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Comparison constructions in Lizu (Tibeto-Burman)

Katia Chirkova*

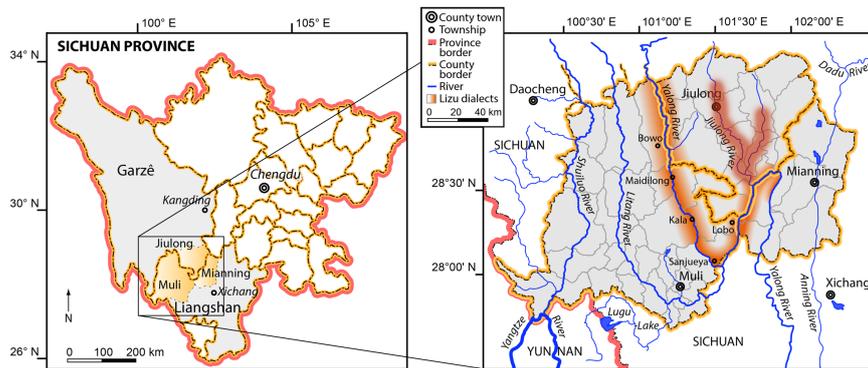
Abstract: This paper focuses on the morphosyntax of comparison constructions in Lizu, a Tibeto-Burman language spoken in Southwest China. The paper has two goals: (1) to provide a synchronic description of four types of comparison constructions: (i) comparative constructions of superiority and inferiority, (ii) superlative constructions of superiority and inferiority, (iii) equative constructions, and (iv) similitive constructions, and (2) to place their distinctive characteristics within a larger typological context. Lizu comparison constructions are characterised, on the hand, by the diversity of means of expression, combining morphological and periphrastic markers across construction types (e.g. morphological degree markers in the comparative and superlative constructions vs. periphrastic degree markers in the equative constructions); and, on the other hand, by co-existence of competing constructions (that is, two instances of superlative constructions of superiority and several instances of the equative and similitive constructions). From a cross-linguistic perspective, two Lizu comparison constructions stand out: (1) the comparative construction of superiority with a dedicated, etymologically obscure, analytic standard marker and a dedicated bound degree marker (prefix), and (2) the superlative construction of superiority with a dedicated bound degree marker (prefix). Given that these construction types tend to show strong areal distribution where they occur, they are examined in the local areal context, as compared to corresponding constructions in the linguistic neighbors of Lizu: Namuzi, Pumi, Nuosu, Tibetan, and Mandarin. The implications of the findings are discussed in typological and areal perspectives.

1. INTRODUCTION

Lizu is a Tibeto-Burman language spoken in three counties in the Sichuan Province of 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).¹

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¹ The Lizu are officially classified as being of Tibetan nationality. Their total number is known by estimation only, as no official census data on the group are available.



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

The Lizu people (*lî-zû* or *lŷ-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 a 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 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*) (for more details, see Sun 1982, Chirkova 2016).

Lizu is spoken in a historically multi-ethnic and multi-lingual area. The immediate linguistic neighbours 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), Pumi (Qiangic), 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 *sâtc̣ʰo p̣ê* ‘eastern dialect’ (from WT *shar phyogs* ‘east’), as spoken in Kālā 卡拉 Township, 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 - DO - IO - V. The (syntactic) relations of subject and object are not grammaticalised. 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 perfectivising 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 be nominalised by one of the nominalisers.

This paper focuses on one particular aspect of Lizu that is not covered in previous work on that language: the morphosyntax of its comparison constructions. It aims at (1) providing a synchronic description of Lizu comparative, superlative, equative, and similitive constructions, and (2) placing their distinctive characteristics within a larger typological and areal contexts.

Data on which this study is based were recorded during several field trips to the Lizu-speaking areas of Muli County between 2008 and 2015. Part of the data, time-aligned and annotated, is accessible online at the Endangered Languages Archive (ELAR, SOAS, University of London) and the Collections de COpus Oraux Numériques (COCOON, the French National Centre for Scientific Research).² Example sentences are drawn from a corpus of 189 interlinearised texts, which include personal narratives, song lyrics, folktales, translations from Mandarin Chinese, and procedural texts.

This paper adopts the terminology used by Treis (2018) and exemplified in (1), where “comparee” stands for the entity being compared against some standard of comparison, “parameter” denotes the quality with regard to which one is comparing, and “standard” is the entity that the comparee is being compared against.

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

² See <https://elar.soas.ac.uk/Collection/MPI655514> and https://cocoon.humanum.fr/exist/crdo/meta2/crdo-COLLECTION_CHK (Accessed on 20 March 2018).

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows: Section 2 outlines basic facts related to Lizu adjectives and details their use in the positive and negative constructions. Sections 3 through 6 provide a synchronic description of the comparative, superlative, equative, and similitive constructions, respectively. Section 7 is a summary of the distinctive characteristics of these four types of constructions, which are also discussed within a larger typological context. Two Lizu comparison constructions stand out as being cross-linguistically infrequent: (i) the comparative construction of superiority with a dedicated, etymologically opaque analytic standard marker, and a dedicated bound degree marker (prefix), (ii) the superlative construction of superiority with a dedicated bound degree marker (prefix). Given that such constructions tend to show strong areal distribution where they occur (cf. Stassen 1985, 2013; Heine 1997; Cuzzolin & Lehmann 2004; Bobaljik 2012; Gorshenin 2012), section 8 examines them in the local areal context, as compared to the Namuzi, Pumi, Nuosu, Tibetan, and Mandarin languages. The concluding section (9) summarizes the findings and suggests directions for future research.

