

Original Paper

Prosodic Morphology of Verb and Adjective Syllables in Yi

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Abstract

Prosodic morphology is an important research object of prosodic typology, and also one of the important elements of prosody and morphology. This paper briefly discusses the prosodic form of the Yi language in terms of the number of syllables in verbs and adjectives. Pure verbs in Yi language usually appear in the form of single syllables. When restricted in grammatical activities, they are always flexibly used by adding the number of syllables, the most obvious one being nominalization. There are two types of adjectives in the Yi language, namely property adjective and state adjective. They can be mainly differentiated in terms of the syllable numbers of a word: the property adjectives are often monosyllabic, while the state adjectives are polysyllabic. The category of level is also expressed by adjusting the number of syllables. The more syllables, the greater the category of level change.

1. Number of Syllables and Prosodic Form

In Sino-Tibetan language, the lexical system of many languages is based on the number of syllables, such as Chinese, Tibetan, Yi and so on. From the prosodic hierarchy theory proposed by McCarthy and Prince (1993), prosodic words were constructed following a “Binary Branching”. In syllabic languages, a foot is divided on the basis of syllables. Thus, Feng Shengli (1995) proposed the degenerate “standard foot”, “degenerate foot” and “super foot” in an analysis of the length and degenerate structure of Chinese syllables.

Jiang Di (2021) pointed out that “the number of syllables is first represented by the syllable length of a word and reflected in word form. Word form includes two elements: word length and word type. Word length is measured in syllables, and it can be distinguished from monosyllabic words, two-syllable words, three-syllable words and multi-syllable words. Word type refers to the lexical classification of simple words, derived words, overlapping words and compound words, which is related to both syllable length and word type category.” Therefore, it is very necessary to discuss prosody and morphology at the level of syllable number in typology.

“According to the number of syllables, Yi morphemes can be divided into monosyllabic morphemes and

polysyllabic segmented morphemes, among which polysyllabic segmented morphemes can be divided into two syllabic and polysyllabic morphemes.” (2010, p. 156) Yi monosyllabic morphemes can be used alone, and can also be used with other morphemes through word formation and in configurations of new words. These morphemes have very strong word-building functionality, such as the root “ꞑ nɔ³³” (Yi) combined with another root “ꞑho²¹” (language) constitute “ꞑ ꞑnɔ³³ho²¹” (Yi language). In multi-syllable morphemes, the mainly method of composition is through the use of the compound words. Additional methods include the use of prefixes, infixes and suffixes, such as ꞑ ꞑa³³mo³³ (mom) with “ꞑ ꞑa³³” as the prefix, ꞑ ꞑ ꞑo²¹h²¹mu³³ (don’t work), with “ꞑ ꞑa²¹” as the infix, and ꞑ ꞑvo⁵⁵zu³³ (piglet) with “ꞑ ꞑzu³³” as the suffix. This paper discusses the syllable number of verbs and adjectives in Yi to describe the prosodic form of syllable number in Yi language.

2. Number of Syllables and Nominalization of Verbs

In Yi, most verbs are monosyllabic with strong word-formation ability. Morphemes are often added to change the word length and thus the lexical category. Nominalization is a typical manifestation. The following examples will be grouped into two categories.

2.1 Nominalization of Verbs with Affixes

Adding an affix to the verb nominalizes the verb. This changes the lexical category of the word and represents a common means of word formation in the Yi language. Some of the most common suffixes are ꞑde³³ꞑndu³³ ꞑ lu³³, ꞑꞑdzu⁴⁴, and ꞑmo²¹. Some prominent examples include:

(1) Verb + Affix → Noun

ꞑzo³³(learn) ꞑꞑzo⁴⁴de³³ (school)

ꞑmu³³(do) ꞑꞑmu³³ꞑdu³³(deeds)

ꞑm^ha⁵⁵ (teach) ꞑꞑm^ha⁵⁵mo²¹ (teacher)

It can be seen that after adding affixes to the verb ꞑzo³³(learn), ꞑmu³³(do), and ꞑm^ha⁵⁵(teach), the verb becomes nominalized and is used as a noun, thus serving as a subject, predicate or other grammatical function. Such as:

(2) ꞑꞑ ꞑꞑ ꞑꞑ ꞑꞑꞑꞑ.

ts^ho²¹ꞑo³³zo⁴⁴ꞑdu³³ko³³a³³ꞑpu³³la³³o⁴⁴.

they school from come back (they’re back from school)

ꞑꞑ ꞑꞑ ꞑꞑ ꞑꞑꞑꞑ

m^ha⁵⁵mo²¹ ts^hꞑ³³ma³³ t^hu²¹ꞑ³³ m^ha⁵⁵dzi³³ ma³³

teacher this book teach well one (The teacher teaches well)

Thus, its lexical attribute is related to the number of syllables. To nominalize a verb, it is necessary to add other morphemes after the verb. Thus turning a monosyllabic verb into a two-syllable noun.

2.2 Monosyllabic and Syllabic Structure Category of Verbs

In Yi, there are mainly monosyllable, double-syllable, trisyllable and quadra-syllable words. Except for

monosyllables, all syllables form relationships in structure, which mainly include subject-verb combination, object-verb combination, modified-middle combination, and moving-complement combination. Three phonetic paragraph forms, 1+1+1, 1+2 and 2+1, each appear in trisyllables. The 1+1+1 type mainly appear in joint phrases, such as 𐄂𐄂𐄂^{hi} 𐄂^{hi} 𐄂^{hi} 𐄂²¹, 𐄂 𐄂 𐄂 mu³³ 𐄂³³ mu³³ (watching and doing). The negative structures, however, are fixed as 1+2 types, like 𐄂 𐄂 𐄂 dza³³/t^ha²¹ mu³³ (don't cook) 𐄂𐄂𐄂do 𐄂²¹a 𐄂^{hi} 𐄂²¹(not talking). Examples of 1+2 and 2+1 forms are as follows:

(3) subject-verb combination:

𐄂𐄂𐄂he³³ ma⁵⁵/k^ha³³ 𐄂𐄂𐄂ma 𐄂^{ha} 𐄂³⁷ dzi²¹

heart happy (happy) rain fall (rain)

object-verb combination:

𐄂𐄂𐄂zε 𐄂²zo⁵⁵/v^u³³ 𐄂𐄂𐄂ku⁵⁵ 𐄂³⁷zo³³

potato buy (buy potatoes) knowledge learning (study)

verb-complement combination:

𐄂𐄂𐄂pi⁵⁵/du³³ la³³ 𐄂𐄂𐄂hi⁵⁵/a³³ v^u³³

take out (take out) basket dry (dry in the sun)

modified-middle combination:

𐄂 𐄂 𐄂 ndza⁵⁵ mu³³/zo³³ 𐄂 𐄂 𐄂 𐄂 o²¹ da³³/hi²¹

nice learn (learn well) think talk (think before one speaks)

It can be seen that the combination mode of three-syllable words in Yi language is mainly 2+1, while the verb complement structure favors 1+2; Whether in 1+2 or 2+1, the verb must be the monosyllabic component. This can be demonstrated in the phonological paragraph detailing the expansion of two-syllable words, as follows:

(4) Noun-Noun Compounds Noun -Verb Compounds

𐄂𐄂vo⁵⁵ 𐄂³³ sui 𐄂³³ pig meat (pork) 𐄂𐄂tze 𐄂³³ 𐄂³³ 𐄂³³ make laws)

𐄂𐄂vo⁵⁵ pa³³/sui 𐄂³³ (boar meat) * 𐄂𐄂tze 𐄂³³ vi 𐄂³⁷ de 𐄂³³ (make laws)

𐄂𐄂vo⁵⁵/sui 𐄂³³ fu 𐄂³³ (pork barbecue) * 𐄂𐄂tze 𐄂³³ de³³ ts^hu³³ (make laws)

𐄂 𐄂 𐄂 vo⁵⁵ pa³³ sui 𐄂³³ fu 𐄂³³ (boarbarbecue) 𐄂𐄂tze 𐄂³³ vi 𐄂³³ de³³ ts^hu³³ (make laws)

