three dialects of one Ersu language (ISO-639 code *ers*). Given that Lizu is not mutually intelligible with Duoxu and Ersu, it is regarded here as a distinct language (for more details, see Sun 1982, Chirkova 2016).

Lizu is spoken in a historically multi-ethnic and multi-lingual area. The immediate linguistic neighbors of Lizu are Southwestern Mandarin (Sinitic) throughout all Lizu-speaking areas, and various Tibeto-Burman languages in different counties where Lizu is spoken. These Tibeto-Burman languages are Kham Tibetan (Bodish) and Nuosu (Northern Yi, Lolo-Burmese) in Jiulong County; Namuzi and Duoxu (both Qiangic) in Mianning County; and Pumi and Namuzi (both Qiangic) in Muli County. Lizu has dialectal variations across its area of distribution. All varieties are mutually intelligible and differ mainly in phonology and lexicon. This study is based on first-hand fieldwork data on /ʃætɕʰo pæ/ *shar phyogs* ‘eastern dialect’, as spoken in Kālā 卡拉 Tonwship, Muli County.

Lizu is isolating, verb-final, and head-final (hence all modifiers precede the element they modify). Syntax operates predominantly through word order and the use of nominal and verbal particles and auxiliaries. The unmarked word order is S/A - DirO - IndO - V. The grammatical relations of subject and object are not grammaticalized. The clause structure is based on the pragmatic relations of topical material (clause-initial) vs. focal material (clause-final). The verb complex is the only necessary element for an utterance to be considered a clause, and the verb complex may be simply a predicate noun. Lizu has two open word classes: nouns and verbs, which can be defined on the basis of morphological and morphosyntactic criteria. Nouns are those forms that can take (in)definite marking, numeral-classifier phrases, and nominal particles (analytic case markers). There is no agreement with nouns of any kind marked on the verb. Verbs are those forms that can take directional or perfectivizing prefixes, the causative marker /su/, and the interrogative and negative marking. Verbs can be preceded by adverbial expressions, followed by markers expressing aspect, evidentiality, and modality, and nominalized by one of the nominalizers. Adjectives are formally a subset of verbs (intransitive stative verbs). They function as (intransitive) predicates, take verbal prefixes, and the causative, interrogative, and negative marking.

This paper focuses on one particular aspect of Lizu that is not covered in previous work on that language: the morphosyntax and typology of its comparative, equative, and similitive constructions. These three types of constructions are demonstrated to show strong resemblance in their formal make-up, sharing basic structure and one standard marker (/pə/). This paper aims at (1) providing a detailed synchronic description of the three types of constructions and (2) placing their distinctive characteristics within a larger typological context (sections 2-4). Given that Lizu comparative constructions belong to the Particle Comparative type, which is argued to be an areal phenomenon in the regions where it is attested (Stassen 1985, 2013; Heine 1997), Lizu comparative constructions are also examined in the local areal

context (section 5). In contrast to other languages of the Particle Comparative type, Lizu's comparative constructions appear to be quite unique among its linguistic neighbors. The paper is concluded with a summary of major typological, genetic, and areal characteristics of comparative, equative, and similitive constructions in Lizu (section 6).

Data on which this study is based were recorded during several fieldwork trips to the Lizu-speaking areas of Muli County between 2008 and 2015. Part of the data, time-aligned and annotated, are accessible online at the Endangered Languages Archive (ELAR, SOAS, University of London) (<https://elar.soas.ac.uk/Collection/MPI655514>). Example sentences are drawn from a corpus of 152 interlinearized texts, which include personal narratives, song lyrics, folktales, translations from Mandarin Chinese, and procedural texts (hereafter corpus).

## 2. COMPARISON CONSTRUCTIONS

This section provides an overview of (a) the comparison of superiority (e.g. *A is taller than B*), (b) the comparison of inferiority (e.g. *A is less tall than B*), and (c) the superlative construction (*A is the tallest of all*). The present discussion adopts the terminology given by Haspelmath & Buchholz (1998) and exemplified in (1), where comparee stands for the entity being compared, parameter denotes the quality with regard to which one is comparing, and standard is the entity that the comparee is being compared with.

- |     |          |    |                            |                 |
|-----|----------|----|----------------------------|-----------------|
| (1) | A        | is | tall-er                    | than            |
|     | Comparee |    | Parameter-Parameter marker | Standard marker |
|     | B        |    |                            |                 |
|     | Standard |    |                            |                 |

The basic constituent order in the Lizu constructions of superiority and inferiority is provided in (2). Comparison is expressed in one single surface clause.

- |     |          |          |                 |                            |
|-----|----------|----------|-----------------|----------------------------|
| (2) | A (NP1)  | B (NP2)  | pə              | jæ-/mɐ-Adjective           |
|     | Comparee | Standard | Standard marker | Parameter marker-Parameter |

The comparee is not morphologically marked, typically occurs in the clause-initial position (topical material), and is often followed by the topic marker *le*, as in example (3).<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> If the standard is animate, it may be morphologically marked by the non-agentive marker *v*, which signals primarily human arguments of the verb (except for agent). Such use, which combs two nominal particles following the standard NP, is infrequent in the corpus.

- (3a) æ t<sup>h</sup>ɛ v pə jæmbɪɔ̃.

- (3) æ = î jêne le ne = î jêne pɛ jæ-mbrɔ̃  
 æ = î jêne le ne = î jêne  
 1SG=GEN younger.brother TOP 2SG=GEN younger.brother  
 pɛ jæ-mbrɔ̃  
 like more-be.tall  
 “My brother is taller than your brother.”

The standard NP is followed by the nominal particle /pɛ/, analyzed here as a standard marker. The main function of /pɛ/ in the corpus is to mark comparison. It is also in use as a particle with the meaning ‘like’, as illustrated in sentence (4).

