

SOME EVIDENCE FROM BIAO MIN ON THE INITIALS OF PROTO-MIENIC (YAO) AND PROTO-HMONG-MIEN (MIAO-YAO)*

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1. PREFATORY NOTES

1.1 Terminology and reconstruction. The language family under discussion here is Hmong-Mien (H-M), consisting of the two branches Hmongic (Hm) and Mienic (Mn).

The family is also known as Miao-Yao, the two branches being Miao and Yao.

All initial consonants are assumed to have a three-way manner distinction. For obstruents these are voiceless unaspirate, aspirate, and voiced; the corresponding manners for sonorants are preglottalized, voiceless, and voiced. In addition, obstruents may be [\pm prenasalized]. Using labials as an example:

p	mp	ʔm
ph	mph	m̥
b	mb	m

Consonant types in the same horizontal row have the same effect on tone splitting.

1.2 Subgrouping and sources. The following gives the subgroup, its abbreviation, the representatives cited for each, and the source used. Transcription is as in the original unless otherwise noted.

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Hmongic Branch

黔东南 Qiangdong or East (EHm)	养蒿 Yanghao (YH), Guizhou, from Wang 1979, Wang and Mao 1995
湘西 Xiangxi or North (NHm)	吉卫 Jiwei (JW), Hunan, from Wang 1979, Wang and Mao 1995
川黔滇 Chuanqiandian or West (WHm)	White Hmong of Laos-Thailand, from Heimbach 1969; 宗地 Zongdi (ZD), Guizhou, from Wang 1979, Wang and Mao 1995

Subgrouping uncertain, probably Hmongic

Bunu 布努	瑶里 Yaoli, Guangxi, from Wang and Mao 1995
Pa Hng 巴哼 Baheng	文界 Wenjie, from Wang and Mao 1995

Mienic Branch

Yu Mien (YM)	Downer 1961 and 1973 (“Highland Yao”); Lombard 1968 and Purnell 1970 (dialect of Chiangrai, Thailand); Mao, Meng and Zheng 1982 (龙胜 Longsheng, Guangxi). I use a normalized transcription, the major changes from the cited sources being the following: <table><tr><td><i>Normalized</i></td><td><i>Downer</i></td><td><i>Mao, Meng and Zheng</i></td></tr><tr><td>č čh ĵ</td><td>kj khj qj</td><td>tɕ tɕh dɕ</td></tr><tr><td>iə uə</td><td>iə uə</td><td>wo je</td></tr></table>	<i>Normalized</i>	<i>Downer</i>	<i>Mao, Meng and Zheng</i>	č čh ĵ	kj khj qj	tɕ tɕh dɕ	iə uə	iə uə	wo je
<i>Normalized</i>	<i>Downer</i>	<i>Mao, Meng and Zheng</i>								
č čh ĵ	kj khj qj	tɕ tɕh dɕ								
iə uə	iə uə	wo je								
Kim Mun (KM)	Savina 1926 ¹ (mostly), Wang and Mao (occasionally)									
Biao Min (BM)	Dialect of 双龙 Shuanglong, 全州 Quanzhou County, Guangxi, from my notes. For the transcription see Solnit 1985; here I retain the narrower transcriptions [ɬ tɕ] for the initials written /c cy/ in the 1985 paper, and I use [j] for the palatal semivowel.									
Dzao Min	Mostly not represented; a few forms are from Wang and Mao 1995									

¹ Savina's *quốc-ngữ* transcription is retained, except for tones. Note the following probable equivalences:

<tg>	tɕ, ɕ	<ê>	ɛ	<ao>	a:u
<xl>	s (perhaps phonetically [ʰ])	<ɛ>	ɛ	<ay>	ai
<s>	ʃ, ɕ	<ô>	o	<ai>	ai
		<o>	ɔ	<au>	au

2. STOP + LIQUID CLUSTER INITIALS

It is a truism of comparative Hmong-Mien that Hmongic preserves initial contrasts and simplifies rhymes, while Mienic preserves rhyme contrasts but simplifies initials. This could also be said of the two proto-languages, although proto-Mienic has nearly the full inventory of initial manners, its simplification being carried out more on the inventory of places of articulation.

The Mienic languages this truism is based on are Yu Mien (YM) and Kim Mun (KM). Biao Min (BM), while still classified as Mienic, is more “Hmongic-like”, in that it simplifies rhymes, although not as much as Hmongic. Compare the YM and BM vowel and final-consonant inventories:

YM	finals	i u m n ŋ p t ʔ
	vowels	i e ε a a: ɔ o u
BM	finals	i u n ŋ
	vowels	i e a ə ² ɔ u

BM preserves initial clusters of stop plus liquid better than either KM or the better-studied dialects of YM (Downer, Lombard). Some YM dialects do preserve *-l-*, including some cited in Haudricourt 1947-50; more recently, Theraphan’s (1993) excellent study of comparative Mienic includes a YM language spoken in 阳朔 Yangshuo³ County, Guangxi (her “Northern Mien”) that includes many medial *l*’s.

