

**Language Survey Report
on the White Yi
of Stone Forest County**

**Lu Yunchun
Liu Yitang
Meng Simu
Bruce Hansen**

**SIL International
2007**

SIL Electronic Survey Report 2007-007, April 2007
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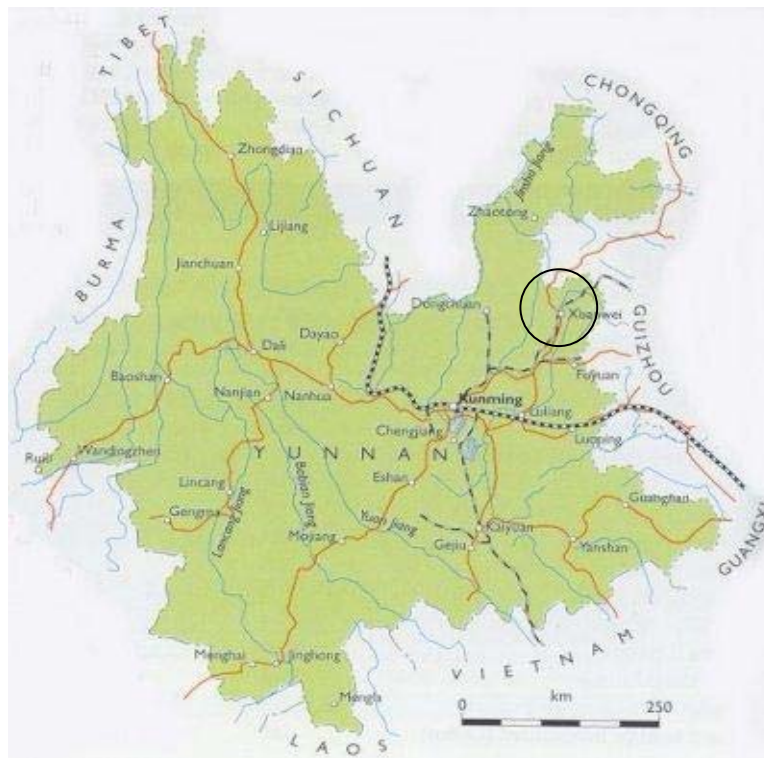
Lu Yunchun, group leader, Yunnan Minority Language Commission
 Liu Yitang, Yunnan Minority Language Commission
 Meng Simu, Yunnan Minority Language Commission
 Bruce Hansen, SIL International, East Asia Group

Abstract

This short note reports on an effort to assess language information from speakers of White Yi who were reported to reside in Shilin (Stone Forest) County of Yunnan Province of China. No speakers were found, and it was concluded that there are no speakers of White Yi indigenous to this county.

Introduction

In November 2003 a survey of Shilin (Stone Forest) County of Yunnan Province of China was conducted as part of a Sociolinguistic Survey Training Course. At the outset of this survey, we had very little information about the White Yi dialect. We knew only that some people called White Yi were said to exist in Shilin County, surrounded by people of other ethnic stock, including the Sani (Yi). In fact we did not intend to include an investigation of the White Yi in the survey due to shortness of time. However, as the overall survey project developed, extra time became available, and the White Yi were included.



Map of Shilin County (located in region circled), Yunnan Province, China

1. Research purposes

To investigate bilingualism among the White Yi in Shilin County to see if these people could use Sani materials.

To investigate the future viability of the White Yi dialect in Shilin County.

2. Research questions

How well do the White Yi of Shilin County understand Sani?

How viable is White Yi in Shilin County?

3. Tools

We had determined to use questionnaires and interviews to carry out this investigation, and prepared for such. These are not included in this report for the simple reason that they turned out to be irrelevant, as will be seen shortly.

4. How the data were collected

We started out by going to Yanzijiao Village (岩子脚) in Dake Township and meeting the mayor, Mr. Huang. He told us the population figure for White Yi in the village was 674, which is the same number we later got from Mr. Bi Dehui in the county Minority People's and Religious Affairs Bureau. The mayor explained how many groups the village was divided into and how many households were in each group. We randomly selected the households to visit, with the intent of randomly selecting people above 15 years old to whom we would administer the questionnaire. This second random selection proved difficult because so few people were at home, but any biases that this would have introduced turned out to be irrelevant, again for reasons that will become quite obvious in just a moment.

We started administering the questionnaire. One of the teams doing this had the mayor with them and were proceeding to interview a 67-year-old woman. She explained that she didn't speak any White Yi in the home, never had, and that her parents never had either. In fact, she said, it had been about 200 years since any of her people had spoken the language. A little further questioning turned up the fact that nobody in the village spoke White Yi, except for one person who was believed to speak a little. The mayor agreed that this was true. Even that one speaker was not a native of the village, but married into the village from another place.

At this point we realized that a founding assumption of this survey – that there were White Yi speakers in the County – was incorrect. So we terminated this part of the investigation, having interviewed a total of four people, all of whom gave essentially the same answers about the White Yi language.

5. Survey Finding

White Yi is not reported to be spoken as a mother tongue in Shilin County.

6. Conclusion and Recommendation

The language does not exist in Shilin County as anything other than an import spoken, if at all, by only one person. Additional survey should be done in Hualin County, where the inhabitants of Yanzijiao village seemed to think there might still be a few speakers of White Yi.