

The Origin and Nature of High Rising Diminutive Tone Change in Siyi Dialect

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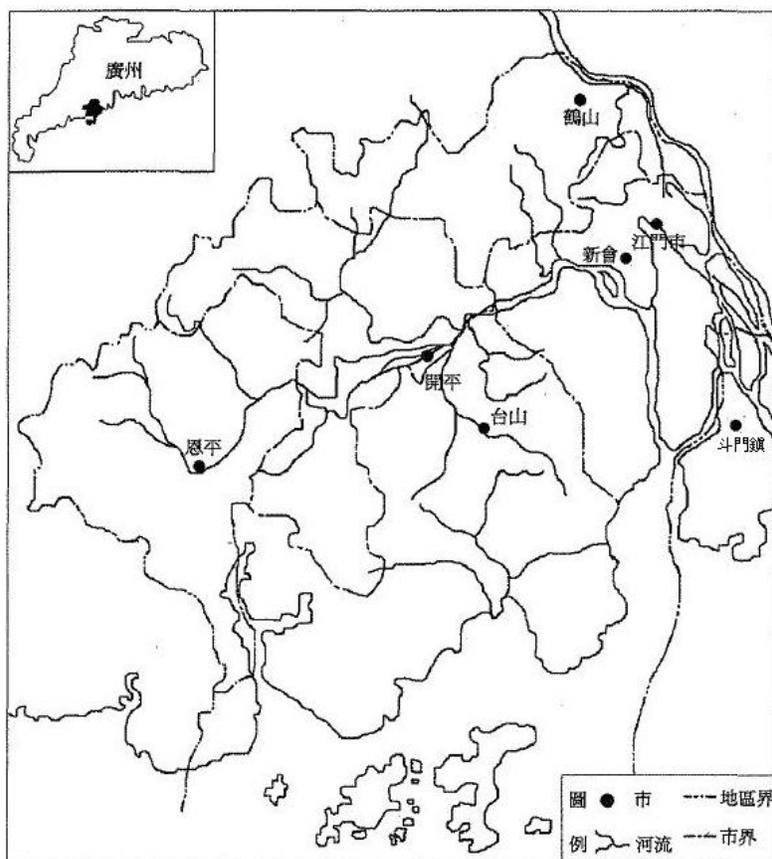
The Siyi area lies in the southwest of the Pearl River Delta, Guangdong Province in China. Occupying an intermediate position, the Siyi dialect links the Guangfu 廣府 Yue 粵 and the Western Yue in Guangdong and Guangxi, in both geographical and linguistic terms. This paper justifies that the origin and nature of high rising diminutive tone change in Siyi dialect could be traced to a diminutive suffix, though on the surface it only involves a tonal alternation. By means of discussing synchronic and diachronic references and documentations, we establish the hypothesis that the high rising *bianyin* in Siyi dialect is the debris fusion of the root word and the *er* 兒 suffix in an earlier stage. This is in line with diminutive forms in Western Yue, and also of great significance in considering all subgroups of Yue and picturing the Proto-Yue as a whole.

1. Introduction

1.1. Siyi Dialect

The Siyi 四邑 area lies in the southwest of the Pearl River Delta, Guangdong Province, and the term “Siyi” (literally ‘four counties’, also spelt as Sze Yup, Sze Yap, or Seiyap in English), is a historical concept, collectively referring to the four districts of Taishan 台山, Kaiping 開平, Xinhui 新會 and Enping 恩平. In addition to these four counties, the Siyi dialect, as a distinct variant of Yue 粵, is widely spoken in Jiangmen 江門, Doumen 斗門 and in some areas of Heshan 鶴山 as well. Siyi is nationally well known as the hometown of early overseas Chinese laborers, who spread all over the world, including Southeast Asia, Australia, New Zealand, and North America.

Map 1. The Siyi Area in Guangdong Province



1.2. Diminutive Tone Change

Diminutives (known as *xiaocheng* 小稱 in Chinese), as typically understood, are words formed by a morphological device that adds a semantic element of *smallness* to the meaning of the stem. Since tiny items can easily gain our affection, diminutives are often used for expressing intimacy and endearment. In Chinese, diminutives generally occur with nouns and classifiers, both of which are nominal in nature, since objects are the very things people think of in terms of size, and almost all classifiers are derived from nouns. As a result, diminutive forms are commonly applied to words in their colloquial readings (known as *baidu* 白讀 in Chinese) referring to daily-life items, everyday tools, colloquial address, familiar animals, vegetables, and places, and so forth.

