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Two notes on Proto-Ersuic

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Abstract

This paper looks at the history of Tosu using 'forward reconstruction'. It concludes that Proto-Ersuic changed *-im to *-am already before its breakup as a unity, but the 'brightening' of *-a- to -i- took place independently in Tosu and Lizu-Ersu. In Tosu this brightening did not target labial (or velar) initial words lacking an inherited medial *-j-. A number of changes in the history of Tosu probably preceded brightening, namely *-um, *-ak > -o and *-u, *-it, *-at, *-ra > -e. In contrast, the change *-e- > -i- in Tosu, of unclear conditioning, appears to be quite late. A dissimilation *CeCe > CeCa is potentially also a recent change.

Keywords

Ersu – Lizu – Tosu – historical phonology – forward reconstruction

1 Preliminary remarks

The Ersuic subbranch of Burmo-Qiangic consists of three languages, Ersu, Lizu, and Tosu.[1] Tosu is recorded among the 華夷譯語 *Huáyí yìyǔ* vocabularies from the Qianlong (1735–1796) period (Chirkova 2014; Nishida 1973). Ersu was first recorded by Baber (1882). Sun Hongkai appears to have first worked on Lizu, with partial publication of his data in Nishida and Sun 1990. Yu (2012) surveys the work on the family and provides a preliminary reconstruction, based predominantly on Ersu and Lizu.

1 This Lizu language is not to be confused with the similarly named Lisu of the Loloish subbranch.

Since Yu's initial study, more data on these three languages have become available. A deposit at the Endangered Languages Archive (MP1655457) contains material from all three languages. Zhang (2013) devoted a PhD dissertation to Ersu. Katia Chirkova published new data on Tosu (2014), including contributing to a grammar (Han et al. 2019), and also published studies on the phonology of all three languages (Lizu: Chirkova and Chen 2013, Ersu: Chirkova et al. 2015, Tosu: Chirkova 2015). In terms of reconstruction, Chirkova and Handel propose a series of voiceless nasals (2013), explore the role of inherited high vowels and glides in conditioning spirantization (2013), and compare the Tosu tone categories to those in Bradley's (1979) Proto-Loloish reconstructions (2016).[2] Yu (2019) offers a variety of modifications to his previous work on the basis of the newly available Tosu data, incorporating some of the proposals of Chirkova and Handel. Most recently, Chirkova and Handel (2019) argue that the change *-a > -i seen in these three languages (conventionally called 'brightening'), occurred independently in their histories; I confirm this finding below.

My brief remarks here do not systematically revise the reconstructed system of Yu (2012), not least because the author himself is partway through such an enterprise (Yu 2019). Instead, I make use of only that data that Yu himself employs in his two studies and I confine myself primarily to the historical phonology of Tosu. I begin with a look at 'son' and 'daughter' and turn from there to the related questions of Yu's reconstruction of *e and *i. I rely on 'inverted reconstruction' (Hockett 1958, 512–516, Anttila 1972, 346) also called 'reconstructing forward in time' (Watkins 1962, 97) and 'reconstruction from the top down' (Blust 1972, 1), a method known to Trans-Himalayan linguistics (Jacques and Michaud 2011), but still poorly known, as evinced by an anonymous referee's admonition that reconstruction "proceeds from the bottom up". In keeping with this method, I intentionally compare Tosu forms to cognates in distantly related languages.

2 The reconstruction of 'son' and 'daughter'

Yu (2012, 96) reconstructs Proto-Ersuic *zi[2] 'son' (giving Kala Lizu-C *'zɿ*, Mianning Lizu *'zi*, and Kala Lizu-H *zɿ*^{53}) and for 'daughter' he reconstructs variation between *zijo[2] (giving Mianning Lizu *'zɨjo* and Kala Lizu-H *zu*^{33}*ju*^{53} ~*zu*^{53}*ju*^{53}) and *zjeji (giving Zeluo Ersu *zi*^{33}*ji*^{55} and Kala Lizu-C *'zeje*).[3] This is an unsatis-

2 A fraught undertaking given the failings of Bradley's reconstructions (see Hill 2019, 54).

3 I use 'Kala Lizu-C' for the doculect reflected in Chirkova (2008) and 'Kala Lizu-H' for the

factory solution; one should avoid positing competing similar forms in a proto-language with the same meaning (Fellner and Hill 2019). I regard *zijo^{2} as innovative, analogically renewed on the basis of 'son' and the diminutive suffix seen in *ŋuijo 'calf' and *gojo^{1} 'mouse', among other forms; only *zjeji requires explanation.

