A Grammar of Maonan

Tian Qiao Lu
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Author’s Preface

The drafting of this volume began in 2004, aiming to undertake a full description of the Maonan language. It accounts for the syntax and lexicalization patterns of Maonan from a typological and ethno-linguistic perspective. It also documents the Maonan language as a communicative system that mirrors social and cultural interaction among members of the Maonan community, as well as between speakers of Maonan and adjacent social groups. Particular attention is paid to the interplay between syntax and semantics, as well as the influence from nearby languages on the phonological, syntactic and semantic structure of the Maonan language.

Studies on Maonan language and culture are relatively limited compared with many other members of the Kam-Tai group.

Chinese linguists began preliminary study on Maonan in the 1950s and 1960s. Professor Zheng Guoqiao was probably the first to document the Maonan language. In the 1980s, Professors Liang Min and Zhang Junru supplied new data from their fieldwork in Luocheng County. The result was a brief description of the language, *Maonan Yu Jianzhi* (A Sketch on the Maonan Language), published in 1983. This general sketch offers a brief description of the phonological system along with some aspects of the grammar. About a thousand vocabulary items were recorded. In *Dong Tai Yu Gailun* (An Introduction to the Kam-Tai Languages) (1990), Professor Ni Dabai presents a brief introduction to Maonan. Mr. Tan Yuanyang, now a law-officer in Huanjiang County who is a native of Maonan, published an article on Maonan synonyms in the journal *Minzu Yuwen* (Minority Languages of China) in 1986. Professor Li Jinfang has compiled a Maonan wordlist for the Intercontinental Dictionary Series published by the Max Planck Institute. He also conducted studies on *Chadong*, a Kam-Sui language which appears to be related to Maonan. Dr. Zhang Jingni came out with an analysis of Maonan verbs in 2006.

Work on Maonan culture has been carried out mainly by Maonan intellectuals. Mr. Meng Guorong published a book in 1999 on Maonan redemption rituals. He is also the co-author of two books on Maonan culture (Meng, Tan et al. 1988) and Maonan customs (Lu and Meng 1994). Mr. Qin Zikun, deputy curator of the Huanjiang House of Culture, is involved in a project collecting first-hand materials on Maonan culture.
Work on Maonan remains scarce in western literature. In his *Killing a Buffalo for the Ancestors*, Professor David Holm has provided a detailed account of the cultural and religious rituals of the Zhuang and Bouyei peoples, with reference to Maonan (Holm 2003).

The present study can be regarded as an attempt to examine in considerable detail the word formation, typological properties, grammaticalization and lexicalization processes of the Maonan language.

Fieldwork was done prior to the author’s PhD program in the University of Melbourne on the suggestion of Dr. Luo Yongxian, the primary supervisor, and was undertaken in two stages. Preliminary fieldwork was carried out in May and June 2004, in which some initial investigation was conducted in Bochuan village in Xianan Township, during which the author became familiar with daily expressions. A longer trip was carried out during April-November 2005 in Xianan village and Si’en Township. By this time the author’s competence in Maonan had improved considerably. The author began to converse in Maonan with the consultants. After returning to the university, the author stayed in touch with the consultants by communicating with them via telephone calls and emails to verify data used in the book. The author’s command of Maonan won high praises from some of the native speakers. One of them said, ‘your pronunciation is even better than mine as I have been working in the Han area for the last two decades and have not spoken Maonan ever since’. This was indeed a rewarding experience. During fieldwork, apart from spoken discourse involving daily conversation, 50 folk stories were recorded, 30 of which have been transcribed. Many of the examples used in the book are taken from these stories, other from personal communication with native speakers.

This study offers a functional-typological description of the Maonan language. Chapter one presents an introduction to the language, culture, social structure and demographic situation of the Maonan people. Chapter Two offers an account of the sound system, followed by an investigation of word formation and morphological processes in Chapter Three. Chapter Four provides a functional-typological sketch of Maonan syntax. Discussion includes word order, interrogatives, negation, imperative, comparative constructions, purposive and resultative constructions, relative clause and existential sentence. Grammatical relations are the subject of Chapter Five. Topics include semantic roles, nominative/accusative marking of classifier doublets, the relation between subject
and object, subject and topic, passivity, transitivity, serial verbs, causative
construction, disposal construction and information structure. Chapter Six
examines tense and aspect, along with related grammatical operators such as
clause final particles. Chapter Seven analyzes the grammaticalization and
lexicalization patterns. Chapter Eight sums up the findings of the book and
proposes directions for future research.

