

國立交通大學

外國語文學系外國文學與語言學碩士班

碩士論文

漢語動詞後「一點」的語法化

The Grammaticalization of Post-verbal *yidian* ‘一點’ in
Mandarin Chinese

研究生：洪舶堯

指導教授：葉美利博士

劉辰生博士

中華民國一百零二年六月

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研究生：洪舶堯

Student: Po-Yao Hung

指導教授：葉美利

Advisor: Mei-Li Ye

劉辰生

Chen-Sheng Liu

國立交通大學

外國語文學系外國文學與語言學碩士班

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摘要

本文主要以語法化的角度為出發點探討漢語動詞後「一點」的語法化現象。本文認為以共時角度來看，「一點」最開始的用法是作為不定量詞，說明名詞的量。之後再演變為動詞和形容詞的補語。本文也用歷時的語料加以佐證這個主張。

由於語用功能在語法化中扮演讓意思改變的角色，本文探討「一點」的緩和功能。本文將討論內容設定在「A 一點」的結構並主要討論兩大內容。其一，本文整理出在語料中觀察到「一點」會出現且具有緩和作用的結構。依照說話者的觀點主要有五種結構：「A 一點」、「比較 A 一點」、「A 了一點」、「太 A 了一點」。其二，本文探討在什麼情況下聽者會知道說話者使用「一點」是為了緩和作用，什麼時候「一點」又維持原意而不具有緩和作用。本文認為，「一點」會被解讀為緩和的詞語的條件是主觀性(subjectivity)、相互主觀性(intersubjectivity)和四個說話者必須緩和其話語的原因共同造成的。

本文也探討是否說話者表達命令時，「一點」一定可以緩和說話者的話語強度。本文藉由 Lin(1981)和 Lee-Wong(1998)討論說話者表達直接要求的文章和問卷調查的結果來說明說話者使用「一點」不一定是為了緩和語氣，有時候是要表達某個不理想的狀況需要馬上獲得至少「一點」的改善。

關鍵字：一點、語法化、主觀性、緩和作用

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Student: Po-Yao Hung

Advisor: Dr. Mei-Li Ye

Dr. Chen-Sheng Liu

Graduate Institute of Foreign literatures and Linguistics

National Chiao Tung University

Abstract

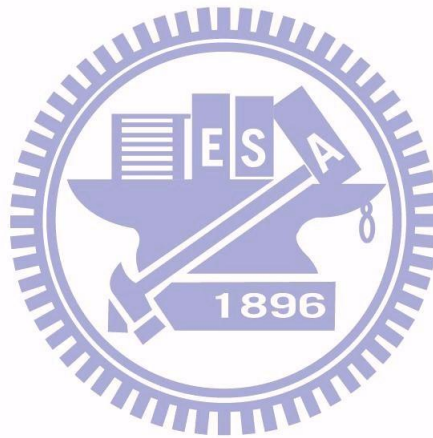
The thesis focuses the discussion on the grammaticalization of the post-verbal *yidian*. In terms of the development of grammaticalization, from the synchronic data, it is suggested that *yidian* is originally used as a quantifier denoting the amount of the head noun, and then develops into the use of the complement of verbs and adjectives. The hypothesis of the development of the grammaticalization of *yidian* can be supported with diachronic data.

Since meaning change caused by pragmatic usage usually goes along with grammaticalization, the thesis also discusses the pragmatic functions of *yidian*. *Yidian* in Mandarin Chinese is usually seen as a mitigator which displays hedging function. Limiting the discussion of the hedging function of *yidian* to the ‘A *yidian*’ construction, this thesis further discusses this issue from two main points. First, the constructions in which *yidian* appears as a mitigator are spelled out. Through the observation from the collected data, it is found that standing on different point of views, the speakers may employ *yidian* as a mitigator with four constructions – ‘A *yidian*’, ‘*bijiao* A *yidian*’, ‘A *le yidian*’ and ‘*tai* A *le yidian*’. Second, it is discussed under what condition *yidian* displays its hedging function, i.e. how the hearers know that the speakers are hedging their utterances in one situation but not in another. It is suggested that *yidian* tends to be interpreted as a mitigator when subjectivity or

intersubjectivity is involved in the utterances and there is one of the four reasons proposed in the thesis that the speaker needs to hedge his/her utterances.

There is also a brief discussion on whether *yidian* is meant to be used to hedge the illocutionary force of a speaker when s/he is making orders. With the support of Lin's (1981) and Lee-Wong's (1998) papers on direct requests and the result of the survey, it is argued in the thesis that whether *yidian* is meant to be used as a mitigator is quite context-based and that *yidian* may not be a mitigator at all when a speaker is making an order to ask the addressee to make at least a bit of improvement to make some change in an undesirable situation.

Keywords: *yidian*, grammaticalization, subjectivity, mitigating, hedging



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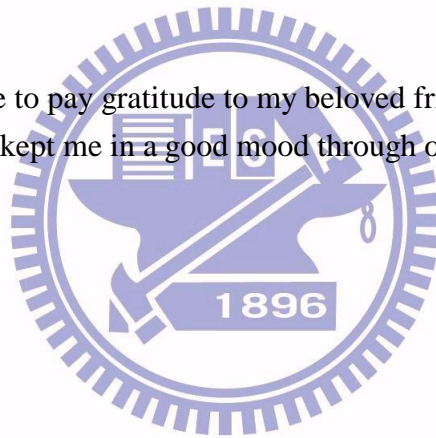
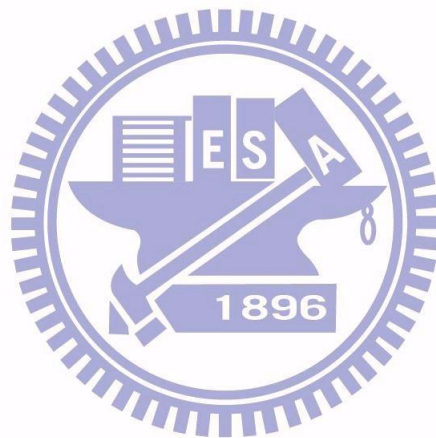


Table of Contents

Chinese Abstract	i
English Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iv
Table of Contents	v
Chapter 1 Introduction	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Literature review	2
1.3 The purpose and the structure of the thesis	5
1.4 Methodology	9
Chapter 2 The grammaticalization of <i>yidian</i>	11
2.1 Theoretical background	12
2.1.1 Earlier studies on grammaticalization	12
2.1.2 Traugott's study on the grammaticalization of degree modifiers in English	15
2.2 The grammaticalization of <i>yidian</i> from a synchronic perspective	18
2.2.1 The development of <i>yidian</i> from denoting amount to denoting degree	20
2.2.2 The development of <i>yidian</i> from 'yidian N' to 'V yidian'	22
2.2.3 The extension to 'A yidian'	27
2.3 Supporting evidence from diachronic perspective	32
2.4 Summary	39
Chapter 3 The pragmatic function of <i>yidian</i>	40
3.1 Literature review	44
3.1.1 Chen (2010), cooperative principle and politeness principle	44
3.1.2 Zou's study (1999) on the construction 'A yidian'	48
3.2 Constructions in which <i>yidian</i> appears and displays hedging function	50
3.2.1 'bijiao A yidian', 'A le yidian', and 'tai A le yidian'	50
3.2.2 A yidian	52
3.2.3 The comparison between the two kinds of situation	56
3.3 The triggers that cause <i>yidian</i> to display its hedging function	58
3.3.1 Politeness principle	58
3.3.2 Constructions	62
3.4 Subjectivity and intersubjectivity	63
3.4.1 The subjectivity of adjectives and adjectival evaluations in Mandarin Chinese ...	64
3.4.2 Subjectivity and reasons to use <i>yidian</i> as a mitigator for speakers	66
3.5 Summary and further discussion	79
3.5.1 Summary	79

3.5.2	The continuum of the propositional meaning and the speaker meaning of <i>yidian</i> .	80
Chapter 4	Grammaticalization and subjectification of <i>yidian</i>	84
4.1	Subjectification and intersubjectification	84
4.2	Subjectification and intersubjectification in the grammaticalization of <i>yidian</i>	88
Chapter 5	Summary	93
References	96



Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The word *dian* ‘點’ in Mandarin Chinese displays diverse functions. For example, it can be used as a verb, meaning ‘to light up’ as in *dian lazhu* ‘to light up candles’, or ‘to order meals’ as in *dian cai* ‘to order dishes’. Besides, *dian* is also used as a quantifier to denote the quantity of something and is equivalent to ‘some’ or ‘a little’. It is observed that *dian* is frequently collocated with the numeral *yi* ‘one’. There are several usages in the combination of *yi* and *dian*. First, *yidian*, like *dian*, can function as a quantifier, as in (1.1):

(1.1) (Academia Sinica)

... 做家務時，身上擦一點香水...

... zuo jiawu shi, shen shang ca yidian xiangshui...

do housework when body on wipe a little / some perfume

‘...when doing housework, apply some perfume on the body...’

Additionally, *yidian* can be used as a complement of a verb or adjective as in (1.2) and in (1.3) respectively:

(1.2) (Academia Sinica)

看一本不懂，看十本懂一點...

kan yi ben bu dong, kan shi ben dong yidian ...

look one CL NEG understand look ten CL understand a little

‘One can’t understand by reading only a copy. One can understand a bit by

reading ten copies...’

(1.3) (Academia Sinica)

如果你不舒服，就喝少一點。

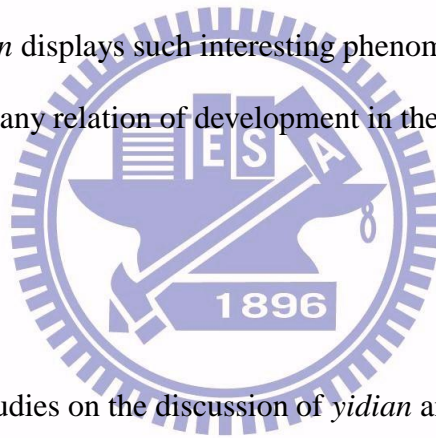
Ruguo ni bu shufu, jiu he shao *yidian*.

If 2S NEG comfortable then drink little a little

‘If you don’t feel good, drink less.’

It is worthy to note that as a quantifier, *yidian* is originally in the position of the specifier of an NP. However, it is posed after a verb or an adjective when used as a complement. Since *yidian* displays such interesting phenomenon, it is worthwhile to find out whether there is any relation of development in the usages of *yidian*.

1.2 Literature review



There are several studies on the discussion of *yidian* and most of them focus on the syntactic functions and the pragmatic functions of *yidian*. In terms of the syntactic perspective of *yidian*, most studies only focus on syntactic behaviors and meanings of *yidian*. Zheng (2007) mostly discusses the syntactic behaviors of *yidian* and finds that there are some syntactic functions of *yidian* such as being a quantifier in ‘*yidian* N’ and being a complement in ‘V *yidian*’ and ‘A *yidian*’. In addition to discussing the syntactic behaviors of *yidian*, Xiu (2002) observes that the meanings of *yidian* change with different syntactic behaviors. For example, when used as a quantifier, *yidian* denotes the amount of the noun; when used as the complement of a verb, *yidian* denotes the degree of change made by the verb, and in the use of the complement of an adjective, *yidian* puts a limit to the degree of the adjective. Although the two studies

provide thorough observation from the data, neither of the studies discuss the relation between the different syntactic behaviors and meanings of *yidian* and whether its development is related to the various usages of *yidian*.

