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# The fuzzy logic of socialised attitudes in Liangshan Nuosu

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## ABSTRACT

Liangshan Nuosu (Tibeto-Burman: P.R. China) exhibits two cross-linguistically rare attitude particles which ascribe wishes and fears to an impersonal socialised agent serving as a speaker-hedge. Linguistic properties of these particles not covered by Potts's (2007a,b) features of expressive content are elaborated upon. It is proposed to analyse the Nuosu attitude operators as *illocutionary force indicating devices* (IFIDs, see Searle and Vanderveken, 1985) and the utterances which host them as speech acts of the expressive type. Success conditions for these speech acts are developed in a fuzzy logic system providing an accurate account of both successful and unsuccessful attitude ascriptions. The fuzzy logic system builds on the distinction between lower-level and higher-level formulae (following Thijsse (1996) and Schwartz (2003)). For lower-level formulae it incorporates a fuzzy epistemic and a fuzzy buletic mode of evaluation. Higher-level formulae are evaluated in a bivalent evaluation mode {*successful, unsuccessful*}.

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## 1. Introduction

Several Yi languages (Tibeto-Burman: P.R. China)<sup>1</sup> exhibit typologically exceptional sentence operators, which ascribe attitudes to an impersonal socialised agent. These operators are realised as two fully grammatical sentence-end particles, described in this paper as WISH and FEAR particles.<sup>2</sup> Cross-linguistically, attitudinal meanings rarely find exclusive expression in the grammatical system of a language. It is as if in a European language we had two mood conjugations, one is uniquely reserved for expressing wishes, the other for articulating fears.<sup>3</sup> Still, the particularity of the Yi attitude particles lies in the fact that they ascribe attitudes to an impersonal socialised agent which the speaker takes as a hedge for him/herself. The term *socialised attitudes* seems best to capture this picture. They starkly contrast with the English expressive predicates *wish, want, desire, be afraid of, fear*. These English verbs ascribe attitudes to their subject, which in general is different from the

*Abbreviations:* 1P PL, first person plural; 1P SG, first person singular; 1P SG POSS, first person singular possessive; 2P PL, second person plural; 3P SG, third person singular; 3P SG POSS, third person singular possessive; CL, classifier; COP, copular; DEM, demonstrative; DEM:PROX, demonstrative: proximal to speaker; DP, dynamic perfect; FEAR, attitude particle of fear; LOC, locative particle; NEG, negation; NOM, nominalisation; NUM, numeral; NUM:9, numeral with its value; PASS, passive; STP, stative perfect; WISH, attitude particle of wish.

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<sup>1</sup> The Yi languages belong to the Tibeto-Burman language family and represent a cluster of perhaps 120 isolating languages spoken in four provinces of south-west China: Sichuan, Yunnan, Guizhou and Guangxi.

<sup>2</sup> The Yi languages are verb-final languages – basically SOV. They are isolating languages in which each TAM (tense, aspect and modality) concept is realised as bound morpheme attached directly to the verb. The TAM categories of the Yi group comprise progressive aspect, perfect, experiential aspect and, among others, WISH and FEAR attitudes. None of these TAM notions needs to be specified, that is to say, a verb may be left unmarked for TAM. Conversely, it is possible to find up to three TAM categories stacked after each other, if they are semantically compatible.

<sup>3</sup> Yet wishes have been grammaticalised as optative mood conjugations in a few languages worldwide. Ancient Greek, for example, has an optative system for all persons of the paradigm.