

A Quantitative and Comparative Study of Synonyms Between Malaysian “Huayu” and Mandarin

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Abstract: Global Chinese also called global “Huayu” is a unique and valuable language resource in the world. Lexical differences are one of the prominent distinctions among Chinese variants in different Huayu communities, which are manifested in three cases—characteristic words, homographs and synonyms according to the similarities and differences between names and realities. Based on the *Grand Global Chinese Dictionary*, this paper establishes a database of synonyms among Malaysian Chinese and Mandarin which includes 529 items, and makes a quantitative comparative study on these synonymous words from the following five aspects: distribution of word classes, quantities of sememes, sources of loanwords, correspondence of alternative words and the convergence among Huayu communities. According to the statistics, the synonyms and notional words are mainly nouns, besides there are verbs, adjectives, quantifiers, onomatopoeia, distinguishing words and so on; most of them are monosyllabic words, meanwhile the polysemous words are mainly words with two sememes, and there are a few words with three or four sememes; the loanwords among them are derived from English in quantities, and mainly in the form of transliteration, partial transliteration or semantic transliteration; the quantitative correspondence is mostly one-to-one, and more are shared by two/three/four districts, reflecting the economic and cultural exchanges, language contact and integration of various Huayu communities. This paper shows the overall situation of synonymous words in Malaysian Chinese and Mandarin, which is conducive to breaking the lexical communication barriers in the language communication and will also provide important conditions for the information processing of Malaysian Chinese.

Keywords: Malaysian “Huayu”, Mandarin, Synonymous Words, Difference and Integration

1. Introduction

Southeast Asia is located at the “crossroads” between Asia and Oceania, the Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean. After several waves of immigration, Singapore and Malaysia are the countries with the largest number of overseas Chinese in the world and they are also the first formation of Huayu among the 11 countries in Southeast Asia. From the existing research, Southeast Asia is the region where Chinese was first spread overseas and overseas Huayu was first formed. It can be said that Southeast Asian Huayu is the starting point of global Chinese. Moreover, in the later development process, the comprehensive effects of Huayu education, media and literature have made the Chinese language inherit well in Southeast Asia, especially in Singapore and Malaysia.

At present, Chinese language research is in the ascendant, which is carried out from the aspects of time, space, contents,

theories and so on. In the past 30 years, many research results have been obtained. Among which vocabulary is the most active part. The academic research findings in this field are the most abundant, and most of them focus on the synchronic level, with obvious regional differences. The research contents include the definition of relevant concepts, the description and origin of vocabulary characteristics, the investigations of variation, the discussions of vocabulary norms and coordination, etc.

The research contents of Huayu vocabulary in different communities of Southeast Asia show a certain degree of significant difference. Zhou Qiong [1] discussed the manifestations, syntactic distribution and the influence of code switching and code mixing of the time words in *Le Bao*. Similar studies can be found in Xiao Guozheng [2], Xu Yingchun [3], Ye Zhongyang [4] and Zhang Jie [5]. The study of Malaysian Huayu vocabulary mainly involves the

investigation of verbs and the analysis of Malaysian unique words. For example, Chen Zixuan [6] analyzed the special usage of the Malaysian Chinese spoken verb "Zhong" through the collection and observation of the spoken language corpus of films and television works, media and social network sites, and then discussed its origin from the two dialects in China—Cantonese and Minnan Chinese; Feng Qian [7] counted the number and distribution of characteristic words in *The Introduction to Chinese (Huayu)*, a local textbook in Malaysia, and divided these characteristic words into six categories according to their meanings.

Besides, Wang Shikai and Fang Lei [8] made statistics on the synonymous words in the global Chinese language; Song Fei [9] made a quantitative study on the unique words and synonymous words in Huayu in Southeast Asia communities. Li Mingze [10] analyzed the unique words in Malaysia with the Chinese textbook for Chinese primary school as the main research object. Xu Yi and Peng Shuang [11] analyzed the four major types of vocabulary variations in Malaysian Huayu—morphological variations, semantic variations, changes of word usage and non-corresponding words; Peng Jian and Yang Wenquan [12] discussed the generation and evolution of the special quantifier "grain" in Huayu of Singapore and Malaysia. However, there is no research on synonymous words between Malaysian Huayu and Mandarin. Therefore, there is an urgent need to extract and analyze this part of vocabulary. The quantitative and comparative study of lexical differences between Malaysian Huayu and Mandarin is of great significance for constructing a complete chain of Chinese lexical research, promoting Chinese teaching, and formulating language norms and policies.