In world languages, a variety of morphological devices can be employed to form diminutives, including affixation, reduplication, changes of noun-class or gender, and shift of consonant, vowel, or tone (Jurafsky 1996: 534). Among them, affixation is the most commonly used device (Dahl 2006). For example, in English the suffixes *-ette*, *-ling* and *-let* can be added to the nouns *kitchen*, *duck*, and *pig*, yielding diminutives *kitchenette* ‘small kitchen’, *duckling* ‘young duck’, and *piglet* ‘young pig’. Diminutive suffixes used

in Chinese dialects include *er* 兒, *zai* 仔, and *jian* 囡 etc., all meaning ‘son’, with *er* 兒 as the most widespread one, found in both Northern and Southern dialects. In Pekinese, the suffixation of *er* 兒 takes the form of rhotacization, in which the syllable *er* 兒 [ər] loses its syllabicity, and [-r] as a sub-syllabic suffix is attached to the final of the root, resulting in a series of rhotacized (or, retroflex) rimes. Loss of syllabicity of the diminutive suffix *er* 兒 is also attested in Southern dialects such as Western Yue 西部粵語 and Southern Wu 南部吳語, where the root rime is affixed either with the nasal initial ([n], [n̥] or [ŋ]) of *er* 兒 or with a [+nasal] feature. In some dialects the *er* 兒 affixation is coupled by a diminutive tone change. Below are some examples from Southern Wu (Shao 1997a):

Table 1.1. Diminutives in Southern Wu

Type	Example	Root	Diminutive	Dialect	Meaning	Note
<i>Er</i> 兒 Suffixation	牛兒	niə ⁴⁴	niə ⁴⁴ nə ⁰³	Lanxi 蘭溪	calf	
<i>Bianyun</i> 變韻 ¹	蓋 (兒)	ke ⁵⁵	ke:n ⁵⁵	YiwuShangyi 義烏尚經	cover	The main vowel of the root prolongs, and the initial of <i>er</i> 兒 becomes the coda of the root syllable.
	白果 (兒)	ko ³¹	koŋ ³¹	Tongjiaqiao 童家橋	gingko seed	The initial of <i>er</i> 兒 becomes the coda of the root syllable.
<i>Bianyun</i> 變韻 + <i>Bianyin</i> 變音 ²	蓋 (兒)	ke ⁵²	keŋ ⁵³⁴	Tangxi 湯溪	cover	The initial of <i>er</i> 兒 becomes the coda of the root syllable, and the tone changes from [52] to [534].

In contrast, the Siyi dialect aligns with Cantonese and some other Wu dialects in that the diminutive formation processes only involves *bianyin*, as illustrated by the examples in Table 1.2 (Shao 1997b, Mai 1995, Gan 2002):

Table 1.2. *Bianyin* in Wu and Yue

Type	Word	Original			<i>Bianyin</i>			Locality	Dialect
		Context	Syllable	Meaning	Context	Syllable	Meaning		
<i>Bianyin</i> 變音	樹	樹	zy ²⁴	tree	樹	zy ²²	small tree	Yongkang 永康	Southern Wu
	鵝	雞鳴鵝	ŋɔ ²¹	chicken, duck and goose	燒鵝	ŋɔ ³⁵	grilled goose	Guangzhou 廣州	Cantonese
	車	車貨	ʃhe ⁵³	to convey	單車	ʃhe ⁵⁵	bicycle		

¹ *Bianyun* in this paper refers to *diminutive rime change*.

² *Bianyin* in this paper refers to *diminutive tone change*.

	房	房屋	fəŋ ²²	house	一間房	fəŋ ¹¹	one room	Huicheng 會城	Siyi
	金	金色	kim ³³	golden	金子	kim ³⁵	gold	Taicheng 台城	

1.3. Significance

The present study is meaningful for a number of reasons.

First of all, previous studies on diminutives in Yue have been largely devoted to Cantonese, as well as, to a lesser extent, some other Yue varieties, particularly those spoken in Western Guangdong and Southeastern Guangxi, and our knowledge of diminutives in Siyi is very limited. With the exception of Yue-Hashimoto (2002), there has been as yet no systematic examination of diminutives in a particular Siyi variant, let alone comprehensive comparative studies among different variants of the Siyi dialect. A number of aspects of the subject matter merit further investigation.

Furthermore, earlier work on diminutives of Southern Wu and Western Yue has revealed an intimate relation of *bianyin* with the *er* 兒 ‘son’ suffixation. The diminutive devices in such dialects, particularly in Southern Wu, form a continuum from the simple *er* 兒-suffixation, *bianyun* (usually in the form of a fusion between the rime of the root with the nasal initial of the syllable *er* 兒), *bianyin* + *bianyun*, and *bianyin* alone, suggesting that the genesis of *bianyin* might be traceable to the *er* 兒-suffixation and some accompanying features. The origin of diminutive forms in Yue is less transparent, and whether *bianyin* has anything to do with the *er* 兒-suffixation is still controversial, largely due to insufficiency of available data, particularly the missing intermediate link in the possible path of development from the *er* 兒-suffixation to *bianyin*. Since the Siyi dialect occupies just such an intermediate position, in both geographical and linguistic terms, linking the Guangfu 廣府 Yue and the Western Yue in Guangdong and Guangxi, a more careful investigation of the Siyi dialect may be expected to shed new light on the historical development of diminutive devices in Yue as a whole.

