THE SOUND AND FUNCTION OF DIFFERENT LANGUAGE PARTICLES IN ZHUANG SONGS OF SOME WESTERN AREAS IN GUANGXI

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Abstract

The often as 'ornamental' syllables named language elements refer to song-text particles, sometimes also named 'vocables', or appellations interspersed among the lyrics during the actual singing process of the singer. It appears to some extent in the Zhuang singer's singing of songs in various regions. Unfortunately, these syllables are often overlooked in textual records because most of them cannot be interpreted in terms of their actual lexical meaning when they are independent of the wording of the phrase. The specific expressions of the singers play an essential role and are an inseparable part of Zhuang songs. If the core text of the lyrics is like the beam of the house, then the vocables are the bricks of the wall. The combination of the two can build a house of Zhuang songs. Based on the audio data of Zhuang songs collected at the border and junction areas of some western areas in Guangxi, this study compares the difference between the song-book texts written by the singers that need a memory tool and the actual singing syllables used. For that, the authors interviewed the singers, analysing the changes produced in sound by the different language particles or short sentences in the singing process and summarizing their laws and functions within the singing events.

Keywords

Zhuang songs, language, Guangxi, selected areas, text functions

INTRODUCTION

In the current singing practice of Zhuang songs, the singers often use a lot of so-called 'ornamental' syllables, including single syllables or phrases or clauses at the beginning or in the middle of a sentence. These single syllables, possibly called "vocables" (Widman, 2019: xiv)[2] or "auxilliary syllables" (Jähnichen, 2014: 184), such as interjection or onomatopoeia, are not written in the text of the lyrics. In addition, these phrases or clauses, both content words and function words, appear at the beginning and can be called "stock phrase"[3] (Widman, 2019: 90). In general, these vocables are rarely written in most songbooks. This doesn't mean that they have no meaning.

The language particles are a special component of the lyrics in which the expressive meaning of music overrides the expressive literal meaning of words. It was already a very long time ago that ethnomusicologists, for example Feld (1984: 13), complained about the text obsession in songs and in their own writings. Charles Seeger (1977: 7) emphasized a long time ago that he felt that speech about music ultimately valued event over process, …, and static over dynamic understanding. There are important and flexible text words and particles that are absent from poems or formal lyrics in most song collections. These elements are not yet well studied, although there is a need for it. Zhu Tengjiao [朱腾蛟] (2020: 52) divides these language elements

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[2] The song lyrics were actually produced by the singer during the performance, interspersed before and after the text lyrics. The term 'vocable' is used in this dissertation of Widman.

[3] Widman's dissertation seems to be the most relevant literature in this study. The term 'vocable' often accompanies pivotal lyrics (also named stock phrase) made up of two lexical words and two additional language elements.

into the following categories: exclamations with non-lexical meanings, with appellation, with onomatopoeia, and in stock phrases with specific meanings. He states that the language elements and singing tunes in Zhuang songs can only reveal their significance in duet singing. Singers must master the local cultural rules for using liner notes and cadences to accurately understand the meaning of the sung words in the process of duet singing.

Zhu Zhanmei and Pan Linzi [朱展玫 & 潘林紫] (2023: 92-93) take the Zhuang folk songs in "The Guangxi Section of the Collection of Chinese Folk Songs" as their research object and classify the elements appearing in these folk songs into the three major categories of single vocable, multiple vocables, and whole-paragraph vocables. Singers use vocables according to their emotional expression and the songs' needs. The singer adds language particles to supplement the deficiencies of the text lyrics in the actual singing process (Xu Ran [徐冉], 2018: 30).

In a less old study of Feld and Fox (1994: 25) was again stated that the relationship between musical and linguistic (Trask, 2007) approaches to culture would be crucial to a future of more rigorously contextualized ethnographic descriptions of musical behaviour. Both scholars referred to Norma McLeod (1974) who spoke about this problem already 20 years earlier at the time their publication was issued.