2. Definition and Corpus Source

2.1. Relative Concepts and Definitions

2.1.1. Global Chinese

"Huayu is a common Chinese language based on traditional Mandarin and centered on Putonghua" was decoded by Diao Yanbin [13, 14].

The earliest area where overseas Chinese was formed was Southeast Asia, mainly Singapore and Malaysia. In order to distinguish it from the Chinese language in other areas (such as "North American Chinese", "European Chinese", "African Chinese", etc.), scholars call it "Southeast Asian Chinese", namely "Southeast Asian Huayu", which is used to refer to the common language of Chinese in Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, the Philippines, Brunei, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, Myanmar, Timor Leste and other regions. From the definition of Chinese (Huayu) referred above, it can be inferred that Southeast Asian Chinese is "a common language of Southeast Asian Chinese based on traditional Mandarin and centered on Putonghua".

At present, there are many Chinese communities over the world. Compared with the "global English", "global Chinese" was proposed, which refers to the common Chinese language all over the world.

2.1.2. Chinese/Huayu Community

With the in-depth development and wide spread of Chinese language, its word distribution shows the characteristics of popularity and diversity. On the premise of the concept of "greater Chinese", the global Chinese communities can be divided into four major ones: Mainland Chinese community, Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan Chinese community, Southeast Asian (including Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Philippines, etc.). Chinese community and other (including Japan, Europe, America, Australia, etc.). Among them, as the largest Chinese community in the world, the words produced and used by the mainland Chinese community are the basis of rich and colorful Chinese vocabulary. With the development of society and globalization, many changes have taken place in Chinese vocabulary.

2.1.3. Synonymous Words

Homonymous words, homonymous words and unique Chinese words are three common types of lexical differences of Chinese language among different Huayu communities. Malaysian characteristic Chinese words refer to those formed by mapping Malaysian specific concepts with specific pronunciation and writing forms, such as "阿兵哥"、"峇峇"、"娘惹", etc. Homonymous words refer to those with the same pronunciation and writing forms but different concepts among different Huayu communities. Homonymous words between Malaysian Chinese and Mandarin refer to words with the same form and pronunciation but different meanings between Malaysian Huayu vocabulary and the corresponding Mandarin vocabulary. For example, the word "爱人" refers to husband or wife in Mandarin while lover in Malaysian Chinese.

"There are no names necessarily appropriate themselves. Names were made by convention"(Ibid). Synonyms refer to words used by different Chinese communities to express the same concept but with different pronunciation or writing forms. The synonymous words in Malaysian Huayu and Mandarin refer to the words with different expressions of the same concept in Malaysian Huayu and Mandarin. According to whether the phonetic forms are the same or homophonic, synonyms can be divided into two types: heterographic ones and heterotypic ones. The former is often close to each other in terms of morphology, such as "保丽龙"(used in China mainland) and "宝丽龙"(used in Malaysia), "德比"(used in China mainland) and "打吡、打比"(used in Hong Kong, Macao, Singapore and Malaysia), "荷尔蒙"(used in China mainland) and "贺尔蒙"(used in Hong Kong, Macao, Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand). The latter go with the following examples, such as "放鸽子"(used in China mainland) and "放飞机"(used in Hong Kong, Macao and Malaysia), "俯卧撑"(used in China mainland) and "掌上压"(used in Hong Kong, Macao and Malaysia), "负增长"(used in China mainland) and "负成长"(used in Taiwan and Malaysia)" and so on.

2.2. Corpus Source

The *Grand Global Chinese Dictionary* is the basis of

vocabulary extraction and screening in this study. It is compiled with the concept of "greater Chinese", that is, the common Chinese language all over the world based on Mandarin or traditional Mandarin. It rose from mainland China and gradually spread to Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan and overseas Chinese communities. The new and old Chinese languages are in contact with each other, thus, gradually forming a "greater Chinese language" that now covers the whole world. Chinese in different Huayu communities have both similarities and differences. The formation of these differences are due to their own distinctions in social life, the imbalance spread by the new and old Mandarin, the infiltration of the background color of local dialects, and, of course, the influence of other local or foreign languages. According to the language sense, the Grand Global Chinese Dictionary is also convenient for the compilation of Chinese language communities. It divides the Chinese language community into Chinese mainland (mainland), China, Hong Kong and Macao, China Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia and Philippines. It also concerns Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Brunei, Northeast Asia, North America, Europe, Oceania, etc. The dictionary contains not only common words extensively used by Huayu communities around the world, but also unique words used by major Chinese communities and common cultural words in Chinese communities. The research object of this paper is the synonymous words between Malaysian Huayu and Mandarin in the *Grand Global Chinese Dictionary*.