Compared to Zheng (2007) and Xiu (2002), Chen (2011) not only provides observation but analysis of the issue. Chen attempts to explain the syntactic behaviors of *yidian* by means of syntactic and cognitive approaches. In her analysis, Chen considers ‘V *yidian*’ the result of the ellipsis of ‘V *yidian* N’. Besides, through her analysis, ‘A *yidian* N’ can be ellipsized into ‘A *yidian*’ and since there is similarity between adjectives and verbs in Mandarin Chinese, *yidian* can also be used as the complement of verbs. Chen (2011) claims that when used as a complement of a verb or an adjective, *yidian* denotes the degree of change of the verb or the adjective and thus can be seen as a result. Therefore, *yidian* can be put on after a verb or an adjective.

Although Chen’s (2011) analysis is insightful, there are still some problems unsolved. First, Chen (2011) only focuses on the development in the syntactic behaviors of *yidian* but not on the development in the meanings with respect to the syntactic behaviors. Second, Chen (2011) fails to observe that there is semantic difference between *yidian* in ‘V *yidian*’ and ‘A *yidian*’. The one in ‘A *yidian*’ actually denotes the differential between two compared objects (Liu 2007). Besides, as for the syntactic development, Chen fails to explain why she thinks the use of ‘A *yidian*’ develops to the use of ‘V *yidian*’ but not in the opposite direction. Furthermore, Chen claims that through her observation, there are cases in which ‘A *yidian* N’ is ellipsized into ‘A *yidian*’, which leads to the use of ‘V *yidian*’. However, Chen (2011) should have provided the cases in which ‘A *yidian* N’ is ellipsized into ‘A *yidian*’ because normally, when an adjective is used transitively, its objects should be introduced with *dui* (Huang 2009: 21) as in (1.4):

(1.4) (Huang 2009: 21)

他對這個結局很不滿。

Ta dui zhe ge jieju hen buman.

he on this CL outcome very discontent

‘He is discontent with this outcome.’

Finally, Chen’s (2011) claim on the development of the syntactic use of *yidian* would be more persuasive if she provided diachronic evidence.

In terms of the pragmatic perspective of *yidian*, it has been pointed out by some studies such as Zou (1999), Shuai (1999) and Chen (2011) that *yidian* displays the function of mitigating. Zou (1999) and Shuai (1999) focuses on the pragmatic function of the ‘A *yidian*’ and ‘*tai A le yidian*’ constructions respectively. Chen (2011) further discusses that sometimes, people flout cooperative principle (Grice 1975) and use *yidian* as a mitigator in order to follow politeness principle (Leech 1983). All of the studies are insightful. However, none of them discuss the relation between the semantic meaning and the pragmatic meaning of *yidian*. That is, these studies fail to explain when the mitigating meaning of *yidian* will be triggered.

Additionally, Zou (1999) and Chen (2011) both agree that *yidian* can mitigate the speaker’s tone when s/he is producing an imperative. However, it is claimed in this paper that not every *yidian* in imperatives sounds like a mitigator especially in the imperatives of making orders (Bach & Harnish 1979). Besides based on the result of the survey conducted to native speakers in the present study, the claim can be supported by the fact that *yidian* in imperatives of making orders is not the main role in downtoning the speaker’s illocutionary force. Furthermore, whether *yidian* displays the function of hedging in imperatives of

making orders is quite context-based.

1.3 The purpose and the structure of the thesis

The purpose of the paper is mainly in the grammaticalization and subjectification of *yidian*. Since subjectification is a trigger that causes an element to acquire pragmatic meanings, the pragmatic function of *yidian* is discussed. In Chapter 2, how *yidian* is developed from a quantifier to a complement of verbs or adjectives is discussed, as mentioned in (1.1) to (1.3). Besides, according to some of the data in which *yidian* is used as a quantifier syntactically, semantically, *yidian* can be seen as a degree modifier which denotes the degree of the head noun rather than the amount as in (1.5):

(1.5) (Academia Sinica)

...一點憂愁也沒有...

... *yidian* *youchou* *ye* *mei* *you*...

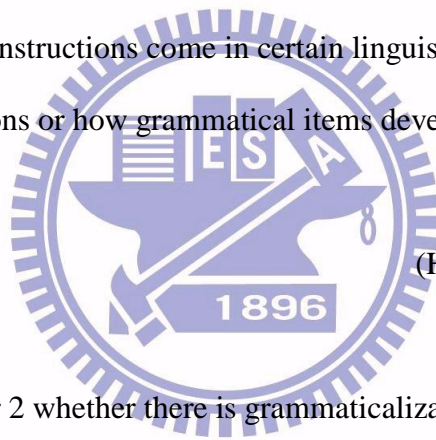
some / a little anxiety also NEG have

‘...there isn’t a bit of anxiety...’

In (1.5), *yidian youchou* ‘a bit of anxiety’ is an NP and originally the internal object of the existential verb *you*; the NP is preposed to the front. In the NP, the head noun is *youchou* ‘anxiety’ and *yidian* functions as a quantifier. However, semantically, *yidian* in (1.5) doesn’t denote the amount of *youchou*; instead, it expresses the speaker’s assessment of the degree of *youchou*. It is worth noting that when used as a complement of verbs, *yidian* also denotes the degree. The meaning of *yidian* is used to denote the differential (Liu 2007) between two compared objects when used as the

complement of adjectives. Therefore, it is quite intriguing because *yidian* behaves quite different syntactically but it seems that there is semantic relation between the different meanings of *yidian*. Besides, there is a tendency that *yidian*, originally a grammatical item, develops new grammatical functions. For example, several studies such as Zou (1999) and Chen (2011) discuss that *yidian* can function as a mitigator. As a result, from this perspective, *yidian* follows the definition of grammaticalization by Hopper and Traugott (2003):

As a term referring to a research framework, grammaticalization refers to that part of the study of language change that is concerned with such questions as how lexical items and constructions come in certain linguistic contexts to serve grammatical functions or how grammatical items develop new grammatical functions.



(Hopper & Traugott 2003: 1)

It is discussed in Chapter 2 whether there is grammaticalization between the different usages of *yidian*. The hypothesis for the development of grammaticalization can be supported with diachronic evidences.

In Chapter 3, the discussion is on the pragmatic functions of *yidian*. As mentioned earlier, *yidian* is seen as a mitigator pragmatically. In Chapter 3, The discussion covers two main issues. The first discussion is on the constructions in which *yidian* often appears and is interpreted as a mitigator especially in the situation in which the speaker makes criticism to express the dissatisfaction against current states. Through the observation, it is found that the speaker may stand on two different points of view when making criticism. First, the speaker may criticise on the perspective of the current state as in (1.6):

(1.6) A: 茶好喝嗎？

Chai hao he ma?
tea good drink SPF?
'Is the tea good?'

B: 淡了一點。

Dan le yidian.
weak PFT a little
'It's a bit weak.'

In (1.6), *dan* 'weak' is the current state that the speaker is dissatisfied with. The speaker stands on the perspective of reality and employs the construction 'A *le yidian*' with *yidian* being a mitigator to make the criticism.

In some cases, it is observed that instead of making comments on the current situation directly, the speaker stands on the perspective of his or her expected situation which the speaker believes to be better than the current state, as in (1.7):

(1.7) 他瘦一點會更好看。

Ta shou yidian hui geng hao kan.
3S thin a little can more good-looking
'He will look better if he is thinner.'

In (1.7), the speaker uses the construction 'A *yidian*' to make a comment, in which the adjective stands for the more desirable state in the speaker's mind. With *yidian* as a mitigator, the speaker is commenting that it would be better if the person that the

speaker refers to can make a bit improvement toward his or her expected state.

In addition to ‘*A le yidian*’ and ‘*A yidian*’, there are also constructions that are found as forms for criticism with *yidian* being a mitigator. The constructions include ‘*tai A le yidian*’ and ‘*bijiao A yidian*’.

In Chapter 3, it is also discussed that what causes the mitigating meaning of *yidian* to be ‘on-record’, i.e. when hearers will interpret *yidian* as a mitigator and when they will understand *yidian* as its semantic meaning. It is suggested in this thesis that subjectivity and intersubjectivity can be considered as the main factors.

In Chapter 4, the discussion is focused on the interaction between grammaticalization and subjectification. In the semantic extension of *yidian*, metaphor and metonymy are the main triggers for the extension. When it comes to pragmatic function, it is subjectification that trigger *yidian* to display its pragmatic functions. The thesis ends at Chapter 5 with an overall conclusion.

It is necessary to note that through out the paper, the emphasis is put on *yidian*, a unit that denotes the amount of something. Although some studies such as Zheng (2007) consider *dian* to be the same as *yidian* in the quantifier use, this conclusion still requires further discussion and support. In addition, the homonyms won’t be involved in the discussion such as *yidian*, which means ‘one o’clock’, as in (1.8):

(1.8) 已經一點鐘了。

Yijing *yidian* zhong le.

already one o’clock PFT

‘It’s one o’clock already.’

Besides, the adverb *youyidian* ‘a little bit’ won’t be included in the discussion since it is *youyidian*, not *yidian*, that is seen as a unit, as in (1.9):

(1.9) 這題目有一點困難。

Zhe timu youyidian kunnan.

this question a little bit difficult

‘This question is a little bit difficult.’

1.4 Methodology

Through out the paper, the data provided are drawn from Academia Sinica Balanced Corpus of Modern Chinese (現代漢語平衡語料庫), the NCCU Corpus of Spoken Chinese (政大漢語口語語料庫). There are both written data and spoken data in Academia Balanced Corpus. Since pragmatic issue is touched in the thesis, more spoken data are needed from the NCCU corpus of Spoken Chinese. In addition to the corpus, a survey is conducted to check the judgement of native speakers of modern Chinese. Recall that diachronic evidence is used to support the hypothesis of the development of *yidian* in the paper, the diachronic data are drawn from Scripta Sinica database (漢籍電子文獻資料庫) and Academic Research and Information Center of *THE DREAM OF THE RED CHAMBER* On line (紅樓夢網路教學研究資料中心).

Two surveys are conducted in the paper. For the first survey, there are one hundred informants who are all between twenty to forty years old. Some of them are university students while the others have already got their diploma of university. All the informants in the survey speak Mandarin Chinese as their mother tongue, and so do their parents. In the survey, there are two questions. The first question is ‘*Tai can le yidian*’ *han* ‘*tai can le*’ *na yi ge qing kuang bijiao can?* (Which situation is more terrible, ‘*Tai can le yidian*’ or ‘*tai can le*’?) Three choices are provided for this question and the informants are asked to put the mark ‘’ on the choice they choose.

The choices are ‘*tai can le yidian*’, ‘*tai can le*’ and ‘*mei you chabie* (no difference between the two)’. The result shows that ninety two informants consider the situation expressed with ‘*tai can le*’ is more terrible while there are eight informants putting the marks on the choice ‘*mei you chabie*’. The second question is ‘*Qing anjing*’ *han ‘anjing yidian’ na ju hua tingqilai bijiao weiwan?* (Which sounds softer, ‘*qing anjing*’ or ‘*anjing yidian*’?) Just like the first question, there are three choices provided, which are ‘*qing anjing*’, ‘*anjing yidian*’ and ‘*mei you chabie*’ respectively. Again, the informants are asked to put the mark “” on the choice they choose. The result shows that seventy six informants consider ‘*qing anjing*’ sounds softer than ‘*anjing yidian*’, while there are twenty and five informants marking on the choice ‘*anjing yidian*’ and ‘*mei you chabie*’ respectively.