1.4. My Fieldwork

The corpus of the current research comes from various sources. The data of the Xinhui 新會 dialect, including Huicheng 會城, Siqian 司前, Hetang 荷塘, Tangxia 棠下 and Liyue 禮樂, are primarily collected from my own fieldwork, and those of Taishan, Kaiping and Enping mainly come from previous studies. What follows is a summary.

Map 2. The Principal Dialectal Spots

TAN: HIGH RISING TONE CHANGE

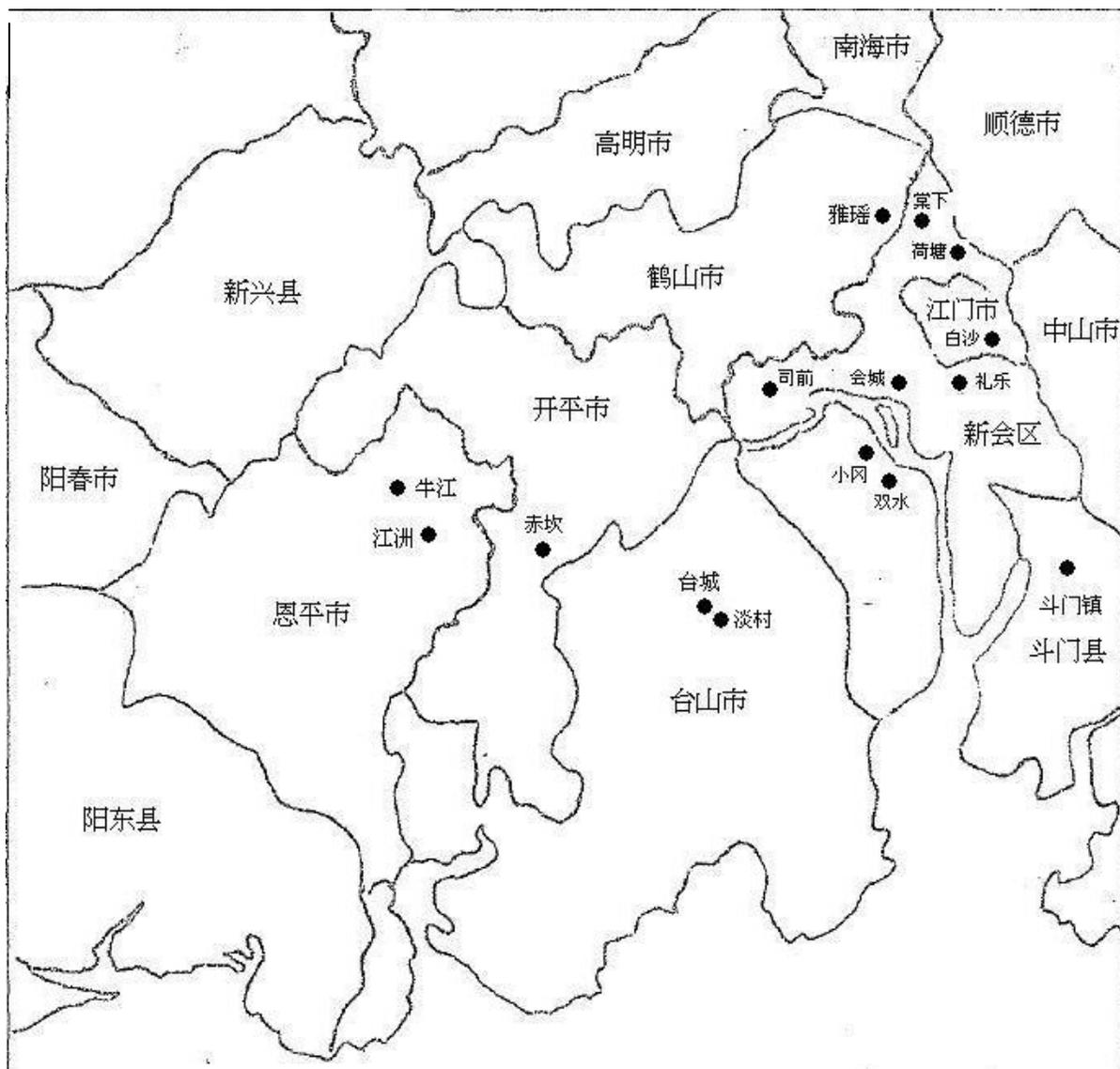


Table 1.3. The Sources of Data

Dialect	District	Source
Huicheng 會城	Xinhui 新會	my own fieldwork
Tangxia 棠下		
Liyue 禮樂		
Hetang 荷塘		my own fieldwork, Xin (2002), Chow & Shum (2007)
Siqian 司前		my own fieldwork, Tong (2004)
Taicheng 台城	Taishan 台	Chen (1966), Zhan & Cheung (1987), Huang & Ye

	山	(1990)
Dancun 淡村		Yue-Hashimoto (2002, 2005)
Chikan 赤坎	Kaiping 開平	Zhan & Cheung (1987), Deng (2000)
Jiangzhou 江洲	Enping 恩平	Shum (2003)
Niujiang 牛江		Zhan & Cheung (1987)

I recorded the corpus of Xinhui in a secondary school in Huicheng, and my informants were local teachers from the following four towns: Tangxia, Hetang, Liyue and Siqian. Huicheng is the county seat of Xinhui, and my father served as my informant for this diapioint. The table below provides some background information of my informants.