In these two sets of compound words, modified-middle combination 𐄂𐄂vo⁵⁵ 𐄂³³ (pork), both words are nouns, so whether they are double syllables or single syllables, they can still be attached flexibly. However, in the noun-verb combinations the only way a two-syllable verb may be attached is to a two-syllable noun. Otherwise, two verb syllables are not permissible in these compounds. In the same way, the single syllable verb 𐄂de 𐄂³³ (make) becomes a double syllable verb 𐄂de³³ ts^hu³³ (make) is not allowed. This indicates that the verb must be monosyllabic in Yi, and the nature of the verb will change if the verb is legally extended from monosyllabic to polysyllabic. This is the effect of prosody on the length of the verb.

3. Category and Number of Syllables in Adjectives

In Yi, there are a large number of adjectives, and the rhythm is very beautiful, with powerful expression and descriptive functionality. Yi adjectives are mainly divided into character adjectives and status-adjectives, character adjective such as 𐄂xuu 𐄂(good), 𐄂ndza⁵⁵(beautiful) 𐄂𐄂o 𐄂bu 𐄂(intelligent), status-adjective such as 𐄂𐄂o 𐄂a 𐄂³³(white), 𐄂𐄂vu⁵⁵lo³³ (lush green), 𐄂𐄂da 𐄂ba 𐄂ba 𐄂(small), 𐄂𐄂𐄂𐄂 bi⁵⁵mu³³bi⁵⁵go²¹go²¹(empty). It is possible for one word to have one to six syllables. All are synthesized, mainly through word formation or conformation, that is, adding and overlapping to create a large number of morphic adjectives.

3.1 “Grade” of Adjectives in Yi Language

In Yi, adjectives have typical “grade” categories, as follows:

(5) base words higher much higher

a. 𐄂 𐄂𐄂 𐄂𐄂𐄂

va⁵⁵ (good) va⁵⁵va⁵⁵ (very good) va⁵⁵dzɿ 𐄂va 𐄂(quite good)

b. 𐄂𐄂 𐄂𐄂𐄂 𐄂𐄂𐄂𐄂

i 𐄂𐄂o 𐄂(short) i 𐄂𐄂o 𐄂zu 𐄂(very short) i 𐄂𐄂o 𐄂zu 𐄂zu 𐄂(quite short)

c. 𐄂𐄂 𐄂𐄂𐄂 𐄂𐄂𐄂𐄂

a³³ts^ha³³ (hot) a³³ts^ha³³ts^ha³³ (very hot) a³³mu³³a³³ts^ha³³ts^ha³³ (quite hot)

d. 𐄂𐄂 𐄂𐄂𐄂 𐄂𐄂𐄂𐄂

ɣo 2𐄂i 𐄂(straight) ɣo 2𐄂i 𐄂𐄂i 𐄂(very straight) ɣo 2𐄂u 𐄂𐄂o 2𐄂i 𐄂𐄂i 𐄂(quite straight)

In the above example, the following points can be drawn: First of all, Yi adjectives have three forms in additional affix, prefix infix and suffix. Secondly, Yi’s adjectives can be compatible with two cases, word formation and configuration as in case 2. Adjectives by means of word formation combines the two words “i 𐄂𐄂o 𐄂(short)” and “zu 𐄂(son)”. The configuration method of the overlapping syllable zu 𐄂(son), makes adjectives change on “grade”, thus it can be seen that Yi adjectives can be compatible with formation and configuration in both cases. Thirdly, adjectives in Yi language have grade differences after overlapping; the more overlapping syllables, the higher the degree of “grade”.