The second survey is aimed at junior high school students who are all in the eighth grade. All the informants in the survey speak Mandarin Chinese as their mother tongue, and so do their parents. There is only one question on the survey. The question is *Dang laoshi shuo ‘anjing yidian’ han ‘anjing’ de shihou, na ju hua tingqilai bijiao weiwan?* (When the teacher says “*anjing yidian*’ or ‘*anjing*’, which utterance sounds softer?) Just like the first survey, there are three choices for the question, which are ‘*anjing yidian*’, ‘*anjing*’ and ‘*mei you chabie*’ respectively. The students are asked to put the mark “” on the choice they choose. The result shows that eighty eight students think that there is no difference between the two utterances by the teacher. Only twelve consider ‘*anjing yidian*’ softer.

Chapter 2 The grammaticalization of *yidian*

In this chapter, the emphasis is put on the semantic extension of *yidian* from the view point of grammaticalization. Synchronically, there are three usages of *yidian* as shown in (2.1) to (2.3):

(2.1)(Academia Sinica)

... 做家務時，身上擦一點香水...

... zuo jiawu shi, shen shang ca *yidian* xiangshui...

do housework when body on wipe a little perfume

‘...when doing housework, apply some perfume on the body...’

(2.2)(Academia Sinica)

看一本不懂，看十本懂一點...

kan yi ben bu dong, kan shi ben *yidian* ...

look one CL NEG understand look ten CL understand a little

‘One can’t understand by reading only a copy. One can understand a bit by reading ten copies...’

(2.3)(Academia Sinica)

小妹也比我矮一點。

Xiao mei ye bi wo ai *yidian*.

little sister also compare 1S short a bit

‘My little sister is also a bit shorter than me.’

In (2.1), *yidian* is a quantifier, meaning *a little* and occurs before a noun phrase. In

(2.2), *yidian* functions as the complement of the verb phrase *dong* ‘understand’ and denotes the degree of *dong*. In (2.3), *yidian* functions as the complement of *ai* ‘short’.

In the following sections, it will be discussed what the relation between the usages is and what the ordering between the usages is. In addition, diachronic evidences are also used as support evidence to the path of extension proposed on the base of grammaticalization in the paper.

2.1 Theoretical background

2.1.1 Earlier studies on grammaticalization

Many linguists have different claims about grammaticalization. Millet, thought to be the first person using the term, thinks that lexical items are one of the source of grammaticalization. Some linguists, such as Lehmann, think that in addition to lexical items, certain contexts or linguistic conditions can also lead to grammaticalization:

Grammaticalization does not merely seize a word or morpheme... but the whole construction formed by the syntagmatic relations of the elements in question.

(Lehmann 1992:406)

In Lehmann’s term, the word ‘construction’ mentioned is the so-called specific contexts or linguistic conditions. Some linguists claim that construction is both the source and outcome of grammaticalization. Linguists such as Bybee, Perkins and Pagliuca (1994), and Heine (2003) are the representatives of the perspective, and Himmelmann (2004) is also one of them:

It is the grammaticizing element in its syntagmatic context which is grammaticized. That is, the unit to which grammaticization properly applies are constructions, not isolated lexical items.

(Himmelmann 2004: 31)

Additionally, it is claimed that the changes in grammaticalization is multilayered; that is, many changes are correlated and involved in this process. Lehmann (1995) mentions that when morphemes and constructions undergo grammaticalization, there is interaction among a number of semantic, syntactic and phonological processes. Bybee, Perkins and Pagliuca (1994) finds the interaction so tightly correlated that they hypothesize that the development of grammatical material is characterized by the dynamic coevolution of meaning and form. Besides, Himmelmann (2004) suggests that three types of expansion contributes the multi-layeredness of grammaticalization – host-class expansion, syntactic context expansion, and semantic-pragmatic context expansion. Host-class expansion means that the members of the relevant syntactic category which the grammaticalized elements co-occur with can increase. Syntactic context expansion refers to the change of a syntactic context that a construction is in. For example, a construction originally occurs in an argument position but appears in an adposition after it undergoes grammaticalization. Finally, Himmelmann (2004) considers semantic-pragmatic context expansion the most important expansion of the three. With the expansion of semantic-pragmatic expansion, the usage of a grammaticalizing form can become broader and new meanings can be developed from the new context.

The pragmatic and semantic context is so crucial to a grammaticalizing form that not only Himmelmann but also other linguists mark its importance. As Heine (2003) has put:

Since linguistic items require specific contexts and constructions to undergo grammaticalization, grammaticalization theory is also concerned with the pragmatic and morphosyntactic environment in which this process occurs.

(Heine 2003: 575)

Since grammaticalization means that syntactic change will occur, many linguists have made discussion on this issue. Initially, Meillet (1958) regards grammaticalization as reanalysis – changes in the underlying structure, and discusses the association and the independence of grammaticalization and reanalysis. Meillet contrasts reanalysis with analogy, which he considers to be an expansion of an existent structure. Harris and Campbell (1995) make the claim that reanalysis and extension – changes in the surface form, are the only two basic internal mechanisms involved in grammaticalization. Traugott (2010: 16) argues that the distinction between reanalysis and extension may cause problems since “any extension that becomes institutionalized and acquires the status of a change rather than merely an innovation, entails at least some minimal reanalysis of the underlying specification.” Traugott (2010) also suggests that grammaticalization involves part of reanalysis in structure but not overall reanalysis. In many cases, the changes triggered by reanalysis are ‘fine-grained and local’. Andersen (2006) points out that such local reanalysis shouldn’t be viewed as error or mis-analysis, but ‘a demonstration of an overperformance of human minds’ and an ability of developing new symbols from existent patterns.

A fundamental discussion that may arise after the introduction above is what may motivate grammaticalization, or what are the factors that cause grammaticalization. No matter what the factors are, they seem to result from speaker production strategies

(Traugott 2010: 241). Among all the factors triggering grammaticalization, the two most discussed factors are 'Be clear' (Traugott 2010) and 'Be quick and easy' (Zipf 1929). In terms of grammaticalization, the first factor comes into play because speakers bear in mind that listeners want to make their words as explicit as possible. In addition to explicitness, economy is also an important principle in communication. Therefore, speakers may produce a new usage with old materials and analogize it. This is what Zipf (1929) means 'Be quick and easy'. Furthermore, Haspelmath (1998) also touches on the issue of how grammaticalization might be motivated. He suggests a number of "ecological" factors, among them unconscious processing, routinization, maxims of action and invisible hand processes. Haspelmath suggests that grammaticalization arises out of speakers' desire to "be extravagant", i.e. "Talk in such a way that you are noticed" (p.1055).

2.1.2 Traugott's study on the grammaticalization of degree modifiers in English

Traugott (2010) discusses the development of degree modifier constructions, such as *a piece of*, *a sort of*, and *a lot of*. They are commonly used as partitives, but they develop the degree modifier use. Some of them develop further into free degree adjuncts. The example *a sort of* is reviewed here.

Before being used as a partitive, *a sort of* has undergone pre-partitive use because *sort* is a word borrowed from French meaning 'group' or 'set', as in (2.4), a data drawn from Traugott (2010):

(2.4) Well may [h]e be called valyaunte and full of proues that hath *such a sorte of noble knyghtes* unto hys kynee

‘Well may he be called valiant and full of prowess that has such a group of noble

knights among his kin.’

(a1470 Malory, Works 526/21 [MED, sort 1a])

A sort of was used as a partitive in the sixteenth century, denoting member of a set. Although there isn’t a change in the NP of NP structure in these two periods, it is crucial to note that there has been a semantic reversal from the term for a superordinate set to that for a member of a set (Traugott 2010:228). When the NP after *a sort of* cooccurs with an indefinite article, it motivates *a sort of* to become a degree modifier:

In this kind of context NP2 came to be reanalyzed as the head and *a sort of* became a degree modifier conveying the speaker’s assessment that the entity referred to is not an adequate or prototypical exemplar of NP2.

(Traugott 2010:229)

The NP2 in Traugott’s term is the NP after *a sort of*, and just as pointed out by Traugott, reanalysis is involved when *a sort of* functions as a degree modifier, i.e. rebracketing and head-modifier shift take place. In a partitive structure, *sort* is the head and of NP is a modifier, as in (2.5); on the contrary, when *a sort of* functions as a degree modifier, *sort of* is a modifier and the NP is the head, as in (2.6).

(2.5) the partitive structure

[*a sort* [*of* NP]]

(2.6) a sort of used as a degree modifier

[[*a sort of*] NP]

Over time, (*a*) *sort of* develops further and extends its use to modify a verb or an adjective and acquires the status of an adverb, as in (2.7):

(2.7)

a. I beesa *sorter* courted, and a *sorter* not

(1839 Marryat Diary Amer. Ser. I. II. 218 [Tabor 1993])

b. One is *sort of* bewildered in attempting to discover....

(1858 Pirie, Inq. Hum. Mind i. 10 [Ibid])

Traugott (2010) points out that as (2.7) illustrates, the article *a* is dropped before *sort*, and *of* loses its prepositional function. Traugott finds that in some cases, *of* becomes cliticized to *sorta*. Eventually, *a sort of* develops further in to a free degree adjunct which can be used as an independent response, as in (2.8):

(2.8) ‘Friend of this hombre?’ ‘Yes; *sort of*’

(1918 Mulford Man fr. Bar-20 vii. 79 [OED, hombre])

Similar development seems to be attested in *yidian*. *Yidian* in its grammaticalization seems to correspond to some of the changes discussed in the former papers. For example, as what will be discussed in the following section, it is found that although *yidian* doesn’t occur in an argument position, it changes from a pre-nominal position to a pos- verbal or post-adjectival position and from a determiner to the complement of verbs or adjectives such as (2.1) and (2.3), repeated below:

(2.1) (Academia Sinica)

... 做家務時，身上擦一點香水...

... zuo jiawu shi, shen shang ca yidian xiangshui...

do housework when body on wipe a little perfume

‘...when doing housework, apply some perfume on the body...’

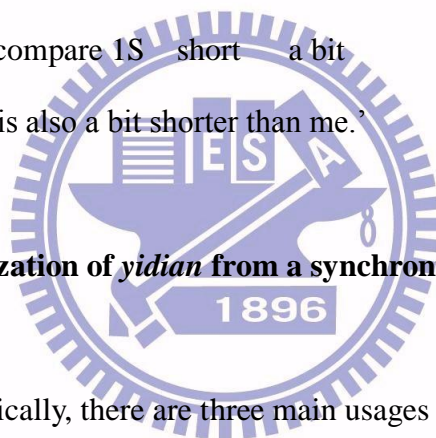
(2.3) (Academia Sinica)

小妹也比我矮一點。

Xiao mei ye bi wo ai yidian.

little sister also compare 1S short a bit

‘My little sister is also a bit shorter than me.’