This analysis is not without defects, particularly with respect to questions of
acoustic analysis of the voiced and pre-glottalized initials. Unfortunately the
author was not able to make any decent recording for laboratory analysis due to
limited time and instruments during the fieldwork.

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May 11, 2008
Acknowledgements

The present study of the Maonan language would not have been possible without the scholarship grants by the University of Melbourne.

First and foremost, I would like to express my gratitude to Professor Yongxian Luo, the primary supervisor for my PhD program, who has provided guidance and support throughout the writing of the volume. I have benefited enormously from his suggestions even before I started my PhD studies here at the university. He provided detailed advice at various stages of the project, from initial fieldwork to the final production of the manuscript. He spent numerous hours reading and commenting on earlier drafts of the chapters. He has offered generous help in bringing the manuscript into the current form.

I would also like to record my thanks to Professor David Holm, my associate supervisor, who gave me useful advice on the anthropological part and the overall structure of the book. He has provided strong support during my PhD research here at the institute.

I would also like to thank Professor Anthony Diller from the Australian National University, who gave me many constructive suggestions when I met problems that I found difficult to hurdle.

I am extremely grateful to Professor Jerold Edmondson from the University of Texas at Arlington, for his valuable comments on various points in the book. He has read through the pages carefully and pointed out a number of errors and shortcomings.

Thanks go to the administrative staff of the Asia Institute, University of Melbourne, for their generous support.

My thanks also go to the staff in the East Asian Collections of the Ballieu Library of the University of Melbourne who assisted me with reference materials.

For their generous help, I would like to thank my Maonan friends during my fieldwork. Most of the data presented in this book were provided by Mr. Tan Xingai from Zhongnan Village, my main consultant. My deepest gratitude goes to Mr. Qin Shuitang, director of Huanjiang Highway Bureau, for his generosity in providing a free apartment where we lived and worked for more than seven months. Many of the following people were involved throughout the fieldwork, to whom I am indebted in very many ways. They include: Huang Huinuo, Lu

Last but not least, I would like to thank my wife Lisa for her unfailing support in all the chores, including preparing materials for manuscript production and helpful suggestions.
Abbreviations and symbols

Kinship abbreviations:

F  Father
M  Mother
B  Brother
Z  Sister
G  Sibling
C  Child, children
S  Son
D  Daughter
H  Husband
W  Wife
E  Spouse
e  Elder
y  Younger
FFF  Father’s father’s father
FFM  Father’s father’s mother
FMF  Father’s mother’s father
FMM  Father’s mother’s mother
FF  Father’s father
FM  Father’s mother
FFG  Father’s father’s sibling
FFGE  Father’s father’s sibling’s spouse
FMG  Father’s mother’s sibling
FMGE  Father’s mother’s sibling’s spouse
MF    Mother’s father
MM    Mother’s mother
MFG   Mother’s father’s sibling
MFGE  Mother’s father’s sibling’s spouse
MMG   Mother’s mother’s sibling
MMGE  Mother’s mother’s sibling’s spouse
F     Father
M     Mother
FG    Father’s sibling
FGE   Father’s sibling’s spouse
MG    Mother’s sibling
MGE   Mother’s sibling’s spouse
HF    Husband’s father
HM    Husband’s mother
WF    Wife’s father
WM    Wife’s mother
EgoG  Ego’s sibling
EgoGE Ego’s sibling’s spouse
FBC   Father’s brother’s child
FBCE  Father’s brother’s child’s spouse
MBC   Mother’s brother’s child
MBCE  Mother’s brother’s child’s spouse
FZC   Father’s sister’s child
FZCE  Father’s sister’s child’s spouse
MZC  Mother’s sister’s child
MZCE  Mother’s sister’s child’s spouse
H  Husband
HG  Husband’s sibling
HGE  Husband’s sibling’s spouse
W  Wife
WG  Wife’s sibling
WGE  Wife’s sibling’s spouse
EgoC  Ego’s child
EgoCE  Ego’s child’s spouse
eBC  Elder brother’s child
eBCE  Elder brother’s child’s spouse
yBC  Younger brother’s child
yBCE  Younger brother’s child’s spouse
ZC  Sister’s child
ZCE  Sister’s child’s spouse
SC  Son’s child
SCE  Son’s child’s spouse
DC  Daughter’s child
DCE  Daughter’s child’s spouse
SSC  Son’s son’s child
SSCE  Son’s son’s child’s spouse
SDC  Son’s daughter’s child
SDCE  Son’s daughter’s child’s spouse
Symbols:

○ Elder sister
△ Elder brother
〇 Younger sister or sister
△ Younger brother or brother
■ Ego
□ Sibling relation
↓ Lineal relation
= Marriage
≠ Unmarriageable
*– Ungrammatical or proto-form
?– Uncommon

Other abbreviations:

1PL:EXCL First person plural exclusive
1PL:INCL First person plural inclusive
1SG First person singular
1SG:POS Possessive pronoun of first person singular
2PL Second person plural
2SG Second person singular
2SG:POS Possessive pronoun of second person singular
3PL Third person plural
3SG Third person singular
ASP:DUR Durative aspect
ASP:EXP Experiential aspect
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
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<tr>
<td>ASP:INCEP</td>
<td>Inceptive aspect</td>
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<td>Manner marker</td>
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<td>ASP:PFC</td>
<td>Perfective aspect</td>
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<td>ASP:SUCC</td>
<td>Successive aspect</td>
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<td>ASP:TENT</td>
<td>Tentative aspect</td>
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<td>Classifier</td>
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<td>Indirect object</td>
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<td>Manner marker</td>
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<td>NP_A</td>
<td>Noun phrase (agentive)</td>
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<td>NP_P</td>
<td>Noun phrase (patient)</td>
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<td>Passive marker</td>
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<td>PCL:ADEQ</td>
<td>Particle expressing adequateness</td>
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<td>PCL:AFFIR</td>
<td>Particle expressing affirmation</td>
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<tr>
<td>PCL:ALLEV</td>
<td>Particle indicating alleviative interrogative</td>
</tr>
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<td>PCL:ATTEN</td>
<td>Particle of attention arouser</td>
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<tr>
<td>PCL:CONFIR</td>
<td>Particle of confirmation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PCL:CONSUL</td>
<td>Particle of consultative</td>
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### Abbreviations and Symbols

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<th>PCL:CRS</th>
<th>Particle of currently relevant state</th>
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<td>PCL:CRS:Q</td>
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<td>PCL:GEN</td>
<td>Particle of genitive</td>
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<td>PCL:HES:POSTU</td>
<td>Particle of hesitant postulation</td>
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<td>PCL:JUX</td>
<td>Particle of juxtaposition</td>
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<td>PCL:LIMIT</td>
<td>Particle of limitation</td>
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<td>PCL:LIMIT:AFFIR</td>
<td>Particle of limitation and affirmation</td>
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<td>Particle of question of perfectiveness</td>
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<td>PCL:Q</td>
<td>Particle of question</td>
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<td>Particle of reminder of change of currently relevant state</td>
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<td>PCL:REMIN:CRS:AFFIR</td>
<td>Particle of reminder of currently relevant state in an affirmation manner</td>
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<td>PCL:REMIN:CRS:CONSUL</td>
<td>Particle of reminder of change of currently relevant state in a consultative manner</td>
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<td>Particle of reminder of change of currently relevant state with hesitant postulation</td>
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<td>Subject functioning as agent</td>
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<td>SO</td>
<td>Subject functioning as object</td>
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<td>SP</td>
<td>Subject functioning as patient</td>
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<td>ØS</td>
<td>Empty subject</td>
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<td>SUFF</td>
<td>Suffixal syllable</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vt</td>
<td>Transitive verb</td>
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</table>
Illustrations

1. Maonan distributed counties

[Map showing Maonan distributed counties in Sichuan Province, Guizhou Province, and Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region.]
2. Huanjiang Maonan Autonomous County
1. Maonan masks used in rituals.


4. A Maonan tomb site.

5. A Maonan house.

6. A wooden baby trolley.
7. The Tam Kindred Genealogy

8. Family worship plate

9. Xianan Village

10. Yausang: cradle of Tam lineage

11. A Maonan primary school.

13. Left side of truss.

14. Right side of truss.

15. Right side of truss.

16. Top of truss.

Truss structure of a Maonan roof (viewed from inside)

Sketch of Maonan truss structure
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