BM also has a prepalatal obstruent series that is phonemically independent,⁴ unlike the phonetically similar YM series, which can be analyzed (as by Downer) as allophones of velars before /j i/. The BM prepalatals allow us to expand the number of place (of articulation) series reconstructable for proto-Mienic, but there are few surprises when the comparison is carried back to proto-Hmong-Mien. In contrast, the BM words with velar clusters include a set whose Hmongic cognates have little or no trace of the liquid: here BM preserves initial clusters better than Hmongic. We will examine the cluster initials in this section.

2.1 Labial clusters The labial clusters fall into two sets, easily interpreted as contrasting *-ɾ-* and *-l-* in pHm and pH-M; pMn has merged the two. (Underlining indicates irregularities)

² See Solnit 1987 on the phonemic status of this vowel.

³ “Yangshou” in Theraphan.

⁴ Note the following Biao Min contrastive set: *tjau*⁴ ‘pickling jar’, *lau*¹ ‘mushroom’, *tcau*³ ‘claw’, *kjau*³ ‘land snail’.

	YM	KM	BM	pHm	WHm	NHm	EHm
FIVE	pja ¹	pêa ¹	pla ¹	*pr[3]A	tʃi ¹	pza ¹	tʃa ¹
HOUSE	pjau ³	pêau ^{3/5}	pla ³	*pr[5]B	tʃe ³	pzu ³	tʃe ³
FISH	bjau ⁴	bêau ^{4/5}	bla ⁴	*mbr[5]B	ntʃe ^{4/7}	mzu ⁴	zɛ ⁴
BMB.SHOOT	bjai ⁶	bêay ⁶	blai ⁴	*mbr[11]C	ntʃua ⁶	mza ⁶	za ⁶
HOT-SPICY	bjat ⁸	biat ⁸	blan ⁴	*mbr[3]D	ntʃi ⁸	mzei ⁸	za ⁸
EAR	mu ² -	bo ^{3/5} -	blau ²	*mbr[5]A	ntʃe ²	mzu ²	zɛ ²
NOSE	bjwi ⁶	blui ⁶	bli ⁴	*mbr[19]C	ntʃu ⁶	mza ⁶	zɛ ⁶

r-clusters

	YM	KM	BM	pHm	WHm	NHm	EHm
FOUR	pjəi ¹	piəy ¹	pləi ¹	*pl[16]A	plau ¹	pzei ¹	lu ¹
RICE PLANT	bjau ²	blau ²	blau ²	*mbl[4]A	nple ²	nu ²	na ²
TONGUE	biət ⁸	biet ^{7/8}	blin ⁴	*mbl[6]D	nplai ⁶	mja ⁸	ni ⁸
STICKY RICE	bjut ⁸	blot ⁸	blan ⁴	*mbl[15]D	nplau ⁸	nu ⁸	nə ⁸

l-clusters

Chang (1976) notes that the contrast *-l/-r-* is preserved in the WHm dialects Ke-cheng and Zongdi, as these Zongdi forms demonstrate: *plɔ^{1a}* ‘four’, *mplæ²* ‘rice plant’, *mple⁸* ‘tongue’ versus *pʒɪ^{1a}* ‘five’, *pʒæ^{3a}* ‘house’, *mpʒæ²* ‘ear’, *mpʒɪ⁸* ‘spicy’ (Wang writes *ʒ* where Chang’s source has *r*; the sound is probably a retroflex approximant with a certain amount of friction noise).

Wang (1979) further reconstructs a series of clusters made up of labials followed by *ʒ*.⁵ While *ʒ* does occur as a simple initial (both in Wang’s pHm and in many modern Hm languages), it does not form clusters with initials at other places of articulation. Mienic does not reflect this medial *ʒ* with any consistency:

	YM	KM	BM	pHm
FRUIT	piəu ³	pêau ^{3/5}	pjau ³	*pʒ[2]B
MEND			bja ³	*mpʒ[3]B
NAME	buə ⁵	bu ^{3/5}	bau ⁵	*mpʒ[4]C
HAND	puə ⁴	pu ⁴	pau ⁴	*b[4]B

This **-ʒ-* is best seen as palatalization, in some cases caused by a medial *-j-*, in others by a high front nuclear vowel. In any case it is clearly not a liquid.

⁵ Replaced in Wang and Mao 1995 by clusters with *-ts-*: **pts mpts* etc.