- (4) tɔmp<sup>h</sup>ê t<sup>h</sup>ê pɛ ʃɛ tɛ, mjæ mjæmjæ tɛ  
 tɔmp<sup>h</sup>ê t<sup>h</sup>ê pɛ ʃɛ tɛ mjæ  
 mouth that like be.long one eye  
 mjæ-mjæ tɛ  
 be.many-be.many one  
 “He was one (scary creature) with a mouth long like that and many eyes.”

The standard NP is formally part of an adverbial phrase, which can be marked by other nominal particles (analytical case markers) expressing locational and non-locational relations. These nominal particles include the locative particle *ke*, as in example (5), the non-agentive particle *ɐ*, as in example (3a), or the instrumental particle *læmu* (see Chirkova 2016 for a detailed discussion).

- (5) nts<sup>h</sup>ôlô mæmô bi le ɹəkæ ke k<sup>h</sup>elô tɕæ  
 nts<sup>h</sup>ôlô mæmô bi le ɹəkæ  
 man.eating.demon old.lady DEF TOP road-half  
 ke k<sup>h</sup>e-lô tɕæ  
 LOC inward-wait RES  
 “The man-eating old lady was waiting halfway up the road.”

Given that spatial expressions are linguistically more basic and often serve as basis / structural templates for non-spatial expressions (Lyons 1977: 178; Stassen 1985: 36-37; LaPolla 2004: 59, in relation to the source of nominal markers in Tibeto-Burman languages), the comparative expression in Lizu may be ultimately derived from a spatial expression. However, /pɛ/ has been grammaticalized to such an extent that the original meaning is no longer reconstructible. /pɛ/ has cognates in the closely related sister-languages of Lizu Duoxu and Ersu, where corresponding forms are also only used as standard markers (*ba*, the standard marker in comparative constructions in Duoxu,

---

æ	t <sup>h</sup> ê = ɐ	pɛ	jæ-mbrɔ̃
1SG	that=N-AGT	like	CMPR-be.tall
“I am taller than her.”			

Chirkova and Han 2017; and *pa*, the standard marker in the equative construction in Ersu, Zhang 2013: 135-136).

The parameter (an adjective) functions as head of an intransitive predicate. The predicative adjective in the Lizu comparison of superiority is marked by a special comparative prefix of unknown etymological origin: *jæ-*. The use of this prefix signals that the compared quality is present to a greater extent (for that reason it is glossed below as ‘more’). The use of this prefix is illustrated in sentences (3) and (6). The comparative prefix *jæ-* also has cognates in the closely related sister languages Duoxu and Ersu (both *ja-*).

- (6) æ temî ʃæbi nedzâ pɐ læ jæzædzâ.  
 æ temî ʃæbi ne-dzâ pɐ læ  
 1SG heart sugar downward-eat like CONJ  
 jæ-zædzâ  
 more-be.pleasant  
 “It was even more enjoyable than eating sweets.”

The structure of the Lizu comparison of inferiority is identical to that of the comparison of superiority, but it uses the negative form of the predicative adjective, where the negator *mɐ* is prefixed to the adjectival root. Consider examples (7) and (8):

- (7) æ=î jêne le ne=î jêne pɐ mɐ-mbɪâ  
 æ=î jêne le ne=î jêne  
 1SG=GEN younger.brother TOP 2SG=GEN younger.brother  
 pɐ mɐ-mbɪâ  
 like NEG-be.tall  
 “My brother is not as tall as your brother.”
- (8) kûthê lôbu dzě bi æmæ k<sup>h</sup>êtʃe=i ɾwædzɛ pɐ de-mê-hỹ.  
 kûthê lôbu dzě bi æmæ k<sup>h</sup>êtʃe=i  
 this stone water DEF mother inward-boil=GEN  
 ɾwædzɛ pɐ de-mê-hỹ  
 chicken-water like upward-NEG-be.fragrant  
 “This stone soup is not as tasty as chicken soup made by mum.”

The Lizu superlative construction is based on the comparative constructions of superiority and inferiority. It employs the same marking on the predicative adjective (the comparative prefix *jæ-* or the negator *mɐ*) and it differs from the latter two constructions in using the etymologically non-transparent form *ɲɪlæ* in position of the standard of comparison. By analogy with degree adverbs like ‘very’, *ɲɪlæ* is here taken as an adverbial form modifying the predicate adjective.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> An alternative strategy to form superlative adjectives is found in song lyrics. It consists of marking the adjective with the prefix *tɕô-*, e.g. *tɕômuæ* ‘the tastiest’, *tɕômbɪâ* ‘the tallest, the highest’, as in:

- (9) æ = î jêne nîlæ jæ-ljê / nîlæ jæ-mê-ljê  
 æ = î jêne nîlæ jæ-ljê /  
 1SG=GEN younger.brother SPRL more-be.good /  
 jæ-mê-ljê  
 more-NEG-be.good  
 “My brother is the best / the least good [the worst].”
- (10) ʃæʃæ sũ i tsʰô nîlæ jæzæpũ i tsʰô ɕêzæ læ tʃʰúzə bi tʰê ke ʃæʃæ.  
 ʃæ-ʃæ = sũ = i tsʰô nîlæ jæ-zæpũ = i  
 search-search=AGT=GEN person SPRL more-be.wealthy=GEN  
 tsʰô ɕê-zæ læ tʃʰúzə bi tʰê = ke  
 person three-hundred CONJ sixty DEF that=LOC  
 ʃæ-ʃæ  
 search-search  
 “[You need to] search among those three hundred and sixty most wealthy  
 people, who are wooing [the princess].”

