

# Plural Endings: A Study on Yibin Dialect

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## ABSTRACT

The Yibin dialect, belonging to the Minjiang subgroup of Southwestern Mandarin, exhibits distinctive plural endings for nouns and pronouns, specifically *-xie*, *-men*, and *-huo*. Among these, *-xie* is applicable to all nouns or pronouns except for singular personal pronouns. Meanwhile, *-men* is affixed to personal pronouns, honorifics, and collective nouns, while *-huo* primarily manifests in fixed expressions. These three markers exhibit variations at the grammatical level, the semantic level, and the pragmatic level.

**Keywords:** *Yibin dialect, Plural, Endings.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

As per F. Palmy, words are classified into lexical and grammatical categories. Lexical words exclusively encapsulate lexical meanings devoid of grammatical attributes such as gender, number, case, tense, etc. The conveyance of syntactic significance relies upon the utilization of configurational morphemes. In terms of the relative position on the stem, morphemes can be divided into prefixes, suffixes, and infixes. In Mandarin Chinese, the number and proportion of endings as an apposition is small. In contrast, the Yibin dialect has a much richer variety of word endings, such as the widely used *-er* and *-zi* as well as dialect-specific word endings like *-xie* and so on.

Generally speaking, the category of numbers encompasses concepts like singular, dual, plural, and so on. However, based on semantic differences, they can be further divided into three types: additive plural, associative plural, and pseudo plural. "Additive plural is a strictly defined category of numbers, referring to a plural relationship involving two or more individual entities of the same thing in a strict sense. Associative plural refers to a numerical relationship in which one individual entity is connected or associated with other entities. Pseudo plural refers to a numerical relationship in which one individual entity is connected or associated with other entities, similar to the concept of associative plural." [6] In Mandarin Chinese, the plural of nouns and pronouns is expressed in a variety of ways,

including "grammatical, lexical and pragmatic means, and the addition of suffixes belongs to the grammatical level of operation." [2] Normally, *-men* is used to indicate the plural. The "*-men*" marker arose around the time of the Tang Dynasty, and is "mainly used to refer to people after nouns and personal pronouns to make plurals." [7] However, in Yibin dialect, the plural endings of nouns and pronouns also have different forms, mainly including *-xie*, *-men.*, and *-huo*, which are widely used and typical of Yibin dialect. The following is a comparison of the grammatical and pragmatic meanings of these three endings.

## 2. -XIE MARKERS

The *-xie* endings in the Yibin dialect are widely used, and are the most frequently used of the three plural word markers, usually after nouns, noun phrases and pronouns.

### 2.1 Grammatical Meaning of *-xie* Markers

#### 2.1.1 Syntactic Structure of Additive Plurals

In the case of denoting an additive plural, the endings *-xie* can have the following syntactic structure, including [CN+*-xie*] in "Table 1", [UN+*-xie*] in "Table 2" and [AN+*-xie*] in "Table 3".

Table 1. [CN+-xie]

a	xuesheng-xie	haizai	jiaoshi	li	dasaoweisheng		
	Student-xie	still	classroom	in	clean up		
	The students are still cleaning up in the classroom.						
b	rang	ta	dai	ni	qu	chongwushichang	kan
	Have	3sg	take	2sg	go to	pet market	see
	Have him take you to the pet market to see the dogs.						
c	ni	ba	bi-xie	dou	dai	huiqu	
	2sg	Ba	pen-xie	all	take	back	
	You take all the pens back.						

a Note: 2sg: 2nd person singular; 3sg: 3rd person singular; CN: countable noun.

From the above examples, it can be seen that in the structure of countable [CN+-xie], the countable noun can be expressive of people, such as students which is consistent with the use of *-men* in Mandarin. But On the other hand, *-xie* can also be

used with nouns that represent objects, including the animate "dog-xie" and the inanimate "pen-xie", which do not exist in Mandarin. In this case, *-xie* denotes the additive plural marker, i.e., the number of objects referred to is more than one.

Table 2. . [UN+-xie]

a	jintian	ni	yiding	yao	ba	yao-xie	dou	hewan
	Today	2sg	must	do	Ba	medicine-xie	all	took
	You must take the medicine today.							
b	zuotian	fadashui,	bazi	dou	bei	shui-xie	yan	le
	Yesterday	flood	dam	all	Bei	water-xie	flood	PST
	The dam was flooded with water yesterday.							
c	ba	fan-xie	dao	gei	gou	chi		
	Ba	rice-xie	dump	to	dog	eat		
	Dump the food on the dog.							

a Note: UN: uncountable noun; PST: past

From "Table 2", it can be seen that *-xie* after uncountable nouns can be used as a modifier to express the quantity of "much" or "a little", and adverbs of degree indicating a large number can also be added before uncountable nouns, such as "so much water", "so much dust", "so much oil".

