A Diachronic Study of the Phenomena of Degree Adverbs Modifying Nouns in Southeast Asia Huayu

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Abstract: China has a long history of overseas migration, and Southeast Asia has been the traditional main destination of our overseas migration because of its geographical advantage. In the context of the global spread of the Huayu, it is of great significance to explore the evolutionary process of Huayu development in Southeast Asia as a relay station for the spread and radiation of the Huayu to the world. The overall situation of Huayu studies is that there are more lexical studies and less grammatical studies, and less attention has been paid to the development of Huayu in its historical plane, including its formation process and the facts of its development and evolution since then. It can be seen that the overall research is not balanced, and grammar itself is very important. Due to the lack of grammar research, the overall understanding of Huayu has been affected. The study of Huayu has developed rapidly, and various studies are being carried out. Relatively speaking, grammar is lagging behind and needs to catch up quickly. The article takes the phenomenon of degree adverb modifying nouns as an entry point to investigate the development and evolution of grammar in Southeast Asia Huayu. It is found that degree adverbs modifying nouns have shown an upward trend in the centuries-old Huayu, as evidenced by the fact that degree adverbs can be combined with more abstract nouns and the range of nouns modified has also been expanded. In addition, investigating the use of this linguistic phenomenon in Huayu, Putonghua, and Mandarin in a global perspective, it can be found that the three maintain a greater consistency.

Keywords: In Southeast Asia Huayu, The Phenomena of Degree Adverbs modifying Nouns, Diachronic Study

1. Introduction

The phenomenon of degree adverbs modifying nouns has been discussed a lot in the academic circles, such as the researches by Xing Fuyi [1, 2], Hu Yushu [3], Gui Shichun [4], Zhang Yisheng [5], Yu Genyuan [6], Zhou Xiaobing [7], Shao Jingmin [8], etc. Among them, Xing Fuyi [1] indicated that degree adverbs modifying nouns are ungrammatical freak; Hu Yushu [3] indicated that the main grammatical function of adverbs is to modify verbs or adjectives, but not nouns that are the subject and object. It can be seen that degree adverbs cannot modify nouns in the traditional grammatical norms. However, this phenomenon is so frequently used in real life that it has become “habitual”. Shi Dingxu, Su Jinzhi and Zhu Zhiyu [9] indicated that a significant proportion of nouns in Hong Kong written language are often modified by adverbs. Little research has been done on the use and development of degree adverbs modifying nouns in Southeast Asia Huayu.

This paper takes Singaporean and Malaysian Huayu as its subjects. We investigate the development of degree adverbs modifying nouns in Southeast Asia Huayu with reference to early Mandarin and Putonghua. We divide the history of Huayu grammar into three phases based on linguistic facts and existing studies: the first phase (1919-1945), the second phase (1945-1980), and the third phase (1980-present). The corpus we use includes The Great Series of New Malaysian Literature, Selected Malaysian Literary Works, and The Great Series of Malaysian Literature, Lat Pau, Sin Chew Daily, and Kwong Wah Yit Poh, etc., covering representative literary works and newspapers as far as possible, with about 3 million words in each stage. The examples of early Mandarin are mainly from https://www.neohytung.com/, and the investigation of

1 Singapore and Malaysia are the countries with the largest concentration of Chinese, the largest number of Chinese, and the first Huayu to be formed among the 11 countries in Southeast Asia.
2. Diachronic Changes of Degree Adverbs Modifying Nouns

2.1. The Consistency of Early Huayu and Early Mandarin

Diao Yanbin [10] investigated the situation of degree adverbs modifying nouns in early Mandarin, and there are not only many use cases, but also different functions in sentences, which can be subdivided into predicates, adverbials and attributives, etc. By searching https://www.neohytung.com, we can also see some use cases of degree adverbs modifying nouns, see examples:

(1) 如因经费困难，不能特聘专人，可择教员中对于图书馆事务最兴趣最有研究者使之兼任主任，馆员则非用专人不可，以免各种事务之废弛。 (《晨报副刊》，1925)

(2) 我看了这部书，很难于下何等判语。似乎这位非常诗人的绝顶天才，已见中和。 (《晨报副刊》，1923)

(3) 我有读过此书，而此书难于下何等判语。似乎这非常诗人的绝顶之天才，已见中和。 (《晨报副刊》，1923)

(4) 那一次一位旧朋友来，她笑说我近来更孩子气，更爱脸红了。 (《山中杂记》，1924)

(5) 有时候经过时，如若我这样的谈法，不就“直观”了吧。 (《独立漫画》，1935)

(6) 当时的风雨来了，如果我这样谈，也难于下何等判语。 (《独立漫画》，1935)

(7) 我看这部书，很难于下何等判语。似乎这位非常诗人的绝顶天才，已见中和。 (《晨报副刊》，1923)

(8) 我有读过此书，而此书难于下何等判语。似乎这非常诗人的绝顶之天才，已见中和。 (《晨报副刊》，1923)

(9) 那一次一位旧朋友来，她笑说我近来更孩子气，更爱脸红了。 (《山中杂记》，1924)

(10) 我有读过此书，而此书难于下何等判语。似乎这非常诗人的绝顶之天才，已见中和。 (《晨报副刊》，1923)

According to the above examples, the degree adverb modifying nouns can be used as complements, predicates, attributives, and adverbials in sentences.