Language elements, in my opinion, unlike the lyrics, are limited in their independent expressive meaning if without the song. It must be combined within a musical expression in order to fully develop their meaning. I want to show that the language elements appear in relatively fixed positions through the recordings. However, different singers have their ideas about the design of the language elements in their singing practice, like adding or subtracting a syllable. In addition, as the language elements have their own phonological rules during the singing process, this tends to result in actual variants that differ slightly in their acoustic effect. The role played by the diction of language elements, both lexical syllables and language elements, also differs. Based on the collected audio recordings and lyrics, this paper analyses the structure, sound variation and role of language elements or stock phrases in Zhuang songs.

PHILOSOPHICAL THEORY

The two main theoretical views that provide the intellectual groundwork for this investigation are phenomenology and hermeneutics. Hans-Georg Gadamer (1983) elaborates on hermeneutics. It is a fundamental resource for comprehending and interpreting cultural phenomena, especially in language contexts. Gadamer's hermeneutic theory promotes a deep investigation of the process of interpretation, enabling a thorough analysis of the layers of meaning concealed in linguistics. The main objective is to expose the complex meaning of these components and their essential place in Zhuang song traditions.

In addition to hermeneutics, the research incorporates elements of phenomenology. The philosophical perspective by Husserl (1986, this is the latest edition) highlights the study approach by exploring people's daily experiences and consciousness, an essential aspect of Zhuang singers. The inclusion allows researchers to learn more about how vocalists perceive and understand language elements subjectively when singing. A similar approach was executed earlier by Wachterhauser (1986).

METHODS

This method is applied to examine Zhuang songs' language elements thoroughly. During the actual singing process, Zhuang singers frequently create these syllables, which ultimately form

in their lyrics. While often omitted from typical text transcripts, words, as they lack independent meaning, should be regarded as an entire lyric component of a Zhuang song. Based on the audio data of Zhuang songs collected in the border and junction areas of the western region of Guangxi as a method approach, a comparison is made between the text of the songbook written by the singer. The text of the song used is considered a memory guide for the actual singing syllables used by the singer.

To carry this out, the researchers interviewed Zhuang singers to gain essential insights into their viewpoints and approaches. The analysis explores the auditory variations resulting from addition of brief sentences or language elements to the singing process.

By contrasting songbook text and the actual singing syllables as the primary subject, this study aims to clarify the guiding principles behind language elements and their purposes within the larger framework of singing events. Through understanding the importance of this linguistic component, language elements that at first glance seem redundant become contributing factors to the overall structure and meaning of Zhuang songs.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE LANGUAGE PARTICLES

The word structure of Zhuang songs exists in a rather solid way, with "hot (spelled in Standard Zhuang, pronounced as [ho:t⁹] in Northern Zhuang and [kʰo:t⁹] in Southern Zhuang)"[4] being the basic unit of a complete verse of the lyrics, and each hot consists of at least two lines, with as few as one or as many as a hundred. In addition, to satisfy the rhyming rules of the Zhuang dialect of the region, the singers also embed language elements or clauses within the fixed text structure in their singing practice. Taken as a whole, there are both mainly fixed language elements in which the combination of initials and compound vowels are intact, and the language elements that sound different in specific speech streams, but currently only the initials are changed and the vowel in the syllable remains largely fixed as it seems.

STRUCTURAL LANGUAGE PARTICLES

In the sentence structure of Zhuang songs, language elements have a relatively fixed position. I can take Zhuang songs with improvised lyrics from different regions as examples. Firstly, the Zhuang song 'There is only you in my eyes', which belongs to the sei naz/sei ya gyaz[5], from Jiuzhou town in Jingxi city (a county-level city) in Baise Prefecture (Zhang Guiying and Zhong Xiuyan [张桂英，钟秀艳], 2021).

Hot [ho:t⁷]	Zhuang words[6]	IPA	Translation[7]
1	byag boh byag meh zaengz gyaenx heiq,	pja:k⁸ po⁶ pja:k⁸ me⁶ tsaŋ² kjan⁴ hei⁵,	I've never been so upset about leaving my parents

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4   Note that in Southern Zhuang (or Central Tai), this term is with an aspirated stop initial consonant [kʰ] instead of [h]. In both Northern Zhuang and Southern Zhuang, the high register tone category of a checked syllable with a long vowel is generally tone 9 instead of tone 7 in the conventional tone marking style, even though tones 7 and 9 are merged into the same tone value in some dialects.