2.2 The grammaticalization of *yidian* from a synchronic perspective

As above, synchronically, there are three main usages of *yidian* – quantifier, the complement of verbs and the complement of adjectives, as in (2.1), (2.2), and (2.3) respectively. The frequency of these usages of *yidian* in written and spoken corpus are shown in Table (2.1) and (2.2) respectively:

Table (2.1) *yidian* in written corpus

	<i>yidian</i> N	V <i>yidian</i>	(V)A <i>yidian</i>	(total)
number	379	58	366	803
percentage	47%	7%	46%	100%

Table (2.2) *yidian* in spoken corpus

	<i>yidian</i> N	V <i>yidian</i>	(V)A <i>yidian</i>	(total)
number	62	26	155	243
percentage	26%	11%	63%	100%

In Table (2.1), it is shown that *yidian* displays much tendency to be used both as a quantifier and as a complement of adjectives in written corpus. There isn't large distance between the numbers of the '*yidian* N' and '*A yidian*' usages with ten more examples found in the former usage. In Table (2.2), it is shown that the usage of *yidian* as a complement of adjectives outnumbers the other two usages greatly. '*A yidian*' takes up 63% of the data, while '*yidian* N' and '*V yidian*' take up 26% and 11% of the data respectively. It is important to note that in this thesis, the '*VA yidian*' construction, in which the adjective is the complement of the verb, is considered the same as the '*A yidian*' construction. The reason is that in the '*VA yidian*' construction, *yidian* functions as the complement of the adjective just as the *yidian* in the '*A yidian*' construction, as in (2.9):

(2.9) (Academia Sinica)

自己的要求不要訂那麼高，你可以訂低一點。

Ziji de yaoqiu bu yao ding name gao, ni keyi ding di *yidian*.

self Poss require NEG want set so high 2S can set low a little

'Don't lay down such a high criteria for yourself. You can lay down a lower one.'

In (2.9), the adjective *di* 'low' is the complement of the verb *ding* 'set' and *yidian* denotes functions as the complement of *di*.

In the present study, it is suggested that the multiple uses of *yidian* arise from

semantic extension and grammaticalization. It is also proposed that the grammaticalization of *yidian* is in the following order:

quantifier → the complement of verbs → the complement of adjectives

According to the order, the development of *yidian* originates from its quantifier use. The reason for the suggestion comes from metaphorical perspectives. Hopper and Traugott (2003) suggest that metaphorical innovation is one of the most widely recognized processes in meaning change (Hopper & Traugott 2003: 84). Given this suggestion, there are metaphorical processes involved in the grammaticalization of *yidian*. The *yidian* in ‘*yidian* N’ is a quantifier and denotes the amount of the noun, while the *yidian* in ‘A *yidian*’ denotes the degree of the adjective. Therefore, the meaning of *yidian* in ‘*yidian* N’ is concrete, while the meaning of *yidian* in ‘A *yidian*’ is abstract.

In the following sections, the discussion is made on the underlying factors for the order of the grammaticalization.

2.2.1 The development of *yidian* from denoting amount to denoting degree

When used as a quantifier, according to Iljic (1994), *dian* (*dianr*, in Iljic’s paper) is restricted to mass or abstract nouns as in (2.10), repeated here:

(2.10) ...而就算募了一點錢想蓋個小房子...

...er jiusuan mu le *yidian* qian xiang gai ge xiao
and even if fund PFT a little money want build CL small
fangzi...

house

‘...and even if you fund a little money and want to build a small house...’

In the corpus, it is found that in some cases, the mass noun after the quantifier *yidian* is rather abstract, as in (2.11):

(2.11)...我們只有這一點智慧。

...women zhi you zhe *yidian* zhihui.

...1P only have this a little wisdom

‘..we only got this bit of wisdom.’

Syntactically, *zhe yidian zhihui* ‘this bit of wisdom’ in (2.10) is a noun, with *yidian* as a quantifier denoting the amount of *zhihui*. However, semantically, *yidian zhihui* can be interpreted as denoting the degree of *zhihui* since *zhihui* is an abstract noun and can’t be measured in amount. Therefore, (2.10) can be viewed as an expanded quantifier use of *yidian*, in which *yidian* is still a quantifier but denotes the degree of the following abstract noun.

As a result, there is a development of *yidian* from the quantifier use to the expanded quantifier use. This change can be viewed as what Himmelmann (2004) calls host-class expansion since the features of the nouns after *yidian* expand from concreteness to abstractness.

This step of development can be explained in two ways. First, we tend to pay more attention to things we can feel and see. Therefore, it is quite logical that *yidian* is originally used to describe the quantity of concrete nouns. Additionally, the metaphoric extension from concrete domains to abstract domains is common. We project the concept of concrete nouns to abstract nouns and conceptualize abstract

concepts as things of which the quality we can measure. Second, the use of *yidian* expanded from measuring the quantity of nouns to modifying the quality of nouns can follow the metaphor that QUANTITY is QUALITY. In the book *Metaphors We Live By* by Lakoff and Johnson (2008), some examples are provided to support the use of the metaphor, and one of them is provided here:

(2.12) Your argument doesn't cover the subject matter in enough depth.

In this sentence, the concept of quantity (depth) is mapped to the quality of argument.

Another example found in Lakoff and Johnson (2008) is:

(2.13) That's not much of an argument.

In general, the word “much” is usually used to describe the quantity of a mass noun. However, in the example, “much” can be understood as describing the quality of an argument. The same logic can be applied to the development of *yidian* – from describing quantity, as in *yidian jiu* ‘a little wine’ to describing quality, as in *yidian zhihui* ‘a bit of wisdom’.

Although the change in the step is minor, this is a crucial step for *yidian* to develop its sense of degree.

2.2.2 The development of *yidian* from ‘*yidian N*’ to ‘*V yidian*’

It is assumed in this study that the second step of the grammaticalization of *yidian* is *yidian* being used as a complement of verbs in ‘*V yidian*’. The reason for this assumption is that since ‘*yidian N*’ can function as an NP, ‘*yidian N*’ can be frequently

used as the object of a verb in ‘V *yidian* N’ as in (2.14) and (2.15):

(2.14) (Academia Sinica)

我多給你一點生活費吧！

Wo duo gei ni *yidian* shenghuo fei ba!

1S more give 2S a little living money ITJ

‘Let me give you more allowance!’

(2.15) (Academia Sinica)

每個人早上起來吃一點東西...

Mei ge ren zaoshang qilai chi *yidian* dongxi...

every CL person morning get-up eat a little thing

‘Everyone gets up in the morning and eat a little food...’

In (2.14), *yidian shenghuofei* ‘a little allowance’ functions as the object of the verb *gei* ‘give’ while in (2.15), *yidian dongxi* ‘a little thing’ functions as the object of the verb *dongxi* ‘thing’. As a result, it is possible that the use of *yidian* in ‘V *yidian*’ is developed from ‘V *yidian* N’

In the corpus, it seems that the data of ‘V *yidian*’ can be divided into two groups. In one group, ‘V *yidian*’ is actually the ellipsis of ‘V *yidian* N’ as in (2.16), while the other group is not, i.e. ‘V *yidian*’ is a construction and *yidian* is the object of the verb as in (2.17):

(2.16) (Academia Sinica)

... 聲音太低，前幾排的人還能聽到一點....

... shengyin tai di, qian ji pai de ren hai neng tingdao *yidian*...

voice too low front few row DE person still can hear a little
'...the voice was too low. People in the front rows may still heard a bit'

(2.17) (Academia Sinica)

...運氣較佳時多賺一點...

... yunqi jiao jia shi duo zhuan yidian...

luck compare good when much earn a little

'...earn a bit more when I am lucky...'

In (2.16), the 'V *yidian*' *tingdao yidian* 'hear a bit' is actually the ellipsis of *tingdao yidian shengyin* 'hear a bit of the voice'. In (2.17), there is no ellipsis in 'V *yidian*' *zhuan yidian* 'understand a bit'. Therefore, *yidian* in (2.16) is actually a quantifier while *yidian* in (2.17) is the complement of the verb *zhuan* 'earn'.

As a result, the assumption can be made that there is a bridging stage before *yidian* develops into its use in 'V *yidian*'. In the bridging stage, 'V *yidian*' is the ellipsis of 'V *yidian* N' and *yidian* is still a quantifier. After the host expansion which is discussed in the last section, *yidian* can denote the sense of degree, and thus, the use of 'V *yidian*' is formed and *yidian* denotes the degree of the extent to which the verb is done.

The assumption that VP ellipsis comes into play at this stage is similar to the example of the grammaticalization of *a lot of* (Traugott 2010). According to Traugott (2010), before developing into a free degree adjunct, there is time when '*a lot*' undergoes the step of ellipsis.

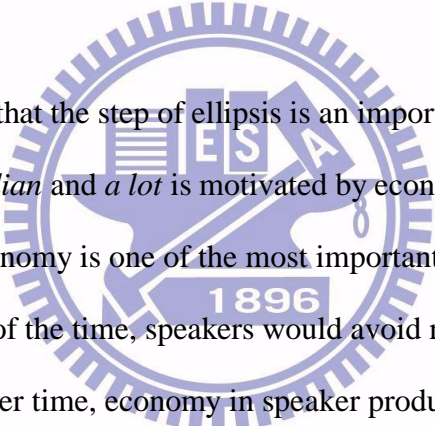
Like *sort/kind of, a lot* (without *of*) came to be used as a free adjunct, at first through ellipsis. This adjunct came to be used as an independent response.

(Traugott 2010: 14)

(2.18) is an example provided in Traugott (2010). In (2.15), *a lot of the hillside* is ellipsized into *a lot*:

(2.18) My house faces east and is built up against a side-hill, or should I say hillside?
Anyway, they had to excavate quite *a lot*.

(1847, Stewart, *Letters of a Woman Homesteader* [UVa])



In addition, the fact that the step of ellipsis is an important process in the grammaticalization of *yidian* and *a lot* is motivated by economy (Zipf 1929) – be quick and easy. Since economy is one of the most important principles in communication, in most of the time, speakers would avoid repeating on elements after the first mention of it. Over time, economy in speaker production leads to reuse of old material for new means (see Traugott 2010: 23). In the case of *yidian*, at the beginning, the construction ‘V. *yidian*’ arises out of speakers’ principle of economy in communication. Then, just as what Traugott (2010) puts in her paper, the construction is used for new meanings – *yidian* being used to refer to the degree of the extent the verb is done.

It is important to note that all of the ‘V *yidian*’ data, which aren’t the result of the ellipsis of ‘V *yidian* N’ can be divided into two groups: in one group, the verb is a transitive verb as in (2.19), and in the other, the verb is an intransitive verb as in (2.20).

(2.19) 你想省一點就吃夜市吧。

Ni xiang sheng yidian jiu chi yeshi ba.

2S want save a little then eat night market SPF

‘If you want to save more money, just eat at the night market.’

(2.20) (Academia Sinica)

今天吃虧一點，明天吃虧一點，合起來就多啦。

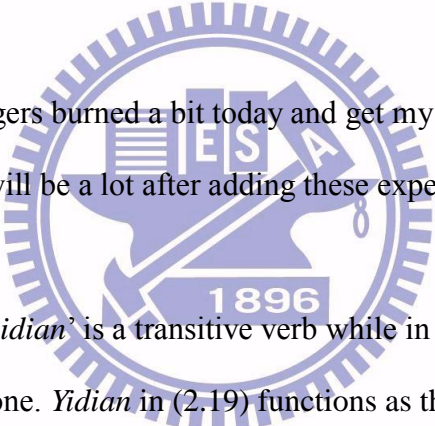
Jintian chikui yidian, mingtian chikui yidian, he qilai jiu duo

today chikui a little tomorrow chikui a little add together then much

la.