2. ADJECTIVES: POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE CONSTRUCTIONS

Lizu adjectives are formally a subset of verbs (intransitive stative verbs). They function as (intransitive) predicates, take verbal prefixes (*de-* ‘upward’, *ne-* ‘downward’, *k^he-* ‘inward’, and the perfectivising prefix *t^he-*), and the causative, interrogative, and negative marking. In contrast to other verbs, adjectives can modify a noun directly in the post-head position (e.g. *Nbɔ̂ dɛ̂-ly* ‘white horse’), whereas other verbs can modify a noun only in the pre-head position (e.g. *Ndzê-Nbɔ̂* ‘riding horse’).

Lizu morphemes are typically monosyllabic but words are generally disyllabic. Consequently, verbal roots, including adjectival roots, are by and large monosyllabic. Monosyllabic roots are of two kinds: free and bound. Examples include *t^hu* ‘open’, *jě* ‘be small’, *ly* ‘be white’ (bound roots), *ts^hu* ‘strike, hit’, *fɔ̂* ‘be long’ (free roots). Conversely, verbs and adjectives as stand alone, base forms are typically disyllabic. Disyllabic verbs and adjectives are mostly formed by affixation, reduplication, and compounding. Affixation uses one of the four verbal prefixes, as in *dɛ̂t^hu* ‘open (up)’, *dɛ̂ly* ‘be white’. The addition of the prefixes conveys the meaning of telicity and boundedness. Reduplication involves full reduplication of the root. For semantically adjectival roots, reduplication conveys

the meaning of intensification, as in *jejê* ‘be (very) small’, *ʃɔʃɔ* ‘be (very) long’. For semantically verbal roots, reduplication essentially conveys the meanings of repetition, as in *ts^hûts^hû* ‘pound, strike repeatedly’. Finally, compounding typically involves a nominal and a verbal element, in that order. Examples include, *sêbû* ‘pant, gasp for air’ (literally, *sê* ‘air, breath’, free root, + *bû* ‘gasp’, free root), *ɹaʃɔ* ‘be far, distant’ (literally, *ɹa* ‘road’, bound root, + *ʃɔ* ‘be long’, free root), *p^hêk^hwă* ‘be expensive’ (literally, *p^hê* ‘price’, free root, + *k^hwă* ‘be large’, free root).

The positive construction in Lizu (e.g. *A is tall*) typically uses disyllabic, base forms of adjectives (2, 3):

- (2) *tê* *bo* *le* *dê-dê* *tê* *bo* *le*
 one DEF.PL CTR be.short-be.short one DEF.PL CTR
 ʃɐ-ʃê
 be.long-be.long
 ‘Some (shapes) are short, while some others are long.’
- (3) *ê* *de-mp^hjê*
 1SG upward-be.cold
 ‘I am cold / I feel cold.’

In addition, free monosyllabic adjectival roots, such as *ʃɔ* ‘be long’, can also be used in the positive construction in their monosyllabic form. However, in that case, they need to be accompanied by a degree-marking adverb (4).

- (4) *kû^hê* *le* *tɕəu* *dězu* *ʃɔ* *tê* *læ* *mɐ-zî*
 this CTR just relatively be.long one CRD NEG-COP
 ‘This (story) is not a long one.’ (literally ‘is not one that is long’)

The obligatory use of degree-marking adverbs with free monosyllabic adjectives in predicative position suggests that free monosyllabic adjectival roots are inherently comparative. That being the case, the addition of a degree-marking adverb serves the function of introducing comparison to the contextually specified standard, hence precluding the comparative interpretation of the adjective.³ In

³ This has a parallel in Chinese, where monosyllabic adjectives in the positive construction more often than not require the presence of the degree adverb *hěn* ‘very’. Unless heavily stressed, the meaning of *hěn* in such cases is semantically bleached (e.g. Li & Thompson

contrast, monosyllabic roots in disyllabic base forms can be considered graded by means of the morphological processes of reduplication and affixation, conveying respectively, the meaning of intensification and telicity or boundedness.

The negation of the positive construction employs the general negator *mɔ-*. In the case of free monosyllabic adjectival roots and disyllabic adjectives formed through reduplication and compounding, *mɔ-* is prefixed directly onto the mono- or disyllabic form. This is illustrated in examples (5)-(7).

- (5) kú^htê t^hô mɔ-fê
 this time NEG-be.long
 ‘It hasn’t been long since this happened.’ (literally, ‘the time since this [happened] is not long’)

- (6) zô-ɾə temî mê-je-jê mê-ke
 3SG.VSB-PL heart NEG-be.small-be.small NEG-be.allowed
 ‘They won’t dare to be careless (again).’

- (7) dǝzu mê-ɾə-fê, dǝzu mê-p^he-k^hwæ
 relatively NEG-road-be.long relatively NEG-price-be.larg
 ‘not very far away, not very expensive’

In the case of disyllabic adjectives formed by prefixation, *mɔ-* is added between the prefix and the adjectival root, as in sentence (8).

- (8) â de-mê-mp^hje
 1SG upward-NEG-be.cold
 ‘I am not cold / I do not feel cold.’

3. COMPARATIVE CONSTRUCTIONS

The Lizu comparative construction of superiority (e.g. *A is taller than B*) is monoclausal with the parameter that functions as the head of an intransitive predicate. Its basic constituent order is outlined in (9):

- (9) NP1 NP2 *pɔ* *jæ-* Adjective
 Comparee Standard Standard marker Degree marker Parameter

1981: 143-144) and its use can also be analysed as introducing comparison to the contextually set standard.

