

WILDLIFE NAMING SYSTEM IN SOUTHERN PUMI

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Abstract:

With a population of about 19,000 (1999), the Southern Pumi ethnic group, linguistically classified as Tibeto-Burman, is mainly distributed in Lanping, Lijiang, Weixi and Yongsheng counties of Yunnan Province, as well as in the Yi Autonomous County of Ninglang. This region lies in the confluence of Tibetan, Yi, Naxi, Lisu and Chinese languages and coincides with a world-known biodiversity rich environment. In such context, the Pumi has formed an extensive wildlife naming system establishing the relationship between experience, embodied cognition and language. Using Leon James' (1975) principles of ethnosemantics, Mark John, George Lakoff and Charles Fillmore's (2006) central guiding principles of cognitive linguistics and Brent Berlin's (1992) principles of categorization of plants and animals in traditional societies, the present research focuses on the wildlife naming system of the Pumi. Data on plant and wildlife names collected from the Pumi communities in the adjacent areas of national nature reserves are selectively analysed and processed. The study attempts to examine the taxonomy, functions and linguistic implications of the plant and wildlife terms in the Pumi language. It is found that there exists in the Pumi language, a sophisticated and practical wildlife naming system. The research, in one way or another, contributes to the reconstruction of proto-Tibeto-Burman language from the ethno-semantic and cognitive linguistic perspectives.

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