5   *sei na* means poems (songs) of the paddy field region. *sei ya gya* is what singer Zhang Guiying calls.

6   The Zhuang lyrics were transcribed by Liu Jingliu, a scholar of the Zhuang languages on 11 December 2022.

7   All English translations have been done by the author.

	byag zwngz byag eiq naemx ta lae.	pja:k⁸ tsə:ŋ² pja:k⁸ ʔei⁵ nam⁴ tha¹ lai¹.	But leaving my lover brings tears to my eyes.
2	byag bae daengz naemx ta lae langq,	pja:k⁸ pai¹ taŋ² nam⁴ tha¹ lai¹ la:ŋ⁵,	My eyes were full of tears after I left you.
	bak gwnz zaengz dangj daej niq gwnz.	pa:k⁷ kən² tsaŋ² ta:ŋ³ tai³ ni⁶ kən².	Even if I were given a hundred men, they couldn't replace you.

Figure 1: Two hot of the Jingxi sei naz *There is only you in my eyes*. Translation and compilation by the authors.

Combining the lyrics of the two hot above with the audio recording of the song, the language particles appear in the following positions:

hot [kʰo:tᵍ] 1:

(ei) byag boh (ei) byag meh (a) zaengz gyanx heiq,

(ei) byag zwnz byag eiq (w) naemx ta (a) lae.

hot [kʰo:tᵍ] 2:

(ei) byag bae (ei) daengz naemx (a) ta lae langj,

(ei) byag bae zaengz dangj (w) deij niq (a) gwnz.

According to the whole lyrics, the placement of the language elements is identical in both hot. However, the final use of the language elements -*a* in the first hot, which rhymes with the same as the preceding content words 'ta', is more like a singer's return to rhyme for the content words that precede it when singing.

Another Zhuang song 'Yingke ge*'*, which belongs to the type sei (sei loiz [ɬi¹ lo:i²]), from Daxin County, Chongzuo City (Xu Xiuzhen and Zhao Hongjuan [许秀珍，赵宏娟], 2021) is shown here:

Hot [ho:t⁷]	Zhuang words	IPA	Translation
1	haemh vaz caengz nonz pi ta tiuq,	ham⁶ va² ɕaŋ² non² phi¹ tha¹ thiu⁵,	Last night when I went to bed I felt my eyelids fluttering,
	vaenz naex miz hek maz laeuz liuh,	wan² nai⁴ mi² khe:k⁷ ma² lau² li:u⁶,	We had guests over today,
	saem doengz hoij ciuz lai loq swz.	ɬam¹ toŋ² ho:i³ ɕi:u² la:i¹ lo⁵ ɬə².	The emotions were like a tidal wave.
2	lwenz lwenz dou kae bak du naj,	lɯ:n² lɯ:n² tou¹ khai¹' pa:k⁷ tu¹ na³,	Everyone opens the doors of their homes,
	yeh cingh ziuq	je⁶ ɕiŋ⁶ tɕiu¹ ta:i⁶ ma²	The host offers tea

	daih maz gingq caz,	kiŋ⁵ ɕa²,	to the guest,
	gwnz gwnz naj ho lai loq swz.	kɯn² kɯn² na³ ho¹ laːi¹ lo⁵ ɬə².	Everyone welcomes guests with a smile.

Figure 2: Two hot in the song of sei loiz *Yingke ge*.

Combining the lyrics and the recording of the singing practice, the language elements appear in the following positions:

hot [hoːt⁷] 1:

(ei) haemh vaz (la) caengz (a) nonz (e) piq ta (a) tiuq (la),
vaenz naej (la) miz (a) kek (ei) maz laeuz (a) liuh (la),
saem doengz (la) hoih ciuz lai loq swh (oi oi).

hot [hoːt⁷] 2:

(ei) lwenz lwenz (la) dou (a) kae (e) bak du (a) naj (la),
yeh cingh (la) ziuq (va) daih (ei) maz gingq (nga) caz (la),
gwnz gwnz (la) naj ho lai loq swh (oi oi).