SPF

‘If I get my fingers burned a bit today and get my fingers burned a bit tomorrow, it will be a lot after adding these experiences together.’



In (2.19), the verb in ‘V *yidian*’ is a transitive verb while in (2.20), the verb in ‘V *yidian*’ is an intransitive one. *Yidian* in (2.19) functions as the object of the verb and the construction still results from ellipsis. However, the ellipsized noun in (2.20) is hard to retrieve through the context. Over time, through generalization, *yidian* is seen as the complement of the verb and denote the degree of the extent the verb is done. Besides, the VC (verb and complement) as a verb phrase is very common in Mandarin Chinese such as *dapo* ‘break’. Therefore, the grammaticalization develops into a stage where the verb in ‘V *yidian*’ is an intransitive verb which takes *yidian* as its complement. As a result, the assumption is that ‘V *yidian*’ with a transitive verb (V_t) develop into ‘V *yidian*’ with an intransitive verb (V_i). Since the development is from a kind of verb to another, this development can be seen as analogy, involving attraction of extant forms to already existing structures (Traugott 2010: 6).

To sum up, the discussion of the development of ‘V *yidian*’ in this section is as followed:

$V \textit{ yidian}$ (result of ellipsis) $\rightarrow V_t \textit{ yidian} \rightarrow V_i \textit{ yidian}$

In this development, both reanalysis and analogy comes into play. In terms of reanalysis, at first, the verb and *yidian* doesn’t form a unit as in [V_t [*yidian* N]]. After rebracketing, the verb and *yidian* become a unit as in [$V_t \textit{ yidian}$]. Through analogy, *yidian* can further be used in [$V_i \textit{ yidian}$].

2.2.3 The extension to ‘A *yidian*’

From synchronic perspective, it is assumed in this paper that the use of *yidian* in ‘A *yidian*’ is developed from that in ‘V *yidian*’. Analogy can account for the assumption. In Mandarin Chinese, verbs and adjectives bear much similarity. Sackmann (1996) mentions that neither adjectives nor verbs allow the use of a copula verb, such as *shi* ‘be’, when they are predicates. Moreover, Sackmann (1996) observes that some verbs, such as *xihuan* ‘like’, *ai* ‘love’, and *zhuyi* ‘pay attention to’, can be modified by degree adverbs like *hen* ‘very’ and *feichang* ‘extremely’. In addition to Sackmann, Huang et al.(2009), in his book *The Syntax of Chinese*, suggests that adjectives in Mandarin Chinese easily undergo a categorical shift and some adjectives tend to change into verbs. Huang et al. (2009) provides two reasons for the change:

... Such a categorical shift is likely to happen more easily in Chinese than in, say, English for two reasons. First, Chinese has no morphological markers for

categories found in European languages. Secondly, Chinese adjectives function as predicates without a copula, making them appear verb-like.

(Huang et al. 2009: 21)

In addition, the ‘A *yidian*’ develops from ‘V *yidian*’ and in the last step of ‘V *yidian*’, the verb is an intransitive verb. Intransitive verbs is more similar to adjectives because objects are not necessary for intransitive verbs and adjectives. Due to the similarity between verbs and adjectives, it is reasonable that the construction can develop from ‘V *yidian*’ to ‘A *yidian*’. In ‘A *yidian*’, Since this development arises out of the similar features of Chinese verbs and adjectives, it can be viewed as analogy.

Although the use of ‘A *yidian*’ occupies a large percentage in both written and spoken corpus, 46% and 63% respectively, all of the adjectives used in ‘A *yidian*’ are adjectives of gradability such as *hao* ‘good’ and *rongyi* ‘easy’. In other words, there are no adjectives of non-gradability such as *zhen* ‘true’ and *dui* ‘right’ appearing in ‘A *yidian*’. This phenomenon can be explained by the fact that since the meaning of gradable adjectives can be scaled by degree, *yidian* can collocate with gradable adjectives because it denotes degree. Paradis (1997) explains why degree modifiers collocate with adjectives:

I argue that the concepts are built up by domains that are of two kinds. There is a content domain and a schematic domain (or mode of construal)... Gradability belongs in the schematic domain. The interpretation of degree modifiers is dominated by the schematic domain... Adjectives, on the other hand, are mainly content words. Their content domain is in the foreground, but they are also configured according to schematic domains, which are in the background.

(Paradis 1997: 48-51, 64-66)

Paradis' claim can also account for the reason why the use of 'A *yidian*' found in the corpus occupies much larger percentage than the percentage of the 'V *yidian*' use, 7% in the written corpus and 11% in the spoken corpus.

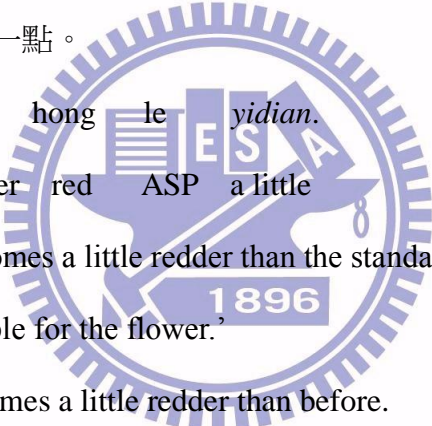
Although verbs and adjectives in Mandarin bear some similarity, the meaning of *yidian* in 'A *yidian*' is different from that in 'V *yidian*', i.e. the *yidian* in 'A *yidian*' doesn't denote the degree as the *yidian* in 'V *yidian*'. Liu (2007) discusses the structure X A-*le* D, where X stands for an object or person, A for adjective, -*le* for the aspectual inflection, and D the differential between two compared objects.

(2.21) is one of the examples in Liu (2007):

(2.21) 這朵花紅了一點。

Zhe duo hua hong le yidian.

This CL flower red ASP a little

- 
- a. 'The flower becomes a little redder than the standard value of redness assumed by people for the flower.'
- b. This flower becomes a little redder than before.

In (2.21), the subject *hua* is X; *hong* is the adjective; *yidian* is the differential.

According to Liu (2007), there are at least two interpretations in (2.21), a stative one and a dynamic one. In Liu's (2007) terms, there is *pro* in the X A-*le* D structure, in which *pro* functions as an individual-denoting compared object or a kind of standard value. If *pro* is not coindexed with the subject, the stative reading occurs. On the contrary, if *pro* is coindexed with the subject, the dynamic reading occurs.

Therefore, the meaning of *yidian* changes in the 'A (*le*) *yidian*' use, developing from 'V *yidian*'. In 'V *yidian*', *yidian* refers to the extent to which the subject does a certain action. In the 'A (*le*) *yidian*' use, if the 'A (*le*) *yidian*' construction yields

dynamic reading, it means that the subject has made some change in the state denoted through the adjective. Therefore, the meaning of *yidian* denotes the differential of the degree to which the subject changes to become more in the situation that the adjective denotes through a period of time as in (2.22):

(2.22) 經過了這次的經驗，大家都成熟了一點。

Jingguo le zhe ci de jingyan, dajia dou chengshou le
through ASP this CL DE experience everyone all mature ASP
yidian
a little

‘After going through this experience, everyone all becomes more mature.’

In (2.22), the ‘A le *yidian*’ construction, *chengshou le yidian*, yields a dynamic reading. In this example, *yidian* denotes the differential between the degree of the maturity that the people own before and after they go through the experience.

Since adjective usually denotes a stative condition, when being interpreted as a stative reading, the subject in ‘A (*le*) *yidian*’ is being compared to another object at the same time. Thus, *yidian* in the ‘A (*le*) *yidian*’ construction denotes that the subject has more property of the adjective than the compared object by the differential of *yidian*. When producing the construction with a stative reading, there is an inference that the speaker is comparing the subject to other objects. If the compared objects can’t be retrieved in the context, the hearer can infer that the compared objects are unspecified or there is some kind of a norm in the speaker’s mind or the standard value assumed by people as in (2.23):

(2.23) (NCCU)

...我覺得客人當然都比較喜歡厚重一點的東西

...Wo juede keren dangran dou bijiao xihuan houzhong yidian

I S feel guest of-course all compare like thick-heavy a little

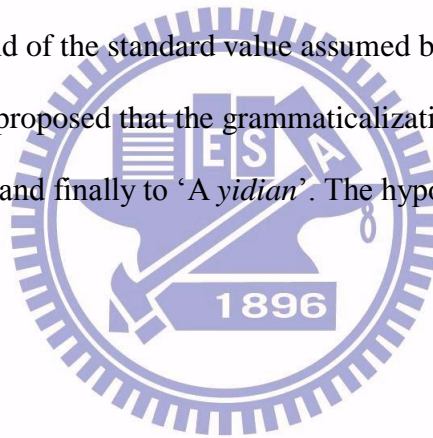
de dongxi

ASSC thing

‘...I think that customers, of course, they like thicker ones more.’

In (2.23), the ‘A *yidian*’ construction, *houzhong yidian*, yields a stative reading. In this example, *yidian* denotes the differential between the degree of heaviness of the things most customers prefer and of the standard value assumed by people.

In this section, it is proposed that the grammaticalization of *yidian* is from ‘*yidian* N’ to ‘V *yidian*’ and finally to ‘A *yidian*’. The hypothesis in the section is shown in Figure (2.1):



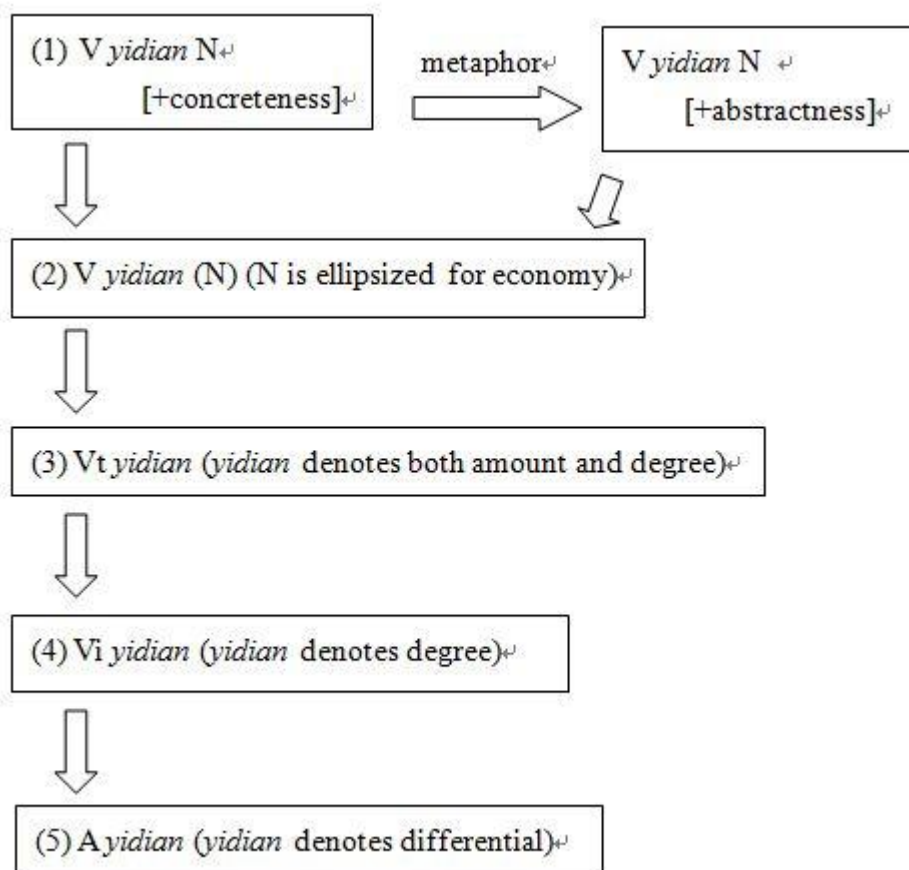


Figure (2.1) the grammaticalization of *yidian* from a synchronic perspective

2.3 Supporting evidence from diachronic perspective

In this section, the proposed path of development will be examined from diachronic perspective resorting to historical data.