The comparee is not morphologically marked, occurs in the clause-initial position, and is often followed by the contrastive topic and focus marker *le*, as in example (10).

- (10) æ=î jêne le ne=î jêne
 1SG=GEN younger.brother CTR 2SG=GEN younger.brother
 pɐ jæ-mbɪǎ
 STD.M DEG.M-be.tall
 ‘My brother is taller than your brother.’ (literally, ‘As for my brother, compared to your brother, he is taller.’)

If the standard is animate, it may be morphologically marked by the non-agentive marker *ɖ*, which signals primarily human arguments of the verb (except for agent). Such use is, however, infrequent in the corpus (11).

- (11) â t^hê=ɐ pɐ jæ-mbɪâ
 1SG that=N-AGT STD.M DEG.M-be.tall
 ‘I am taller than she is.’

The standard NP (which may be marked by the non-agentive marker *ɖ*) is followed by the nominal particle *pɖ*, which occurs in the same slot as other Lizu analytical case markers, such as the locative marker *ke*. *pɖ* has been grammaticalised to such an extent that its original meaning is no longer reconstructible. It is a dedicated standard marker, which has no other function in Lizu than that of marking the standard of comparison.

The predicative adjective is marked by a special comparative prefix of unknown etymological origin: *jæ-*, analysed here as a degree marker. The use of this prefix signals that the compared quality is present to a greater extent. *jæ-* is directly prefixed onto free monosyllabic adjectival roots and disyllabic adjectives formed by affixation, reduplication, and compounding. Consider examples (12 - 14).

- (12) nê â pɐ jæ-jejê â nê=ɐ
 2SG 1SG STD.M DEG.M-be.small-be.small 1SG 2SG=N-AGT
 jêne kojê hû

yonger.sibling call want
 ‘You are younger than me, I will call you little sister.’

- (13) ɕitʰɛŋ le muli pɛ jæ-de-mpʰjê
 Xichang CTR Muli STD.M DEG.M-upward-be.cold
 ‘As for (the weather in) Xichang, (it) is colder than (in) Muli.’

- (14) æ temî jâbi ne-dzâ pɛ læ
 1SG heart sugar downward-eat STD.M even
 jæ-zædʒâ
 DEG.M-be.pleasant
 ‘It was even more enjoyable than eating sweets.’

The expression of relative inferiority is not grammaticalised in Lizu. Rather, relative inferiority is expressed as a negative construction that includes an overt standard of comparison, followed by the standard marker *pɛ*. It is the presence of the overt standard of comparison that determines that the sentence in question is comparative (15-16).

- (15) æ=î jêne le ne=î jêne
 1SG=GEN younger.brother CTR 2SG=GEN younger.brother
 pɛ mɛ-mbɔ̃
 STD.M NEG-be.tall
 ‘My brother is not as tall as your brother.’

- (16) kâtʰê lôbu dʒě bi æmæ kʰê-tʃe=i
 this stone water DEF mother inward-boil=GEN
 ɽwâdʒe pɛ de-mê-hỹ
 chicken.water STD.M upward-NEG-be.fragrant
 ‘This stone soup is not as tasty as chicken soup made by mum.’⁴

4. SUPERLATIVE CONSTRUCTIONS

Lizu has two types of superlative constructions of superiority (e.g. *A is the tallest of all*): (i) A superlative construction that is based on the comparative construction

⁴ A Lizu translation of the traditional story about stone soup, in which everyone contributes an ingredient to create a delicious stew from originally nothing more than a stone and boiling water.

and employs the etymologically non-transparent form *jɪlæ* in position of the standard of comparison, and (ii) A superlative construction with a morphological degree marker (prefix).

The first type is more frequently found in my data, occurring in natural narratives, conversations, and elicitation. It employs the same marking on the predicative adjective (the comparative prefix *jæ-*), while the etymologically non-transparent form *jɪlæ* takes the place of the standard of comparison. This construction type is illustrated in sentences (17) and (18):

- (17) *mɪdzâ tê bi tɕəuɰə jɪlæ jæ-Ntɰʰɛ*
 hare one DEF just SUP DEG.M-be.clever
 ‘That hare was the smartest (of all animals).’

- (18) *zâ bi ne jɪlæ jæ-je-jê*
 sone DEF TOP SUP DEG.M-be.small-be.small
 ‘The son was the youngest (of all the children).’

The second type of superlative construction of superiority is restricted to song lyrics and idiomatic expressions. It consists of marking the predicative adjective with the prefix *tɕô-*, as in sentence (19):

- (19) *nɛŋkʰɛ xɛjê xâne ne-dzâ bʒê tɕô-mbɪɔ?*
 sky bird what downward-eat fly SUP-be.tall
 ‘What do birds in the sky eat to fly the highest?’

The construction of absolute inferiority (e.g. *A is the least tall of all*) is expressed as a negative superlative construction of superiority, with the negator *mɔ-* occurring between the degree marker *jæ-* and the adjective. This is illustrated in sentence (20).

- (20) *æ=ɪ jêne jɪlæ jæ-mɔ-ljê*
 1SG=GEN younger.brother SUP DEG.M-NEG-be.good
 ‘My brother is the worst of all.’⁵

⁵ Note that the Lizu form *jæljê* is both a comparative adjectival form ‘be better’ and a lexicalised verbal form meaning ‘get better, recover (from illness)’. The omission of *jɪlæ* in sentence (20) would yield the meaning ‘My younger brother has not (yet) recovered from illness.’

