The present thesis by Mr. Štěpán Pavlík gives a detailed description of one of the endangered languages spoken by ca 5000 speakers in Western Sichuan. As pointed out by the author, it is rather a description of an idiolect – the tongue of his language consultant, Mr. Wang Wenfa with whom Mr. Pavlík collaborated during his fieldwork among the Namuzi people. The fieldwork itself deserves our close attention, because Mr. Pavlík managed not only to collect valuable linguistic data, but also facts about customs and everyday life of the Namuzi people, their shamanistic rituals and folk tales. These are beyond the task of this thesis but they will be hopefully published soon as well.

Mr. Pavlík wrote his M.A. thesis on this topic already using mainly those few secondary sources which exist on Namuzi language. In his Ph.D. thesis he enriched this material with very interesting and original primary data on which his description is based now.

The scope of the thesis is really admirable. It consists of a methodological Introduction followed by a chapter on Phonology. The next four chapters are devoted to the description of parts of speech, among which Nominals and Verbals are treated in great detail. The last of the main chapters describes various types of Namuzi sentences. In each of the main parts of the thesis, Mr. Pavlík has his own and original insights visualized in rich and clear graphical schemes.

The Namuzi phonology appears to be a very complex system of initials, finals and tones, for the sake of illustrativeness the author introduces his own system of transcription of the Namuzi language, which I find quite unusual in this type of descriptive work. One would wish that the transcription system could prove its usefulness also outside of this one particular thesis.

In the definition of the word classes (parts of speech), Mr. Pavlík basically adopts the sinological approach of functional classes (functional characteristics) which was
motivated by the fact, that one lexeme can be used in various syntactic functions, despite of the existence of richer morphological inventory than is available in Chinese. This should enable a cross-linguistic comparison with other members of the ST language family, and also to ensure the compatibility with results of leading Chinese specialists in Namuzi studies. As it is shown in the thesis, the previous researchers have often omitted or neglected many of the described linguistic phenomena (e.g. within the description of verbal categories which are one of the most complicated parts of the thesis). Mr. Pavlík is thus filling up the blank spots left in the previous description.

In the Appendix one can find three of the folk stories provided with transcription a word-to-word and an idiomatic translation which gives us insight into the material excerpted and into the Namuzi folklore.

It is hard to question the overall importance of this work: being a primarily synchronic linguistic description of the given language, it has deep implications in fields like comparative linguistics, ethnology, anthropology, religionistics etc. Of course, there is also a question of the possibility of the revitalization of the language – it would be interesting to listen to the author’s opinion.

The thesis as it is presented shows the author’s ability of conducting both field and theoretical research; the thesis introduces the Namuzi language in much more detail than could have been achieved by previous researchers. It has a clear and logical structure which helps the reader not to get lost in the details of description of a completely unknown language. The terminological apparatus shows also a good knowledge of general linguistics due to the complexity of some of the Namuzi categories. The use of the transcription along with the IPA proves itself to be a practical tool for the description of Namuzi.

As concluding verdict I recommend the thesis for defense with a tentative mark “passed”. After having been proof-read by a native speaker of English it should be also recommended for publication.

PhDr. David Sehnal, Ph.D.

In Prague 9. 06. 2017