

1. Record Nr.	UNINA990004638330403321
Titolo	Phrase structure and the lexicon / edited by Johan Rooryck and Laurie Zaring
Pubbl/distr/stampa	Dordrecht ; Boston ; London : Kluwer Academic, 1996
ISBN	0-7923-3745-X
Descrizione fisica	298 p. : ill. ; 25 cm
Collana	Studies in natural language and linguistic theory ; 33
Disciplina	415
Locazione	FLFBC
Collocazione	415 ROO 1
Lingua di pubblicazione	Inglese
Formato	Materiale a stampa
Livello bibliografico	Monografia
2. Record Nr.	UNINA9910781796903321
Autore	Pelkey Jamin R. <1974->
Titolo	Dialectology as dialectic [[electronic resource]] : interpreting Phula variation / / by Jamin R. Pelkey
Pubbl/distr/stampa	Berlin ; ; New York, : De Gruyter Mouton, c2011
ISBN	1-283-16601-1 9786613166012 3-11-024585-X
Descrizione fisica	1 online resource (532 p.)
Collana	Trends in linguistics. Studies and monographs, , 1861-4302 ; ; 229
Disciplina	495
Soggetti	Yi language - Dialectology Yi language - Phonology Yi (Chinese people) - Languages Yi (Chinese people) - Ethnic identity Anthropological linguistics - China - Yunnan Sheng Anthropological linguistics - Vietnam
Lingua di pubblicazione	Inglese
Formato	Materiale a stampa

Livello bibliografico**Note generali****Nota di bibliografia****Nota di contenuto****Monografia**

Revision of author's (doctoral) thesis--LaTrobe University, Australia, 2008.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

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Sommario/riassunto

Dialectology proper has traditionally focused on the geographic distribution of language variation as an end in itself and has remained relatively segregated from other branches of linguistic and extra-linguistic inquiry. Cross-fertilizing winds have been blowing through the field for more than a decade, but much work remains for adequate synthesis. This book seeks to further the interdisciplinary integration of the field by highlighting, and harnessing, the many dialectic tensions inherent in language variation research and dialect definition. Undertaking a broadscale experiment in applied dialectics, the book demonstrates multiple grounds for insisting on a more robust, integrational approach to dialectology while simultaneously demonstrating grounds for defining the Phula languages of China and Vietnam. The Phula languages belong to the Burmic sub-branch of the Tibeto-Burman family and are primarily spoken in southeastern Yunnan Province, China. With origins as early as the ninth century, these language varieties have been left undefined, and largely unresearched, for hundreds of years. Based on extensive original fieldwork, the book identifies 24 synchronic Phula languages descended from three distinct macro-clades diachronically. This is accomplished by blending typological-descriptive, historical-comparative and socio-cognitive perspectives. Diagnostics include both qualitative and quantitative measurements, and insights from history, geography, ethnology, language contact, sociolinguistics and more are called on for data interpretation. This dialogic approach incorporates complexity by asserting that dialectology itself best flourishes as an interdependent dialectic - a dynamic synthesis of competing perspectives.