5. EQUATIVE CONSTRUCTIONS

Lizu distinguishes between two types of equative constructions (e.g. *A is as tall as B*): (i) specific (in which the nominal standard has specific reference) and (ii) generic (in which the nominal standard refers to a generic standard or a class generically) (e.g. Haspelmath & Buchholz 1998: 309-313; see also Akmajian 1979; Higgins 1979; Mikkelsen 2005). The constituent order in the Lizu specific equative construction is provided in (21).

(21)	NP1	NP2	<i>tê pɔ</i> ‘such as, of that kind’	Adjective
	Comparee	Standard	Degree marker	Parameter

Both the comparee and the standard are not morphologically marked, whereas the parameter is modified by the periphrastic degree marker *tê pɔ*. This marker consists of the numeral *tê* ‘one’ followed by the comparative case marker *pɔ*, used as the standard marker in Lizu comparative constructions. This expression can be analysed as an indefinite demonstrative that conveys a “variety interpretation” (cf. Lyons 1999: 40-41). Consequently, it can be paraphrased by ‘such as’ or ‘of that kind’. The predicative adjective can be a free monosyllabic adjectival root or a disyllabic adjectival form. The comparison can be presented from the perspective of a topical comparee, as in sentence (22):

(22)	<i>æ=î</i>	<i>jêne</i>	<i>le</i>	<i>ne=î</i>	<i>jêne</i>
	1SG=GEN younger.brother	CTR	2SG=GEN younger.brother		
	<i>têpɛ</i>	<i>mbɔ̃</i>			
	one.STD.M	be.tall			

‘My brother is as tall as your brother.’ (literally, ‘As for my brother, your brother is as tall as he is.’)

Alternatively, the comparee and the standard can operate as a unit having the function of a given topic. In that case, they may be linked with the conjunction *læ* ‘and, also, even’, as in sentence (23); or be one single conjoined nominal, as in sentence (24):

(23)	<i>æ-dzî</i>	<i>ɔt^hû</i>	<i>læ</i>	<i>t^he-dzî</i>	<i>ɔt^hû</i>	<i>têpɛ</i>
	1SG-family.GEN	field	CRD	that-family.GEN	field	one.STD.M
	<i>ndě</i>					
	be.good					

‘The fields of our family and those of that family are equally fertile.’

- (24) mûhê ne-t^hê têpe ʃě
 sisters two-that one.STD.M be.long
 ‘The two sisters are equally tall.’ (from a riddle about chopsticks)

In the second type of equative construction, the generic equative 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) are formed by modifying a noun with the genitive particle *i* and the marker *su*. The latter functions in Lizu as agentive nominaliser, as in *dzə-sû* ‘eater’ (from *dzə* ‘eat’), *mpʃe-sû* ‘thief’ (from *mpʃe* ‘steal, rob’). The standard is further modified by the adverbialiser *mû* (from the verb *mû* ‘make’), which is used to derive manner adverbials. Finally, the parameter functions as the head of an intransitive predicate. This construction can also be interpreted as using verb serialisation as its basis. The constituent order in the generic equative construction is presented in (25).

- (25) NP1 NP2=*i*=*su* *mû* ‘make’ Adjective
 Comparee Standard=GEN=AGT adverbialiser Parameter

The standard in the Lizu generic equative construction is not conventionalised. That is to say, it does not make the constructions in which it occurs idiomatic, as is the case in some languages, including English (e.g. *cunning as a fox*), or German (e.g. *arm wie eine Kirchenmaus* ‘(as) poor as a church mouse’) (Haspelmath & Buchholz 1998: 309). The basic construction in (25) can be optionally modified by inserting the periphrastic degree marker *tê pɔ* of the specific equative construction between *mû* and the predicative adjective. This is illustrated in sentence (26).

- (26) dʒumê=i=su mû têpe ntʃ^hě
 fox=GEN=AGT make one.STD.M be.smart
 ‘be smart as a fox’

A negation of the generic equative construction is formed by prefixing the negator *mɔ-* to the predicative adjective, as in the following example:

- (27) kû^hê mæmê tûŋkwê=i=su mû mɔ-ʃê

this fruit wax.gourd=GEN=AGT make NEG-be.long
 sâŋgæ = i = su mû mê-pi-pi
 pumpkin=GEN=AGT make NEG-be.flat-be.flat
 ‘This vegetable is not as long as a wax gourd and not as flat as a pumpkin.’

An alternative schema is a construction, in which the quality being compared is formally in “possession” of the standard NP (linked to it with the genitive marker *i*), whereas the predicate is a verb with the meaning ‘have, possess’. The constituent order is outlined in (28) and an example is provided in sentence (29).

- (28) NP1 NP2=*i* + NP (quality) Verb ‘have, possess’
 Comparee Standard=GEN + NP (parameter) Predicate
- (29) â læ ʃôNbôtʃ^hê = i ʃomô dʒê = ẽ ge
 1SG CRD elephant=GEN strength contain=CS N.EGO
 le t^hê pɛ ljě o
 CTR that STD.M be.good INTJ
 ‘If I too had the elephant’s strength, it would be so great!’

6. SIMILATIVE CONSTRUCTIONS

The Lizu simulative construction (that is, a construction expressing sameness of manner, as in *He sings like a nightingale*) has the exact form of the generic equative construction, as detailed in (25) above, but it employs a verb as head of the predicate, hence leaving the parameter not overtly expressed. Examples include:

- (30) xwê = i = su mû bʒê
 bird=GEN=AGT make fly
 ‘fly like a bird’, literally ‘fly in the manner of birds’
- (31) tʃæmæ bi k^he-nts^hê k^hæ le
 wife DEF inward-pull time.when CTR
 çædæ = i = su mû nê-nts^hæ su
 raw.meat.pulp=GEN=AGT make downward-prepare CAUS
 ‘(He) brought the wife in and had her cut into small pieces like minced meat.’

