On a partial, strictly word-order based definition of grammatical relations in Liangshan Nuosu*

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Abstract

Liangshan Nuosu, a Burmese-Lolo language from Southwest China, is verb-final, and A and O (cf. Dixon 1979, 1994) rarely carry morphological markers. Nuosu partitions simple clauses into three aspectual categories: (i) ''ongoing'' clauses display an invariable AOV order, (ii) ''resultative'' clauses exhibit a fixed OAV order, and (iii) there is a third category of ''indeterminate'' clauses which have variable word order and a potentially ambiguous encoding of semantic roles. An indeterminate clause like John Mary bite *can mean* John bites Mary *or* Mary bites John. *Due to its lack of morphology, Nuosu presents a genuine problem of ambiguity at the level of simple clauses. As for complex clauses, Nuosu reveals a consistent constraint in coordinate and relative clauses for the deletion of the 2nd coreferential NP: each time the 2nd coreferential NP appears in* INITIAL *position of the linked clause or dependent clause, it has to be deleted. Given this general outline of Nuosu syntax, one may define (partially) the grammatical relations as follows.*

	Intransitive clauses	Ongoing clauses	Resultative clauses
SUBJECT	Unique NP	Clause-initial NP	Clause-initial NP
OBJECT	—	Clause-second NP	Clause-second NP

1.   Background and terminology

Many papers and studies have recently dealt with the nonalignment of morphological and syntactic ergativity. For example, languages may display an ergative morphology while their syntax is accusative. This cross-linguistic hybridism has led several scholars to question whether erga-