The above two songs were recorded in different localities, but they both belong to the genre *sei*, which is characterized by a fixed hot structure, with three lines forming a hot, in which with forming the first two lines both contain seven syllables, and the third line consists of five syllables of lyrics plus two syllables of structural language elements (*loq swz*, which must be read even in lyrics reciting). The last syllable of each hot (i.e. the last syllable of the third line of each hot) must rhyme with the last syllable of another hot, in keeping with the metrical characteristics of *sei.* In addition, there are Hot-internal rhymes, being the first two lines rhyming each other at the last syllables, and these two syllables rhyming to the non-final syllables of the third line, as in *tuiq – liuh – ciuz* in hot *1* and *naj – caz – naj* in hot *2*. Such rhyming style is called 'foot-waist' rhyme (脚腰韵) in the Zhuang song research circles in the Chinese literature (Liao Hanbo and Tai Chung-pui [廖汉波 & 戴忠沛], 2019: 54). The 'foot-waist' rhyme is the most common in Zhuang folk songs, most Zhuang songs have a flexible rhyming scheme, and singers have more freedom to create lyrics within a certain metrical framework (Zhu Tengjiao [朱腾蛟], 2022: 43).

THE STATIONARITY OF BASIC LANGUAGE PARTICLES

Among the types of Zhuang songs collected during 2021 and sometime earlier in the western region of Guangxi, some fixed language elements do not change, most of which are either lexical syllables or a combination of lexical syllables and language elements of the primary text, which is called "basic language elements". In summarizing the language elements of *fwen naz haij*, Zhu Tengjiao [朱腾蛟] (2020: 56) pointed out that they all appear in the critical positions at the beginning and end of the sentence and have a structure that provides a relatively stable performance framework for the singer's singing.

These basic language elements often have an impact on the melody in which they are found, and are most directly reflected in the beginning and at the end of phrases of the different types of Zhuang songs. For example, the Zhuang song 'eir yor yiux eir yiux [ei⁰ yo⁰ jiu⁰ ei⁰ jiu⁰]' and 'dien loz dien loz naz [teːn⁰ lo⁰ teːn⁰ lo⁰ na⁰]', which is in the Longlin County, Baise Prefecture; 'lwenx Yang [lɯen⁴ jaːŋ¹]' in Napo County, Baise Prefecture; 'fwen Noengz [fɯːn¹ noŋ²]' in Tianlin County, Baise Prefecture; 'fwen sw goh [fɯːn³³ ɬɯ³³ ko³¹]', 'fwen naz haij [fɯːn¹ na² haːi³]', 'fwen dinj [fɯːn¹ tin³]', 'fwen raez [fɯːn¹ ɹai²]' in Pingguo County, Baise Prefecture;

'sei loiz' in Daxin County, Chongzuo Prefecture. These different types of Zhuang songs from different regions have their own fixed lyric language elements, which appear regularly in the singing practice of the Zhuang, and have formed a fixed pattern with the text lyrics and song melodies.

In addition to the beginning or end, there are also some basic language elements interspersed in the lyrics. For example, in the 'lwenx Yang [lɯen⁴ jaːŋ¹]', the male singer will always have nangz [naːŋ²] 'young lady' or nuengx [noːŋ⁴] 'young girl' (literally 'younger sister/brother') in the language elements, and the female singer will always use langz [laːŋ²] 'young gentleman' or beix [pi⁶] 'senior fellow' (literally 'elder brother/sister').

This study argues that these agreed-upon language elements are related to the expressions that the singers want to convey and are the result of a long history of accumulation, facilitating the singing, teaching and interaction of the singers within the singing system of the region, and have become one of the essential components of the musical and aesthetic ecology of the Zhuang people in their area. This study will analyse the role in the following section.