In terms of frequency of occurrence, the construction “(Comparee)-Standard=GEN=AGT-adverbialiser *mû*-Verb” appears to provide the primary option for the

expression of similarity in Lizu. At the same time, Lizu also has an alternative schema to express the similative meaning, as outlined in (32):

- | | | | | |
|------|------------------|-----------|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| (32) | NP1 | NP2 | <i>p^ho</i> ‘side’ | <i>tê qô jĩ</i> ‘one-manner-have’ |
| | Comparee | Standard | Standard marker | Degree marker |
| | <i>mû</i> ‘make’ | Verb | | |
| | adverbialiser | Predicate | | |

In this schema, the standard is marked with the bound locative noun *p^ho* ‘side’, followed by the verbal phrase *tê qô jĩ*, literally ‘have one manner’, which is, in turn, followed by the adverbialiser *mû*. This construction is illustrated in (33).

- | | | | | | | |
|------|--|-----------|------------|-----------|-----------|------------|
| (33) | <i>xwê = p^ho</i> | <i>tê</i> | <i>qê</i> | <i>jĩ</i> | <i>mû</i> | <i>bzê</i> |
| | bird=side one | manner | exist.ABST | make | fly | |
| | ‘fly like a bird’, literally ‘fly by the side of birds in the same manner’ | | | | | |

7. SUMMARY: LIZU COMPARISON CONSTRUCTIONS IN CROSS-LINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE

This section summarises the main properties of Lizu comparison constructions as outlined in sections 3-6; it also attempts to place these properties in a larger typological context (with reference to Stassen 1985, 2013; Heine 1997; Cuzzolin & Lehmann 2004; Henkelmann 2006; Bobaljik 2012; Gorschenin 2012; Fuchs 2014; Haspelmath et al. 2017).

All Lizu comparison constructions are monoclausal. In the majority, the parameter functions as the head of an intransitive predicate. The constituent order for all comparison constructions is uniformly the clause-initial Comparee, followed by the Standard. Lizu comparison constructions differ, on the one hand, in whether or not they employ a standard and/or a degree marker, and, on the other hand, in the type of standard and/or degree marking (morphological or periphrastic).

The use of a standard marker is generally restricted to the comparative constructions of superiority and inferiority. Both employ a dedicated standard marker of opaque etymology (*pɔ*), which can be viewed as one of Lizu analytic case markers, namely, a comparative case marker. In view of its obscure etymology, Lizu constructions with *pɔ* could be analysed as belonging to the Particle Comparative type in Stassen’s (1985, 2013) typology of comparative constructions or to the Pure Comparative type in Stolz’s (2013: 22) analysis.

Alternatively, on semantic grounds, Lizu constructions with *pɔ* could be considered candidates for membership in the Similarity comparative ('X is Y like Z') in Heine's (1997) event schemata. That is because, as a dedicated comparative marker, Lizu *pɔ* could be analysed as a meaning equivalent of English *like*. However, given that (i) the precise etymology of *pɔ* is as yet unknown, and (ii) the Lizu standard marker *pɔ* is unique to comparative constructions (whereas, according to Heine's analysis, languages using the Similarity Schema for the comparative are likely to also use this schema for the equative), an analysis of Lizu comparative constructions with *pɔ* as belonging to the Similarity comparative type is not very plausible.

The use of degree markers is restricted in Lizu to the comparative construction of superiority, the superlative construction of superiority, and the equative and simulative constructions. Notably, the former two types of constructions employ morphological degree marking: respectively, the dedicated bound degree markers *jæ-* and *tɕo-* (both prefixes). Viewed from a cross-linguistic perspective, comparative and superlative constructions with affixal degree marking represent relatively uncommon types (Cuzzolin & Lehmann 2004, Bobaljik 2012, Gorshenin 2012). Lizu equative and simulative constructions, on the other hand, use periphrastic degree marking: the expression *tê pɔ* 'such as, of that kind', which contains the comparative case marker *pɔ*. This degree marker is obligatory in the specific equative construction, and optional in the generic equative construction and the simulative constructions.

Several types of Lizu comparison constructions are typified by co-occurrence of competing constructions. These include superlative, equative, and simulative constructions.

Of the two competing superlative constructions in Lizu, the more frequently used type, which is based on the comparative construction, happens to be fairly common cross-linguistically ("Absolute Comparison Superlative", Gorshenin 2012: 87-110). According to this author, the standard of comparison in this type is typically expressed by a universal quantifier 'all', 'every(body/thing)' or an indefinite pronoun 'any(body/thing)' as head of the phrase or as modifier. It is, therefore, conceivable that the Lizu form *nɪlɛ* in position of the standard of comparison may also be ultimately derived from a universal quantifier or an indefinite pronoun. However, in the present state of our knowledge, the origins of *nɪlɛ* must be considered etymologically opaque. The second, less frequently used type, which employs morphological degree marking is, on the other hand, cross-

linguistically infrequent (“Conventionalized Degree Superlative”, Gorshenin 2012: 122-143).