However, it is not correct to precede uncountable nouns with adverbs of degree indicating small quantities, such as "a little bit of medicine" or "a little bit of rice", which means *-xie* in structure of [UN+-xie] denotes additive plural marker.

Table 3. [AN+-xie]

a	daxue	xuede	zhishi-xie	haishi	youyongde
	College	learn	knowledge-xie	still	useful
	What you learn in college is still useful.				
b	tade	mingtang-xie	duodehen		
	3sg:GEN	mind-xie	a lot		
	He's got a lot on his mind.				
c	zhe	ben	shu	de	guandian-xie
	This	CLF	book	POSS	point-xie
					dou
					henyouyisi
					all
					interesting
	The "points" in this book are interesting.				

a Note: AN: abstract noun; CLF: classifier; GEN: genitive; POSS: possessive

From “Table 3”, it can be seen that abstract nouns with *-xie* mean "many" and "more", and also has the effect of strengthening the tone, adding to the speaker's affirmative tone, expressing the speaker's certain emotions. For example, Example a indicates an affirmative emotion and Example b indicates a disgusted emotion. This type of collocation does not apply to the Mandarin ending *-men*.

From the above, it can be seen that the "[N+*-xie*]" structure indicates the additive plural, i.e., more than one, when the nouns are countable, uncountable and abstract nouns. In this case, the

structure of countable nouns with *-xie* is interchangeable with the Mandarin word "[N+*-men*]". In Mandarin, however, there can be no "[UN+*-men*]", "[AN+*-men*]" structure.

### 2.1.2 Syntactic structure of associative plural

"Endings in the associative plural have here lost the truth-value condition of 'object-item' and become majority-meaning relations denoting the aggregation of different things." [6] The structures associated with associative plural are shown in “Table 4” and “Table 5”.

Table 4. [PN+*-xie*]

a	Zhou Yongkang-xie	fenfen	luoma		
	Zhou Yongkang-xie	all	fallen		
	People like Zhou Yongkang have removed from their positions for corruption.				
b	Li Jiaqi-xie	de	shidai	jieshu	
	Li Jiaqi-xie	GEN	era	over	PST
	The era of persons like Li Jiaqi is over.				

a Note: PN: proper noun

A proper noun is a noun component that is used exclusively to refer to something in a specific context. The above structure of [PN *-xie*] does not mean a large number of things, not a few "Zhou

Yongkang" or "Li Jiaqi", but something related to them. This structure is equivalent to the "[P.N. *-men*]" in Mandarin. If *-xie* is removed, it no longer means plural, but singular and special.

Table 5. [N+N+*-xie*]

a	zhuoziyizi-xie	ye	yao	dazheng				
	Chairs and tables-xie	also	need	clean				
	The desks and chairs need to be cleaned too.							
b	ta	ba	tangtangshuishui-xie	sa	de	daochudoushi		
	3sg	Ba	soup-xie	spill	PRT	everywhere		
	He's making soup everywhere.							
c	tamen	de	guandainxaingfa-xie	ni	hai	bu	liaojie	ma
	3pl	GEN	idea and point -xie	2sg	still	NEG	understand	Q
	Don't you understand their opinions and ideas?							

a Note: 3pl: 3rd person plural; N: noun; NEG: negative; Q: question marker

There is no limit to the type of noun in this construction, and it is mainly used to denote associative plural. For example, the phrase "desks and chairs" includes other facilities and equipment remaining in the classroom in Example a, the "soup-xie" refers to all the leftover food, and "ideas and points" indicates all the ideas they have. These structure cannot be split, and if it is, it becomes additive plural.

From the above, it can be seen that the structure of [P.N.+*-xie*] and [N+N+*-xie*] indicates associative plurals, not in terms of quantity, but in terms of a certain type of thing.

### 2.1.3 Pragmatic Meaning of *-xie* Markers

In the Yibin dialect, *t-xie* is a highly productive ending, mostly combined with free morphemes,

indicating a certain tone of voice and expressing a certain emotion, mainly including the following aspects.