In sum, the comparison of superiority, inferiority, and the superlative construction in Lizu share (a) the same basic constituent order, in which the standard NP and the superlative marker are adverbial elements, and (b) the same standard and parameter markers (/pɛ/, /jæ-/, /mɛ/). In Stassen’s (1985, 2013) typology of comparative constructions, Lizu comparison constructions are indeterminate between a sub-type of adverbial comparatives (which essentially include Locational Comparative, see section 5) and a Particle Comparative. The latter type is characterized by the presence of a specific, etymologically opaque, comparative particle, which accompanies the standard NP. Particle Comparative also often marks a predicative adjective by means of a special affix, which is also etymologically opaque. Given that the Lizu standard marker /pɛ/ is unique to comparative constructions and that its etymology offers no decisive indication of its categorical status, the Lizu comparative constructions above are analyzed as belonging to the Particle Comparative type. Particle Comparative is cross-linguistically uncommon and has been mostly described for European languages. It is furthermore argued to be an areal phenomenon in regions where it is found. We will explore this issue in connection to Lizu in section 5.

### 3. COMPARISON OF EQUALITY

The Lizu equative construction (in which a quality is attributed to comparee and standard to an “equal extent”, as in *A is as tall as B*) is built on the model of comparison constructions. Lizu distinguishes between two types of equative

- 
- (9a) nɛŋkʰɛ xɛjê xêne ne-dzê bzê tɕô-mbɪâ?  
 sky bird what downward-eat fly SPRL-be.tall  
 “What do birds in the sky eat to fly the highest?”





/tê pɛ/ can be analyzed as an adverbial construction modifying the parameter, that is, a parameter marker, which can be translated into English as ‘equally’.

Another interesting feature of the Lizu specific equative construction is that the form of the parameter is different from that in the positive construction, as exemplified in sentence (15). More specifically, the equative construction employs monosyllabic adjectival forms (as in examples (12-14)), whereas the positive construction uses disyllabic adjectival forms. These include reduplicated forms of monosyllabic adjectives and monosyllabic adjectives prefixed with a telicity-inducing directional prefix, as in /dê-hỹ/ upward-be.fragrant ‘have become fragrant, be fragrant’ (as in example 8). In this respect, Lizu is different from the cross-linguistically more commonly attested type of equative constructions, in which the positive degree coincides with the basic form of the adjective (as in English or French).

- (15) æ=î                      jêne                      mbɛɛ-mbɛɛ  
          1SG=GEN                      younger.brother                      be.tall-be.tall  
          “My brother is [very] tall.”

Lizu disyllabic adjectival forms used in the positive degree of comparison can be considered graded by means of the morphological process of reduplication and derivation (conveying respectively, the meaning of intensivity and telicity or boundedness). In languages where the positive degree coincides with the basic form of the adjective, that basic form is potentially ambiguous between (a) being compared to the standard, which is presupposed logically or by conversational implicature (which is held to be the basic interpretation of the basic form of gradable adjectives) (see Sapir 1944; Lyons 1971: 465-467, 1977: 271; Cuzzolin & Lehmann 2004), and (b) being compared to the standard mentioned in the context (which is held to be the special interpretation of the basic form of the adjective). By contrast, in Lizu, the use of the monosyllabic basic form of the adjective is restricted to explicitly comparative contexts. For that reason, the basic interpretation of the monosyllabic basic form of the adjective would rather correspond to (b) above.

In contrast to the comparison of superiority, inferiority, the superlative construction and the specific equative construction, which all contain elements of obscure etymology (the standard marker /pɛ/, the parameter marker /jæ-/, the superlative marker ɲɪlɛ), the Lizu generic equative construction is etymologically transparent. In this type of construction, the standard of comparison is a generic noun. Generic nouns (that is, nouns that refer to all members of a class or some whole) in Lizu are formed by modifying a noun with the genitive particle i and the marker su, which is generally employed in Lizu as agentive nominalizer (see example (10) above). The agentive nominalizer su transparently derives from the noun /sũ/ ‘person, man’. Examples of generic nouns are provided in sentence (16).

- (16) gæ i wũli sɛŋgê i sũ, gæ i mɛntʃʰo mæpɛzæ i sũ.  
          gæ=i                      wũli                      sɛŋgê=i=sũ                      gæ=i                      mɛntʃʰo  
          song=GEN                      head                      lion= GEN=AGT                      song=GEN                      tail

mâpɛ̃ = i = sũ.

peacock=GEN=AGT

‘The beginning of this song is like a lion [’s head], the ending of this song is like a peacock [’s tail].’

In the generic equative construction, the standard modified by the genitive marker and the agentive nominalizer /sũ/ is further modified by the morpheme /mũ/ (from the verb /mũ/ ‘make’), which is used in Lizu to derive manner adverbials. In other words, the standard NP is formally constructed as a manner adverbial. Finally, an adjective is used as head of the predicate. The constituent order in the generic equative construction is presented in (17).

- |      |          |                  |               |           |
|------|----------|------------------|---------------|-----------|
| (17) | A (NP1)  | B (NP2)=i=su     | /mũ/ ‘make’   | Adjective |
|      | Comparee | Standard=GEN=AGT | adverbializer | Predicate |

This basic construction can be further modified by inserting the expression /tê pɛ̃/ between the manner adverbial ending in the adverbializer /mũ/ and the predicate, as in sentence (18). When following manner adverbials, /tê pɛ̃/ can only be analyzed as an adverbial element modifying the predicate (‘equally’).

- (18) dʒumâ i su mũ (tê pɛ̃) ntʃʰě  
 dʒumâ = i = su mũ (tê pɛ̃) ntʃʰě  
 fox=GEN=AGT make one like be.smart  
 ‘be smart as a fox’ (literally, ‘be equally smart like a fox’)

A negation of the construction is formed by prefixing the negator mɛ̃ to the predicative adjective, as in the following example:

- (19) kũtʰê mæmâ tuŋkwê i su mũ mɛ̃-ʃê, sɛ̃ŋgæ i su mũ mɛ̃-pipi  
 kũtʰê mæmâ tuŋkwê = i = su mũ mɛ̃-ʃê  
 this fruit wax.gourd=GEN=AGT make NEG-be.long  
 sɛ̃ŋgæ = i = su mũ mɛ̃-pipi  
 pumpkin=GEN=AGT make NEG-be.flat  
 ‘This vegetable is not as long as a wax gourd and not as flat as a pumpkin.’