3. Statistics and Analysis of Synonyms

3.1. Corpus Statistics

The synonymous words in the *Grand Global Chinese Dictionary* are dealt in the way of main and auxiliary interpretive items. The main items with a wide range of application are set up with detailed notes, and "也说..." is indicated at the end of the item. Others are set up as secondary ones in which the main items are directly used for annotation. For instance:

【火龙果】一种热带水果。因其外表肉质鳞片像蛟龙的外鳞，故称。也指生长这种水果的树。也说青龙果（港澳）、红龙果（台）、龙珠果（新马）。

【青龙果】火龙果。用于港澳等地。

【红龙果】火龙果。用于台湾等地。

【龙珠果】火龙果。用于新马等地。

We record the interpretation part of the main items as A, and the contents marked "也说..." at the end as B. Only the main items containing the word "马" is selected as the research objects, and 11 data fields including Id, words, word classes, semantic category, quantities of sememes,

semantic items, main regions, word sources, synonymous words' usage regions, corresponding relations and page number are set to form the initial database. Then, the entries containing "陆" in B are eliminated (that is, the words commonly used in Malaysia and Mandarin are not counted if there is alternative synonym), and 529 valid items are finally selected.

Then the contents of each data field are marked respectively, in which "corresponding relation" refers to the specific number of Mandarin and Malaysian Huayu words contained in a group of synonyms in the same semantic item of the same entry, which is divided into "one to one", "one to many", "many to one" and "many to many", and the specific number of the party with more are indicated in parentheses; Under each quantitative relationship, the common scope of Malaysian Huayu synonyms is counted, including "single area", "two areas", "three areas", "four areas", "five areas", "six areas" and "seven areas", forming a total of 594 items. For example, "氨基酸 (land) – 胺基酸 (Taiwan and Malaysia)" belongs to a one-to-one relationship, and the alternative word "胺基酸" is shared in two areas—Taiwan and Malaysia; "吹牛 (land) – 牛皮 / 吹水 (Hong Kong, Macao and Malaysia)" is of a one-to-many (2) relationship, and the two alternative words "牛皮" and "吹水" are shared in Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan three areas.

3.2. Statistical Results and Preliminary Analysis

3.2.1. Statistics and Analysis of the Distribution of Word Classes

In terms of parts of speech, the synonymous words of Malaysian Huayu and Mandarin mainly include nouns (such as "巴仙率", "班导师", "程式员", etc.), verbs (such as "传召", "复新", "割脉", etc.), adjectives (such as "八", "鸡手鸭脚"), quantifiers (such as "安士", "奈米", etc.), onomatopoeic words (such as "哈啾"), distinguishing words (such as "一次性"). Besides, there are 6 multi-category words, 6 phrases and 1 proverb.

Due to the existence of multi-category words, the total number of parts of speech is 535. On the premise of clearly listing "multi-category words" separately, the total number is 529, which is in line with the number of entries. Among them, nouns and verbs (excluding concurrent words) are more distributed, with 432 and 81 respectively, accounting for 81.66% and 15.31% respectively. See Table 1 for details as following ("N" stands for nouns, "V" for verbs, "Q" for quantifiers, "A" for adjectives words, "D" for distinguishing words, "O" for onomatopoeias, "M" for multi-category words, "Ph" for phrases and "Pr" for proverbs):

Table 1. Distribution of synonyms' word classes in Malaysian Huayu and Mandarin.

Word classes	N	V	Q	A	D	O	M	Ph	Pr
Nums	432	81	4	2	2	1	6	1	1
Proportion	81.66%	15.31%	0.76%	0.38%	0.38%	0.19%	1.13%	0.19%	0.19%

3.2.2. *Statistics and Analysis of the Quantities of Sememes*

Swedish linguist Noren first proposed “sememe” in 1908, the state in which a meaning of a word is interpreted in a dictionary is the combinatorial relationship between words in a category. Zhang Zhiyi, and Zhang Qingyun [15] put forward that a monosemous word has only one sememe, while a

polysemous word has multiple sememes.

In terms of the number of semantic items, most synonymous words in Malaysian Huayu and Mandarin are monosyllabic words, a total of 483, up to 91.30%; There are 46 polysemy words, including 38 with two senses, 5 with three senses and 3 with four senses. See Table 2 for details.

Table 2. Quantities of synonyms' sememes in Malaysian Huayu and Mandarin.