THE POSITIONAL INSTABILITY OF SOME LANGUAGE PARTICLES

Some language elements are not required on any specific syllable and occur at the discretion of the singer (Widman, 2019: 89). In improvisation, the singer not only has to follow the format and rhythm of the lyrics, but also has to make up and sing a response or reminder to the partner singer in a very short time, including forgetting the words or one of them has to match the partner and give timely balance when the partner hesitates, which tests the singer's singing level and clinical performance to the extreme. In the *yaej* [ʔjai̯⁴], which is one branch of the Zhuang, singers are free to use the language elements in the middle of the song according to the specific situation in addition to the language element at the beginning and the end of the song, it enables the singer to show more singing skills and also to get time for the singers to recall the lyrics, thus ensuring the overall coherence of the song (Zhu Tengjiao [朱腾蛟], 2020: 54). So, the structural position remains relatively fixed in the same or similar Zhuang songs, and the number of language elements appearing in the same position increase or decrease to some extent.

Hot [hoːt⁷]	Zhuang words	IPA	Translation
2	moek iek ndwn byaek soemj miq roengz,	Mɔk⁷ a⁰ ʔjaːk⁹ le⁰ ʔdən³ phjak⁷ le⁰ θam³ mɔ⁰ ei⁰ mi⁵ ja⁰ lɔŋ²,	I feel hungry but I can't even swallow pickled mustard greens,
	nien cingz ndwn noh roengz nyaengz genx.	Le⁰ niːn¹ tsiŋ² a⁰ ʔdən³ nə⁴ lei⁰ lɔŋ² ŋaŋ² le⁰ keːn⁴ ne⁰ ei⁰ noːŋ⁴ a⁰ no⁰.	I miss you so much that I felt like choking my stomach even after I ate the meat.
3	roeg gut siengj hwnj dat gem lingz,	nɔːk⁸ kwat⁷ θɯːŋ³ khən³ taːt⁹ keːm¹ liŋ²,	The golden pheasant wants to climb up the cliff after the monkey,

| | gaem saz mbouj miz rengz gangj vangx. | kam¹ θa² ʔbo⁵ mi² reːŋ² kaːŋ³ waːŋ⁴. | Unfortunately, I don't even have the strength to carry a basket. |

Figure 3: Table comparing Zhuang words used in the song *Tanqing ge*. Translation and compilation by the authors.

Taking an example of a Zhuang antiphonal song (excerpts from the second and third hot of the male vocal part) "Tanqing ge" belonging to 'lwenx [luɯən⁴]', recorded in Napo County, Baise Prefecture (Liang Youqiag & Nong Feiqion, 2017).

Language elements appear in the following positions.

Excerpts from the hot 2 and 3 of the male vocal part:

(ne no o hui lo nga le no) moek (a) iek (le) ndwn byaek (le) soemj (mo ei) miq (ya) roengz, (le) nien cingz (nga) ndwn noh (lei) lungz nyaengz (le) genx (lei nuengx nga no). (m no o hui nuengx nga le no) roeg (nga) gut (lei) siengj hwnj (de) dat (lei) gem (ma) lingz, (le) gaem (ndo) saz (le) mbouj miz (lei) rengz gangj (le) vangx (no ui yi nuengx nga no).

These two hots have basically the same structure. One can find that the language elements used and the number of language elements used in the line at the beginning and the end of the hot differ. The author found that the line at the beginning is not only affected by the change of the articulation part, which leads to an increase or a decrease in the number of articulations, but also by the random addition of interjections and onomatopoeia when the singer sings. According to the audio recording, the end of hot 3, the male singer has three movements in the articulatory dynamics, which gives the impression of 'no ui yi'. The singer also adds 'nuengx', a stock phrase commonly used in *lwenx Yang* [luɯen⁴ jaːŋ¹]. Then, the first text lyrics in the second sentence of hot 3 are followed by an additional syllable than in hot 2 at the same position. The change in the number of the language elements affects the length and development of the melody, which can continue.