### 2.1.3.1 Express Friendliness

In oral communication, the addition of "-xie" after a predicate can bring the speaker and the listener closer together, indicating friendliness and cordiality. ("Table 6")

Table 6. Expressing friendliness

a	dixiong-xie	dou	buyao	danxin		
	brother-xie	all	NEG	worry		
	Don't worry, brothers.					
b	tongxue-xie	jiu	buyao	zheme	keqi	ma
	Classmate-xie	PRT	NEG	so much	polite	MOOD
	Don't be so polite, we are classmates.					
c	wo	xiaode	malaohaner-xie	doushi	wei	wo hao
	1sg	know	parent-xie	all	for	1sg good
	I know my parents were good to me.					

a Note: 1sg:1st person singular; MOOD:mood; PRT:clause/sentence final particle

Such a statement applies when a more friendly relationship has been established between the speaker and the listener, and is generally used between friends, family members. Compared with "brothers", "classmates", "parents", the addition of the word *-xie* can show a more intimate relationship.

### 2.1.3.2 Express Dissatisfaction and Disdain

"-xie" is used after pronouns to express displeasure and sarcasm.

Table 7. Expressing dissatisfaction and disdain

a	laoma'er-xie	yitindaowan	mei	shi	gan	
	Old woman-xie	the whole day	NEG	things	to do	
	The old women have nothing to do all day.					
b	hao	xuesheng-xie	cai	buhui	bang	naxie chasheng-xie
	Good	student-xie	PRT	NEG	help	those bad student-xie
	The good students won't help the bad students.					
c	mo	le	gouer-xie	yao	xi	shou
	Touch	PST	dog-xie	need	wash	hands
	Wash your hands if you touch dogs.					

The quantities referred to in structures [P+*-xie*] are not clear ("Table 7"). "laoma'er" is a personal pronoun unique to Sichuan, a contemptuous term for older women. In example a, the marker of *-xie* better conveys a tone of contempt and disdain, and in example b, there is sarcasm towards the good students, expressing dissatisfaction and sympathy for the poor students. Example c, on the other hand, uses *-xie* to strengthen the emotion of dislike.

## 3. -MEN MARKERS

### 3.1 Grammatical Meaning of -men Markers

#### 3.1.1 Syntactic Structure of Additive Plurals

In the Yibin dialect, *-men* cannot be combined with a noun, because *-xie* is used in most cases. There are two main cases when *-men* is used to express the additive plural, one is the same as in Mandarin, but only used as the endings of personal

pronouns in the Yinbin dialect. The second case is a special usage in the Yinbin dialect: kinship terms +

third person pronoun + *-men*, examples are in “Table 8”:

Table 8. [P+-men]

a	wo-men 1sg-men	zuotian yesterday	jiu PRT	guoqu go over	le PST	
We went over there yesterday.						
b	ta-men 3sg-men	hai still	meiyou NEG	lai come		
They haven't come yet.						
c	ma Mum	ta-men 3sg-men	xian first	qu go	fandian restauration	le PST
Mum and the others went to the restaurant first.						
d	jiejie Sister	ta-men 3sg-men	haizai still	deng wait	zhe DUR	
Sister and the others are still waiting.						

a Note: DUR: durative; P: pronoun

Examples a and b are consistent with Mandarin and need not be repeated. Examples c and d are specific to the Yinbin dialect and the Sichuan dialect as a whole, where only the third-person pronouns "he" or "she" can be used after kinship titles to indicate that group of people. For example c, it indicates that the mother and her friends or relatives (or any group of people knows) have gone to the restaurant first, but the speaker and listener know the mother better, so she is used to refer to everyone else left.

### 3.1.2 Syntactic Structure of Associative Plural

Pseudo-plural means "the grammatical form of the plural in the grammatical plane, expressing the grammatical meaning of the singular in the pragmatic plane, i.e., plural for singular". In the Yinbin dialect, "personal pronoun + *-men* + relative noun" denotes the pseudo plural. (“Table 9”)

Table 9. [P+-men]

a	wo-men 1sg-men:GEN	yaoer kid	zuijin lately	guai good	de PRT	hen COMP
Our kids have been very good lately.						
b	wo 1sg	zuotian yesterday	kandao see	ni-men 2sg-men:GEN	jiejie sister	le PST
I saw your sister yesterday.						
c	wo-men 1sg-men:GEN	baba dad	jintian today	qu go	nali where	ne Q
Where's our dad going today?						

a Note: COMP: comparative

In Example a, "our kids" actually means "my kids", in Example b, the plural of you actually refers to the singular, and in Example c, our dad means my dad.

### 3.1.3 Syntactic structure of associative plural

When *-men* is used as the ending of a collective noun with a spatial meaning, it indicates all the objects or people in that space, with the structure of

"personal pronoun+*-men*+collective noun", as details in "Table 10".