Given, on the one hand, the two alternative interpretations of the expression /tê pɛ̃/ and, on the other hand, the fact that the comparison can be presented both from the perspective of the comparee and that of the comparee and the standard together as a unity, the place of the Lizu specific equative construction in existing typologies of equative constructions (Henkelmann 2006, Fuchs 2014, Haspelmath 2015) is indeterminate. Lizu specific and generic equative constructions clearly belong to the types in which the parameter is encoded as predicate. The Lizu specific equative construction can be viewed as either that with a standard marker or that with a parameter marker (strategy I in Henkelmann’s typology, Henkelmann 2006: 385-387). In Haspelmath’s typology, the Lizu specific equative construction would belong either to Type 1 (only equative standard marker) or Type 3 (where the comparee and the standard are a single conjoined nominal). The Lizu generic equative construction

represents a new type, which is not included in existing typologies of equative constructions, and in which the standard NP is part of a manner adverbial phrase modifying the parameter.

Lizu specific and generic equative constructions generally comply with generalizations based on word order, as outlined in Haspelmath & Buchholz (1998: 289f) and Haspelmath's (2015). More specifically:

(a) If the parameter follows the standard, then the language generally has dominant object-verb order. Put differently, equative constructions in head-final languages have the order Standard - Standard marker - Parameter.

(b) If the standard precedes the parameter, then the standard marker generally follows the standard.

If Lizu /tê pɛ/ 'like one' is regarded as a standard followed by a standard marker, then Lizu equative constructions would also comply with the generalization in Haspelmath & Buchholz (1998: 295-297), formulated on the basis of head-final, nonfinite peripheral European languages (Kalmyk, Lezgian, Abkhaz), that head-final languages generally lack a parameter marker. The proposed functional explanation for that generalization would, however, not apply to Lizu. That is because that explanation relies on the identity of the parameter-adjective in the positive and comparative constructions and the analysis of the parameter marker as disambiguating between the two meanings of the predicate adjective, that is, (a) the basic interpretation of the adjective in the positive degree of comparison, as compared to the standard presupposed logically or by conversational implicature, and (b) the specific, comparative interpretation of the adjective in the equative construction. According to the explanation in Haspelmath & Buchholz (1998: 295-297), in head-final languages, where the standard precedes the parameter, as soon as the standard is processed, the hearer is warned that a special interpretation of the adjective follows. The Lizu case discussed presently does not appear to comply with this logic, because the parameter adjective in the positive degree of comparison and that in the equative construction have different forms. Hence, if to be extended to the Lizu case, the functional explanation for the generalization that head-final languages lack a parameter marker would be in need of revision.

#### 4. SIMILATIVE CONSTRUCTIONS

The Lizu simulative construction (that is, a construction expressing sameness of manner, as in *He sings like a nightingale*) is built on the model of the generic equative construction. Cross-linguistically, the two types of constructions tend to be similar (Haspelmath & Buchholz 1998: 278). Semantically, the difference between equatives and similatives lies in the fact that similatives express identity of manner, whereas equatives express identity of degree or extent. Put differently, the equative construction expresses sameness of extent, which is a simple one-dimensional notion; whereas the simulative construction expresses sameness of manner, which is a complex multi-faceted notion. Formally, this difference is reflected in the choice of predicate: a gradable parameter (an

adjective) in the case of the equative construction, and a verb in the case of the similitive construction, hence leaving the parameter not overtly expressed. The Lizu similitive constructive has the exact form of the generic equative construction, as detailed in (17) above, but it employs a verb as head of the predicate. The standard NP is formally constructed as a manner adverbial, which modifies the predicative verb. Examples include:

- (20) xwê i su mû bzê  
 xwê = i = su mû bzê  
 bird=GEN=AGT make fly  
 “fly like a bird”, literally “fly in the manner of birds”
- (21) ɬæ i su mû dê-ɣu  
 ɬæ = i = su mû dê-ɣu  
 deity=GEN=AGT make upward-worship  
 “[They] worshipped [her] like a deity.”
- (22) tɕæmæ bi k<sup>h</sup>ents<sup>h</sup>ê k<sup>h</sup>æ le [...] ɕædæ i su mû nents<sup>h</sup>æ su  
 tɕæmæ bi k<sup>h</sup>e-nts<sup>h</sup>ê k<sup>h</sup>æ le  
 wife DEF inward-pull time.when TOP  
 ɕædæ = i = su mû nê-nts<sup>h</sup>æ su  
 raw.meat.pulp=GEN=AGT make downward-prepare CAUS  
 “(He) brought the wife in and had her cut in small pieces like mashed meat.”

In terms of frequency of occurrence, the construction in (17), with the verb as head of the predicate, appears to provide the primary option for the comparison of similarity in Lizu. At the same time, Lizu also has a number of alternative schemas to express the similitive meaning. They include:

- (23) A (NP1) B (NP2) p<sup>h</sup>o ‘side’ tē qê nĩ one-manner-have  
 Comparee Standard Standard marker Parameter marker  
 mû ‘make’ Verb  
 adverbializer Predicate

In this schema, the standard is marked with the bound locative noun p<sup>h</sup>o ‘side’, while the predicate marker contains the verbal phrase tē qê nĩ, literally “have one manner,” followed by the adverbializer /mû/. Consider the following example:

- (24) xwê = p<sup>h</sup>o tē qê nĩ mû bzê  
 xwê = p<sup>h</sup>o tē qê nĩ mû bzê  
 bird=side one manner exist.ABST make fly  
 “fly like a bird”, literally “fly by the side of birds in the same manner”

An alternative schema in (25) is a construction with a possessive predicate.

