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Meigu County Yi Tone

Andy Eatough

Meigu County,\textsuperscript{1} in the southern part of China's Sichuan Province, is primarily inhabited by people who are known in Chinese as Yi [ji\textsuperscript{35}] or Yizu [ji\textsuperscript{35}tsu\textsuperscript{35}], and in their own language as Nosu [nQ\textsuperscript{33}su\textsuperscript{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 zi\textsuperscript{3}nQ\textsuperscript{33} 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.\textsuperscript{2}

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\textit{Turlock, CA 95380}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item 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.

\item 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. nQ\textsuperscript{33}sji\textsuperscript{31} eye, rather than the expected nQ\textsuperscript{33}sji\textsuperscript{45}.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
## Meigu County Yi Tone

**(Sichuan, China)**

### Figure 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>labial</th>
<th>alveolar</th>
<th>palatalized</th>
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<th>glottal</th>
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<td>t</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>k</td>
<td></td>
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<td>tʰ</td>
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### Figure 2

<table>
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<tr>
<td>unrounded mid front vowels</td>
<td>e</td>
<td>e</td>
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<tr>
<td>unrounded close near-front vowels</td>
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<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\(^{33}\) ts\(^{h31}\) bo\(^{11}\) one tree
2. si\(^{33}\) ne\(^{31}\) bo\(^{11}\) two trees
3. si\(^{33}\) so\(^{33}\) bo\(^{33}\) three trees
4. si\(^{33}\) li\(^{33}\) bo\(^{33}\) four trees
5. si\(^{33}\) nga\(^{33}\) bo\(^{33}\) five trees
6. si\(^{33}\) fy\(^{45}\) bo\(^{44}\) six trees
7. si\(^{33}\) si\(^{33}\) bo\(^{33}\) seven trees
8. si\(^{33}\) he\(^{45}\) bo\(^{44}\) eight trees
9. si\(^{33}\) bo\(^{33}\) a tree
10. he\(^{33}\) me\(^{33}\) a mouse
11. he\(^{33}\) ts\(^{h31}\) me\(^{11}\) one mouse
12. he\(^{33}\) ne\(^{31}\) me\(^{11}\) two mice
13. he\(^{33}\) so\(^{33}\) me\(^{33}\) three mice
14. he\(^{33}\) li\(^{33}\) me\(^{33}\) four mice
15. he\(^{33}\) nga\(^{33}\) me\(^{33}\) five mice
16. he\(^{33}\) fy\(^{45}\) me\(^{44}\) six mice
17. he\(^{33}\) si\(^{31}\) me\(^{11}\) seven mice
18. ne\(^{33}\) ge\(^{33}\) te\(^{11}\) le\(^{33}\) Where are you coming from?
19. nga\(^{33}\) je\(^{33}\) ko\(^{33}\) te\(^{33}\) le\(^{33}\) I'm coming from home.
20. nga\(^{33}\) dzeg\(^{33}\) dze\(^{33}\) te\(^{33}\) le\(^{33}\) I'm coming from eating.
21. ts\(^{h3}\) ge\(^{11}\) le\(^{11}\) o\(^{33}\) He's not coming anymore.
22. ne\(^{33}\) ge\(^{33}\) ko\(^{11}\) bo\(^{33}\) Where are you going?
23. nga\(^{33}\) je\(^{33}\) ko\(^{33}\) bo\(^{33}\) I'm going home.
24. nga\(^{33}\) It is.
25. ge\(^{31}\) nga\(^{11}\) It isn't
Set 2

1. ŋge³³ buckwheat ŋge³³tu³³  sweet buckwheat
2. ŋge³³ buckwheat ŋge³³ŋê³³  bitter buckwheat
3. bu³³ bug bu³³de³³  earthworm
4. mu³³ horse mu³³pe³³  male horse
5. kʰê³³ mouth kʰê³³pê³³  mouth
6. jo³³ sheep jo³³mo³³  ewe
7. jo³³ sheep jo³³ze³³  lamb
8. le³³ musk deer le³³pu³³  male musk deer
9. le³³ musk deer le³³mo³³  female musk deer
10. ŋge³³ buckwheat ŋge³³fu³³  buckwheat bread
11. vô³³ chicken vô³³tu³³  chicken egg
12. mu³³ earth mu³³ê³³  sand

Set 3

1. tsʰi³³bu³³  one (drop)
2. je³³tu³³  two (drops)
3. so³³bu³³  three (drops)
4. li³³bu³³  four (drops)
5. ñô³³bu³³  five (drops)
6. fi³³bu³³  six (drops)
7. si³³tu³³  seven (drops)
8. he³³bu³³  eight (drops)
9. gu³³tu³³  nine (drops)
10. e³³tu³³  not good
11. mu³³tu³³  fire