Table 1.4. Background Information of the Informants

Name	Age	Gender	Dialect	Language Background
TXQ	54	Male	Huicheng 會城	born, raised, and living in Huicheng all the life
LWW	39	Female	Tangxia 棠下	born and raised in Tangxia, currently working in Huicheng
ZQS	35	Male	Hetang 荷塘	born and raised in Hetang, currently working in Huicheng
TZH	38	Male	Liyue 禮樂	born and raised in Liyue, currently working in Huicheng
TQN	38	Female	Siqian 司前	born and raised in Siqian, currently working in Huicheng

2. Diminutive Tone Changes in Siyi Dialect

It is widely accepted that there are three major diminutive tone change forms in Siyi dialects, all adopting the *bianyīn* device, i.e., Low Falling *Bianyīn*, High Rising *Bianyīn* and High Level *Bianyīn*.

2.1. Low Falling *Bianyīn*

Most Siyi varieties have a low falling diminutive tone [11]/[11] or [21]/[21], which is identical to Yangshang Category in value and contour. The following table provides some examples in the Huicheng dialect.

Table 2.1. The Low Falling *Bianyīn* Syllables in Huicheng

Initial Syllable with Low Falling <i>Bianyīn</i>			Final Syllable with Low Falling <i>Bianyīn</i>		
Word	Syllable	Meaning	Word	Syllable	Meaning

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蝦米	ha ¹¹ mai ⁴⁵	dried shrimp	香蕉	hiəŋ ³³ tsiu ¹¹	banana
褲腳	fu ¹¹ kiək ³³	trouser legs	洗衫	sai ⁴⁵ sam ¹¹	to wash clothes
鑊鏟	vək ¹¹ tshan ⁴⁵	rice ladle	頭殼	hau ²² hək ¹¹	head
魚骨	ŋi ²²⁻¹¹ kwət ⁵⁵	small fish bones	田基	hin ²² kei ³³⁻¹¹	paths between fields
婆姆	phə ²²⁻¹¹ na ⁴⁵	woman	狗竇	kau ⁴⁵ tau ²¹⁻¹¹	kennel
尺寸	tshiak ³³⁻¹¹ tshən ³³	measurement	吃藥	hiak ³³ jɨk ²¹⁻ ɨ	to take medicine

2.2. High Rising *Bianyin*

Generally speaking, the high rising *bianyin* in the Siyi dialect is formed by attaching a highest pitch [5] to the end of the target syllable, the actual shape hinging on its original value and contour. Moreover, the highest pitch [5] can be added after a low falling [21]/[21] or [11]/[11], indicating that the high rising *bianyin* can also occur in syllables that have already undergone the low falling *bianyin*. Hence, we can detect ample examples in which one root carries more than one -- three at most -- changed tone simultaneously to denote diminutives:

Taicheng:³

包 _{動作}	pau ³³	‘to wrap’
包 _{量詞}	pau ¹¹	‘classifier’
包 _{名詞}	pau ³⁵	‘round dumpling’
梳 _{動作}	sɔ ³³	‘to comb’
梳 _{名詞}	sɔ ³⁵	‘comb’

Dancun:

帶 _{動作}	ʔai ³³	‘to lead’
褲帶	fu ²¹ ʔai ²¹	‘waist belt’
鞋帶	hai ²² ʔai ³⁵	‘shoe lace’

Chikan:⁴

蓋 _{動作}	kɔi ³³	‘to cover’
蓋 _{名詞}	kɔi ¹¹	‘cover’

³ [35] is the short form of [335].

⁴ [25] is the short form of [225].