3.2 The number of Syllables and Grammatical Category of Adjectives

In terms of grammatical nature, adjectives in Yi have the following characteristics: First, although Yi distinguishes nature adjectives and state adjectives when used in sentences, the boundary between nature adjectives and state adjectives will change with the difference of the number of syllables. In general, most monosyllabic adjectives can only modify monosyllabic nouns, while two-syllable adjectives mainly modify two-syllable nouns, such as:

(6) Syllable collocation restriction

𐄂𐄂o 𐄂bu 𐄂³³o 𐄂ma 𐄂bu 𐄂³³o 𐄂bu 𐄂ho 𐄂bu 𐄂(smart)

𐄂ve 𐄂𐄂 𐄂³³bu⁵⁵ve 𐄂𐄂 𐄂bu⁵⁵ve 𐄂a 𐄂𐄂 𐄂(yellow flower)

𐄂𐄂o 2𐄂⁵⁵ *vo 2𐄂o 2𐄂⁵⁵ vo 2𐄂o 2h 𐄂𐄂⁵⁵ (green vegetables)

These nature words carrying monosyllabic adjective modifiers double syllable nouns are obviously not

permissible. Double syllable state adjectives modify double syllable nouns, such as vo²to²h³³ 55, although such a word may exist, in practice, one needs to add “Hmu³³”su³³”ta³³” etc. This is more in line with the Yi language usage habits.

(7) * X³³ 33 33 33 33 33

X³³ 33 33 33 33 33

ts^h1³³ bu⁵⁵v^ε 33a 33 33 33 33 33

she flower yellow like (She likes yellow flowers)

Secondly, the superimposed state adjective is originally derived from the superimposed affix of qualitative adjectives. The basic form of the adjective can only be a monosyllabic adjective rather than a two-syllable adjective, as follows:

(8) ʃ³³vu⁵⁵lo³³ ʃ³³vu⁵⁵lo³³lo³³ *a³³ʃ³³vu⁵⁵lo³³lo³³ (lush green)

H³³ɔ³³ 33 33 33 33 33 *ɔ³³ 33 33 33 33 (to keep one's head up - signifying confidence)

θ³³ku²mo²ku²mo²ku²mo²*ku²mo²ku²mo² (boiling sweat- signifying to sweat profusely)

Third, the Yi monosyllabic adjectives have two situations after overlapping. One of which becomes the question word and the other the state adjective, as follows:

(9) base words question words adjective words

ʃ³³tei³³(sour) tei⁴⁴tei³³ ʃ³³ is it sour) tei²¹⁴tei³³ ʃ³³(very sour)

θ³³ndza⁵⁵(beautiful) ndza⁵⁵ndza⁴⁴(is it beautiful) ndza⁵⁵ndza⁴⁴(very beautiful)

θ³³ts^hu³³ ʃ³³(sweet) ts^hu³³ 44ts^hu³³ ʃ³³ is it sweet) ts^hu⁴⁴ts^hu³³ ʃ³³(very sweet)

ʃ³³Qa³³ ʃ³³ ʃ³³(white) *a³³ ʃ³³ ʃ³³ ʃ³³(is it white) *a³³ ʃ³³ ʃ³³ ʃ³³

It can be seen that in this kind of adjective variant, all the adjectives that can overlap are monosyllabic adjectives, which mainly rely on the phonetic length to distinguish the word meaning and part of speech. However, it is not allowed in two-syllable adjectives.

Although there are also two syllable state adjectives with overlapping affixes, there is no difference between the state adjective and the overlapping state adjective depending on the phonetic duration like that of single syllables, such as:

ʃ³³mo³³ ʃ³³zi³³ ʃ³³(see clearly) mo³³ ʃ³³zi⁴⁴ ʃ³³(see clearly) *mo³³ ʃ³³zi³³ mo³³ ʃ³³zi³³

This shows that words mainly occur in monosyllabic adjectives. The main reason is that the characteristics of the adjective with two syllables are weakened, and more of them are transformed into state adjectives.

Based on the above grammatical features, it can be seen that the number of syllables can distinguish between nature adjectives or state adjectives. Especially in the two - syllable adjectives, the definition of nature and state category is more vague. However, it can be concluded from a large number of linguistic facts that only monosyllabic adjectives are nature adjectives in a strict sense, while those with two or more syllables are more similar to state adjectives.

4. Conclusion

To sum up, the number of syllables plays an important and decisive role in defining the category of speech and the change of word morphology. Typical manifestations are the nominalization of verbs after attaching morphemes, the division of word classes by syllables in adjectives, and the category of “level” expressed by the number of syllables. From the perspective of prosodic word formation, the number of syllables is a direct reflection of word length. The number of syllables allowed is bound by grammatical function.

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