Lizu distinguishes two types of specific equative constructions based on whether the construction is presented from the perspective of the comparee or that of the comparee and the standard together as a unit. Furthermore, the parameter (denoting the quality one is comparing to/with) can be alternatively presented as the head of an intransitive predicate or as a nominal phrase in “possession” of the standard NP, with a verb meaning ‘have, possess’ as the predicate. Finally, Lizu generic equative constructions and Lizu simulative constructions use verb serialisation as their basis, encoding the standard of comparison as a manner adverbial, formally marked by the adverbialiser *mû* ‘make’. This diversity of types represents a challenge for placing Lizu equative constructions in existing typologies (e.g. Henkelmann 2006, Fuchs 2014, Haspelmath et al. 2017). Given that the Lizu specific equative construction has a degree marker (*tê pv*) and its comparee and standard can, but need not be unified, it could be analysed as part of strategy I “Constructions with equative markers” in Henkelmann’s typology, where it sits between types I.A (constructions with separation of comparatum and standard) and I.B (constructions with unification of comparatum and standard) (Henkelmann 2006: 385-387). In a similar fashion, in Haspelmath’s et al. (2017) typology, the Lizu specific equative construction would belong in type 3 (where the comparee and the standard are a single conjoined nominal and there is a degree marker). The Lizu generic equative construction (Comparee Standard=*i=su mû* Parameter), on the other hand, potentially represents a novel type, in which the standard NP is part of a manner adverbial phrase modifying the parameter.

Finally, Lizu simulative constructions distinguish between, on the one hand, a type in which the standard NP is encoded as a generic noun and, on the other hand, a type with a standard marker (*p^ho* ‘side’) following the standard NP and a degree marker encoded as a manner adverbial.

Table 1 summarises Lizu comparison constructions discussed in sections 3 through 6.

Construction type	Constituent order				
	CMP	STD	STD.M	DEG.M	PARAMETER
Comparative (relative superiority)	CMP (CTR)	STD	<i>pv</i>	<i>jæ-</i>	Parameter
Comparative	CMP (CTR)	STD	<i>pv</i>		<i>mv</i> -Parameter

(relative inferiority)					
Superlative (absolute superiority) I	CMP	<i>ɲɪlɛ</i>		<i>jæ-</i>	Parameter
Superlative (absolute superiority) II	CMP			<i>tɕo-</i>	Parameter
Superlative (absolute inferiority)	CMP	<i>ɲɪlɛ</i>		<i>jæ-</i>	<i>mɛ</i> -Parameter
Equative (specific) I	CMP (CTR)	STD		<i>tê pɔ</i>	Parameter
Equative (specific) II	CMP <i>læ</i> STD			<i>tê pɔ</i>	Parameter
Equative (specific) III	CMP	STD= <i>i</i> NP (parameter)			Verb ('possess')
Equative (generic)	CMP	STD= <i>i=su mû</i> (<i>tê pɔ</i>)			Parameter
Similative I	CMP	STD= <i>i=su mû</i> (<i>tê pɔ</i>)			Verb
Similative II	CMP	STD	<i>p^ho</i>	<i>tê qɔ</i> <i>ɲɪ mû</i>	Verb

Table 1: Summary of Lizu comparison constructions

In summary, Lizu comparison constructions represent a rich array of types employing diverse means of expression, and perhaps even have potential to suggest some novel types (such as that of the generic equative construction).

7. LIZU COMPARISON CONSTRUCTIONS IN AN AREAL CONTEXT

The previous section highlighted two typologically infrequent constructions types in Lizu, namely, a Particle or Pure comparative, characterised by the obligatory use of a dedicated standard marker of opaque etymology; and a Conventionalised Degree Superlative, characterised by the obligatory use of a dedicated bound degree affix. Interestingly, these two types are generally argued to be restricted in their areal distribution. More specifically, (i) the Particle or Pure comparative is considered to be a near-monopoly of languages of the European Sprachbund (e.g. Stassen 1985, Haspelmath 2001); whereas the Conventionalised Degree

Superlative is argued to be almost exclusive to Eurasia (Gorshenin 2012: 122-143). Overall, comparison constructions are held to be particularly open to borrowing and able to diffuse across all or most of the languages in a linguistic area (e.g. Stassen 1985, 2013; Heine 1994; Dixon 2008: 813; Bobaljik 2012: 6, 17; Gorshenin 2012: 164-168; Stolz 2013). Furthermore, as argued by Heine (1997: 126-130), significant correlation exists between the source schemas underlying comparative constructions and their areal distribution, so that the choice of a particular schema appears to be determined primarily by areal factors. Following this logic, if attested in Lizu, the two cross-linguistically uncommon types of comparison constructions as above could be found in other local languages of Southwest China. This possibility is explored in this section in relation to the close neighbours of Lizu: Namuzi, Pumi, Nuosu, Kham Tibetan, and Southwestern Mandarin. As the area where Lizu is spoken is as yet relatively little explored and many of its languages are but little documented, the discussion below has to rely, on the one hand, on sketch descriptions of the Namuzi language (Huang & Renzeng 1991; Yin 2015) and, on the other hand, on the grammatical description of Dongwang Tibetan (Bartee 2007), a Kham Tibetic variety spoken in the neighbouring Yunnan Province, rather than that of the Kham Tibetic variety of Jiulong County in Sichuan Province, which is in direct contact with Lizu, but for which no grammatical description is available. The comparative discussion below focuses on the following aspects: (i) the types of the comparative and superlative constructions in each of the languages under discussion (following, respectively, Stassen's 1985, 2013 and Gorshenin's 2012 typologies), (ii) the type of degree marking (morphological or periphrastic) in the comparative and superlative constructions. The discussion below is organised in the order of geographical proximity of the five languages to the Lizu dialect on which this paper is based.