Yu (2019) revisits these reconstructions in light of the newly available Tosu data. The relevant Tosu forms are *ʑi^{32}* 'son' and *za^{44}-mi^{44}* 'daughter'. Although Tosu has the three distinct correspondences *-a-*, *-i-*, and *-e-* for his 2012 *-i- (see Table 1), Yu refrains from adding further reconstructions to account for these divergent correspondences. He etymologizes Tosu *ʑi^{32}* to Proto-Ersuic *zi^{2}. In contrast, on the basis of new Tosu data Yu "rather formulaically" updates his 2012 reconstructions of the rimes *je and *jẽ to *-an and *-am (see Table 2).[4] Yu is not explicit in 2019 about how he proposes to handle the variation in the word for daughter that he posited in 2012. Presumably his new reconstruction *zan^{2} is only meant to replace the first syllable of *zjeji, so we should reconstruct *zanji^{2} as the form ancestral to Zeluo Ersu *zi^{33}ji^{55}* and Kala Lizu-C *'ʑeje*. By implication, he regads this *-ji as unrelated to the *-mi^{44}* of Tosu.

To account for the difference between *ʑi^{32}* 'son' (< *zi^{2}) and *za^{44}-mi^{44}* (< *zan^{2}) 'daughter', Yu invokes the so-called 'allofams' *za and *za-n 'child' in James Matisoff's reconstruction of Proto-Tibeto-Burman (2019, 28 n. 24). Characteristic of accounts that take recourse to allofamic variation, this explanation merely borrows from Peter to pay Paul. The similarity between Tosu *za^{44}-mi^{44}* and cognates such as Burmese သမီး *sa-mīḥ* and Thangmi *camăi* speak against the reconstruction of the Tosu form as *zan^{2}. Yu's current reconstruction suggests that Burmo-Qiangic *tsa-mi (*vel. sim.*) became Proto-Ersuic *zan-mi^{2}, which then partially reverted, giving the attested *za^{44}-mi^{44}*. A continuity between Burmo-Qiangic and Tosu on the relevant details is a more parsimonious explanation.

If we instead permit ourselves to rewrite Yu's (2019) *-an and *am (his 2012 *-je and *jẽ) mechanically as *-am and *-Am, the solution to 'daughter' falls into place.[5] Before 'brightening' we had *za^{2} 'son' and *zami^{2} 'daughter'. The con-

doculect reflected in Huáng (1992). Note that the raised 1 and 2 in Proto-Ersuic forms index tonal categories and do not indicates phonetic pitch values.

4 The 2012 distinction between *-je- and *-jẽ-, seems to have something to do with distinct outcomes in Mianning Lizu, but I am unable to locate a clear statement of its motivation in Yu's works.

5 A draft version of this article followed Yu's (2002) notational convention by writing *-am and *-ãm, but a referee mistook this as a positive proposal, so I now go with this more explicitly arbitrary solution. The difference between *-am and *-Am is in any event here irrelevant (see note 4).