- (25) A (NP1) B (NP2) =i + NP (quality) Verb ‘have, possess’  
 Comparee Standard=GEN + NP (quality) Predicate

In this schema, the quality being compared is formally in “possession” of the standard NP (linked to it with the genitive marker *i*), whereas the verb has the meaning ‘have, possess’. Consider the following example:

- (26)     $\hat{a}$  læ  $\text{ɬ}\hat{o}\text{Nb}\hat{o}\text{t}^{\text{h}}\hat{e}$  *i*  $\text{ɬ}\hat{o}\text{m}\hat{o}$   $\text{d}\hat{z}\hat{e}$   $\check{e}$  ge le  $\text{t}\hat{c}^{\text{h}}\hat{i}$   $\text{p}\hat{e}$   $\text{l}\hat{j}\hat{e}$  o  
           $\hat{a}$     læ         $\text{ɬ}\hat{o}\text{Nb}\hat{o}\text{t}^{\text{h}}\hat{e}=\text{i}$          $\text{ɬ}\hat{o}\text{m}\hat{o}$      $\text{d}\hat{z}\hat{e}=\check{e}$                     ge  
          1sg    CONJ       elephant=GEN       strength   contain=CS       N-EGO  
          le        $\text{t}^{\text{h}}\hat{e}$         $\text{p}\hat{e}$         $\text{l}\hat{j}\hat{e}$        o  
          TOP    3SG       like       be.good   INTJ  
          “If I too had elephant’s strength, it would be so great!”

To sum up the discussion in sections 2 through 4, Lizu comparison, equative, and similitive constructions show formal overlap, sharing (a) the same basic structure, in which the standard NP is constructed as an adverbial phrase, and (b) one standard marker (*/pɛ/*). Based on the type of the adverbial phrase with the standard NP, Lizu comparative constructions can further be divided into two sub-types:

(i) comparison construction, the superlative construction, and the specific equative construction constitute one type, in which the adverbial phrase is marked by the nominal particle */pɛ/* of obscure etymology

(ii) the generic equative and the similitive constructions form another type, in which the standard NP is constructed as a manner adverbial, which furthermore only contains etymologically transparent elements: the agentive nominalizer */su/*, from */sũ/* ‘person, man’, and the adverbializer */mũ/* from */mũ/* ‘make’.

In the following section, we will explore how these two subtypes correlate to the comparative types in the linguistic neighbors of Lizu.

## 5. LIZU COMPARATIVE, EQUATIVE, AND SIMILATIVE CONSTRUCTIONS IN AN AREAL CONTEXT

Comparative constructions are held to be particularly open to borrowing and able to diffuse across all or most of the languages in a linguistic area (Stassen 1985, 2013; Dixon 2008: 813). In particular, equative and similitive constructions commonly spread through contact and are often found in Sprachbund areas (cf. Haspelmath & Buchholz 1998, Haspelmath 2015 in relation to the core SAE languages). Furthermore, as argued by Bernd Heine (1997: 126-130), there is some significant correlation between the source schemas underlying comparative constructions and their areal distribution, so that the choice of a particular scheme appears to be determined primarily by areal factors. Following this logic, the unusual Lizu type of comparative constructions, characterized by the use of elements of unknown etymology (Particle Comparison) and a strong parallelism between equative and similitive constructions may be probative of a broader areal distribution of these characteristics in the region where Lizu is spoken. This assumption is explored in this section in relation to the comparative constructions as attested in the linguistic neighbors of Lizu: Kham Tibetan, Nuosu, Namuzi, and Mandarin. For

such a comparison it is necessary that (a) there are available descriptions of all concerned languages and (b) that these descriptions provide detailed discussions of various types of comparative constructions in each of the languages. However, the area where Lizu is spoken (Southwest China) is as yet relatively little explored and many of its languages are but little documented. For that reason, the discussion below has to rely on the grammatical description of Lhasa Tibetan (Tournadre & Dorje 2003) rather than that of the Kham Tibetan variety of Jiulong County which is in direct contact with Lizu, but for which no grammatical description is available.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the present discussion necessarily excludes Namuzi data, because existing grammatical sketches of that language (Huang and Renzeng 1991, Yin 2015) only contain information on the comparison of superiority and do not include other types of comparative constructions.<sup>5</sup> The comparative discussion below focuses on the following aspects: (i) the type of the comparison of superiority in each of the languages under discussion, (ii) whether or not the equative construction shows formal overlap with the comparison of superiority, as is the case of Lizu, (iii) whether or not the similitive construction is modeled on the equative construction.

The comparison constructions in the northwestern neighbors of Lizu, Tibetan and Pumi belong to the Locational Comparative type in Stassen's typology (1985, 2013). In this type of comparatives, the NP standard is constructed as an adverbial phrase with a spatial predication. Depending on the precise meaning of the locative marker governing the adverbial phrase, Locational Comparative can be further divided into three subtypes: (i) from-comparatives, which mark the standard NP as the source of a movement, with a marker meaning 'from' or 'out of'; (ii) at-comparatives, which encode the standard NP as a location, in which an object is at rest, with a marker meaning 'in', 'on', 'at', or 'upon'; and (iii) to-comparatives, which mark the standard NP as the goal of a movement, with a marker meaning 'to, towards' or 'over, beyond'. Tibetan belongs to the from-comparative type, because its standard marker is used as the ablative marker in the literary Tibetan language, see example (27). By contrast, Pumi comparatives belong to the at-comparative type, because its standard marker is the locative marker *tu* 'on top', see example (28). Unlike Lizu, neither Tibetan nor Pumi employs a parameter marker.

- (27) *gyag*      *mdzo*      *las*      *che ba*  
       yak        dzo        ABL      be.big  
       "Yaks are bigger than dzo." (Tournadre & Dorje 2003: 263, my glosses)

<sup>4</sup> Fortunately, Tibetic languages are generally similar in their structure and morphogenesis. When differences occur, they are related to phonological and lexical variation between varieties (e.g. Tournadre 2014).