Step I: from classifier to quantifier

Based on synchronic data, it is proposed that the grammaticalization of *yidian* originates from the quantifier use. Based on diachronic data, it is further found that

yidian is originally composed of a numeral *yi* ‘one’ and *dian*, which refers to a black, small dot. Over time, *dian* is widely used as a classifier. According to Hopper (1986), classifiers ‘echoes’ the semantic features of the head nouns. In Tang Dynasty, *dian* can be used to denote things in the shape of grain (Lin 1996) as in (2.24):

(2.24) 一點水墨，兩處成龍。

Yi dian shui mo, liang chu cheng long.

one CL water ink two place become dragon

‘A drop of ink extends into a line and its two ends meet and become the shape of a dragon.’

(五燈會元)

In the data collected, it is in Song Dynasty that *yidian* is used as a quantifier to denote a small amount of something as shown in (2.25). Until Yuan Dynasty, the use of *yidian* as a quantifier becomes more common as shown in (2.26):

(2.25) 天色美晴，空色青碧，無一點翳。

Tianse mei qing, kongse qing bi, wu *yidian* yi.

sky beautiful sunny sky blue green NEG a little haziness

‘The sky is beautiful, sunny, and clear.’

(入唐求法巡禮記)

(2.26) 我若喫一點酒...

Wo ruo qi yidian jiu...

1S if drink a little wine

‘If I drink a little wine...’

(關漢卿戲曲集／望江亭中秋切鱸且／第三折)

In this step of development, *dian* is originally used as a classifier to denote a noun small in size and of a shape like a dot or a grain; over time, with metonymic extension, the concept of small in size is extended to denote the small amount in quantity. In Mandarin Chinese, there are some cases in which the collocation of *yi* and classifiers becomes frozen as a quantifier to denote quantity. In one of the examples, *pian* ‘piece’ is a classifier denoting a noun in the shape of thin slice such as *yipian yezi* ‘a leaf’. When *yi* collocates with *pian*, the combination *yipian* can be used as a quantifier such as *yipian youchou* ‘a sense of anxiety’. In this case, *yi* doesn’t mean *one* and *pian* can’t be viewed as a classifier because it doesn’t denote a noun in the shape of thin slice. With the case of *pian*, it is more persuasive that *dian* is originally used as a classifier and then functions as a quantifier after its collocation with *yi*.

Step II: from denoting amount to denoting degree

It seems that Yuan Dynasty is a crucial period in the development of *yidian*. First, not only does the use of quantifier become more common, but the quantifier use of *yidian* also gets expanded. In the expanded use, the noun after *yidian* can be an abstract concept as in (2.27). Therefore, syntactically, *yidian* is still a quantifier; semantically, it denotes the degree of the following noun more rather than the amount:

(2.27)

a. 一點相思幾時絕。

Yidian xiangsi jishi jue.

a little miss when stop

‘When will I stop missing you a bit?’

(關漢卿戲曲集／附錄／關漢卿散曲輯存／小令／南呂四塊玉一首／別情)

b. 我想這世上這一點情緣...

Wo xiang zhe shi shang zhe *yidian* qingyuan...

IS think this world on this a little predestination

‘I think such a little predestination in the world.....’

(元刊雜劇三十種／諸宮調風月紫雲亭雜劇／第三折)

Step III: from ‘*yidian* N’ to ‘V *yidian*’

In Qing dynasty, the use of ‘V *yidian*’ appears. Just as the assumption made in the paper, the use of ‘V *yidian*’ originates from the ellipsis of ‘V *yidian* N’ as in (2.28 a,b):

(2.28)

a. 你說的話，我牢牢的記著，要違背一點兒(你的話)...

Ni shuo de hua, wo laolaode ji zhe, yao weibei *yidianer*

2S say Poss. word 1S firmly remember ASP want disobey a little

(ni de hua)...

(you Poss. word)

‘I will remember your words firmly. If I disobey a bit (of your words)...’

(醒世姻緣／第五十三回 欺絕戶本婦盜財 逞英雄遭人網打)

b. 家事產業都是我的，誰敢分我一點兒(家事產業)。

Jiashi chanye dou shi wo de, shei gan fen wo *yidianer*
housework business all be 1S Poss., who dare share 1S a little
(*jiashi* *chanye*).
(housework business)

‘Family business all belongs to me. Who dare share a bit (of family business).’

(醒世姻緣／第七十六回 狄希陳兩頭娶大 薛素姐獨股吞財)

In Qing dynasty, the ‘*V_t yidian*’ use is found, as in (2.29):

(2.29) 外頭這們亂哄，我家裏一點兒也不曉得。

Waitou zhemen luanhong, wo jia li *yidianer* ye bu xiaode.
outside so noisy, 1S home inside a little also NEG know
‘It’s so noisy outside. I don’t know even a bit at home.’

(醒世姻緣／第三十二回 女菩薩賤糶賑飢 眾鄉宦愧心慕義)

In (2.29), *yidian* is originally the object of *xiaode* ‘know’. With the focus marker *ye*, *yidian* is preposed to the left of the verb. In (2.30), although there is still ellipsis, however, just as what has been mentioned, the ellipsized noun is hard to retrieve and thus, the use of ‘*V_t yidian*’ is analogized to ‘*V_i yidian*’. The use of ‘*V_i yidian*’ is found in Qing Dynasty as in (2.30):

(2.30) ...恐怕他的墳又站不住...我背著眾人走去瞧了一瞧，果然又動了
一點子

...kongpa ta de fen you zhan bu zhu... wo bei zhe zhongren
for fear 3S Poss. tomb again stand NEG still 1S back others
zou qu qiao le yi qiao, guoran you dong le yidianzi
walk go look PFT one look certain again move PFT a little
‘...for fear that his tomb can’t stand still, I went over and took a look
without others’ notice. I found that it has been moved a bit a gain.’

(紅樓夢 / 第四十七回 / 呆霸王調情遭苦打 冷郎君懼禍走他鄉)

Step IV: from ‘V *yidian*’ to ‘A *yidian*’

In the last step of the grammaticalization of *yidian*, the ‘A *yidian*’ use appears as
in (2.31a, b):



(2.31)

a. 這孩子命裡不該早娶，等大一點兒再定罷。

Zhe haizi ming li bu gai zao qu, deng da yidianer zai ding ba
this child life in NEG should early marry wait big a little again decide ITJ
‘This kid is destined not to get married early. Let’s wait and decide his
marriage until he gets older.’

(紅樓夢 / 第二十九回 / 享福人福深還禱福 痴情女情重愈斟情)

b. 太太是苛刻一點的

Da taitai shi keke yidian de

big wife be hardness a little CLFT

‘The first wife is a bit harsh.’

(紅樓夢 / 第一百十四回 / 王熙鳳曆幻返金陵 甄應嘉蒙恩還玉闕)

In conclusion, the diachronic data can support the hypothesis of the development of *yidian* and also shows that there is a pre-quantifier stage at which *dian* functions as a classifier at first and then becomes a quantifier after its frequent collocation with *yi*. The grammaticalization of *yidian* from a diachronic view is shown in Figure (2.2):

(2.2)

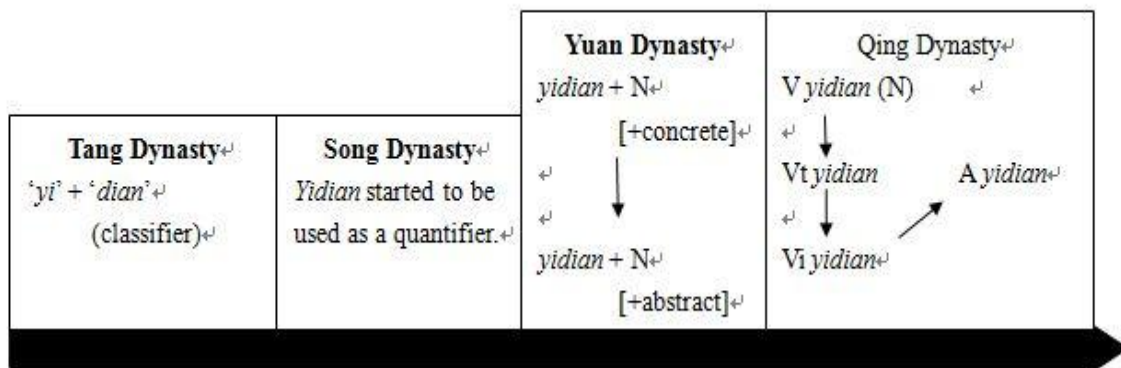
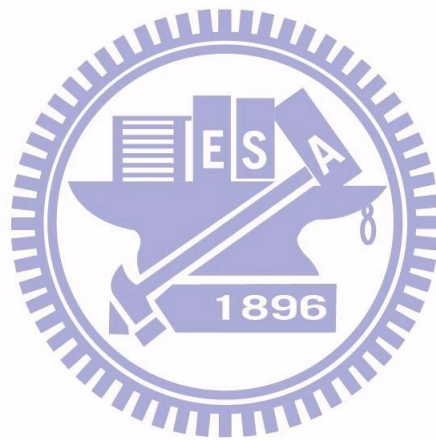


Figure (2.2) the grammaticalization of *yidian* from a diachronic view

2.4 Summary

In summary, *yidian* develops from a quantifier, after host-class expansion, into an extended quantifier that denotes the degree of the following noun semantically. Through a bridging stage, the ellipsis of ‘V *yidian* N’, and reanalysis, *yidian* can be used as the complement of the verb. In the ‘V *yidian*’ stage, the use of ‘V_t*yidian*’ appears first and the use of ‘V_i*yidian*’ occurs. Following the use of ‘V *yidian*’, with the similarity between verbs and adjectives, *yidian* develops its use in ‘A *yidian*’ through analogy.



Chapter 3 The pragmatic functions of *yidian*

After the discussion on the grammaticalization from synchronic and diachronic perspectives, this chapter discusses the pragmatic functions of *yidian*. Recall that in the last chapter, the final development of the grammaticalization of *yidian* comes to the ‘A *yidian*’ usage. In this construction, it is known that *yidian* denotes the differential between the compared objects (Liu 2007). However, *yidian* in (3.1) may not be understood as denoting the differential for most native speakers:

(3.1) (Academia Sinica)

A: 就是她那個歲數...稍微大了一點。

Jiushi ta na ge suishu... shaowei da le *yidian*.

just 3S that CL age slightly big ITJ a little

‘It’s just that she is... slightly a bit old.’

B: 哦，歲數...

O, suishu...

ITJ age

‘Oh, her age...’

A: 其實沒關係啦...

Qishi meiguanxi la...

actually no big deal ITJ

‘Actually, it’s no big deal.’