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<u>Jiangzhou:</u>	筆蓋	vet ⁵⁵ kai ¹¹⁵	‘pen lid’
	船	suən ²²	‘ship’
	行船	haŋ ²² suən ²⁵	‘to work as a sailor’
	長沙	tʃiəŋ ²² sa ³³	‘place name’
	沙石	sa ²¹ siak ²¹	‘sand and stone’
	沙	sa ²¹⁵	‘sand’
	金銀	kiam ³³ ŋan ²²	‘gold and silver’
	黃金	vəŋ ²² kiam ³⁵	‘gold’
	芥菜	kai ³³ tʃuai ³³	‘mustard green’
	苜菜	siək ⁵⁻²¹⁵ tʃuai ²¹	‘chard’
芥勒菜	kai ³³ lak ⁵ tʃuai ²¹⁵	‘one type of edible wild herbs’	
鹹菜	ham ²² tʃuai ³⁵	‘preserved vegetable’	

2.3. High Level *Bianyin*

The high level *bianyin* in Siyi, which takes a highest pitch [45]/[55]/[55], is identical to Yinshang and Upper Yinru in tone value. It constitutes a rather small proportion of all diminutives, compared with the low falling and the high rising *bianyin*. Below are examples in Taishan, Kaiping, Enping from Deng (2000) and Gan (2003):

Table 2.2. High Level *Bianyin* Words in Siyi and Their Counterparts in Cantonese

Word	Meaning	Taicheng	Chikan	Jiangzhou	Huicheng	Cantonese
阿姨	young lady	a ³³ ji ⁵⁵			a ³³ ji ⁴⁵	a ³³ ji ⁵⁵
阿姨	mother's younger sister		a ³³ ji ⁵⁵			a ³³ ji ⁵⁵

公	old man		vak ⁵ jɛ ⁵⁵ kuŋ ⁵⁵ (伯爺公)	lou ⁵⁵ mian ⁵⁵ koŋ ⁵⁵ (老根公)		pak ³³ jɛ ⁵⁵ kuŋ ⁵⁵ (伯爺公)
伯爺公	old man	pak ⁵ jɛ ⁵⁵ koŋ ¹⁵	vak ⁵ jɛ ⁵⁵ kuŋ ⁵⁵		pak ⁵ tia ³⁵ (伯爹)	pak ³³ jɛ ⁵⁵ kuŋ ⁵⁵
笠衫		lep ⁵ sam ⁵⁵		liap ⁵ sam ⁵⁵		lep ⁵ sam ⁵⁵
麻雀	mah-jong	ma ²² tiak ⁵	ma ²² tiək ⁵	ma ²² tsiək ⁵⁵		ma ¹¹ tsiək ³⁵
雀	bird	ma ²² tiak ⁵ (麻雀)	vo ²² tiək ⁵ (禾雀)		tsiək ⁵⁵	tsiək ³⁵
瓦渣	debris	ŋa ⁵⁵ tsa ⁵⁵	ŋa ⁵⁵ tsa ⁵⁵			tsa ⁵⁵
水腳	travelling expenses	sui ⁵⁵ kiak ⁵	sui ⁵⁵ kiək ⁵			
上高	above		siɛŋ ³² kɔ ⁵⁵			siɔŋ ²² kou ⁵⁵

3. The Nature and Origin of High Rising *Bianyin*

This paper focuses on the second type of diminutive tone changes, that is, the high rising *bianyin*. To better understand its origin and nature, in this section we firstly conduct a brief comparison of diminutive forms employed by different Yue varieties, particularly those spoken in Western Guangdong and Guangxi such as Yulin 玉林, Rongxian 容縣, Xinyi 信宜, Gaozhou 高州, Huazhou 化州, etc, which lie to the west of the Siyi district, forming a geographically contiguous region and a linguistic continuum.

3.1. A Typology of Diminutive Forms in Yue Dialects

Previous studies have convincingly demonstrated that diminutive forms in many Yue varieties in Western Guangdong and Southwestern Guangxi region are intimately related to the well-known *er* 兒-suffixization, attested as the major diminutive device in Northern Chinese dialects and some of the Southern dialects such as Wu, but rarely found in present-day Cantonese and the majority of Yue varieties of the Guangfu subgroup. In connection with this, an interesting question naturally arises: Do Siyi diminutive forms have anything to do with the *er* 兒-suffixization? To answer the question, a brief typological overview of diminutive forms across Yue varieties is needed.

3.1.1. *Bianyin* 變音 + *Bianyun* 變韻

Simultaneous employment of *bianyin* and *bianyun* is characteristic of diminutive forms in a considerable number of Yue varieties distributed in Western Guangdong and Southeastern Guangxi. This type can be further divided into two sub-types, with Xinyi in Guangdong and Yulin in Guangxi as representatives.

3.1.1.1. The Xinyi 信宜 Type

There is only one changed tone for diminutives in Xinyi, which possesses a high

rising pitch identical to none of the lexical tones. The pitch, designated by a rising signal “↗” in the literature, may involve the use of a very special type of vocal phonation known as falsetto, and thus is extremely high, well exceeding what the highest point [5] in the standard 5-degree tone-letter system could capture.