<sup>5</sup> It is interesting that while the Namuzi standard marker in the comparison of superiority (*wu<sup>55</sup>dæ<sup>53</sup>*) is distinct from that in Lizu, the Namuzi parameter marker, the comparative prefix *ja<sup>33</sup>*, is comparable in form and meaning to the parameter marker *jæ-* in Lizu. It would therefore be of interest to further explore similarities between Lizu and Namuzi in their comparative, equative, and similitive constructions, as soon as more comparative data on Namuzi become available.

- (28) è = dzǎŋ      jǎw      tǎ = dzǎŋ = tú      tʰòŋ  
 1.EXCL=DU      again      3=DU=on.top      fast  
 “(...) the two of us were faster than the two of them (...)” (Daudey 2014: 522)

In addition to Locational Comparative, Pumi also makes use of the Conjoined Comparative type, in which comparison is expressed by juxtaposing two clauses. More specifically, Pumi employs the construction A V, B hǎ ti V, where A is comparee, B is standard, V is parameter, hǎ is a verb meaning ‘to be excessive’, and ti is the numeral ‘one’. Consider the following example:

- (29) tǎ      pì = gǎ      tɕʰwǐ,      tǎ      pì = gǎ  
 this      pen=DEF      be.good      this      pen=DEF  
 hǎ      tì      tɕʰwǐ  
 be.excessive      one      be.good  
 “This pen is good; this pen is even better.” (Daudey 2014: 522)

Again, unlike Lizu, equative constructions in Tibetan and Pumi are not similar in structure and in the choice of markers to their respective comparative constructions. The Tibetan equative construction belongs to the type with a standard marker (*nang bzhin* ‘like’), whereas the Pumi equative construction belongs to the type with the comparee and the standard functioning together as a unity and a parameter marker (the bound demonstrative *ǎ-* ‘that’). This is illustrated in sentences (30) and (31):

- (30) *bu mo*      *'di*      *ama*      *nang bzhin*      *mdzes po*      *'dug*  
 girl      this      mother      like      beautiful      have  
 “This girl is as beautiful as her mother.” (Tournadre & Dorje 2003: 255, my glosses)
- (31) *ɣǎ*      *nǐŋ*      *ǎ-tǎj*      *kʰi = nʰǎ*      *tsʰóŋpǎŋ*  
 grandfather      2SG      that-be.big      time=just      T:trader  
*pǎ*      *ǎ = sǐ*      *tɕǎw.*  
 do      go:PFV:N.EGO=INF      HSY  
 “When grandfather was as big as you now, (he) already went trading, it is said.” (Daudey 2014: 522)

The Pumi similitive construction is not modeled on the Pumi equative construction. Instead, it is characterized by a coordination of the comparee and the standard and has the verb *ɕǎ* ‘to resemble’ as the predicate. The standard NP is marked with the coordination marker *noŋ*, as in the following example:

- (32) *tɕ-ɕi*      *tɕ-qǎ = nòŋ*      *ɕǎ*      *pǎ*  
 one-CLF:village      one-CLF:household=COORD      resemble      do  
 “(...) one village is like one household (...)” (Daudey 2014: 523)

The northwestern and southern neighbor of Lizu, Nuosu represents the third subtype of the Locational Comparative in Stassen’s typology: the to-

comparative. Furthermore, in contrast to Tibetan and Pumi, which have standard markers, Nuosu comparison constructions are also characterized by a parameter marker, *ap cy*, which functions as adverbialized adjective and postverbal adverb. As an adjective, *ap cy* precedes the parameter and is modified by the verb *mu* which is used in Nuosu to form manner adverbials from adjectives. The constituent order in the Nuosu comparison of superiority is provided in (33).

- (33a) Comparee                      Standard                      Parameter                      *ap cy* ‘more’  
 (33b) Comparee                      Standard-*jox* ‘to’                      *ap cy* ‘more’-*mu* ‘make’                      Parameter

Consider the following examples:

- (34) *mu ga*      *nga*      *yyx*      *ap cy*  
       name      1P.SG      big      more  
       “Muga is bigger than me.” (Gerner 2013: 444)

- (35) *mu ga*      *ngat*      *jox*      *ap cy*      *mu*      *yy*  
       name      1P.SG      to      more      ADVL      big  
       “Muga is bigger than me.” (Gerner 2013: 444)

The Nuosu equality construction is different from comparison constructions. It belongs to the type with unification of comparee and standard. The constituent order is: Comparee-Standard, followed by *si nip* ‘with’ (standard marker)-Parameter. The parameter can be either prefixed with the reciprocal prefix *jjy*- (as in 36) or preceded by an adverbial expression *jjy sux mu* reciprocal-resemble-adverbializer (as in 37).

- (36) *yit*      *cyx*                      *ji*      *ngat*      *uo*      *nyi cyx*  
       needle      DEM.PROX                      CL      1P.SG      hair      DEM.PROX  
       *ji*      *si nip*      *jjy-sho*.  
       CL      with      RECL-long  
       “This needle is as long as this hair of mine.” (Gerner 2013: 448)

- (37) *yit*      *cyx*      *ji*      *ngat*      *uo nyi*      *cyx*      *ji*      *si nip*  
       needle      DEM      CL      1P.SG      hair      DEM      CL      with  
       *jjy-sux-mu*                      *a sho*.  
       RECL-resemble-ADVL      long  
       “This needle is as long as this hair of mine.” (Gerner 2013: 448)