TABLE 1 Tosu correspondences to Yu's 2012 Proto-Ersuic *-i-

Yu (2012)	Tosu	Gloss	Other Trans-Himalayan
*pimæ^{1}	pa^{44}ma^{44}	frog	Lashi *ʔpaH*, Japhug *qaɕpa*, Tib. སྦལ་པ་ *sbal-pa*
*bi^{1}	ba^{32}	thin	Bur. ပါး *pāḥ*, Lashi *ʔpɔːH*, Japhug *mba*
*dzi^{2}	dʑi^{32}	eat	Bur. စား *cāḥ*, Lashi *tsɔː*, Tib. ཟ་ *za*
*ts^{h}i^{2}	tɕ^{h}i^{44}	salt	Bur. ဆား *chāḥ*, Lashi *tshoH*, Tib. ཚྭ་ *tshwa*
*zi^{2}	ʑi^{32}	son	Bur. သား *sāḥ*, Atsi *tsɔ^{11}*, Thangmi *ca*
*zikæ	ʑi^{44}ka^{53}	foolish/stupid	
*ni^{1}	ɲi^{44}	gold	Bur. နီ *nī* 'red'
*megi^{2}	me^{32}-dʑi^{32}	thunder	
*bi^{2}	bi^{32}	bee	Bur. ပျား *pyāḥ*
*mi	mi^{32}	monkey	WBur. မျောက် *myok* < *myuk, Lashi *mjukV*
*mjidzi^{2}	mi^{32}dzɿ^{44}	rabbit	
*ji^{1}	ji^{44}	go	
*pwEki/pwEtɕi	pe^{32}tɕi^{53}	send/dispatch	
*bedi^{1}	be^{32}dʑi^{44}	insect	
*hĩ^{2}	mi^{44}	bamboo	Tib. སྨྱིག་ *smyig*
*tɕi (2019)	tɕi^{32}	put, place	
*kri^{1}	ke^{34}	star	Bur. ကြယ် *kray*, Lashi *ʔkji*
*t^{h}egri^{1}	ge^{44}	hear	Bur. ကြား *krāḥ*
*rdi^{1}	ɕe^{34}	eight	OBur. ရှစ် *rhyat* (Nishi 1999, 47)
*(ri)ni^{1}	wa^{44}-ɲe^{32}	near	Bur. နီး *nīḥ*, Tib. ཉེ *ñe*
*ʃi^{2}	ʃe^{44}	meat	Bur. သား *sāḥ*, Lashi *śɔH*, Tib. ཤ་ *śa*
*si^{1}	se^{32}	hit/kill	Bur. သတ် *sat*, Lashi *ʔsaːtH*
*ɬjeki^{1}	tɕe^{44}le^{44}	ladder	
*mi^{1}	mje^{44}	name	OTib. མྱིན་ *myiṅ*, Bur. မည် *mañ̃* < *miṅ
*nemi^{1}	mie^{21}ko^{44}	swallow	WBur. မျိုး *myui*
*mp^{h}i^{2}	p^{h}je^{34} 'vomit'	spit	Japhug Rgy. *mujphɤt*

ditioning environment for brightening, whatever it may have been, pertained only to the former. I propose that in Ersu and Lizu the *am in *zami^{2} developed exactly as it did in monosyllabic words. Compare Zeluo Ersu *zi^{33}ji^{55}*, Kala Lizu-C *ʻʑeje*, and *za^{44}-mi^{44}* 'daughter' with Zeluo Ersu *tsi^{55}*, Kala Lizu-H *tɕe^{31}*, Tosu *tsa^{34}* 'hair' (< *tsam^{1}). With an analogous explanation, Tosu *na^{44}ma^{44}* 'sister' derives from *hnAmæ^{1}, with no need for the second -m- posited by Yu; this