The *bianyun* for finals in Xinyi follows three rules as shown below:

- 1) For coda-less open syllables, an [n] is added to the ending: C V → C V n
- 2) For syllables with a stop coda, the stop changes to a homorganic nasal:
C V C_S → C V N (C_S = [p t k] N = [m n ŋ])
- 3) For syllables with a nasal or vowel coda, the ending remains unchanged:
C V₁ V₂ → C V₁ V₂; C V N → C V N (N = [m n ŋ])

Rongxian is similar to Xinyi, except that a high rising [35] serves as the *bianyin* and its *bianyun* merely occurs in Rusheng syllables with a stop coda. In other words, coda-less syllables remain unchanged in Rongxian, just as those with nasal or vowel endings do. Some examples from these two dialects are listed in the following table (Ye & Tang 1982, Zhou 1987).

Table 3.1. Diminutives in Xinyi and Rongxian

Dialect	Word	Origin	Diminutive	Meaning	Word	Origin	Diminutive	Meaning
Xinyi 信宜	試	ʃi ³³	ʃin↗	test	姑	ku ⁵³	kun↗	aunt
	鴨	ap ³³	am↗	duck	屋	ʔuk ⁵⁵	ʔuŋ↗	house
	頭	theu ¹¹	theu↗	head	深	ʃem ⁵³	ʃem↗	deep
Rongxia 容縣	魚	ny ³¹	ny ³⁵	fish	鎖	θø ³³	θø ³⁵	lock
	菜	thoi ²²	thoi ³⁵	vegetable	扇	sin ²²	sin ³⁵	fan
	碟	tep ¹	tem ³⁵	dish	腳	kek ³	kej ³⁵	foot

3.1.1.2. The Yulin 玉林 Type

Similar to Rongxian, the Yulin dialect only allows *bianyun* to occur in Rusheng syllables, where a homorganic nasal will take the place of the original plosive consonant, serving as a new coda. Nonetheless, Yulin distinguishes itself from the aforementioned two dialects in its *bianyin* rules. Instead of adopting a single, unified tone, the *bianyin* in Yulin takes different values, hinging on the contour of the target syllable’s lexical tone (Zhang & Zhou 1993):

- 1) [+high] / [+mid] / [+level] (Yin) + 兒 [55] → high level [44] or mid rising [34]
- 2) [+low] / [+falling] (Yang) + 兒 [55] → low rising [24]

It is evident that the three *bianyīn* variants result from a tonal fusion between the tone of the target syllable and that of the already vanished *er* 兒 suffix.

3.1.2. *Bianyīn* 變音 Alone

This type is rarely found in Western Guangdong and Southeastern Guangxi Yue varieties. In other words, diminutive forms in such dialects retain more or less certain residues of the *er* 兒 suffix in the rime, particularly in Rusheng syllables.

On the other hand, this type prevails in Cantonese and other Yue varieties of the Guangfu subgroup, where *bianyīn* is used as the only diminutive device, involving no change in the rime. Therefore, whether the high level [55] and high rising [35] *bianyīn* forms in Cantonese have anything to do with the *er* 兒-suffixization remains a controversial issue. On the basis of available data, it is difficult to reject either of the following two hypotheses. (1) The *bianyīn* is autogenous, independent of any kind of diminutive suffixization such as the *er* 兒-suffixization. (2) The *bianyīn* in the Guangfu Yue dialects is the remnant of a high-pitched *er* 兒 suffix which might have existed in Common Yue at an earlier stage but is lost in the majority of its modern varieties, even in the most conservative Rusheng syllables. The two *bianyīn* forms can be plausibly derived via a single process of tonal fusion between the lexical tones and the postulated high-pitched *er* 兒 suffix: the fusion between the Yinping [53] and the tone of *er* 兒 [55] results in the high level *bianyīn* [55], and that between the relatively low-pitched non-Yinping tones (i.e., [11], [35], [13], [33], [22], etc.) and [55] results in the high rising *bianyīn* [35].

3.2. The Origin of Siyi High Rising *Bianyīn*

On the surface, the high rising *bianyīn* in Siyi only involves tonal alternation and it seems to be an independent diminutive device. But several pieces of evidence lead us to the hypothesis that its origin could be traced to a diminutive suffix.

First of all, the contour configuration of the high rising *bianyīn* in Siyi dialect strongly suggests that it is the result of a tonal fusion, i.e., the fusion between the original lexical tone and a high-pitched tone [5]. In other words, it patterns with the Yulin type, and it is likely that this high-pitched tone could be ascribed to a certain diminutive suffix with the highest pitch [5]. Chances are that this diminutive suffix is lost in history, leaving its tonal residue attached to the preceding target morpheme.