In (3.1), most native speaker of Mandarin Chinese will agree that *yidian* displays

the function of mitigating the utterance of Speaker A. Pragmatically, it has been pointed out in some studies such as Zou (1999) and Chen (2011) that *yidian* displays the function of mitigating, or in another term, hedging. The linguistic term, hedge, is introduced by Lakoff (1973) in his article discussing logical words and phrases such as *rather*, *largely* and *sort of*. Lakoff suggests that these words or phrases have the ability to make things fuzzier or less fuzzy (Lakoff 1973: 195). After Lakoff's study, many linguists work on the concept of hedge in other fields such as the study of politeness. For example, there are studies on how hedge is used as face-saving strategies intended to obtain speaker's or writer's acceptance, or how hedge mitigates and modifies utterance (Martin 2008: 2). Some studies also focus on how vague language is used to display hedging function as a face-saving strategy. Hamilton and Mineo (1998) point out different impact of vague language and precise language on politeness and suggest that vague language can minimize face-threat while a precisely worded message might threaten a receiver's self-esteem (Hamilton & Mineo 1998: 6). Vague language can especially be employed in the so-called off record acts to mitigate face threats. The concept of off record acts is introduced by Brown and Levinson (1987). When off record strategies are employed, vague language is required in order not to be clear with one's intention for the purposes of self-protection and for protecting the interlocutor's face (Ruzaitè 2007: 5).

There are many kinds of vague language to express indirectness, and quantifiers fall into one of the categories of it. Ruzaitè (2007) conducts a research on how quantifiers are employed as a face-saving strategy in teacher-student interaction. Based on the result, Ruzaitè suggests that when speakers express self-criticism or criticism towards others, they use quantifiers as a face-saving strategy, especially paucal quantifiers (those that refer to small quantities). Additionally it is in negative contexts that face-saving strategy with quantifiers is employed:

Paucal quantifiers especially frequently function as a face-saving device since they have a mitigating effect. The use of quantifiers as mitigators is especially evident in those instances where they occur in negative contexts.

(Ruzaitè 2007: 1)

In addition, Leech (1983) mentions that *a bit*, *a little*, and *a little bit*, which he calls minimizing adverbials of degree, as a politeness strategy and claims that they can be used to understate ‘pessimistic evaluation’ (Leech 1983: 148).

Yidian, being a quantifier and a kind of vague language, can function as a mitigator. In the following discussion, the emphasis will be put on the hedging function of *yidian* when it serves as the complement of adjectives, i.e. when *yidian* appears in the construction ‘A *yidian*’. The reason for focusing on the construction ‘A *yidian*’ is that first, it seems that *yidian* in the ‘A *yidian*’ construction has more tendency to function as a mitigator. Zheng (2007) in her thesis discusses the mitigating function of *yidian*, and all of her data are related to the ‘A *yidian*’ construction. Observing that *yidian* is used as a mitigator usually in the ‘A *yidian*’ construction, Zou (1999) and Shuai (1999) discusses on the ‘A *yidian*’ and ‘*tai* A *le yidian*’ constructions respectively. Second, it is observed that the ‘A *yidian*’ construction appears to be more inclined to be used in conversations as shown in Table 3.1, in which the data are collected from the spoken data from Academia Balanced Corpus of Modern Chinese (現代漢語平衡語料庫) and the NCCU Corpus of Spoken Chinese (政大漢語口語語料庫).

Table 3.1 *yidian* in spoken corpus

	<i>yidian</i> N	V <i>yidian</i>	A <i>yidian</i>	(total)
number	62	26	155	243
percentage	26%	11%	63%	100%

The prevalence of the ‘A *yidian*’ construction in the spoken data indicates that the ‘A *yidian*’ constructions have more tendency to be used pragmatically.

Since it is found in the data that speakers may produce several types of constructions which are based on ‘A *yidian*’ when they are employing *yidian* as a mitigator, in this chapter, the discussion is focused on spelling out all the constructions observed through the data in which *yidian* displays the hedging function. Besides, there will also be a brief discussion on whether *yidian* is always meant to be used to hedge speaker’s order when it is used in imperatives with the construction ‘A *yidian*’. In addition, it is proposed in the paper that *yidian* is interpreted as a mitigator when subjectivity is involved in the speaker’s utterance in which it is necessary for the speaker to mitigate his/her utterance.

As for the structure of the chapter, the issues discussed in this chapter are raised after two previous studies related to this topic, Zou (1999) and Chen (2011), are reviewed. Since Chen bases her discussion on cooperative principle (Grice 1975) and politeness principle (Leech 1983), the two principles will also be reviewed. Based on ‘A *yidian*’, what constructions *yidian* appears in as a mitigator will be spelled out in section 2, and in section 3, the trigger that causes the hedging function of *yidian* to be sensed by the hearer is discussed. Subjectivity and the reasons for the speaker to mitigate the utterance are discussed in section 4, and section 5 is a brief summary for the chapter and further discussion.

3.1 Literature review

3.1.1 Chen (2010), cooperative principle and politeness principle

Chen bases her discussion on cooperative principle (Grice 1975) and politeness principle (Leech 1983). In cooperative principle, Grice (1975) argues that people follow some kind of rules in communication so that what they say can be coherent in conversation. Therefore, he proposes four Gricean Maxims -- the Maxim of Quantity, Relevance, Quality and Manner. According to Grice (1975), the Maxim of Quantity means that a speaker should make his contribution sufficient and say as much as he can. The Maxim of Relevance is that a speaker should only say something relevant and make his contribution necessary. Besides, the Maxim of Quality states that a speaker should say something that he believes to be true and never provides anything that he knows to be false. Additionally, a speaker should make his words brief and orderly, and he should avoid ambiguity and obscurity, which is stated in the maxim of manner. In principle, people would follow the four maxims when talking to each other. However, Chen (2011) states that people sometimes flout the maxims as in (3.2):

(3.2)(Chen 2011: 78)

L: ...你就不能謙虛一點嗎？

...Ni jiu bu neng qianxu yidian ma?

2S then NEG can modest a little SPF

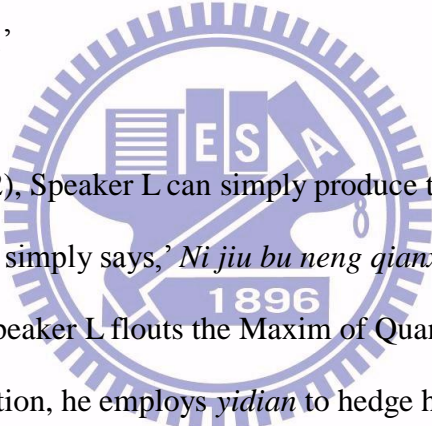
‘Can’t you be a bit modest?’

D: 絕對不能。

Juedui bu neng.

certainly NEG can

‘Certainly not.’



Chen suggests that in (3.2), Speaker L can simply produce the utterance without *yidian*, i.e. Speaker L can simply say, ‘*Ni jiu bu neng qianxu ma?*’ According to Chen (2011), the reason why Speaker L flouts the Maxim of Quantity is that since he is expressing his dissatisfaction, he employs *yidian* to hedge his criticism toward Speaker D.

With (3.2), Chen agrees with Leech (1983) that people don’t just follow cooperative principle in conversation and that people sometimes flout the Gricean Maxims for the sake of politeness. According to Leech (1983), politeness pertains to a relationship between participants: *self* (or speaker) and *other* (or hearer). Leech (1983) suggests that the Gricean framework of maxims should be proliferated (Brown & Levinson 1987:4), and he proposes the politeness principle. The politeness principle explains why, despite the Maxims of Quality and Quantity, people sometimes quite appropriately say things that are false or less informative than is required (Brown & Levinson 1987:4).

Leech (1983:132) proposes six Maxims of the politeness principle – the Tact Maxim, the Generosity Maxim, the Approbation Maxim, the Modesty Maxim, the Agreement Maxim, and the Sympathy Maxim. In her study, Chen (2010) analyzes how *yidian* is used as a mitigator so that people can interact in the politeness principle as in (3.3):

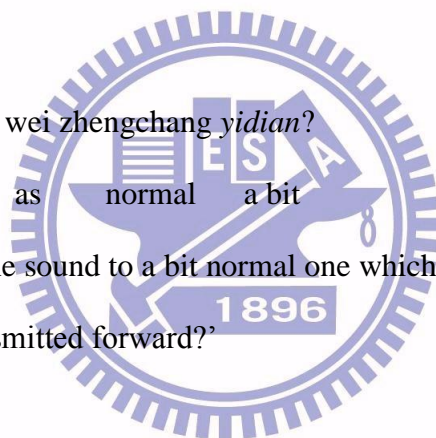
(3.3)(Chen 2011: 82)

你能不能把你簡訊傳過來那聲音設為正常一點？

Ni neng bu neng ba ni jianxun chuan guolai na
 2S can NEG can BA 2S message transmit forward that

shengyin she wei zhengchang yidian?
 sound set as normal a bit

‘Can you set the sound to a bit normal one which reminds you that there is a message transmitted forward?’



Chen suggested that in (3.3), the speaker is making an advice and order to the addressee. According to Chen (2011), the speaker uses *yidian* to hedge and soften his order. Therefore, the speaker in (3.3) follows the Tact Maxim in politeness principle which states that speakers should minimize the expression of beliefs which imply cost to other and maximize the expression of beliefs which imply benefit to other (Leech 1983:132).

Chen’s (2011) discussion doesn’t limit to the construction ‘A *yidian*’. Though detailed Chen’s discussion is, there are two major problems in Chen’s discussion. First, it is not appropriate to conclude that Speaker L in (3.2) flouts the Maxim of Quantity and employs *yidian* to follow politeness principle because without *yidian*, the

acceptance of the sentence is low, as in (3.4):

(3.4) ? ...你就不能謙虛嗎?

...Ni jiu bu neng qianxu ma?

2S then NEG can modest SPF

‘Can’t you be modest?’

Second, it seems that Chen (2011) doesn’t observe that there are cases in which speakers uses *yidian* to hedge their utterances not for the sake of politeness. Take (3.5) for example. Speakers A and B are family and they are talking about the make-up of a person who they don’t know:

(3.5)(NCCU)

A: ...她那個眼線就到這邊之後再勾起來

... Ta na ge yanxian jiu dao zhebian zhihou zai

3S that CL eyeliner then reach here after then

gou qilai

hook up

‘...She had drawn her eyeliner until here and then hooked up.’

B: [@@@]

A: ...我就覺得這樣...有點太蠢了一點

... Wo jiu juede zheyang... youdian tai chun le *yidian*

1S then think like-this a little too stupid PFT a little

‘I think it’s a little stupid like this.’

In (3.5), Speaker A doesn’t really have to mitigate his utterance because he is neither

making criticism against Speaker B nor against a person who Speaker B knows. However, Speaker A still employs *yidian* as a mitigator. There are other data which aren't appropriate to be analyzed as the speaker using *yidian* to follow politeness principle. A detailed discussion of these data will be provided in section 3 and 4.

3.1.2 Zou's study (1999) on the construction 'A *yidian*'

Zou (1999) in her study focuses on discussing the construction 'A *yidian*'. She first mentions that the suffix *-le* can appear in the 'A *yidian*' construction and lead to the 'A *le yidian*' construction. Then, Zou suggested that the construction 'A *yidian*' does display strong pragmatic function because the adjectives in the 'A *yidian*' construction are mostly the colloquial ones. For example, *gaoxing* and *yukuai* both means 'glad', but *gaoxing* tends to appear in 'A *yidian*' more because it is more colloquial than *yukuai*. Besides, Zou (1999) also discusses the function of *yidian* in 'A *yidian*' and her claim agrees with that of Chen's (2011). Zou suggests that *yidian* can mitigate the degree of the adjective when a speaker is making a statement, comment or order.