	Synonymous words	Monosyllabic words		
		2 sememes	3 sememes	4 sememes
Nums of words	483	38	5	3
Rate	91.30%	7.18%	0.85%	0.57%

3.2.3. *Statistics and Analysis of the Word Sources*

In terms of word sources, there are 56 loan words in synonymous words between Malaysian Huayu and Mandarin, accounting for 10.59% of the total vocabulary. Among them there are the most from English, such as “安士”, “骇客” and “执行长”, with a total of 50, mainly in the

form of transliteration, partial transliteration or semantic transliteration, and a few in the form of free translation; One word respectively from Thailand, Malaysia, Spain and France is borrowed by transliteration; One from Guangdong dialect and one from Fujian dialect in china. See Table 3 for details.

Table 3. Sources of synonymous words between Malaysian Huayu and Mandarin.

Word sources	Borrowing methods or specific dialects	Nums of sub-items	Proportion of Sub-items	Proportion of word sources
English	Pure transliteration	26	46.43%	89.29%
	Free translation	14	25%	
	Part transliteration	8	14.29%	
	Semantic transliteration	2	3.57%	
Malaysian	Pure transliteration	1	1.79%	1.79%
Thai language	Pure transliteration	1	1.79%	1.79%
French	Pure transliteration	1	1.79%	1.79%
Spanish	Pure transliteration	1	1.79%	1.79%
Chinese dialects	Cantonese dialect	1	1.79%	3.58%
	Min (Fujian) dialect	1	1.79%	

3.2.4. *Statistics and Analysis of Correspondence*

In terms of correspondence, most of the 529 synonyms between Malaysian Huayu and Mandarin are one-to-one (such as “内行 (land) – 熟行 (Hong Kong, Macao, Singapore and Malaysia)”, “软件 (land) – 软体 (Taiwan and Malaysia)”, a total of 398 groups, accounting for about 75.24%; The second is the one-to-many relationship, including one-to-two, one-to-three, one-to-four and one-to-five ones. There are 131 groups, accounting for about 24.76%. For example:

方便面 (陆) — 速食面 (台马泰)、快食面 (新马泰)
 沙茶 (陆) — 沙爹酱 (新马泰欧)、沙爹 (港澳新马泰欧)、沙爹 (港澳新马)

蹦极 (陆) — 笨猪跳 (港澳马)、高空弹跳 (台马)、绷紧跳 (新马泰印尼)、绷紧跳 (新马泰印尼)
 出生证 (陆) — 出生纸 (港澳新马印尼)、出世纸 (港澳新马)、报生纸 (新马)、报生字 (新马)、出生字 (新马印尼)。

There are 18 groups in many-to-one relationship, such as “大头照、大头像 (land) – 人头像 (Singapore and Malaysia)”, “航天员、宇航员 (land) – 太空人 (Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan and Malaysia)”; There are 5 groups in many-to-many relationship, such as “肉糜、肉末 (Land) – 肉脞 (Singapore and Malaysia)、肉碎 (Singapore, Malaysia and Thai)”. See Table 4 for details.

Table 4. Correspondence of synonymous words between Malaysian Huayu and Mandarin.

Relationships	Nums of words	Proportions	
One-to-one relationship	398	75.24%	
One-to-many relationship	One-to-two	83	15.69%
	One-to-three	14	2.65%
	One-to-four	5	0.95%
	One-to-five	1	0.19%
Many-to-one relationship	18	3.40%	
Many-to-many relationship	10	1.89%	

It can be seen that when conveying specific concepts to Malaysian Huayu in Mandarin, as well as receiving and

understanding the concepts conveyed by Malaysian Huayu, we should pay more attention to these synonyms, otherwise it

is very easy to cause misunderstanding.

3.2.5. Statistics and Analysis of Convergence

According to the research results in the late 1990s, Tang Zhixiang [16] pointed that 90% of the words in the global Chinese circle are the same. The *Grand Global Chinese Dictionary* contains a large amount of common words in the Chinese community. Similarly, many synonymous words between Malaysian Chinese and Mandarin also appear as multi-district common words. According to the use of regional markers in the annotation part of the main entry of

synonymous words in the *Grand Global Chinese Dictionary* (594 items in total, as mentioned above), we have carried out the convergence statistics of alternative words in Malaysian Chinese. The statistics take the same use of the two regions as the minimum unit, increasing successively. At the same time, those used only in Malaysia are also counted as a reference. If a word is used in a large region, it will not be repeatedly recorded in a small region. There are many areas where synonyms are used, but the areas often used together are relatively fixed. See Table 5 for details.

Table 5. Convergence of synonymous words between Malaysian Huayu and Mandarin.