Moreover, besides the high rising *bianyīn*, diminutives in Huicheng can also be expressed by adding an extra high-pitched syllable [ə⁴⁵] to the target words, especially when in slower speech. According to Deng's (2000) report, a similar syllable [e⁵⁵] is also found in the Chikan dialect of Kaiping. In terms of distribution it is more constrained than its Huicheng counterpart, as it can only be attached to Rusheng syllables, while the syllable [ə⁴⁵] in Huicheng is not subject to this constraint. Below are some examples from the two dialects:

Huicheng:

有時	jəu ¹¹ si ²²⁵	jəu ¹¹ si ²² ə ⁴⁵	‘sometimes’
khui ¹¹ 排	khui ¹¹ phai ²²⁵	khui ¹¹ phai ²² ə ⁴⁵	‘recently’

Chikan:

白鶴		vak ³² hək ²¹ e ⁵⁵	‘white crane’
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The extra syllables [ə⁴⁵] and [e⁵⁵] are transparently identical given their clear similarity in phonetic form and the close affinity between the two dialects, and can be regarded as a kind of diminutive suffix possibly traceable to the stage of Common Siyi. In tracing its history, there are two possibilities to consider:

- 1) At an earlier stage, the extra syllable could only occur with Rusheng syllables, as is the case of the present-day Chikan dialect;
- 2) At an earlier stage, the extra syllable could occur with syllables in all tonal categories, as is the case of the present-day Huicheng dialect.

The second scenario becomes apparently more plausible when the situation of other Yue varieties, particularly those spoken in Western Guangdong and Southeastern Guangxi, is taken into comparison. The *bianyun* forms resulted from the *er* 兒-suffixization in Rongxian and Yulin clearly indicate that Rusheng syllables with a plosive coda are more conservative in retaining remnant features of the diminutive suffix than those with a nasal, vowel or zero coda. Likewise, it is better to regard the Chikan [e⁵⁵] after Rusheng syllables as a residue, reminiscent of a wider distribution at an earlier historical stage. In other words, there is a striking parallel between the syllable [e⁵⁵] in Chikan and the [+nasal] feature in Rongxian and Yulin, where the diminutive suffix or its remnant feature can only occur with Rusheng syllables, and Huicheng is more like Xinyin in that the distribution of the diminutive suffix or its remnant feature is less constrained.

Of course, one may raise the objection that [e⁵⁵]/[ə⁴⁵] could be nothing but an autogenously generated dummy syllable rather than a diminutive suffix. It is reasonable if one only takes the case of Chikan into consideration, as Rusheng (checked) syllables are hardly suitable to be a TBU (tone bearing unit) for high and long pitch since they are short and abrupt. But when it comes to the Huicheng dialect, where words in all tonal categories can be appended with an [ə⁴⁵], such an opinion becomes difficult to hold.

Admittedly, it is fairly difficult to ascertain the etymology of this [ə⁴⁵]/[e⁵⁵]. It could be a diminutive suffix that was extensively used in Guangdong but ultimately lost without any trace in most contemporary Yue varieties, or it might even be a substratum suffix inherited from Baiyue 百越 languages, which have a long history of interaction with Southern Chinese dialects. But there exists no concrete evidence that could either

verify or falsify such an assumption. Nonetheless, it is not implausible, if not entirely satisfactory, to hypothesize that the suffix could be identified as exactly the diminutive suffix *er* 兒, which is not only used in Mandarin and Southern Wu, but also widely distributed in Western Yue.

To begin with, although *er* 兒 is no longer used in colloquial speech of today's Siyi dialects, and its typical pronunciation (such as [ŋi²²] in Huicheng, Jiangzhou and Niujiang) departs drastically from [ə⁴⁵]/[e⁵⁵] in terms of initial, final, as well as tone, our assumption can nonetheless find some support in the pronunciation data of the morpheme *er* 兒 provided by previous studies.

Table 3.2. The Pronunciation of *Er* 兒 in Siyi Varieties

	Huicheng	Shuangshui ⁵	Taicheng	Chikan	Haixin ⁶	Jiangzhou	Niujiang
The Author's Observation	ŋi	ŋi					
McCoy (1966)			ŋei		ŋei		
Zhan & Cheung (1987)	ŋi		ŋi	ŋei			ŋi
Huang & Ye (1990)			ŋei				
Deng (2000)				ŋei			
Shum (2003)						ŋi	

The table shows that *er* 兒 is pronounced as either [ŋi] or [ŋei] in different Siyi varieties. Many other words that have the same MC phonological status (i.e. Grade III of Category *Zhi* 止攝三等), such as *er* 耳 'ear' and *er* 二 'two', are read as [ŋei] in most Siyi varieties, as shown in the following table.

Table 3.3. The Pronunciation of *Er* 耳二 in Siyi Varieties

	Huicheng	Shuangshui	Taicheng	Chikan	Haixin	Niujiang
The Author's Observation	ŋi	ŋei				
McCoy (1966)			ŋei		ŋei	
Zhan & Cheung (1987)	ŋi		ŋei	ŋei		ŋi
Huang & Ye (1990)			ŋei			
Deng (2000)				ŋei		

It is fairly explicit that the alternate pronunciations of syllables in Grade III of Category *Zhi* should be attributed to two different strata in Siyi, with [i] as the literal

⁵ Shuangshui 雙水 is a town in Xinhui. Compared with Huicheng, the county seat, Shuangshui receives much less influence from Standard Cantonese.