TABLE 2 Tosu correspondences to Yu's 2012 Proto-Ersuic *-je- and *-jẽ-

Yu (2012)	Yu (2019)	Tosu	Gloss	Other Trans-Himalayan
*ʃje¹	*ʃan¹	ʃa⁴⁴	iron	Bur. သံ *saṃ*
*zjeji/zijo²	*zan²	za⁴⁴-mi⁴⁴	daughter	Bur. သမီး *sa-mīḥ*, Thangmi *camăi*
*mbje¹	*mban¹	(m)ba⁴⁴	mountain	Bola *pam⁵⁵*
*tɕe¹	*tɕan¹	tɕa³⁴	cloud	Bur. တိမ် *tim*
*jẽ¹		ja⁴⁴	house	Bur. အိမ် *im*
*tɕʰe¹	*tɕʰan¹	tʃʰa³⁴	drink	
*tsjẽ¹	*tsam¹	tsa³⁴	hair	Bur. ဆံ *chaṃ-*, Lashi *tsham*
*dzjẽ¹	*dzam¹	dza⁴⁴	bridge	Japhug Rgy. *ndzom*, Tib. ཟམ་ *zam*
*zjẽ¹	*zam¹	za³²	use	
*hjẽmæ¹	*hnammæ¹	na⁴⁴ma⁴⁴	sister	Tib. ཉ་མ་ *ña-ma* 'young lady'
*bjẽbjẽ¹	*bjam	dʑa⁴⁴-dʑa⁴⁴	fly (v.)	Bur. ပျံ *pyaṃ*
*tsjẽpʰrje¹	*pʰran (?)	pʰe³⁴	braid / plait	
*bædzje¹	*bædzɻan¹ (?)	ba⁴⁴dʒe⁴⁴ 'copper coin'	money	
*ɬjeki¹		tɕe⁴⁴le⁴⁴	ladder	
*kʰje¹		kʰo⁵³	give	Japhug Rgy. *khɤm*
*sjẽ²		so⁴⁴	three	Bur. သုံး *suṃḥ*, Tib. གསུམ་ *gsum*

revised reconstruction has the merit of bringing the word closer to Tibetan ཉ་མ་ *ña-ma* 'young lady'.[6]

In sum, Proto-Ersuic 'daughter' should be reconstructed *zami² and Proto-Ersuic 'sister' should be reconstructed *hnAmæ¹. We may also note in passing that both 'cloud' and 'house' (respectively Tosu *tɕa³⁴* < *tɕam¹, Bur. တိမ် *tim*, and Tosu *ja⁴⁴* < *jAm¹, Bur. အိမ် *im*, my reconstructions) point to a change *-im > *-am, unambiguously shared by the three Ersuic languages and therefore an isogloss for this family (see Table 2).

6 Also compare Japhug Rgy. *tɤ-snom* 'sister of a man'.

3 Reconstructing *i and *e

In our discussion of 'daughter' we saw that Yu's (2012) reconstruction of Proto-Ersuic *-i- corresponds to -a-, -i-, and -e- in Tosu. Yu notes that "[p]eeking at the PTB roots, we notice that many in the -i set have open syllables, whereas a number in the -e set have closed syllables" and considers reconstructing distinct origins in Proto-Ersuic, but decides to "leave this as an exercise for the future" (2019, 32). Instead, he derives the Tosu from the Proto-Ersuic forms, for example proposing the change *ri > e- to account for 'star' and 'hear'. The conditioning environments necessary to explain these data are more complex that the open versus closed syllable that Yu toys with. On the one hand, 'bamboo' with inherited *-i- is a closed syllable (if it is not a Wanderwort); on the other hand 'meat' and 'hear' inherited open syllables but have *e.

My suggestion, agreeing with Chirkova and Handel (2019), is that brightening had not yet occurred at the Proto-Ersuic level and that when it did occur it affected Tosu differently than Ersu and Lizu. The words 'frog' and 'thin', which Yu refers to as "somewhat aberrant" (2019, 32), have impeccable Trans-Himalayan etymologies (see Table 1). Yu's current reconstruction suggests that Burmo-Qiangic *a became Proto-Ersuic *i, which then reverted to Tosu *a, with the most recent change lexically conditioned. To propose that Tosu maintains the inherited vowel is a much simpler explanation. But, if Tosu generally changes inherited *a to -i, then either the two words 'frog' and 'thin' inherited a vowel, call it $*a_2$, that was distinct from the vowel inherited in 'eat', 'salt', etc. (in which case Japhug, Burmese, etc. merged $*a_1$ and $*a_2$) or the differing results are due to different phonetic environments. To suggest that in the proto-language 'frog' and 'thin' had distinct vowels from 'eat', 'salt', etc. is less parsimonious than to propose that Tosu brightening did not target labial initial words. Those labial initial words with the vowel *-i-* in Tosu that might appear to be exceptions ('bee' and 'monkey') inherited medial *-j- (Bur. ပျား *pyāḥ* and ဗျောက် *myok*), which is what triggered the brightening.

