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Meigu County Yi tone

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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 [nɔ̱^{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 ʑi̱^{33}nɔ̱^{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.[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. ȵɔ̱^{31}si̱^{31} *eye*, rather than the expected ȵɔ̱^{31}si̱^{45}.

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(Sichuan, China)

Figure 1

	labial	alveolar	palatalized post-alveolar	flat post-alveolar	velar	glottal
vl. stops	p	t			k	
vl. asp. stops	p^h	t^h			k^h	
vd. stops	b	d			g	
prenasalized stops	mb	nd			ŋg	
vl. affricates		ts	tɕ	tʂ		
vl. asp. affricates		ts^h	$tɕ^h$	$tʂ^h$		
vd. affricates		dz	dʑ	dʐ		
prenasal. affricates		ndz	ndʑ	ndʐ		
vl. fricatives	f	s	ɕ	ʂ	x	h
vd. fricatives	v	z	ʑ	ʐ	ɣ	
vd. nasals	m	n	ɲ		ŋ	
vl. nasals	m̥	n̥	ɲ̥			
vd. lateral		l				
vl. lateral		l̥				

Figure 2

	advanced tongue root	pharyngealized
unrounded open-mid central vowels	ɐ	ɐ̟
unrounded mid front vowels	e	e̟
unrounded close near-front vowels	i	i̟
mid back vowels with compression rounding	o	o̟
close near-back vowels with compression rounding	u	u̟

Set 1

1.	si̱^{33} ts^{h}i^{31}bo^{11}	*one tree*
2.	si̱^{33} ɲe^{31}bo^{11}	*two trees*
3.	si̱^{33} so^{33}bo^{33}	*three trees*
4.	si̱^{33} li^{33}bo^{33}	*four trees*
5.	si̱^{33} ŋɐ^{33}bo^{33}	*five trees*
6.	si̱^{33} fu̱^{45}bo^{44}	*six trees*
7.	si̱^{33} ʂi^{31}bo^{11}	*seven trees*
8.	si̱^{33} he̱^{45}bo^{44}	*eight trees*
9.	si̱^{33} bo^{33}	*a tree*
10.	he̱^{33} mɐ̱^{33}	*a mouse*
11.	he̱^{33} ts^{h}i^{31}mɐ̱^{11}	*one mouse*
12.	he̱^{33} ɲe^{31}mɐ̱^{11}	*two mice*
13.	he̱^{33} so̱^{33}mɐ̱^{33}	*three mice*
14.	he̱^{33} li^{33}mɐ̱^{33}	*four mice*
15.	he̱^{33} ŋɐ̱^{33}mɐ̱^{33}	*five mice*
16.	he̱^{33} fu̱^{45}mɐ̱^{44}	*six mice*
17.	he̱^{33} ʂi^{31}mɐ̱^{11}	*seven mice*
18.	ne^{33} ʂɐ̱^{33}ɐ̱^{31} tɐ̱^{11} lɐ̱^{33}	*Where are you coming from?*
19.	ŋɐ̱^{33} ʝe^{33} ko^{33} tɐ̱^{33} lɐ̱^{33}	*I'm coming from home.*
20.	ŋɐ̱^{33} dzɐ̱^{33} dzɐ^{33} tɐ̱^{33} lɐ̱^{33}	*I'm coming from eating.*
21.	ts^{h}i^{33} ɐ̱^{31}lɐ̱^{11} o̱^{33}	*He's not coming anymore.*
22.	ne^{33} ʂɐ̱^{33}ɐ̱^{31} ko^{11} bo^{33}	*Where are you going?*
23.	ŋɐ̱^{33} ʝe^{33} ko^{33} bo^{33}	*I'm going home.*
24.	ŋɐ^{33}	*It is.*
25.	ɐ̱^{31}ŋɐ^{11}	*It isn't*

Set 2

1.	ŋgɐ^{33}	*buckwheat*	ŋgɐ^{31}tɕ^{h}i^{11}	*sweet buckwheat*
2.	ŋgɐ^{33}	*buckwheat*	ŋgɐ̲^{31}nɔ̲^{11}	*bitter buckwheat*
3.	bu^{33}	*bug*	bu^{31}de^{11}	*earthworm*
4.	mu^{33}	*horse*	mu^{31}pɐ̲^{31}	*male horse*
5.	k^{h}ɐ^{33}	*mouth*	k^{h}ɐ̲^{31}p^{h}ɐ̲^{31}	*mouth*
6.	ʝo^{33}	*sheep*	ʝo^{31}mo^{31}	*ewe*
7.	ʝo^{33}	*sheep*	ʝo^{31}zɐ^{11}	*lamb*
8.	lɐ^{33}	*musk deer*	lɐ^{31}pu^{11}	*male musk deer*
9.	lɐ^{33}	*musk deer*	lɐ^{31}mo^{31}	*female musk deer'*
10.	ŋgɐ^{33}	*buckwheat*	ŋgɐ^{33}fu^{33}	*buckwheat bread*
11.	vɔ̲^{33}	*chicken*	vɔ̲^{33}tɕ^{h}e^{31}	*chicken egg*
12.	mu^{33}	*earth*	mu^{33}ʂi^{33}	*sand*

Set 3

1.	ts^{h}i^{31}t^{h}ɔ̲^{31}	*one (drop)*
2.	ɲe^{31}t^{h}ɔ̲^{31}	*two (drops)*
3.	sɔ̲^{33}t^{h}ɔ̲^{45}	*three (drops)*
4.	li^{33}t^{h}ɔ̲^{45}	*four (drops)*
5.	ŋɐ^{33}t^{h}ɔ̲^{45}	*five (drops)*
6.	fu̲^{45}t^{h}ɔ̲^{45}	*six (drops)*
7.	ʂi^{31}t^{h}ɔ̲^{31}	*seven (drops)*
8.	hɐ̲^{45}t^{h}ɔ̲^{45}	*eight (drops)*
9.	gu^{33}t^{h}o^{45}	*nine (drops)*
10.	ɐ̲^{31}vɐ̲^{45}	*not good*
11.	mu̲^{31}tu̲^{45}	*fire*