Scopes	Areas	Nums	Proportions	Total proportions
One area	Malaysia	83	13.97%	13.97%
Two areas	Taiwan, Malaysia	105	17.68%	34.51%
	Singapore, Malaysia	95	32.31%	
	Malaysia, Thai	3	1.02%	
	Hong Kon, Malaysia	2	0.68%	
Three areas	Hong Kong, Macro, Malaysia	49	16.67%	20.20%
	Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia	35	11.90%	
	Singapore, Malaysia, Thai	21	7.14%	
	Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia	8	2.72%	
	Taiwan, Malaysia, Thai	4	1.36%	
	Hong Kong, Malaysia, Indonesia	1	0.17%	
	Malaysia, Thai, Indonesia	1	0.17%	
	Singapore, Malaysia, Europe	1	0.17%	
Four areas	Hong Kong, Macro, Singapore, Malaysia	82	27.90%	22.22%
	Hong Kong, Macro, Taiwan, Malaysia	19	6.46%	
	Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, Thai	12	4.08%	
	Singapore, Malaysia, Thai, Indonesia	11	3.74%	
	Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei	5	1.70%	
	Hong Kong, Macro, Malaysia, Thai	2	0.68%	
	Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia	1	0.17%	
Five areas	Hong Kong, Macro, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia	36	12.24%	7.24%
	Hong Kong, Macro, Singapore, Malaysia, Thai	5	1.70%	
	Hong Kong, Macro, Taiwan, Malaysia, Thai	1	0.17%	
	Hong Kong, Macro, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia	1	0.17%	
Six areas	Hong Kong, Macro, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, Thai	5	1.70%	1.52%
	Hong Kong, Macro, Singapore, Malaysia, Thai, Indonesia	3	1.02%	
	Hong Kong, Macro, Singapore, Malaysia, Thai, Europe	1	0.17%	
Seven areas	Hong Kong, Macro, Singapore, Malaysia, Thai, Indonesia, Brunei	1	0.17%	0.17%
Eight areas	Hong Kong, Macro, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, Thai, Indonesia, Brunei	1	0.17%	0.17%

"Characteristic Huayu words in varies communities" is a dynamic word group that is constantly changing. There is a phenomenon of new words and old words disappearing in a single area. Single area words may go to two or three areas or eventually enter the category of global Chinese circulation. From the perspective of synonyms between Malaysia Huayu and Mandarin included in the *Grand Global Chinese Dictionary*, the number of words shared by various Chinese communities accounts for about 86.03%, with more shared by two districts, three districts and four districts, and relatively less shared by five districts, six districts, seven districts and eight districts. The coverage area is mainly Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia and Brunei, and a small amount involves Europe. On the one hand, it reflects that the exchange and integration

of the Chinese language circle in economy, science and technology, culture and other aspects are expanding and the consistency is increasing; On the other hand, with the in-depth development of globalization and frequent and close exchanges between different regions, the number of words shared by multiple regions in the Chinese language circle will continue to increase, and the scope of use will also be wider.

4. Conclusion and Research Prospect

4.1. Conclusion

Based on the *Grand Global Chinese Dictionary*, this paper establishes a database, extracts 529 groups of synonymous

words between Malaysia Huayu and Mandarin through the definition of basic concepts, and makes a quantitative comparative study on these synonymous words from the five dimensions of distribution of word classes, quantities of sememes, sources of loanwords, correspondence of alternative words and the convergence among Huayu communities. It is found that: in terms of word classes, nouns are the main body, followed by verbs; In terms of the quantities of sememes, most of them are monosyllabic words; From the perspective of word sources, borrowing words are most derived from English, mainly in the form of transliteration, partial transliteration or semantic transliteration, with a small number from Thailand, Malaysia, Spain, France, Cantonese and Fujian dialect; From the perspective of correspondence, most of them are one-to-one relationships; From the perspective of the common areas of alternative words, the two districts, three districts and four districts share more, which reflects the economic and cultural exchange, language contact and integration of various Chinese communities.

The above research results show the overall situation of synonymous words between Malaysia Huayu and Mandarin, which is conducive to breaking the lexical communication barriers in the language communication between Malaysian Chinese and Mandarin. At the same time, the establishment of the "synonymous corpus between Malaysia Huayu and Mandarin" will also provide important conditions for the information processing of Malaysian Chinese.

4.2. Research Prospect

At present, the study of global Chinese has gone through 30 years and has gained some achievements in terms of ontology, theory and application, especially in the diachronic aspect. The characteristics of Huayu at all levels have attracted extensive attention, especially at the lexical and grammatical levels. The breadth and depth of ontology research have been further expanded, which is mainly manifested in paying attention to the comparative study of Chinese in many places and at many levels, paying attention to the study of Chinese from the perspective of contact, and the description of words is more detailed. However, there are relatively few quantitative studies, which should be paid more to and further enhance the research of large-scale corpus and statistical methods for follow-up work on this topic.

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