

# Split numeral classifiers in the Chinese variety spoken by the Lalo Yi people

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The Chinese variety spoken by the Lalo Yi people, the so-called *yizu hanhua* (彝族汉语, **YH**) is the vernacular used by the Lalo Yi people in Dali City, Yunnan Province, China. The Lalo Yi people who do not know how to speak Lalo Yi use this vernacular as their mother tongue. The grammatical system of this language is non-stable. If the speaker has less contact with the Han people and is less fluent with Chinese, he will speak YH with more detectable Yi characteristics at phonological, morphological and grammatical levels.

This paper investigates the grammatical behaviors of numeral classifiers in YH. We first used pearl story to collect some connected speech data from two speakers, a male and a female. Both of them are native Lalo Yi speakers, fluent in both Lalo Yi and YH. When communicating with Lalo Yi speakers, they will speak Lalo Yi. When communicating with people who do not speak Lalo Yi, they will speak YH. The following data are extracted from our transcription of the two speakers' pear-story telling.

- (1) zəu<sup>31</sup> zi<sup>55</sup> thin<sup>33</sup> mɛ<sup>33</sup>, zən<sup>31</sup> ko<sup>55</sup>læ<sup>31</sup>zi<sup>31</sup>ka<sup>55</sup>, phi<sup>33</sup> tso<sup>33</sup> so<sup>33</sup>zi<sup>33</sup>.  
有 一 天 TOP 人 过来 一个 披 着 蓑衣  
have one day TOP person come one CL wear PROG raincoat  
'One day, a man who wears a raincoat came.'  
有一天，来了一个人，穿着蓑衣。
- (2) nə<sup>55</sup> ka<sup>55</sup> zən<sup>31</sup> ʂɿ<sup>55</sup> ʂo<sup>33</sup>zi<sup>33</sup> tʂhuan<sup>33</sup>tʂo<sup>33</sup> zi<sup>31</sup> tein<sup>55</sup>.  
那 个 人 是 蓑衣 穿 着 一 件  
that CL person COP raincoat wear PROG one CL  
'That man wore a raincoat.'  
那个人穿着一件蓑衣。

From (1) and (2), we observed that the indefinite meaning is expressed in YH by split numeral classifier phrases, and 'split' is in the sense that the head noun and the numeral classifier phrase is separated by the main predicate. In (1), the numeral classifier quantifies over the entity denoted by the subject. In (2), the numeral classifier quantifies over the entity denoted by the object.

We then use different types of verbs (unergative, unaccusative, transitive) to confirm that split numeral classifier is a legitimate and frequently-used way to express the indefinite reading in YH. Of particular interest is the ambiguous transitive sentences in YH, as shown in (3). (3a) is in the perfective aspect, and (3b) is in the progressive aspect. When the sentence is in the perfective aspect, the numeral classifier phrase can only quantify over the entity denoted by the object (patient). When the sentence is in the progressive aspect, the numeral classifier phrase can quantity over the entity denoted by either the subject (agent) or the object (patient), leading to ambiguous readings.

- (3) a. **lao<sup>31</sup>fu<sup>31</sup>**      **pao<sup>55</sup> tsi<sup>33</sup>**      **zao<sup>31</sup> si<sup>31</sup> la<sup>55</sup>**      **lian<sup>31</sup> kə<sup>55</sup>**      **a<sup>31</sup>mu<sup>55</sup>.**  
老虎                  豹子                  咬 死 了                  两 个                  示证标记  
tiger                  leopard                  bite dead PERF          two CL                  EVID  
a) ‘The tiger bit two leopards dead.’ 老虎咬死了两头豹子。  
b) ‘The leopard bit two tigers dead.’ 豹子咬死了两头老虎。
- b. **lao<sup>31</sup>fu<sup>31</sup>**      **pao<sup>55</sup> tsi<sup>33</sup>**      **zao<sup>31</sup> tein<sup>55</sup>**      **lian<sup>31</sup> kə<sup>55</sup>**      **ni<sup>33</sup>mu<sup>55</sup>.**  
老虎                  豹子                  咬 进                  两 个                  示证标记  
tiger                  leopard                  bite PROG                  two CL                  EVID  
a) ‘Two tigers are biting leopards.’ 有两只老虎正在咬豹子。  
b) ‘Tigers are biting two leopards.’ 老虎正在咬两只豹子。  
c) ‘Two leopards are biting tigers.’ 有两只豹子正在咬老虎。  
d) ‘Leopards are biting two tigers.’ 豹子正在咬两只老虎。

To disambiguate (3a) and (3b), the patient marker  $\text{ʃaŋ}^{55}$  “上” can be used after the patient.

- (4) a. **lao<sup>31</sup>fu<sup>31</sup>**      **pao<sup>55</sup> tsi<sup>33</sup>-ʃaŋ<sup>55</sup>**      **zao<sup>31</sup> si<sup>31</sup> la<sup>55</sup>**      **lian<sup>31</sup> kə<sup>55</sup>**      **a<sup>31</sup>mu<sup>55</sup>.**  
tiger                  leopard -PATIENT      bite dead PERF          two CL                  EVID  
‘The tiger bit two leopards dead.’ 老虎咬死了两头豹子。
- b. **lao<sup>31</sup>fu<sup>31</sup>**      **pao<sup>55</sup> tsi<sup>33</sup>-ʃaŋ<sup>55</sup>**      **zao<sup>31</sup> tein<sup>55</sup>**      **lian<sup>31</sup> kə<sup>55</sup>**      **ni<sup>33</sup>mu<sup>55</sup>.**  
tiger                  leopard -PATIENT      bite PROG                  two CL                  EVID  
‘Two tigers are biting leopards.’ 有两只老虎正在咬豹子。

Since the patient is overly marked and the sentence is in perfective aspect, (4a) has only one meaning. In progressive sentences, the patient marker has two functions. On the one hand, it marks the patient; on the other hand, it prevents the numeral classifier phrase from quantifying over the patient, so (4b) can have only one reading.

The grammatical behaviors of split numeral classifiers in YH is in exact accordance with the split numeral classifiers in Lalo Yi. More evidence of Lalo Yi grammar in YH is: (i) the progressive aspect marker in YH **tein<sup>55</sup>** 进 is borrowed from the progressive aspect marker in Lalo Yi **ki<sup>33</sup>**, whose lexical meaning can be traced back to the verb “put something in”, expressed in Chinese as 放进.

(ii) the patient marker in YH **ʃaŋ<sup>55</sup>** 上 is borrowed from the patient marker in Lalo Yi **di<sup>31</sup>**, whose lexical meaning can be traced back to “on the top of”, expressed in Chinese as 上.

(iii) the evidential marker in YH is directly borrowed from Lalo Yi. When the sentence is in progressive aspect, the evidential marker is **ni<sup>33</sup>mu<sup>55</sup>**; when the sentence is in perfective aspect, the evidential marker is **a<sup>31</sup>mu<sup>55</sup>**.

Our investigation shows that the grammatical system of *yizu hanhua* (YH) is not stable. It oscillates between the Chinese grammar and the Lalo Yi grammar. The general trend is that YH is becoming more and more Chinese-like, despite the fact that some deeply rooted grammatical elements of Lalo Yi such as the aspect marker, the patient marker, and the evidential marker have tenaciously survived in YH. Lalo Yi is now an endangered language, because many Lalo Yi people have shifted their first language from Lalo Yi to YH. It is predictable that YH will play a more important role in Lalo Yi community, and deserves more research as a product of intensive language contact.