CHANGES IN THE SOUND OF LANGUAGE PARTICLES

Based on an examination of the range of living music, and not just an analysis of static musical texts, combined with audio, the author finds that the phenomenon of phonetic assimilation occurs extensively in the singing practice of the Zhuang, both in language elements and primary text lyrics, in almost each Zhuang song. A phonetic assimilation is a syncretic plane of phoneme change that occurs in a dynamic, concrete discourse. Because phonemes are always in an uninterrupted flow in discourse, in the singing practice, they form chains of sounds to express certain meanings, so that several phonemes in close proximity to each other tend to interact and adapt to each other, so that various prosodic changes occur (Lin, Tao and Wang Lijia [林焘, 王理嘉], 2013: 149). In the Central Taic language Yang-Nong (Dejing vernacular), if the interjections have no initial consonant, they must be pronounced in conjunction with the preceding syllable's coda, whether consonant or vowel, such as the interrogative particle [a⁴⁵] becoming [na⁴⁵] if its preceding syllable is [ŋan³¹] 'money' which has the coda [-n](Liao, Hanbo [廖汉波] 2010: 103-104). This is why the singer, consciously or unconsciously, makes two phonemes that are different, not close to each other, but adjacent to each other, change and become identical or similar, mainly at the connection of two syllables, mostly consonants as Dai Qingxia [戴庆夏] (2006: 73) mentioned.

I use the examples of the song (excerpt) "Langhua ge (*lwenx Yang* [luɯen⁴ jaːŋ¹]″ (Luo Jingchao and Pan Xiucai [罗景超 & 潘秀彩], 2017) from Napo County and "Where friends come

from (*eir yor yiux eir yiux*)" (excerpt) from Longlin County to elaboration.

Excerpt of 'Langhua ge':

Zhuang: (le) ngvaih (li) go (le) ndok (nga le) daih (li) haj (lo langz nga nw wi no) IPA: (le^0) ŋwaːi^6 (li^0) ko^1 (le^0) ʔdoːk^9 (ŋa^0 le^0) taːi^6 (li^0) ha^3 (lɔ^0 laːŋ^2 ŋa^0 nə^0 əi^0 nɔ^0)

Translation: Swinging the fifth flower.

The coda of *ndok* 'flower' is a velar plosive -k [k], n causing the following language element -a[a] to produce an initial consonant [k], but this [k] has been strengthened in singing to become a nasal stop [ŋ], which is with the same POA (place of articulation) with [k]. This causes the language element -a [a] to become phonetically -nga [ŋa], although phonologically it should be a simple -a [a] without an onset.

Furthermore, the coda of the word *langz* 'young gentleman' is a velar nasal stop -ng [ŋ], cause the following language element -a [a] to become phonetically -nga [ŋa], by producing an initial consonant, which is directly assimilated by the coda of the preceding syllable, -ng [ŋ].

Excerpt of "Where friends come from":

Zhuang: scwz nix cingj mwngz gwn laeuj gonq (nar)
IPA: ɕɯ² ni⁴ ɕiŋ³ mɯŋ² kɯn¹ lau³ koːn⁵ (na^0)

Translation: Have a drink, please.

Similarly, the nucleus of the language element 'nar' is actually the single vowel -a [a], the initial consonant n- in 'nar' being derived from the coda -n of the preceding syllable gonq [koːn⁵] 'first'. This is a phenomenon of phonetic assimilation. Actually, the mechanism of such liaison is exactly the same as that described by Liao Hanbo [廖汉波] (2010: 103-104) for those utterance particles without initial consonants in Debao Zhuang.

The existence of language is dynamic and much more variable than that of words (Trask, 2007). There are numerous examples of phonetic assimilation in Zhuang songs, where such occurrences of sound changes in specific speech activities happen in order to regulate the harmony between syllables, making speech smoother and more convenient. By the same token, in the specific case of singing activities, it also occurs in order to avoid the poor flow and to make the singing to proceed smoothly. Therefore, phonological assimilation is both a variation of language in speech activity and also an integral part of the aesthetic mechanism of music in singing. It is also clear from this fact that the initial consonants of language elements are not absolutely fixed, except for some of the basic language elements, which means that the most central part of a syllable is the compound vowel, not the initial consonant.

THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE PARTICLES

The analysis of the structure and sound changes of the language elements shows that they are an integral part of the singing practice of Zhuang songs, and that the different ways in which they are currently used shape a relatively stable structure, building a fixed structure for different Zhuang songs.

The content words and function words appear to vary in degrees in the structure of each different type of Zhuang song, and the specific position and format of their use are relatively fixed. Lexical syllables are less frequent and more formulaic in their use. The function words core of

the syllables they use are vowels, the number of which is relatively limited. The content words and function words also play different roles.

