One dialect of Yi spoken in Meigu County in the southern part of China's Sichuan Province is analyzed for its tone patterns, based on data provided by a bilingual native speaker. Consonant and vowel inventories are provided. Three contrastive tones are found. One has three allophones, which are conditioned by the preceding tone. Tonal allophony is illustrated in one data set. Some tonal allomorphy is also found; in a second data set, a rule applying to nominal compounds and affecting the tone of the first noun root is illustrated. A third data set illustrates another rule that applies in number + classifier compounds and affects the tone of the classifier. (MSE)
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 [no\(^{33}su^{33}\)]. 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 zi\(^{33}no^{33}\) 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.\(^2\)

\[^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. ng\(^{31}\)si\(^{31}\) eye, rather than the expected ng\(^{31}\)si\(^{45}\).
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>
</tr>
</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>$p^h$</td>
<td>$t^h$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$k^h$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vd. stops</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>d</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>g</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prenasalized stops</td>
<td>mb</td>
<td>nd</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ηg</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>ts</td>
<td>tc</td>
<td></td>
<td>$t$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vl. asp. affricates</td>
<td>$t^{s^h}$</td>
<td>$t^{c^h}$</td>
<td></td>
<td>$t^{s^h}$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>vl. fricatives</td>
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<td>s</td>
<td>c</td>
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<td>h</td>
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<td>z</td>
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<td>$z$</td>
<td>$\gamma$</td>
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<tr>
<td>vd. nasals</td>
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<td>n</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>vl. nasals</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>n</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vd. lateral</td>
<td>l</td>
<td>l</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>vl. lateral</td>
<td>l</td>
<td>l</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</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>$e$</td>
<td>$\varepsilon$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unrounded mid front vowels</td>
<td>$e$</td>
<td>$e$</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>
1. si33 tsʰi31bo11  
   one tree

2. si33 ne31bo11  
   two trees

3. si33 so33bo33  
   three trees

4. si33 li31bo33  
   four trees

5. si33 ṇe33bo33  
   five trees

6. si33 fu45bo44  
   six trees

7. si33 si31bo11  
   seven trees

8. si33 he45bo44  
   eight trees

9. si33 bo33  
   a tree

10. he33 mg33  
    a mouse

11. he33 tsʰi31mg33  
    one mouse

12. he33 ne31mg33  
    two mice

13. he33 so33mg33  
    three mice

14. he33 li31mg33  
    four mice

15. he33 ṇe33mg33  
    five mice

16. he33 fu45mg44  
    six mice

17. he33 si31mg33  
    seven mice

18. ne33 ṇe33g33 tʰi11 lg33  
    Where are you coming from?

19. ṇe33 je33 ko33 ty33 lg33  
    I'm coming from home.

20. ṇe33 dzə33 dzə33 tə33 lg33  
    I'm coming from eating.

21. tsʰi33 ṇe31lg11 o33  
    He's not coming anymore.

22. ne33 ṇe33g33 ko11 bo33  
    Where are you going?

23. ṇe33 je33 ko33 bo33  
    I'm going home.

24. ṇe33  
    It is.

25. ʊ31ŋu11  
    It isn't
Set 2

1. ŋge³³ buckwheat  ŋge³¹tç³¹i³¹ sweet buckwheat
2. ŋge³³ buckwheat  ŋge³¹nò³¹ bitter buckwheat
3. bu³³ bug  bu³¹de³¹ earthworm
4. mu³³ horse  mu³¹pè³¹ male horse
5. kʰg³³ mouth  kʰg³¹pʰè³¹ mouth
6. jo³³ sheep  jo³¹mo³¹ ewe
7. jo³³ sheep  jo³¹ze³¹ lamb
8. le³³ musk deer  le³¹pu³¹ male musk deer
9. le³³ musk deer  le³¹mo³¹ female musk deer
10. ŋge³³ buckwheat  ŋge³²fu³³ buckwheat bread
11. vo³³ chicken  vo³²tç³¹e³¹ chicken egg
12. mu³³ earth  mu³³sì³³ sand

Set 3

1. tsʰ³¹th³¹o³¹ one (drop)
2. ne³¹tʰo³¹ two (drops)
3. s³³th³¹o⁴⁵ three (drops)
4. li³³th³¹o⁴⁵ four (drops)
5. ŋe³³tʰo⁴⁵ five (drops)
6. fu⁴⁵tʰo⁴⁵ six (drops)
7. sì³¹th³¹o³¹ seven (drops)
8. he⁴⁵tʰo⁴⁵ eight (drops)
9. gu³³tʰo⁴⁵ nine (drops)
10. v³¹vè⁴⁵ not good
11. mu³¹ty⁴⁵ fire
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