2.2. The Diachronic Changes of Huayu in Three Stages

Through the investigation of the three stages of Huayu, it can be seen that the centuries-old Huayu has not only inherited this form, but also has shown an upward trend in terms of the number of uses from less to more, the frequency from low to high, and the range of uses from narrow to wide. Specifically, it is reflected in the following two aspects:

First, from the perspective of quantity, degree adverbs can be combined with more abstract nouns, such as “the most” capable, the most accustomed, the most economical, the most logical, but I know that it is a question of self-determination for every writer. (The Old Cow and the Broken Cart, 1937)

(7) 枚表妹脾气改了不少，对人也很谦和，就是脸上非常慈容，据说她一天大半闷在屋里看书，倒是芸表妹常常去陪她谈谈。 (《秋》，1940)

(8) Cousin Mei’s temper has changed a lot, and she is very modest to others, but her face is very sad, and it is said that she spends most of the day reading in the house, but cousin Yun often goes to talk with her. (Autumn, 1940)

(9) 他原来讲话相当长，但头射没有注意他，不能完全的领略，真是抱歉得很。 (《新国民杂志》，1922)

(10) My brother very much hopes that the overseas Chinese in Nanyang will love their ancestral family as a loving mother loves her children, no matter how much the sky and the earth may fall apart. (Deserted Island, 1927)

(11) 我们日常在报章上看到的马来亚各地通讯，大都为简单呆板枯燥，而且很少能够把各地最本质的特征事件报道出来。 (《世纪风》，1939)

(12) 上面只是很原则的举了马来亚戏剧要走的道路的一点点。 (《今日剧场》，1937)

(13) The above is just a very principled list of the path to be taken by Malayan drama. (Drama Shadows Today, 1937)

According to the above examples, the degree adverb modifying nouns can be used as complements, predicates, attributives, and adverbials in sentences.

2 Early Mandarin refers to modern Chinese from the May 4th period to the early founding of the People’s Republic of China, which is the starting point and “blueprint” of global Huayu (Diao Yanbin [11]).

3 Early Huayu is the first phase of Huayu, dated from 1919 - 1945, which is basically consistent with the time of early Mandarin.
emotional, very hopeful, very secret, very regular, very stressful, very loving, very divisive, very conceptual, too pedantic, too ladylike", etc. The ratio of use cases in the three stages is 69:77:122, and one example for each is as follows:

(13) I am inevitably offended many aphids by speaking so freely, but it is not, unless they are so self-respect that they do not have the strength to fight for food as my ancestors did. (Deserted Island, 1927)

(14) If I hadn’t been so stubborn, I would have switched to a department where I could make a lot of money, so why be stuck in a "metaphysical" circle? Besides, I am not very philosophical by nature. (The Great Series of Malaysian Literature, 1968)

(15) 讲歪理你最本事。这可是你决定的，以后阿义问起，我都推给你好了。 (《两代亲酬》, 1995)

(16) 我缺少一只猎狗的鼻子; 狗终究是更猎人的。(《纯文学》, 1970)

(17) 反观拜登形象虽比特朗普更“君子”, 无奈始终摆不脱奥巴马的影子。 (《星洲日报》, 2020)

(18) Look at the Action Party, when they were formed in 1965, they were actually a branch of the Singapore People’s Action Party, they were “very Chinese”, but then the Action Party realized that you can’t behave like the Singapore Action Party in Malaysia. (Ibid)

There are other similar use cases, see examples:

(19) … (《文道》, 1993)

(20) When students are naughty and mischievous as children, they become even more badass in their senior years, not only fighting and causing trouble, but also daring to oppose teachers. (Wen Dao, 1984)

In addition, the use case of “degree adverb + person’s name” also appears, see examples:

(21) 有一位杨江院长对《演讲纵横》的评论如下: “此书很‘王一平’; 故事多而趣, 功课浅白易上手, 实是在每一个上台的人必读之物。” (《百合文集》, 2011)