The sound changes affecting Tosu appear to include *at > *e* for 'kill' and 'eight', and *ra > *e* for 'star' and 'hear' (as suggested after a manner by Yu). The *-i-* in 'bamboo' and the *-e-* in 'near' and 'name' are likely inherited. As for brightening, it can now be stated more precisely as *-a- > *-i-* after coronals or medial *-j-. The most problematic forms are 'gold' and 'meat'. In the case of 'gold', it is quite possible that the Burmese comparandum is simply incorrect. The most obvious analysis of 'meat' is that the inherited rime should be treated as *-ja- rather than *-a-, but even so, there is a problem because we then expect *-i-* as we see in 'bee'. The treatment of *-ju- is problematic, with *-i-* as expected in 'monkey' but *-e-* for 'swallow'; I have no solution to offer.

Having looked at the Tosu correspondences to Yu's (2012) Proto-Ersuic *-i-, we turn to the Tosu correspondences to his 2012 Proto-Ersuic *-e- (Table 3). Yu sees the *-o-* vowel of the Tosu forms for 'hand', 'deep', 'breath', and 'three' as unexplained; the fact that Burmese has the rime *-ak* for three out of four of these words points to a change *-ak > *-o*, as Chirkova and Handel (2016, p. 30) propose.[7] The change *-um > *-o* is warranted on the basis of 'three' and 'give'. Some examples of Tosu *-i-* are probably inherited ('two', both syllable of 'eye'). The changes *-at > *-e*, and *-u > *-e*, already proposed above, account for 'root', 'who', 'nine', 'sky', 'insect' and the first syllable of 'phlegm/spittle'. Both 'goat' and 'seven' point to a change *-it > *-e*. If *-i- is indeed inherited, it is surprising to see *-e-* in 'wind'. The etymon 'fire' appears with *-i-* as an independent lexical item, but with the vowel *-e-* in compound with 'smoke'. However, when we note that the first syllable for 'this year' optionally appears with either *-e-* or *-i-*, it seems likely that we are not seeing here a phenomenon of any great age. The *-a-* seen in 'spittle' and 'smoke' suggests a change *-u- > *-a-* after velars, but if so, 'nine' somehow escaped this change. Perhaps 'spittle' and 'smoke' instead point to a dissimulation of *CeCe to *CeCa.[8]

If Proto-Ersuic *-a > -i occurred independently in Tosu and Lizu-Ersu, two questions arise, namely (1) how to now reconstruct in Proto-Ersuic those words that Yu (2012) reconstructs with *-i and (2) how to now reconstruct in Proto-Ersuic those words that he reconstructed with *-a. Since all proposals made here relate to Tosu, these questions we can safely kick into the long grass if we understand Yu's (2012) reconstructions as pertaining to Proto-Ersu-Lizu rather than proto-Ersuic.

4 Conclusions

Proto-Ersuic changed *-im to *-am already before its breakup as a unity, but the 'brightening' of *-a- to *-i-* took place independently in Tosu and Lizu-Ersu. In Tosu this brightening did not target labial (or velar) initial words lacking an inherited medial *-j-. A number of changes in the history of Tosu probably preceded brightening, namely *-um, *-ak > *-o* and *-u, *-it, *-at, *-ra > *-e*. In contrast, the change *-e- > -i- in Tosu, of unclear conditioning, appears to be quite late. A dissimilation *CeCe > CeCa is potentially also a recent change.

