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 subjects1. 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

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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.
Putonghua is mainly with the help of the BCC corpus of Beijing Language and Culture University and the CCL corpus of Peking University. Then, we draw on the spot to understand the evolutionary process and path of the development of Huayu grammar 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.neohyung.com/, we can also see some use cases of degree adverbs modifying nouns, etc.

(1) If it is not possible to hire a special person due to financial difficulties, the one who is most interested in library affairs and has the most research among the faculty members can be chosen to be the director, while the librarian must be a special person to avoid the waste of various affairs. (Morning Post Supplement, 1925)

(2) I have read this book, and it is difficult for me to make any judgment. It seems that the supreme genius of this extraordinary poet has been neutralized. (Morning Post Supplement, 1923)

(3) When the fashion turns around, if we talk like this, it would be too “intuitive”, right? (Independent Comics, 1935)

The above are examples of the use of nouns modified by degree adverbs in the newspaper corpus. Many such examples can also be found in the works of Bing Xin, Lao She, Ba Jin, Lu Xun, Qu Qiubai, Zhou Zuoren, Ding Ling, Xiao Jun, etc., see examples:

(4) That once a old friend came over, she said she recently more childlike, and I was a little blushing. (The Independent Comic, 1935)

(5) When an old friend came over, she laughed and said that I had become more childlike and blushing recently. (Miscellaneous Notes in the Mountain, 1924)

(6) Wearing a cotton robe at this time of year! What a joke! I'm afraid my sister will suspect me of being insane. (Home, 1933)

(7) 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. (About Women, 1943)

(8) Those who know me, and many say I am very female. (About Women, 1943)

Consistent with the early Mandarin, there are many such usages in the early Huayu", see examples:

(9) He originally spoke at great length, but at first I did not pay attention to him and could not fully grasp it. He really regretted it. (New National Magazine, 1922)

(10) Brother ten? where the Nanyang drama. (About Women, 1943)

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) We often in the newspaper saw a communications from various parts of the Malaya, which is the first phase of the Hua, dated from 1919 - 1945, which is the first phase of the Huayu (Diao Yanbin [11]).

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 capable” for various events in each region. (Century Wind, 1939)

(12) The above is just a very principle list of the path to be taken by the 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]).
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) 反观拜登虽然比特朗普更“君子”，无奈始终摆脱不了奥巴马的影子。（《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) 是呀,刚才我确实是太笨蛋了,如果稍微用一点力，不是，不是博到么？（《马华文学大系》，1981）

(20) 学生小时候顽皮捣蛋，到了高年级就更坏蛋了，不但打架闹事，还敢与老师作对。（《文道》，1984）

(21) 有一位杨子江院长对《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,实在是每个上台的人必读之物。”（《百合文集》，2011）

(22) According to the survey, nearly 90% of the respondents believe that contributing to the society is the most needed spirit of Lei Feng today, but there are innovative ways to practice the spirit of Lei Feng, such as microblog forwarding and online voting, which are also considered “very Lei Feng”. (Yangcheng Evening News, 2012)

(23) 三月春风十里，这里的兵哥很雷锋。（《国防时报》，2021）

(24) 反直觉得这个地方倒真是很陶渊明的。（《湖南文学》，1993）

(25) 这孩子有点李承晚,不过没那么漂亮。（《羊城晚报》, 2011）

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 and Putonghua, etc. Diao Yabin [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) 当然，诗人与诗的关系应该是在更早期的年月开始的。（《蕉风》，1996）
(27) 但是现在仍是非常初期，还未制定执行的日期。（《星洲日报》，2020）
(28) 然而，它现在仍然非常早，在过程和没有日期已经设定。 (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:

(29) 当游击队知道斗争已经开始，今天必然会展开更长期、更惨烈的苦斗。（《小城之夜》，1954）
(30) “关仔角的古堡很西方”也使人联想到余光中的“星空很希腊”。（马华文学，2012）
(31) What Mr. Jinzhong said is true. Besides, Murakami is also very Japanese. (Malaysian Huayu literature, 2013)

2.3. Convergence of Huayu and Putonghua

The number and frequency of the use of “degree adverb + noun” in Putonghua can be seen from the frequency graph automatically generated by searching the BCC corpus over time. In addition, a multi-domain search of the BCC corpus for “most/very/more/extremely/too+N” and manual filtering also showed that the use of “degree adverb + noun” is very common in Putonghua, see examples:

Most+N: 最血性，最专业，最喜剧，最男人，最奇迹，最天使，最情侣，最英雄，最早期

The most+N: the most bloody, the most professional, the most comedy, the most manly, the most miraculous, the most angelic, the most couple, the most heroic, the earliest

Very+N: very genius, very trash, very connotation, very spiritual, very drama, very tragedy, very personality, very lady, very man, very mouse, very cabbage, very Chinese, very official, very small citizen

More+N: more charming, more human, more professional, more tragic, more dramatic, more beautiful, more earthy, more peachy, more metal, more manly, more womanly, more slogan, more genius, more humane, more advantageous

Very+N: very genius, very trash, very connotation, very spiritual, very drama, very tragedy, very personality, very lady, very man, very mouse, very cabbage, very Chinese, very official, very small citizen

More+N: more charming, more human, more professional, more tragic, more dramatic, more beautiful, more earthy, more peachy, more metal, more manly, more womanly, more slogan, more genius, more humane, more advantageous

Extremely+N: extremely market, extremely love, extremelyism, extremely characteristics, extremely personality, extremely vitality, extremely temptation, extremely low temperature, extremely connotation

Very+N: very genius, very trash, very connotation, very spiritual, very drama, very tragedy, very personality, very lady, very man, very mouse, very cabbage, very Chinese, very official, very small citizen

More+N: more charming, more human, more professional, more tragic, more dramatic, more beautiful, more earthy, more peachy, more metal, more manly, more womanly, more slogan, more genius, more humane, more advantageous

Extremely+N: extremely market, extremely love, extremelyism, extremely characteristics, extremely personality, extremely vitality, extremely temptation, extremely low temperature, extremely connotation

Too+N: too tragic, too truthful, too heartfelt, too connotation, too dark, too Gaga, too shit, too tragic, too comedy, too rapeseed, too human, too elite, too detailed, too nightmare

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 childlike, 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 [16] 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。” (People’s Daily 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’.”

(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.

(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.

(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) 住公寓开小车没西装……“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本质的特征 (《东华日报》，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) 美财金记者峰会前瞻：美国一天会很美很杭州 (《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 自称设计颜色搭配“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. Khoo Kiak Uei [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.

References