Represented by appellations, the content words are often seen in the beginning of Zhuang songs in many areas, such as 'nuengx' [noːŋ⁴] 'young girl', 'langz' [laːŋ²] 'young gentleman', 'beix' [pi⁶] 'senior fellow', which often appear in the beginning of 'lwenx Yang' [lɯen⁴ jaːŋ¹]); 'hoc jis' [ho³ tɕi⁵] 'buddy' which is found in 'eir yor yiux eir yiux' [ei⁰ yo⁰ jiu⁰ ei⁰ jiu⁰]) 'hello, my fellow'. In my observation, combining with previous studies such as 'youx' [ju⁴] 'friend', such appellations play the following roles:

- They directly mark the start of the singing activity. It can be seen as a reminder to the partner and an announcement of the start of the question-answer singing.

- It's a friendly and polite greeting to the partner, an expression of the specific affection of the singers. The choice of the language elements can also reflect the degree of affection between the singers. These appellations reflect the change in the relationship between men and women in the antiphonal singing (Zhu Tengjiao [朱腾蛟], 2020: 52). For example, the words *nax* 'uncle and *go* 'fellow' (literally 'elder brother') appear in the ornamental phrase at the beginning of a song.

- It is an introduction by the singer to their partner of the opposing side in antiphonal singing.

- It indicates the meaning of a transition, as in the case of a change of scene or a change of partner during the practice of the question-answer singing, to sing some fixed transitional stock phrase.

- It is also to mark the end of the song.

Language elements that have no lexical meaning, such as interjections and onomatopoeia, also play an important role in the following ways:

- Zhuang singers use a number of vocables associating with text lyrics to allow the development of the musical phrase to a specific length. In the *fwen leu* of Pingguo County, the singers often use vocables with cohesive functions to make the phrase structure more complete (Xu Ran [徐冉], 2018: 31).
- It may increase the melodic rhythmic types. The pronunciation of the function words being derived from the lyrics is indirectly leading to the formation of different rhythmic types such as soothing and long, cheerful and bouncy. The vocables in Zhuang songs of Bama County and Nandan County in northwest Guangxi also have this function (Zhu Tengjiao [朱腾蛟], 2020: 55).

The Zhuang languages generally have eight to ten tones, including six tones on smooth syllables (ending on a non-stop coda) and two to four tones on checked syllables (ending on a stop coda, either -p, -t, or -k) (Wei & Qin, 2008: 11). Checked syllable tones are on a syllable with airflow being completely stopped in the mouth, and if the last syllable is a checked syllable, the melody would be short, such as 'nok' 'bird'. In such a situation, a language element is usually given to end the melodic phrase.

Language particles play a bridging role within the phrase, as the use of those language elements can weaken the stop endings of the preceding lyrics ending in a checked syllable due to the impact of sound progressions, making the singing process smoother and more harmonious.

They may play a role as an inhaling possibility when the singers sing, giving the singers space to change their breath.

In addition, the language particles play a major role in naming the song. Zhuang singers will currently use the most commonly used language particles as the name of a song in that area, making it a name or alias for that type of Zhuang song; thus, this naming method has become an important source of song names. One example of this is the 'eir yor yiux eir yiux' mentioned above.

CONCLUSION

This study takes the language particles of Zhuang songs as the research object, selected some Zhuang songs of the categories sei and lwenx in the border and junction areas of some western regions of Guangxi to explain the rules, sound changes, and functions of language particles in the singers' actual singing. The format of Zhuang song-texts is strictly regular, and the relationship between lyrical structure and language particles is highly controlled. The language particles build up a complete Zhuang song with the text lyrics in actual singing. The position and syllables of the language particles are currently fixed. Changes are caused by the singer's effort to fit the given situation, rather than by the choice of the song as songs are already chosen to fit the situation. Those additional syllables that represent the different language particles are essential, which is an organic element of the living practice in the singing process. If not, it will possibly stay a simple poem that cannot be conveyed due to its detachment from the context. This last insight is crucial for further implementations of an improved understanding for musical purposes.

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