

Changed Tone in Caijia

Lee Man Hei

Changed tone occurs when a word's (or syllable's) tone becomes a different tone due to a particular context or meaning. For instance, in the Róngxiàn 容縣 dialect of Yue, the tone of many nouns is changed to tone 35 to indicate tininess: 煲—pəu⁵⁵ refers to 'big pot', whereas pəu³⁵ refers to 'small pot' (Zhou 1987:60). Changed tone is not to be confused with tone sandhi which refers to the change of tone based on the pronunciation of adjacent words or morphemes. In the above example, the change is not motivated by the tone of the adjacent syllables, but by the size of the object. The current study investigates the use of changed tone in Caijia, a language spoken in northwestern Guizhou. This language has generally been regarded as a Sinitic language (Zhengzhang 2010; Sagart 2011; Hu 2013; Lee forthcoming), though it has also been claimed to be an unclassified language (Lü 2021). The Caijia data (Wēining 威寧 dialect) below is cited from my fieldnotes.

Five tones exist in Caijia: 21, 22, 33, 35, 55. All of them show regular correspondences with Middle Chinese tones, except for 35 (Lee forthcoming), indicating that the tone is a secondary development. The other four tones change to 35 in two cases. First, changed tone is employed to derive plural pronouns. The singular pronouns in Caijia are ŋu³³ (1st), nəu³³ (2nd), je³³ (3rd). Tone 35 is used to generate plural pronouns: ŋu³⁵ (1st), nəu³⁵ (2nd), je³⁵ (3rd). Tone 35 is also a diminutive marker; similar to Róngxiàn dialect, plenty of Caijia nouns show tone alternations, which are conditioned by the size of the object. Examples include: 'stick' pəŋ³³ (big), pəŋ³⁵ (small); 'pot' mu²¹ (big), mu³⁵ (small); 'insect' məŋ²¹ ŋoŋ²¹ (big), məŋ²¹ ŋoŋ³⁵ (small). Some nouns, which typically refer to small objects, do not appear to preserve the original tone, e.g., tsəŋ³⁵ 'silkworm' and pa²¹ pəu³⁵ 'ant'.

The most remarkable use of changed tone is found in verbs. Tone alternation conditioned by syntactic environments is observed in a group of Caijia verbs. Some of such verbs are in tone 55 when it serves as a transitive verb and in tone 33 when it acts as an intransitive verb, e.g., 'kill' ɛi³³-intransitive, ɛi⁵⁵-transitive. Others are in tone 33 when they are transitive and in tone 21 when they are intransitive, e.g., 'bury' məu^{21/33}. This phenomenon is rarely seen in other Sinitic languages. From a diachronic perspective, Caijia verbs utilizing changed tone belong to four Middle Chinese (MC) tone categories: qīngpíng 清平, zhuópíng 濁平, qīngrù 清入, and zhuórù 濁入. The table beneath shows the alternation patterns of these verbs. Note that not all Caijia verbs exhibit tone alternations, verbs like mo²¹ 'sharpen' are always in the same tone.

MC tone category	qīngpíng 清平	zhuópíng 濁平	qīngrù 清入	zhuórù 濁入
Alternation type	33*-55	21*-33	33-55*	21-33*

*indicates the tone most often found in words (not only verbs) of the corresponding MC tone category, e.g., qīngpíng words generally have tone 33 in Caijia

Keywords

Caijia, changed tone, historical linguistics, diminutive marker

Selected References

- Hu, Hongyan. 2013. A Study of the Pronominal System of Caijia 蔡家話代詞系統探析. *Minzu yuwen* 民族語文 6. 34–40.
- Lee, Man Hei. (forthcoming). Phonological Features of Caijia that are Notable from a Diachronic Perspective. *Journal of Historical Linguistics*.
- Lü, Shanshan. 2021 (forthcoming). *A Reference Grammar of Caijia: An Unclassified Language of Guizhou, China*. Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter Mouton.
- Sagart, Laurent. 2011. Classifying Chinese Dialects/Sinitic Languages on Shared Innovations. Paper presented at Séminaire Sino-Tibétain du CRLAO, Nogent-sur-Marne, France.
- Zhengzhang, Shangfang. 2010. Relationship between Caijia and Bai and Comparison of their Roots 蔡家話白語關係及詞根比較. In *The Joy of Research II: A Festschrift in Honour of Professor William S-Y. Wang on his Seventy-Fifth Birthday* 研究之樂: 慶祝王士元先生七十五壽辰學術論文集, ed. by Wuyun Pan & Zhongwei Shen, 389–400. Shanghai: Shanghai Educational Publishing House.
- Zhou, Zuyao. 1987. The Diminutive Changed Tone in Guǎngxī's Róngxiàn Dialect [廣西容縣方言的小稱變音]. *Fangyan* 方言 1. 58-65.