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Meigu County Yi Tone

Andy Eatough

Meigu County,\(^1\) in the southern part of China’s Sichuan Province, is primarily inhabited by people who are known in Chinese as Yi [ji\(^{35}\)] or Yizu [ji\(^{35}tsu^{35}\)], and in their own language as Nosu [n\(\dot{q}\)^{33}su^{33}]. The dialects of the Yi are Tibeto-Burman, and belong to the Loloish subgroup of Lolo-Burmese. Those Loloish dialects which are spoken by people officially considered to be Yi are usually divided into 6 major dialect groupings. The northernmost of these 6 groupings is called Northern Yi or Liangshan Yi. The speech variety of Meigu County is classified as part of the z\(\dot{i}\)^{31}n\(\dot{q}\)^{31} dialect of Liangshan Yi.

The data was collected by the author in 1995 and 1996, primarily from a bilingual speaker in her 20s who grew up near the town of Bapu, the seat of government for Meigu County. She speaks Yi with some of her friends and with family members, some of whom are monolingual in Yi. A male speaker in his 20s from Bapu was also consulted.

The syllable structure is (C)V. The consonant and vowel inventories are given in Figure 1 and Figure 2 respectively.

There are three contrastive tones. One of these has three allophones, which are conditioned by the preceding tone. Tonal allophony is illustrated in the first data set.

There is also some tonal allomorphy. The second data set illustrates a rule which applies to nominal compounds and affects the tone of the first noun root. The third data set illustrates another rule which applies in number + classifier compounds and affects the tone of the classifier.\(^2\)

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\(^1\) Meigu County is in Liangshan Prefecture, and is one of the most inaccessible and traditional of the counties in Liangshan. More than 96% of the county’s population is Yi, according to official statistics. The County did not exist before liberation, since during the Republic of China period the only ethnic Chinese in the area were slaves of the Yi. Naturally, use of the Yi language is very vigorous among all ages in the Yi villages of the county, especially outside of the county seat, the town of Bapu.

\(^2\) Cross-dialectic comparison suggests that this rule may have a wider application than just number plus classifier compounds. Most nominal compounds which, based on cross-dialectic comparison, would be expected to have the tones 31 + 45, have 31 + 31, e.g. n\(\dot{q}\)^{31}s\(\dot{j}\)^{31} eye, rather than the expected n\(\dot{q}\)^{31}s\(\dot{j}\)^{45}.
### Meigu County Yi Tone
(Sichuan, China)

#### Figure 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>labial</th>
<th>alveolar</th>
<th>palatalized post-alveolar</th>
<th>flat post-alveolar</th>
<th>velar</th>
<th>glottal</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>vl. stops</td>
<td>p</td>
<td>t</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>k</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vl. asp. stops</td>
<td>pʰ</td>
<td>tʰ</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>kʰ</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>d</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>q</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>nd</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ηq</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>tɕ</td>
<td>tʂ</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vl. asp. affricates</td>
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<td>tɕʰ</td>
<td>tʂʰ</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>vd. affricates</td>
<td>dz</td>
<td>dʑ</td>
<td>dʐ</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>ndz</td>
<td>ndʑ</td>
<td>ndʐ</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vl. fricatives</td>
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<td>s</td>
<td>c</td>
<td>s</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>h</td>
</tr>
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<td>z</td>
<td>z</td>
<td>z</td>
<td>γ</td>
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<td>n</td>
<td>n</td>
<td></td>
<td>η</td>
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<td>n</td>
<td>n</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>vd. lateral</td>
<td>l</td>
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<tr>
<td>vl. lateral</td>
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</table>

#### Figure 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>advanced tongue root</th>
<th>pharyngealized</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>unrounded open-mid central vowels</td>
<td>u</td>
<td>ʁ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unrounded mid front vowels</td>
<td>e</td>
<td>ɛ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unrounded close near-front vowels</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mid back vowels with compression rounding</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>close near-back vowels with compression rounding</td>
<td>u</td>
<td>u</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Set 1