⁶ Haixin 海心 is a town in Kaiping.

reading and [ei] as the colloquial one. The literal-colloquial distinction can easily account for the difference in pronunciation between *er* 耳二 and *er* 兒 in today's Siyi varieties: 耳 and 二 are frequently used as colloquial words in everyday speech, and consequently the colloquial reading [ɲei] prevails in Siyi; whereas 兒 is no longer used as a colloquial word, and thus only the literal reading [ɲi] is available to most Siyi varieties. We may further hypothesize that, at an earlier historical stage when 兒 was used in the colloquial speech of Siyi (as it is in many Western Yue varieties), it was read as [ɲei].

Therefore, it is not impossible for [ɲei] to evolve into something like [ə] or [e] at the 'weak' position of a suffix. The schwa [ə] occupies the central place in the vowel space, which nearly all vowels could easily change into when weakened. As for the origin of the syllable [e] in Chikan, it could be reasonably conceived as a result of erosion of the original [ɲei], with its initial and coda lost.

A potentially vulnerable point in our claim is that in nearly all southern Chinese dialects where the *er* 兒-suffixation is used as a productive diminutive device (i.e., Yue varieties spoken in Western Guangdong and Southeastern Guangxi, and Southern Wu), reduction of the pronunciation of the suffix often results in the loss of its rime, with its nasal initial fused into the preceding syllable, but in the Siyi dialect it is the main vowel rather than the nasal initial that is preserved as a residue of the whole syllable after reduction. Nevertheless, the postulated sound change is articulatorily possible; and moreover, a similar change can be found in today's Siyi dialects.

The syllabic reduction we postulated for the diminutive suffix finds a parallel case in the perfective aspect suffix in a number of Siyi varieties. According to Gan & Shao (2001), the etymology for the perfective aspect marker in Siyi is *dao* 到/倒, which is also found in quite a few southern dialects. The following table compares pronunciations of the character *dao* 到/倒 and the perfective aspect marker in several Siyi diapients.

Table 3.4. The Pronunciation of *Dao* 到/倒 and Perfective Aspect Markers in Siyi Varieties

	Taicheng	Huicheng ⁷	Chikan	Jiangzhou	Niujiang	Yayao
<i>dao</i> 到/倒	au	tou	ɔ	tɔu	tau	ɛ
Perfective Aspect Marker	ə	tæu	e	a	a	e

The syllabic reduction of the perfective aspect marker *dao* 到/倒 is strikingly parallel to that of *er* 兒. Compare:

- 1) Vowel reduction to schwa [ə]:

⁷ According to the author's observation, the perfective aspect marker in Huicheng is read as [ə³³] instead of [tæu].

- [ŋei] → [ə] [au] → [ə]
 2) Lose of initial and coda:
 [ŋei] → [e] [tau] → [a]

Furthermore, though the tone of *er* 兒 is consistently Yangping in its literal reading in most Yue varieties, when used as a suffix, its tone in the colloquial reading is predominantly a high level [55] in a significant number of Western Yue varieties, which is in general not identical to the lexical tone of Yangping (Chen, Xiaojin 2007; Xie 2007; Chen Xiaoming 2007; Liang 2007).

Table 3.5. The Colloquial Reading of *Er* 兒 as a Diminutive Suffix

Dialect	Example			Yangping Tone	Tone Category for [55]
	Word	Syllable	Meaning		
Nankang 南康	仔兒	tsei ³⁵ ŋi ⁵⁵	young man	21	Yinping
Bobai 博白	鴨兒	ap ³³ ŋi ⁵⁵	little duck	232	
Daxin 大新	桌兒	ŋi ⁵⁵	small table	33	
Xiaojiang 小江	雞兒	kɛi ⁵⁵ ŋi ⁵⁵	chicken	22	
Cantonese	乞兒	hɛk ⁵ ji ⁵⁵	bagger	11	

It is clear that *er* 兒 tends to adopt the high level tone [55] when serving as a suffix, that is, in its colloquial reading. The regular Yangping tone of *er* 兒 in various Yue varieties is associated with its literal reading rather than colloquial reading, and we believe that the colloquial reading of *er* 兒 in Siyi at an earlier stage could be reconstructed as [ŋei⁴⁵] or [ŋei⁵⁵], from which [ə⁴⁵]/[e⁵⁵] could be easily derived.

In summary, it is rather conclusive that the high rising *bianyīn* in Siyi belongs to the Yulin type of diminutive forms, except that the origin of its diminutive suffix [ə⁴⁵]/[e⁵⁵] is not as transparent as its Yulin counterpart. Nevertheless, in absence of a better candidate, *er* 兒 could be considered as the most plausible origin of the suffix [ə⁴⁵]/[e⁵⁵], which is in turn held responsible for the rise of the high rising *bianyīn* in Siyi.

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