Historically, the eastern neighbor of Lizu, but now also the dominant language for the Lizu people across all Lizu-speaking areas, Southwestern Mandarin has a radically different type of comparative constructions, which uses verb serialization as their basis. Southwestern Mandarin historically makes use of Exceed comparatives (Chappell 2015: 47-48). Exceed Comparatives have as their characteristic that the standard NP is constructed as the direct object of a transitive verb with the meaning ‘to exceed’ or ‘to surpass’. The constituent order is Comparee - Parameter - ‘exceed’/ ‘surpass’ - Standard (literally, *This house old exceed that*). However, in Southwestern Mandarin dialects in contact



with Lizu, this schema is replaced by the prepositional comparative, which is common to Northern Mandarin dialects. In this latter comparative type, the comparative marker of verbal origin is part of a prepositional phrase formed with the standard NP (Li and Thompson 1981: 564-566, Chappell 2015: 37-38). The constituent order is Comparee - *bǐ* ‘compare’ (standard marker) - Standard - Parameter, as illustrated in example (38):

- (38) *tā*            *bǐ*                      *nǐ*            *gāo*  
          3SG            compare                      2SG            be.tall  
       “S/He is taller than you are.” (Li & Thompson 1981: 564, my glosses)

The Mandarin equative construction is different from Mandarin comparison constructions in that it uses a different standard marker (*gēn* ‘with’) and a parameter marker (*yíyàng* ‘similarly’, literally ‘one manner’). The constituent order is Comparee - *gēn* ‘with’ - Standard - *yíyàng* ‘similarly’ - Parameter. This is illustrated in sentence (39):

- (39) *tā*            *gēn*            *nǐ*            *yíyàng*            *gāo*  
          3SG            with            2SG            one.manner            be.tall  
       “I am as tall as you are.” (Li & Thompson 1981: 565, my glosses)

This construction is open to two interpretations. On the one hand, *gēn* ‘with’ can be analyzed as the standard marker (as above). On the other hand, *gēn* ‘with’ can be analyzed as a coordinative conjunction connecting the comparee and the standard (Henkelmann 2006: 385, 387).

Finally, the Mandarin similitive construction is modeled on the Mandarin equative construction. It has a variant with the verb *xiàng* ‘resemble’ taking the place of *gēn* ‘with’ and the expression *nàyàng* ‘that manner’ taking the place of *yíyàng* ‘one manner’. This construction type is illustrated in sentence (40):

- (40a) *gēn*            *yú*            *yíyàng*            *yóu*  
          with            fish            one.manner            swim  
       (40b) *xiàng*            *yú*            *nàyàng*            *yóu*  
          resemble            fish            that.manner            swim  
       “swim like a fish”

This overview of various types of the comparative, equative, and similitive constructions in the languages with which Lizu is in contact suggests that the region where these languages are spoken lies at the intersection of many distinct types of comparative, equative, and similitive constructions. Notably, the unique combination of characteristics of Lizu comparative, equative, and similitive constructions, as outlined in sections 2-4 (such as formal overlap of comparative, equative, and similitive constructions; use of the same standard marker; similarity of the equative and similitive constructions), are not paralleled in any of its linguistic neighbors. Nonetheless, Lizu appears to combine various features of comparative, equative, and similitive constructions of its neighboring languages. On the one hand, Lizu comparison constructions share with its

Tibeto-Burman neighbors (Tibetan, Pumi, Nuosu) the basic structure of the NP standard, which is modeled on the locative adverbial phrase. On the other hand, the Lizu equative and similative constructions combine structural and semantic elements of the equative and similative constructions in Mandarin (that is, the formal parallelism of these two types of constructions, and the use of a parameter marker with the meaning ‘one manner’). Interestingly, Mandarin is a relatively recent newcomer to the Lizu-speaking areas (dating from the second half of the 20th century). Taken together with the transparent organization of the equative and similative constructions and their low degree of grammaticalization, the ways of expressing equative and similative meanings may be recent grammaticalizations in Lizu, likely owing to contact with Mandarin.

The cross-linguistically infrequent Particle Comparative type of comparative constructions is not attested in any of the linguistic neighbors of Lizu. The etymology of the standard marker /pɛ/ and the parameter marker /jæ-/ in the comparison of superiority will likely become clearer as more comparative data on the closely related languages of Lizu, Duoxu and Ersu, and its linguistic neighbors become available. Finally, if it is maintained that there is significant correlation between the source schemas underlying comparative constructions and their areal distribution, the local areal distribution of comparative, equative, and similative constructions in the Lizu-speaking areas is clearly suggestive of complex migration patterns and related complex cultural and linguistic dynamics.

## 6. SUMMARY

Typologically, genetically and areally comparative, equative, and similative constructions in Lizu share a number of notable features. From a synchronic point of view, Lizu comparative, equative and similative constructions bear strong resemblance in their formal make-up, for they use similar construction types (with the standard NP invariably constructed as an adverbial phrase) and same markers (/pɛ/, /jæ-/ , /ɲilæ/). From a diachronic point of view, these markers have been grammaticalized to such an extent that their diachronic origin is no longer clear. In particular, the standard marker /pɛ/ in its synchronic form cannot be related to other nominal markers in Lizu. That being the case, Lizu comparative constructions can be classified as belonging to a cross-linguistically infrequent type of comparative constructions: Particle Comparative. In contrast to other languages with a Particle Comparative, however, this type of comparative constructions is not an areal phenomenon in the region where Lizu is spoken. Lizu equative constructions generally comply with cross-linguistic generalizations in Henkelmann (2006), Haspelmath and Buchholz (1998), and Haspelmath (2015). At the same time, they may also challenge some functional explanations proposed to account for some of these generalizations (such as that head-final languages lack a parameter marker). Lizu data may also contribute a new type of equative constructions (with the standard NP constructed as a manner adverbial) to existing typologies.

From a genetic and areal point of view it is also noteworthy that the area where Lizu is spoken is so diverse. Lizu comparative, equative, and similitive constructions appear to combine etymologically obscure markers, possibly attesting to some older patterns, with constructions typified by low degree of grammaticalization and hence likely owing to recent contact. More research into the languages of the area where Lizu is spoken will undoubtedly contribute to a better understanding of the local dynamics of language variation and change, and enrich our understanding of the typology and diversity of comparative, equative, and similitive constructions.

#### ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviations follow the Leipzig Glossing Rules (LGR, <http://www.eva.mpg.de/lingua/resources/glossing-rules.php>). Abbreviations in examples (28) through (37) follow conventions in Daudey (2014: xviii-xix) and Gerner (2013: xxvii-xxx). Non-standard abbreviations (those not included in the LGR) are: 1P.SG=first person singular, ABST = abstract, ADVL=adverbializer, AGT = agentive, ANM = animate, CL=classifier, COORD=coordinator, CMPR = comparative, CS = change of state, EGO = egophoric, SPRL = superlative, HSY=hearsay, INF=inferential, INTJ=interjection, T=Tibetan loanword, N.EGO=non-egophoric, RECL=reciprocal, WT = Written Tibetan.

#### REFERENCES

- Chappell, H., 2015, Linguistic areas in China for differential object marking, passive, and comparative constructions, in H. Chappell (ed.), *Diversity in Sinitic Languages*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, p. 13-52.
- Chirkova, K., 2016, Lizu (Ersu), in G. Thurgood & R. J. LaPolla (eds.), *The Sino-Tibetan Languages*, Second Edition, New York, Routledge, p. 823-839.
- Chirkova, K. (Qi Kajia) & Zh. Han, 2017, *Shiyong Duoxuyu Yufa* [A practical grammar of Duoxu], Beijing, Minzu Chubanshe.
- Cuzzolin, P. & C. Lehmann, 2004, Comparison and gradation, in G. Booij et al. (eds.), *Morphologie. Ein internationales Handbuch zur Flexion und Wortbildung*, Berlin, New York, W. de Gruyter, vol. 2, p. 1857-1882.
- Daudey, H., 2014, *A Grammar of Wadu Pumi*. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Department of Linguistics, La Trobe University, Melbourne, Australia.
- Dixon, R. M. W. 2008. Comparative constructions: a cross-linguistic typology. *Studies in Language* vol. 32, no. 4, p. 787-817.
- Fuchs, C, 2014, *La comparaison et son expression en français*, Paris, Ophrys.
- Gerner, M., 2013, *A Grammar of Nuosu*, Berlin, De Gruyter Mouton.
- Haspelmath, M., 2015, Equative constructions in world-wide perspective, in Y. Treis & M. Vanhoeve (eds.), *Similitive and Equative Constructions: A Cross-linguistic Perspective*, Amsterdam, Philadelphia, John Benjamins.
- Haspelmath, M. & O. Buchholz, 1998, Equative and similitive constructions in the languages of Europe, in J. van der Auwera & D. P. O. Baoill (eds.),

- Adverbial Constructions in the Languages of Europe*, Berlin, New York, Mouton de Gruyter, p. 277-334.
- Heine, B., 1997, *Cognitive Foundations of Grammar*, New York, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Henkelmann, P., 2006, Constructions of equative comparison. *Sprachtypologie und Universalienforschung* vol. 59, no. 4, p. 370-398.
- Huang, Bufan & Renzeng Wangmu, 1991, Namuziyu [The Namuzi language], in Dai Qingxia, Huang Bufan, Fu Ailan, Renzeng Wangmu, and Liu Juhuang (eds.), *Zang-Mianyu Shiwu Zhong / Fifteen Tibeto-Burman languages*, Beijing, Yanshan Chubanshe, p. 153-173.
- LaPolla, R. J., 2004, On nominal relationship morphology in Tibeto-Burman, in Y. Lin, F. Hsu, Ch. Lee, J. T.-S. Sun, Hs. Yang & D. Ho (eds.), *Studies on Sino-Tibetan Languages: Papers in Honor of Professor Hwang-cherng Gong on his Seventieth Birthday*, Taipei, Institute of Linguistics, Academia Sinica, p. 43-74.
- Li, Ch. N. & S. Thompson, 1981, *Mandarin Chinese: A Functional Reference Grammar*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, University of California Press.
- Lyons, J., 1971, *Introduction to Theoretical Linguistics*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Lyons, J., 1977, *Semantics*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Tournadre, N., 2014, The Tibetic languages and their classification, in T. Owen-Smith & N. W. Hill (eds.), *Trans-Himalayan linguistics: Historical and descriptive linguistics of the Himalayan area*, Trends in Linguistics Studies and Monographs Vol. 266, Berlin, Mouton de Gruyter, p. 105-129.
- Tournadre, N. & S. Dorje, 2003, *Manual of Standard Tibetan: Language and Civilization*, Ithaca, New York, Boulder, Colorado, Snow Lion Publications.
- Sapir, E., 1944, Grading: A Study in Semantics. *Philosophy of Science* vol. 11, no. 2, p. 93-116.
- Stassen, L., 1985, *Comparison and Universal Grammar*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell.
- Stassen, L., 2013, Comparative constructions, in M. Dryer & M. Haspelmath (eds.), *The World Atlas of Language Structures Online*, Leipzig, Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology. Available online at <http://wals.info/chapter/121>, accessed on 10 April 2017.
- Sun, H., 1982, Ersu (Duoxu) hua jianjie [An outline of Ersu (Duoxu)], *Yuyan Yanjiu* [Linguistic Study] vol. 2, p. 241-264.
- Wang, D., 2010, *Ersu Zangzu Wenhua Yanjiu* [Study of Ersu Tibetan culture], Chengdu, Sichuan University Press.
- Yin, W., 2016, Namuziyu Yufa Biaozhu Wenben [A collection of interlinearized texts in the Namuzi language], Beijing, Shehui Kexue Wenxian Chubanshe.
- Zhang, S., 2013, *A Reference Grammar of Ersu: A Tibeto-Burman Language of China*, PhD Thesis, James Cook University.