

Lataddi Narua Tones:

The tonal system of a Sìchuān variety of Yǒngníng Na

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Abstract

Yǒngníng Na (YN Na) is the central of three dialects of the language recently given *Ethnologue* status as Narua [nru]. Also known as Eastern Nàxī or Mósuō, Narua comprises the three eastern dialects of the Nàxī language of SW China identified by Chinese linguists in the late 1970's (Hé & Jiāng, 1985:104-116). Three Yúnnán varieties have already been documented, but very little data has been made available to date on YN Na as it is spoken in Sìchuān.

The variety of YN Na under study here is referred to as Lataddi Narua /la^hl^adi^l na^lz^wɿ^l/: LTD Narua for short. It is spoken in and around the swamp area known as the Grass Sea which forms the eastern end of Lúgū Lake in Yányuán County, Liángshān Yí Autonomous Prefecture, Sìchuān Province. Data was collected during 2008-2010, both in Chéngdū in collaboration with native speakers living there and in Wǔzhīluò, a sub-village of Bóshù Village on the northern edge of the swamp (四川省凉山彝族自治州盐源县泸沽湖镇博树村五指落) - see map below.

The tone system of LTD Narua exists, not at syllable level as in languages such as Mandarin and Nàxī (aka Western Nàxī), but at word level. The domain of influence of the tone is not necessarily restricted to the lexical item, but extends across an entire phonological phrase, which may consist of more than one word, including compound nouns, N + DEM/NUM + CL, ADJ + PTCL, and PAT(N) + V where there is no verbal prefix.

Under the current analysis, LTD Narua tones are described using two tonal levels: H (high) and L (low). This differs from the other varieties of YN Na documented to date and from (Western) Nàxī, which have been described in terms of three tonal levels. In LTD Narua noun and adjective word classes, there are four tone categories which, on the basis of phonetic evidence as well as descriptive economy, are described as /H/, /HL/, /L/ and /LH/. Although realisations of these categories vary somewhat depending on the number of syllables in the phonological word, the categories do not change.

Intonation and stress also have roles in the prosodic system of LTD Narua. An utterance may not end on a flat tone: its last syllable has to either rise or fall, although this contour is not phonemic. A phonological phrase of tonal category /H/ will unfold gradually as a fall over any number of syllables when utterance final. In phrases consisting of N + NUM + CL, where the number is emphasised, it is pronounced with stress.

The tone system of LTD Narua as it relates to nouns and to adjectives as attributives is clear and described in this paper. The system for verbs (and adjectives as predicates) is not fully described at the present stage, so this presentation will not broach the subject.

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Map showing locations of YN Na research