1. si\textsuperscript{33} ts\textsuperscript{h\textsuperscript{31}bo\textsuperscript{11} one tree
2. si\textsuperscript{33} ne\textsuperscript{31}bo\textsuperscript{11} two trees
3. si\textsuperscript{33} so\textsuperscript{33}bo\textsuperscript{33} three trees
4. si\textsuperscript{33} li\textsuperscript{33}bo\textsuperscript{33} four trees
5. si\textsuperscript{33} ng\textsuperscript{33}bo\textsuperscript{33} five trees
6. si\textsuperscript{33} fu\textsuperscript{45}bo\textsuperscript{44} six trees
7. si\textsuperscript{33} si\textsuperscript{31}bo\textsuperscript{11} seven trees
8. si\textsuperscript{33} he\textsuperscript{45}bo\textsuperscript{44} eight trees
9. si\textsuperscript{33} bo\textsuperscript{33} a tree
10. he\textsuperscript{33} me\textsuperscript{33} a mouse
11. he\textsuperscript{33} ts\textsuperscript{h\textsuperscript{31}me\textsuperscript{11} one mouse
12. he\textsuperscript{33} ne\textsuperscript{31}me\textsuperscript{11} two mice
13. he\textsuperscript{33} se\textsuperscript{35}me\textsuperscript{33} three mice
14. he\textsuperscript{33} li\textsuperscript{33}me\textsuperscript{33} four mice
15. he\textsuperscript{33} ng\textsuperscript{33}me\textsuperscript{33} five mice
16. he\textsuperscript{33} fu\textsuperscript{45}me\textsuperscript{44} six mice
17. he\textsuperscript{33} si\textsuperscript{31}me\textsuperscript{11} seven mice
18. ne\textsuperscript{33} ge\textsuperscript{31}te\textsuperscript{31}le\textsuperscript{33} Where are you coming from?
19. ge\textsuperscript{33} je\textsuperscript{33} ko\textsuperscript{33} te\textsuperscript{33}le\textsuperscript{33} I'm coming from home.
20. ge\textsuperscript{33} dz\textsuperscript{33} dz\textsuperscript{33} te\textsuperscript{33}le\textsuperscript{33} I'm coming from eating.
21. ts\textsuperscript{h\textsuperscript{31}le\textsuperscript{11} o\textsuperscript{33} He's not coming anymore.
22. ne\textsuperscript{33} ge\textsuperscript{31} ko\textsuperscript{31}bo\textsuperscript{33} Where are you going?
23. ge\textsuperscript{33} je\textsuperscript{33} ko\textsuperscript{33}bo\textsuperscript{33} I'm going home.
24. ge\textsuperscript{33} It is.
25. ge\textsuperscript{31} It isn't
Set 2

1. ŋge³³ buckwheat  ŋge³³tcʰi¹¹ sweet buckwheat
2. ŋge³³ buckwheat  ŋge³³ŋɡ¹¹ bitter buckwheat
3. bu³³ bug  bu³³de¹¹ earthworm
4. mu³³ horse  mu³³pg³¹ male horse
5. Ḵe³³ mouth  Ḵe³³pʰe³¹¹ mouth
6. jo³³ sheep  jo³³mo³¹ ewe
7. jo³³ sheep  jo³³ze¹¹ lamb
8. le³³ musk deer  le³³pu¹¹ male musk deer
9. le³³ musk deer  le³³mo³¹ female musk deer
10. ŋge³³ buckwheat  ŋge³³fu³³ buckwheat bread
11. və³³ chicken  və³³tcʰe³¹¹ chicken egg
12. mu³³ earth  mu³³ɛ³³ sand

Set 3

1. tsʰi³¹tu³¹ one (drop)
2. ne³¹tu³¹ two (drops)
3. so³³tu³¹ three (drops)
4. li³³tu³¹ four (drops)
5. ŋe³³tu³¹ five (drops)
6. fu³³tu³¹ six (drops)
7. si³³tu³¹ seven (drops)
8. he³³tu³¹ eight (drops)
9. gu³³tu³¹ nine (drops)
10. ɛ³¹və³¹ not good
11. mu³³tu³¹ fire