(22) President Yang Zijiang’s review of Speech Vertical is as follows: “This book is very ‘Wang Yiping’: the stories are many and interesting, the homework is shallow and easy to follow, and it is really a must-read for everyone who goes on stage.” (Lily Anthology, 2011)

There are many similar forms in Putonghua, of which the most common and most noticeable is “very Lei Feng”, see examples:

(23) The spring breeze in March is ten miles, and the soldier here is very Lei Feng. (National Defense Times, 2021)

(24) Lao He thinks that this place is really very Tao Yuanming. (Huayu, 1993)

(25) 这孩子有点李承晚,不过没那么漂亮。 (《羊城晚报》, 2011)

(26) This child is a little bit Li Chengwan, but not so pretty. (Wang Shuo Kan Da Shan·Kan Society, 1993)

There are two possible sources of this form in Huayu: first, the analogy of the old usage, in the second stage of the corpus, the adverb of degree plus a noun referring to a person, such as "more hunter", which is further expanded in this stage; second, the influence of the works of Hong Kong and Taiwan, etc. Diao Yanbin [12] listed some similar usages in the works of Hong Kong and Taiwan, such as “how Venus” and so on. In addition, Wang Huidi [13] indicated that “China’s Taiwan, China’s Hong Kong, China’s Macau, Singapore and Malaysia are geographically close to each other, and all share the same capitalist system and values, thus forming a Huayu usage circle. Due to advanced technology, convenient information transmission, and frequent folk contacts, the languages have been in a state of active interaction and complementarity for a long time, and
the exchange of words is extensive, fast, and frequent. New words and phrases produced in any of the five regions, which immediately spread to the remaining four regions through media or film and television works, etc., usually settle locally, are accepted by local language users, and become words shared by the five regions.” Chew Chenghai [14] also indicated that before China’s reform and opening up, all ethnic Chinese communities (including Europe, America, Southeast Asia, China’s Hong Kong and Macao, etc.) had close ties with China’s Taiwan, and most intellectuals in the Huayu regions had received their tertiary education in China’s Taiwan, and many scholars in Taiwan also went to the Huayu regions to work in education, and the influence of Taiwan Mandarin on the global Huayu was great.

At this stage, you can also see some use cases of time nouns, see examples:

(26) Of course, the relationship between poets and poetry should have begun in earlier years. (Jiao Feng, 1996)

(27) However, it is still very early in the process and no date has been set for implementation. (Sin Chew Daily, 2020)

Accordingly, the composition of temporal nouns at this stage is “adjective + period”. Such a use case appeared in the previous stage, and the increase of use cases in this stage is the expansion of the analogy of “adjective + period”, another example is:

(28) The guerrillas know that the struggle has already begun, and they will inevitably start a longer and more fierce struggle in the future. (《小城之夜》，1954)

(29) However, when Li Yongping strenuously denies it, he certainly does not admit so, let alone admit that he has “fooled” all the critics, fabricating a very Chinese world with a non-Chinese world. (《中国与外国文学》，1993)

(30) As can be seen, such usage is also very common in the CCL Modern Chinese Corpus, such as “very divergent, very principled, very realistic, very contradictory, the most essential, the most core, the most idealistic, the most realistic, the most inner, the most economical, very childish, very ideal, very faithful, very habitual, very artistic, very poetic, too habitual, too realistic, too pedantic, too garbage, more female, more dominant, more heroic, very short-term”, etc.

As can be seen, Huayu and Putonghua share the same performance: on the one hand, degree adverbs can be combined with a large number of abstract nouns; on the other hand, degree adverbs can be paired with nouns referring to persons, time, and premises, etc.

From the above investigation of degree adverbs modifying nouns, it can be seen that this grammatical phenomenon already existed in early Huayu, in line with early Mandarin, and has undergone a process of development and evolution from small to large in number and from narrow to wide in scope. Over the past century, and they have become a relatively common way of expression in contemporary Huayu and Putonghua.
3. Development Characteristics of Degree Adverbs Modifying Nouns from the Perspective of Global Huayu

Huayu is distributed all over the world, but the development process is different. Lee, Y. M. [15] indicated that “Greater Huayu has several Huayu variants, the most important being Putonghua in the mainland, Mandarin in Taiwan, Mandarin in Hong Kong and Macau, Huayu in Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei, etc., Huayu in North America is taking shape, and Huayu in Europe is taking shape.” Diao Yanbin [11] clarified the pattern of the “three divisions” of global Huayu, under the top-level concept of “global Huayu” is the conceptual system of Putonghua-Mandarin-Huayu.