Namuzi, the immediate neighbour of Lizu in Muli County, is also the closest to Lizu in terms of its comparative and superlative construction types and its of degree marking type (morphological). Similarly to Lizu, the comparative construction in Namuzi has the constituent order Comparee – Standard – Standard marker – Degree Marker – Parameter. Furthermore, the standard marker (*wu*⁵⁵*dæ*⁵³) is also an analytical case marker, whose function is restricted to marking the standard of comparison. The degree marker in the comparative construction is a degree affix (the prefix *ja*³³).⁶ Notably, the Namuzi degree affix is comparable in form and meaning to the degree affix *jæ*- in Lizu. The Namuzi comparative construction is illustrated in sentence (34):

⁶ The two numbers in the superscript indicate tone contour.

- (34) ηa^{55} $t\zeta^h e^{55}$ $wu^{55} dae^{31}$ $ja^{55} - da^{53} - dz\eta^{31}$
 1SG 3SG STD.M DEG.M-more?-be.big
 ‘I am bigger than he is.’ (Huang & Renzeng 1991: 171, my glosses)

In terms of etymology, the origins of both the Namuzi standard marker and its degree marker are non-transparent, making the Namuzi comparative construction a candidate for the Particle Comparative or Pure Comparative type.

The superlative construction in Namuzi again bears close similarity to that of Lizu. It also belongs to the Conventionalised Degree Superlative type of superlative constructions because it has dedicated superlative degree prefixes: $t\zeta uo^{31}$ - or $mi\zeta^{31}$ - (Huang & Renzeng 1991: 164), as in $t\zeta uo^{33} da^{53} dz\eta^{31}$ or $mi\zeta^{31} dz\eta^{33} dz\eta^{35}$ ‘the biggest’; and $fi\zeta o^{35}$ - (Yin 2015: 16), as in $fi\zeta o^{35} da^{55} dz\eta^{31}$ ‘the biggest’. Given these close parallels between Lizu and Namuzi and possible cognacy between their degree prefixes (ja^{33} - and jae -, $t\zeta uo^{33}$ - and $t\zeta o$ -), it would be of interest to further explore similarities between the two languages in their comparison constructions, once more comparative data on Namuzi become available.

The comparative constructions in the southwestern neighbours of Lizu, Pumi and Nuosu, belong to the Locational Comparative type in Stassen’s (1985, 2013) typology. In this type of comparative, 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, the Locational Comparative is 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’.

Pumi comparatives belong to the at-comparative type, because its standard marker is the locative marker tu ‘on top’, as in sentence (35).

- (35) $\zeta = dz\ae\eta j\ddot{a}w$ $t\grave{a} = dz\ae\eta = t\acute{u}$ $[\text{h}\delta\eta]$
 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 *hâ ti* V, where A is comparee, B is standard, V is parameter, *hâ* is a verb meaning ‘be excessive’, and *tĩ* is the numeral ‘one’ (36).

- (36) *tá* *pĩ = gá* *tɕ^hwĩ*, *tá* *pĩ = gá* *há*
 this pen=DEF be.good this pen=DEF be.excessive
 tĩ *tɕ^hwĩ*
 one be.good
 ‘This pen is good; this pen is even better.’ (Daudey 2014: 522)

Unlike Lizu, Pumi does not employ a degree marker in either of its comparative constructions. Daudey (2014) does not provide a description of the superlative construction in Pumi, but notes that a “superlative state [...] is expressed through a combination of a stative verb with the prefix *t^hǎ-*, as in *t^hv-lêj* ‘be heavier, be too heavy’, *t^hv-ká* ‘be spicier, be too spicy’, *t^hv-žá* ‘be more, be too much’.” (Daudey 2014: 272-273). In sum, in terms of the type of comparative construction (Locative and Conjoined comparative types), the lack of a degree marker in the comparative construction, and the lack of a dedicated superlative degree marker (the prefix *t^hǎ-* conveying both comparative and superlative meanings), Pumi comparative and superlative constructions are markedly distinct from those in Lizu.

Nuosu comparatives represent the third subtype of the Locational Comparative in Stassen’s (1985, 2013) typology: the to-comparative. In addition to an analytic standard marker (*jox*), Nuosu comparative constructions are also characterised by the use of a periphrastic degree marker, *ap cy* ‘more’, which functions as an adverbialised adjective (37) and postverbal adverb (38). 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.

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

- (38) *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 superlative construction employs a dedicated superlative infix *-lop-*, which is inserted between a gradable predicate and its fully reduplicated copy (Gerner 2013: 451-452). This is illustrated in example (39):

- (39) cy ietzyr-lop-ietzyr zhax su nge.
 3P.SG small-SUP-small ART COP
 ‘He is the smallest.’ (Gerner 2013: 451)

All in all, the Nuosu comparative construction is distinct from that of Lizu in its type (Locative comparative) and in the morphological status of its degree marker (periphrastic). The Nuosu superlative construction, on the other hand, appears to belong to the Conventionalised Degree Superlative type, albeit its type of the degree affix (infix) is different from that of Lizu (prefix).

The comparative construction in the northwestern neighbour of Lizu, Kham Tibetan, as exemplified by Dongwang Tibetan (Bartee 2007: 176-180), presents a type in which the standard of comparison, a clitic =*ji*, is homophonous with the ergative-instrumental-genitive clitic =*ji*. The parameter is expressed by monosyllabic adjectival forms or, alternatively, by adjectival forms followed by *tɕ^hi⁵³* ‘big’. The comparative construction in Dongwang does not employ a degree marker. Consider examples in sentences (40) and (41):

- (40) ji¹¹ɕi⁵⁵ ɬa⁵⁵ts^hu⁵³=ji gi¹³ ŋõ
 Yishi Lhatsu=than older VIS.IPFV
 ‘Yishi is older than Lhatsu.’ (Bartee 2007: 177)

