Khatso (*kʰaⁿʦo*; aka Katso, Kazhuo 卡卓, Gazhuo 嘎卓 and Yunnan Mongolian) is an endangered language spoken in a single farming village in central Yunnan, the southwestern-most province in China. Khatso is classified as a Ngwi (or Yi) language, a branch of the Burmic group within the Tibeto-Burman phylum, although its exact position within the family is unclear.

One feature unique to the Ngwi branch is the existence of family group classifiers, which describe collective groups of family members, such as ‘father & son’ or ‘grandmother & granddaughter’ (Bradley 2001). The form and function of the classifiers vary somewhat among the Ngwi languages that have them, including the degree of grammaticalization and how mixed-gender groups are described. This paper presents new data from Khatso about these typologically unusual classifiers, comparing and contrasting them with those in other Ngwi languages. The results also point to a potential historical connection between Khatso and Lisu, a Central Ngwi language spoken in northwestern Yunnan, providing another clue to the place of Khatso in the larger Ngwi branch.

### 7.1 Overview of Khatso

Khatso is spoken only in the farming village of Xingmeng 兴蒙, which lies west of the county seat Tonghai 通海, approximately 100 kilometers south of Kunming 昆明, the capital of Yunnan Province. The village has a population of around 5,600 (通海县兴蒙乡2010年统计年鉴), and Khatso remains the language of daily life, though it is endangered.

The Khatso are believed to be descended from the soldiers Kublai Khan brought to Yunnan in the 13th century to conquer China. In order to
control the region, his soldiers took local wives and settled permanently in strategic military and administrative sites. One such place, Qutuoguan 曲陀关, sits in a mountain pass above the Tonghai valley. When the Yuan Dynasty fell in 1368, the Mongol forces in Yunnan continued to resist the new Ming Dynasty army until 1381. At that point, the surviving Mongols fled. A group from Qutuoguan, said to be the relatives of the last commander and his troops, escaped into the valley below and hid in the marshy western edge of Qilu Lake 杞麓湖, which was much larger then than it is today. They are the ancestors of the Khatso, and the marshland, drained long ago, is the site of present-day Xingmeng (Huang 2009: 8).

A recent language survey states that more than 99% of the residents in Xingmeng are proficient in the language, and it remains the language of everyday life in the village (Dai 2008: 3). Nonetheless, Khatso is endangered. All residents are bilingual in Chinese, and even in the village certain domains require its use, such as some government services, medical clinics and local trade. Furthermore, as Dai (2008: 112) points out, in the 1980s teachers in the local school began urging parents to teach their children Chinese before they started school. Today, many parents now purposely teach children Chinese as their first language. Khatso is then picked up by children while listening to the everyday conversation of adults. As a result, the Khatso of the younger generations is increasingly limited since its use is mainly restricted to a few domains. For these reasons, both the Ethnologue (Lewis et al. 2013) and UNESCO (Moseley 2010) classify Khatso as endangered.

Despite its history, there are no obvious elements of Mongolic in modern Khatso. Instead, there is a strong consensus among linguists that Khatso belongs to the Ngwi branch (e.g. Bradley 1997, Bradley 2016, Dai et al. 1987, He 1989, Matisoff 2003: 697, Mu 2002: 26). However, which variety, or varieties, of Ngwi was its parent is unknown. Consequently, its exact place within the family is an open question.

7.2 Family group classifiers

Family group classifiers are collective numeral classifiers that point to two or more individuals within a family, often of different generations, such as ‘father & son’ or ‘mother & daughter’. These classifiers have been found in languages in all three sub-branches of Ngwi. Although previously identified in a few individual languages (e.g. Lewis & Bai 1996 and Björverud 1998: 69), Bradley (2001) is the first and only typological overview of these classifiers, establishing them as a unique feature of the Ngwi branch as a whole.

Bradley looks at seven languages across the three branches of Ngwi: Akha and Hani in the southern sub-branch, Nasu and Nuosu in the