According to the previous investigation, the phenomenon of degree adverbs modifying nouns shows an upward trend in the three stages of Huayu, that is, “more - more - very much”. Diao Yanbin [16] investigated the usage and changes of nouns modified by degree adverbs in different stages of modern Chinese from a diachronic perspective, and finds that it presents an evolutionary trend of “more-less-more”. This shows that the form of degree adverbs modifying nouns is very common in contemporary Putonghua, and Huayu in Southeast Asia is consistent with Putonghua, see examples:

32) 最近，一位朋友在刊物上发议论：“排几出短命的新戏，倒没什么，少一些‘很内涵的演员’，则‘有伤大雅’了。” (人民日报 2002)
32) Recently, a friend commented in a magazine: “it’s nothing to arrange a few short-lived new plays. If there are fewer ‘very connotative actors’, it will ‘hurt the elegance’.” (People’s Daily, 2002)
33) 世界冠军德国的阵容称得上星光熠熠，而意大利则是史上“最平民”的一支。 (人民日报海外版 2016)
33) The world champion Germany’s lineup can be called a shining star, while Italy is the “most civilian” in history. (People’s Daily Overseas Edition, 2016)
34) 我们的祖先们一直期待生活能够更精彩、更诗意,更有物质和精神的质量、境界和高度。 (人民日报海外版 2017)
34) Our ancestors have always expected life to be more wonderful, more poetic, more material and spiritual quality, realm and height. (People’s Daily Overseas Edition, 2017)
35) 这种精气神很中国！ (《香港文汇网》，2021)
35) This spirit is very Chinese! (Hong Kong wenhui.com, 2021)
36) 在公寓开小车没西装……“最平民”新科立委是谁? (《台湾联合新闻网》，2020)
36) Living in an apartment, driving a car without a suit......Who is the “most civilian” new member of the legislature? (Taiwan United News Network, 2020)
37) 习近平：中国共产党领导是中国特色社会主义最本质的特征 （《华日日报》，2020）
37) Xi Jinping: The leadership of the Communist Party of China is the most essential characteristic of socialism with Chinese characteristics (Khmer China Daily, 2020)
38) 美财金记者峰会前忙碌的一天，很美很杭州 (《欧洲侨声报》，2016)
38) A busy day for beautiful financial journalists before the summit, very beautiful and Hangzhou (European Diaspora Voice, 2016)
39) 川普揭晓“空军一号”新形象 亲自设计颜色搭配 “更美国” (《美国中文网》，2019)
39) Trump unveils the new image of “Air Force One” and personally designs color scheme to be “more American” (Chinese-American website, 2019)
40) 读书人的命运里，那些被外人看见的孤独寂寞，对于他自己来说，就是很哲学的窗子。 (《新西兰中文先驱网》，2017)
40) In the fate of a scholar, the loneliness and solitude seen by outsiders are very philosophical windows for himself. (New Zealand Chinese Pioneer Network, 2017)

According to the above examples, it is clear that the grammatical phenomenon of degree adverbs modifying nouns is common in headings as well as in the text.

Through the above investigation, it can be seen that the phenomenon of degree adverbs modifying nouns is very common in global Huayu, and Huayu, Putonghua, and Mandarin maintain a greater consistency. Chew Chenghai [14] discussed the development trend of various elements of global Huayu, and indicated that “gradual integration is almost inevitable”. The article provided concrete justifications for this assertion from five aspects: first, before China’s reform and opening up, all ethnic Chinese communities had close ties with China’s Taiwan, and Taiwan Mandarin had a great influence on the global Huayu; second, from the new perspective of Huayu going to the world, we should pay more attention to the communication between Huayu areas, so that Huayu can be integrated in the communication; third, the highly unified written language and formal standard spoken language, as well as the tradition of using Chinese characters to record the language, are the solid foundation for Chinese integration. In addition, the opening of China’s door and the continuous development of national power have increased the opportunities for communication between Huayu areas; fourth, Singaporean Huayu has obviously gradually “moved closer to Putonghua”; fifth, we must follow the language standards of major countries, the best solution is to reduce the difference. Kho Kian Kwee [17] also expressed the same view that “This rich diversity of features is dying out dramatically in favor of a gradual unification into a single standard form of ‘Standard Huayu.’” The use of degree adverbs modifying nouns in Putonghua, Huayu and Mandarin also verifies the above judgment from one perspective or aspect.

4. Conclusion

Based on the above investigation and analysis, three
conclusions can be drawn.

First, the phenomenon of degree adverbs modifying nouns has been inherited in Southeast Asia Huayu, which belongs to the development type of “full-scale”, that is, it is used in all three stages without a “break”.

Second, degree adverbs can be combined with more abstract nouns in the century-old Huayu, and the range of nouns modified by them has been expanded, showing an upward development trend.

Third, the use of degree adverbs modifying nouns in Huayu, Putonghua, and Mandarin has remained more consistent in a global Huayu perspective, indicating a trend of gradual integration.

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