Table 10. [P+-men]

a	ni-men 2sg-men: GEN Do you have a big family?	wutou family	ren person	duo many	ma Q
b	wo-men 1sg-men: GEN We had a good relationship in the dormitory.	sushe dormitory	guanxi relationship	bucuo good	
c	ni-men 2sg-men Is this class doing well?	ban class	chengji grade	hao good	ma Q

In example a, "your house" actually refers to the people in your family, in example b, "our dormitory" refers to the people in our dormitory, and in example c, "your class" refers to the people in your class.

### 3.2 Pragmatic Meaning of *-men* Markers

In comparison to *-xie*, the emotional tone indicated by the *-men* is more subdued, and since it

is more written and formal, it appears to be more rigorous and disciplined. But *-men* is not a completely emotionless word and will change depending on the tone of the speaker.

#### 3.2.1 Express Cordiality

In the structure "person pronoun+ *-men* + kinship terms", the marker *-men* brings the two closer. ("Table 11")

Table 11. express cordiality

a	wo-men 1sg-men My mum cooked something delicious today.	ma mum	jintian today	zuo cook	le PST	haochi delicious	de NMLZ
b	wo-men 1sg-men:GEN Our son went to college this year.	erzi son	jinnian this year	kaoshang go to	daxue college	le PST	

a Note: NMLZ: nominalizer, nominalization

Compared to "my mum" or "my son", the addition of the endings *-men* emphasises the feeling of closeness and expresses a friendly and pleasant mood.

#### 3.2.2 Express Ego and Dissatisfaction

There is only one word in the Yibin dialect that expresses self-importance, namely the special word "Laozi--men", which is also a vulgar word. This word is used as a self-reference, equivalent to "I", but with a much stronger tone of anger, disdain, and resentment. ("Table 12")

Table 12. Expressing ego and dissatisfaction

a	laozi-men 1sg-men	jintian today	jiu PRT	bu NEG	xin believe	le PST
I'm not going to believe this today.						
b	laozi-men 1sg-men	xianzai now	bu NEG	gaoxing happy	le PST	
I'm not happy right now.						

This word is vulgar and is usually only used when you are angry or smug.

In general, the use of *-men* is narrower than that of *-xie*. Two main cases are covered, one is similar to Mandarin and denotes a pseudo-plural under a structure of "person pronoun+ *-men* + kinship terms", the other is paired with specific words to denote anger.

#### 4. -HUO MARKERS

Compared with *-xie* and *-men*, *-huo* has a narrower range of use in the Yibin dialect, which is only found in a few specific words, such as "wa er huo"(means youngest), example are follows ("Table 13"):

Table 13. [N+-huo]

a	waer-huo Kid-huo	tiaopi naughty	hen very	zhengchang normal	
It's normal for kids to be naughty.					
b	xianzai Nowdays	de PRT	xuesheng-huo student-huo	bu NEG	haoguan control
It's hard to control students nowadays.					
c	xiongdì-huo Bro-huo	xie PL	bangbangmang help		
Bros, please help me.					

Examples a and b refer to the associative plural, referring to all students and all children, respectively, and example c refer additive plural. On a pragmatic level, *-huo* is mainly used to bring the speaker and the listener closer together

#### 5. CONCLUSION

In the Yibin dialect, the three word endings are used in the range *-xie* > *-men* > *-huo*, and the range of grammatical meanings is *-men* > *-xie* > *-huo*.

*-xie* can be used in a wide range of ways, after nouns in general, including countable nouns, uncountable nouns, abstract nouns, collective nouns and proper nouns. Among them, countable nouns, collective nouns, and proper nouns can be replaced with *-men* in Mandarin, while uncountable nouns, abstract nouns, and juxtaposed nouns cannot.

*-men* is used mainly after personal pronouns, as in the written language, mostly after personal pronouns to form "ni *-men*"(2pl), "wo *-men*"(1pl)

and "ta *-men*"(3pl), etc. Although *-xie* can be used in a wide range of contexts, it cannot use \*"wo *-xie*", \*"ni *-xie*", and so on, which means that *-men* is preferred to be combined with personal pronouns. In addition, *-men* can also be used in the plural to indicate singular meaning after kinship titles, such as "ni *-men* ma"(your mom), "wo *-men* gege"(my brother), etc. As well as the use after nouns is limited to collective nouns with a spatial meaning, denoting things contained within that space. In addition, there is a special noun phrase "lao zi *-men*" which is often used when angry and teaching children.

The use of *-huo* is even more limited, occurring only in a few specific words such as "xiong di *-huo*", "wa er *-huo*". And it is still possible to add *-xie* ending after these words, which educes the plural significance of *-huo* itself.

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