7 The 18th century data has 'hand' *log kog*, 锣锅, *'lo. –ko, 'deep' *na*, 那, *'na, 'breath' *sog*, 率, *'shai, and 'three' *gsum*, 梭, *–so (see Chirkova 2014)

8 I thank Mikhail Zhivlov for pointing out a serious error in an earlier version of this discussion.

TABLE 3 Tosu correspondences to Yu's 2012 Proto-Ersuic *-e-

Yu (2012)	Tosu	Gloss	Other Trans-Himalayan
*le-	lo^{32}-ko^{53}	hand	Bur. လက် *lak*, Tib. ལག་ *lag*
*nene	no^{34}	deep	Bur. နက် *nak*
*sẽ^{1}	so^{32}	breath	Bur. သက် *sak*
*sjẽ^{2}	so^{44}	three	Bur. သုံး *suṃḥ*
*k^{h}je^{1}	k^{h}o^{53}	give	Japhug Rgy. *khɤm*
*mja^{1}(se)	mi^{53}sɿ^{32}	eye	Bur. မျက်စိ *myak-ci*, OTib. དམྱིག་ *dmyig*
*ts^{h}e^{2}	ts^{h}ɿ^{44}	wash	OBur. ဆိယ်း *chiyḥ*, Atsi *čhi*^{11}
*tse^{2}	tsɿ^{44}	hemp	
*ndze^{1}	dzɿ^{32}	ride (horse)	Bur. စီး *cīḥ*, Atsi *či*^{11}
*tɕ^{h}etɕ^{h}e^{1}	tɕ^{h}i^{44}	ten	Bur. ဆယ် *chay*
*ts^{h}ehĩ^{1}	ts^{h}e^{32}-ɲe^{44}, tɕ^{h}i^{32}-ɲe^{44}	this year	
*te^{1}	tɕi^{44}	one	Tib. གཅིག་ *gčig*, Bur. တစ် *tac* < *dik
*ne^{1}	ɲi^{53}	two	Tib. གཉིས་ *gñis*
*ts^{h}ek^{h}ɑ^{1}	ts^{h}e^{32}-k^{h}a^{53}	phlegm/spittle	Tib. མཆུ *mchu* 'lip', Tib. ཁུ་ *khu* 'juice'
*se^{2}	se^{44}-ɡu^{44}	who	Bur. သူ *sū* 'he', Tib. སུ་ *su* 'who?'
*mende	me^{32}-dje^{44}	clear (weather)	
*t^{h}e^{1}	t^{h}e^{55}	s/he	
*meli/mele^{2}	me^{32}-le^{44}	wind	WBur. လေ *le* < *liy
*mbre^{1}	me^{32}-tsu^{53}	root	OBur. *mryat*
*ɣeniu/ɣoniu	ve^{53}-ɲi^{32}	intestine	
*ŋɡe^{2}	ŋɡe^{32}	nine	WBur. ကိုး *kuiḥ*, Tib. དགུ་ *dgu*
*gre^{1} (2019)	ge^{32}	grind	
*bebe^{1}	be^{44}be^{44}	crawl, climb	
*p^{h}ek^{h}wæ^{1}	p^{h}e^{44}k^{h}a^{54}	expensive (= price+big)	
*me/mo	me^{32}	sky	OBur. မိုဝ်း *muiwh*
*bedi^{1}	be^{32}dzi^{44}	insect	OBur. ပိုဝ်း *puiwḥ*, Tib. འབུ་ *ḥbu*
*me^{1}	mi^{32}	fire	Bur. မီး *mīḥ*, OTib. མྱེ་ *mye*
*sẽpu^{1}	ɕe^{53}-pu^{32}	tree	Bur. သစ် *sac* < *sik, Tib. ཤིང་ *śiṅ*
*snẽ^{2} (2019)	ɲe^{34}	seven	Chi. 七 *tshit*
*ts^{h}ẽ^{1}	tɕ^{h}e^{53}	goat	Bur. ဆိတ် *chit*
*k^{h}re (2019)	k^{h}u^{53}	year	
*nebre^{1}	ba^{53}	tired	
*meŋk^{h}e^{2}	me^{32}-k^{h}a^{44}	smoke	OBur. မီးခိုဝ်း *mīḥ-khuiwḥ*
*jẽ^{1}	ja^{44}	house	Bur. အိမ် *im*

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