- (41) ɕi⁵⁵ŋi⁵³ ɕə⁵³ wə⁵⁵ŋi⁵³ ɕə⁵³=ji ŋä¹³ tɕ^hi⁵³ ŋõ
 2PL.GEN dog 2PL.GEN dog=than fierce big EVL.IPFV
 ‘Your dog is more aggressive than our dog.’ (Bartee 2007: 178)

Dongwang does not have a dedicated morpheme to form superlatives. Rather, it uses intensive constructions with degree-marking adverbs to express the superlative meaning (Bartee 2007: 179-180), hence belonging to Gorshenin’s (2012) Intensifier Superlative type with an overt degree marker having a general intensifying function. Overall, Dongwang Tibetan is highly distinct from Lizu in its choice of comparative construction type (with the standard marker being

homophonous with the ergative-instrumental-genitive marker),⁷ its lack of a degree marker and a general lack of morphological means to form superlatives. Historically, the eastern neighbour of Lizu, but now also the dominant language for the Lizu people across all Lizu-speaking areas, Southwestern Mandarin has a radically different typology of comparative constructions, which uses verb serialisation as their basis. Southwestern Mandarin historically makes use of Exceed Comparatives (Chappell 2015: 47). Exceed Comparatives are characterised by the standard NP being constructed as the direct object of a transitive verb with the meaning ‘exceed’ or ‘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 (42):

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

Finally, the superlative construction employs periphrastic degree markers (*zuì* ‘most’ and *dǐng* ‘most’), which are placed immediately before the adjectival predicate, as in *zuì hǎo* ‘the best’, *dǐng lěng* ‘the coldest’ (Li & Thompson 1981: 571-572). Mandarin is hence markedly different from Lizu in its construction types and the type of its degree marking.

Table 2 summarises the types of comparative and superlative constructions and the types of degree marking in the comparative construction in the five languages (including Lizu).

Language	Comparative construction type	Superlative construction type	Type of degree marking
Lizu	Particle or Pure Comparative	(i) Absolute Comparison Superlative	degree prefix

⁷ Bartee (2007) does not discuss the interesting case of homophony or polysemy of the standard marker with the ergative-instrumental-genitive marker (all *jī*). It may represent a previously unreported type of standard marking in comparative constructions.

		(ii) Conventionalised Degree Superlative	
Namuzi		Conventionalized Degree Superlative	
Pumi	(i) Locative Comparative (ii) Conjoined Comparative	no dedicated superlative construction	none
Nuosu	Locative Comparative	Conventionalized Degree Superlative	lexical morpheme
Dongwang	?	Intensifier	
Mandarin	Serial verb construction	Superlative	none

Table 2: Types of the comparative and superlative constructions and types of the degree marking in the comparative construction in Lizu, Namuzi, Pumi, Nuosu, Dongwang Tibetan, and Mandarin.

This overview of the various types of comparative and superlative constructions in the languages that are geographically adjacent to Lizu reveals a great diversity of both construction types and types of degree marking. Despite this diversity, however, the typologically infrequent Particle or Pure comparative and Conventionalised Degree Superlative types are found in several local languages (both types are also found in Namuzi, and the Conventionalised Degree Superlative is also found in Nuosu). Further research on this multilingual and little-explored area holds the potential to uncover yet more languages with these uncommon types of comparison constructions, hence informing our understanding of their cross-linguistic distribution. Overall, if it is maintained that there is significant correlation between the source schemas underlying comparative and superlative constructions and their areal distribution, this diversity of comparative and superlative constructions in the Lizu-speaking areas may be taken as suggestive of complex migration and residence patterns of the local ethnic groups, whereby some probably have not interacted long and/or deeply enough to borrow larger amounts of grammar from each other. Naturally, only more in-depth studies involving more construction types will be able to reconstruct the complex local cultural and linguistic dynamics.

9. CONCLUSION

This paper has provided a synchronic description of four types of Lizu comparison constructions: comparative, superlative, equative, and similitive. The two notable characteristics of Lizu comparison constructions are (i) diversity of means of expression, combining morphological and periphrastic markers across

construction types; and (ii) co-existence of competing constructions. Lizu data are interesting because they exemplify a few cross-linguistically infrequent types of comparison constructions (Particle or Pure comparative and Conventionalised Degree Superlative) and possibly suggest some novel types (such as the Lizu equative construction with the adverbialiser *mû*). Furthermore, Lizu data are not only interesting on their own, but they also lend insight into a genetically and typologically diverse area where Lizu is spoken (Southwest China). The preliminary investigation in this paper reveals that the cross-linguistically uncommon types of comparison construction (as above) are also found in more local languages (Namuzi, Nuosu). This warrants a more thorough exploration of local languages. Given that areal diffusion via language contact is one of the decisive factors responsible for the competition of several comparative constructions in one and the same language (Stolz 2013), further comparative research on comparison constructions in the linguistic neighbours of Lizu may show possible borrowing relations. In sum, more research into the languages of the area 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 comparison constructions.

ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviations follow the Leipzig Glossing Rules (LGR).⁸ Abbreviations in examples (28) through (37) follow the conventions in Bartee (2007: xxviii-xxix), 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 = adverbialiser, AGT = agentive, ANM = animate, ART = article, CRD = coordinate conjunction, CS = change of state, CTR = contrastive focus or topic marker, DEG.M = degree marker, EGO = egophoric, EVI = evidential, HSY = hearsay, INF = inferential, INTJ = interjection, T = Tibetan loanword, N.EGO = non-egophoric, RECL = reciprocal, SUP = superlative, STD.M = standard marker, SUP = superlative, VIS = visual evidential, VSB = visible, WT = Written Tibetan.

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