Zou's discussion is quite enlightened. However, in addition to not observing that there are constructions other than 'A *le yidian*', Zou's discussion is not without problems. First, it is too assertive for Zou to claim that *yidian* in all the 'A *yidian*' in affirmatives displays hedging function. It is hard to interpret *yidian* as a mitigator in (3.6):

(3.6)(Zou 1999: 2)

只是他想的官大一點，錢多一點。

Zhishi ta xiang de guan da yidian, qian duo yidian.

only 3S want DE position big a little money much a little

‘It’s just that he desires for a higher position and more money.’

As a result, Zou seems doesn’t take into consideration that *yidian* in ‘A *yidian*’ has semantic meaning which denotes the differential between two compared objects as discussed in Chapter 2. *Yidian* is understood as its propositional meaning when isn’t interpreted as a mitigator.

Second, Zou seems too hasty to make the conclusion that *yidian* displays its hedging function when speakers are making orders. In some cases, *yidan* doesn’t seem to be a mitigator in imperatives as in (3.7):

(3.7)(Zou 1999: 2)

你輕一點，我的胳膊都快被你折斷了！

Ni qing yidian, wo de gebei dou kuai bei ni zheduan le!

2S light a little 1S Poss arm all almost by 2S broke ITJ

‘Be tender! You almost break my arm!’

In (3.7), the speaker exaggerates the situation by saying that the addressee almost breaks his arm. The speaker says that because the addressee’s action causes extreme pain in his arm. As a result, it is hard to conclude that *yidian* in (3.7) functions as a mitigator and that the speaker uses *yidian* to mitigate the degree of *qing* ‘tender’ because a person may not care about politeness in the situation like (3.7).

3.2 Constructions in which *yidian* displays hedging function

3.2.1 ‘*bijiao A yidian*’, ‘*A le yidian*’, and ‘*tai A le yidian*’

It is found that when making a comment, a speaker may stand on two different point of views. In one situation, the speaker makes a comment from the view point of the current state. Three constructions may be produced under this condition. One of them is ‘*bijiao A yidian*’ as in (3.8) in which the speaker is talking about his teacher:

(3.8)(Academia Sinica)

A: 你說他怎樣?

Ni shuo ta zenyang?

2S say 3S how

‘What did you said about him?’

B: 他就是比較情緒化一點...

Ta jiushi bijiao qingxuhua yidian...

3S then compare emotional a little

‘He is a bit emotional...’

Through the observation, it is also found that *yidian* can display its hedging function in ‘*A le yidian*’ as in (3.9) and (3.10). In (3.9), the Speaker B is making criticism on the cup of tea which Speaker A just brewed for him:

(3.9)A: 茶好喝嗎?

Chai hao he ma?
tea good drink SPF?
'Is the tea good?'

B: 淡了一點。

Dan le *yidian*.
weak PFT a little
'It's a bit weak.'

In (3.10), a student complains that the teacher's class is boring and the teacher defends for himself:



(3.10) Student: 你的課真的很無聊。
Ni de ke zhede hen wuliao.
2S Poss. class really very boring
'Your class is really boring.'

Teacher: 我只是「衰」了一點教英文。

Wo zhishi sui le *yidian* jiao yingwen.
1S only unlucky PFT a little teach English
'I just lack a bit of luck and teach English.'

Finally, it is also observed that *yidian* can be interpreted as a mitigator in the construction '*tai A le yidian*' in which *tai* is roughly equivalent with too in English. In (3.11), Speaker A and B are comment on their friend, Susan, with the '*tai A le yidian*' construction:

(3.11) (NCCU)

A: Susan 會不會太沒自信了一點？

Susan hui bu hui tai mei zixin le *yidian*?

Susan can NEG can too NEG confidence PFT a little

‘Don’t you think Susan lacks a bit too much confidence in herself?’

B: 對我覺得太沒自信了一點。

Dui wo juede tai mei zixin le *yidian*

right IS feel too NEG confidence PFT a little

‘You’re right. I think she lacks a bit too much confidence in herself.’

In the above data, since the speakers are making comments on the view point of the current state, the adjectives in the ‘*bijiao A yidian*’, ‘*A le yidian*’, and ‘*tai A le yidian*’ constructions denote the states in reality. With the mitigator *yidian*, the degree of the adjective is lowered and the speaker’s utterance is softened.

3.2.2 *A yidian*

The reason why the ‘*A yidian*’ construction is different from the constructions in 3.2.1 is that in this situation, the speaker is making comments on the view point of his or her expectation in mind. Therefore, the adjective in ‘*A yidian*’ denotes the speaker’s expectation. In most cases, *yidian* displays its hedging function most when the speaker is making criticism toward current state which is undesirable to him/her, as in (3.12):

(3.12) 他瘦一點會更好看。

Ta shou *yidian* hui geng hao kan.

3S thin a little can more good-looking

‘He will look better if he is thinner.’

In (3.12), the speaker thinks that the third person he refers to is fat or heavy, which is not desirable to him. Instead of producing the utterance *pang le yidian* or *bijiao pang yidian* ‘a bit fat’ in ‘A *le yidian*’ or ‘*bijiao* A *yidian*’ construction, the speaker expresses his comment by uttering his expectation with the ‘A *yidian*’ construction and states that the person would be more good-looking if he were thinner. Note that when the speaker produces the ‘A *yidian*’ with the adjective describing the speaker’s expectation, the hearer can infer the implication that the current situation is ‘not A enough’ for the speaker. For example, there is the implication ‘not thin enough’ in (3.12)

It is important to emphasize that in the situation in which the speaker is commenting on the viewpoint of his/her own expectation with the ‘A *yidian*’ construction, the mitigator *yidian* does soften the speaker’s utterance but *yidian* doesn’t lower the degree of the adjective. On the contrary, it enhances the degree of the adjective because the speaker is expressing that the situation would live up to his/her expectation more if the degree of the adjective is enhanced a bit. In (3.12), the speaker is commenting that the person would be more good-looking if the degree of being thin is enhanced. Therefore, in this situation, for a hearer, *yidian* enhances the adjective in the ‘A *yidian*’ construction but it still softens the speaker’s utterance because in reality, the speaker may think that the degree should be enhanced a lot instead of just a bit.

If the speaker is making a suggestion or giving an order to the addressee with the

use of the ‘*A yidian*’ construction in the main clause, it can be seen as the speaker expressing an imperative to the addressee as in (3.13):

(3.13) (NCCU)

看 PPT 然後那你就把它改得白話一點...

Kan PPT ranhou ni jiu ba ta gai de baihua *yidian*

look PPT then 2S then BA 3S correct DE colloquial a little

你不要就是只有寫一個什麼...什麼...

ni buyao jiushi zhiyou xie yi ge sheme... sheme...

2S NEG just only write one CL what what

‘Read the PPT and then correct it to become more colloquial. Don’t just write something...something...’

As it has been mentioned, both Chen (2011) and Zou (1999) argue that the employment of *yidian* follows the Tact Maxim when the speaker is making a request or suggestion. However, it is argued in this paper that *yidian* doesn’t contribute much to mitigation in order, a category of imperatives (Bach & Harnish 1979).

First, *yidian* is not the main factor to reduce the tone of the speakers in imperatives of making orders. Lin (1981) finds that the Chinese particle *ba* can soften the speaker’s tone when suggestions and request are conveyed. Li (1981) also mentions that *ba* can express solicit agreement. Lee-Wong (1998) conducts a research on how Chinese particles *ba*, *a/ya*, and *ne* help to reduce the illocutionary force of imperatives in direct requests. In her terms, particles *ba*, *a/ya*, and *ne* have an impact on the pragmatic meaning of direct request (Lee-Wong 1998: 13). In addition, Lee-Wong (1994) finds that native speakers of Mandarin Chinese tend to mitigate imperatives with polite expressions such as *mafan ni* ‘brother you’ and *qing* ‘please’.

Through these previous studies, it can be suggested that with particles such as *ba* and polite expressions, A-imperatives sound softer. This suggestion can be proved by the result of the survey that 76 out of 100 native speakers consider *Qing anjing* ‘Please be quiet’ sounds softer than *Anjing yidian* ‘Be quiet’.

Second, although native speakers may agree that imperatives such as *Anjing* ‘be quiet’ sounds softer than *Anjing yidian*, the sense of mitigation is quite context-based. According to a survey conducted to junior high students whose mother tongue is Chinese, about 88 out of 100 students think that *Anjing* and *Anjing yidian* expressed by the teachers don’t sound different to them. They think both expressions are authoritative. Some of the students add in the survey that the orders of the teachers won’t sound soft unless the teachers express the orders with *qing* ‘please’ or *baituo* ‘could you please’. Their judgment may be explained by the fact that the power relation is clear in a classroom context. Therefore, in this context, *yidian* doesn’t display the hedging function. In addition to the classroom context, the sense of mitigation provided by *yidian* in imperatives of making orders isn’t sensed in an arguing context. For example, it is common that people utter (3.14) when they feel they are being insulted by the addressee:

(3.14) 放尊重一點！

Fang zunzhong *yidian*!

put respect a little

‘Be respectable!’

None of the speaker will agree that *yidian* here can hedge the illocutionary force of the speaker. Besides, it should be taken into consideration whether the speaker really intends to use *yidian* to mitigate his or her order in situation such as (3.14).

3.2.3 The comparison between the two kinds of situations

In the situation discussed in 3.2.1 (Situation 1), it is known that the speaker can make a comment on the viewpoint of the reality and states that the current situation is ‘a bit A’ compared with his/her expectation. Therefore, *yidian* not only softens the speaker’s utterance but mitigates the degree of the adjective. In the situation discussed in 3.2.2 (Situation 2), the speaker makes a comment on the viewpoint of his/her own expectation and states that the situation lives up to his/her expectation more if ‘the degree of A’ is enhanced a bit. As a result, *yidian* in Situation 2 also softens the speaker’s utterance, but it enhances the degree of the adjective, which is different from Situation 1.

Although the two *yidian* in the two situations vary from each other, the two situations can actually refer to the same issue. This is because what makes the two *yidian* ‘sound’ different is the speaker’s perspectives. Take (3.12) for example, the speaker can still comment that the person in the utterance is not thin enough in the way in Situation 1, as shown in (3.12 b):

(3.12 b) 他胖了一點。

Ta pang le *yidian*.

3S fat ITJ a little

‘He is a bit fat.’

In (3.12 b), the speaker makes the comment on the viewpoint of the reality with the ‘A *le yidian*’ construction. In (3.12 b), *yidian* mitigates the degree of heaviness. Although the two *yidian* seem to be different in (3.12) and (3.12 b), the hearer knows that the

speaker is actually expressing the same thing with different perspectives. This is similar to Kuno's (1987: 203-205) analogy of perspective-taking as 'camera angles' in filming a scene where a camera is placed at one person/thing's position while monitoring the other people/things. In (3.12b), the speaker comments on the viewpoint of the reality and stated that compared to his/her own expectation, the person referred to is a bit too fat. Therefore, *yidian* sounds like lowering the degree of heaviness; however, to be more precisely, *yidian* mitigates the differential between the reality and the speaker's expectation.

In (3.12), the speaker makes the comment '*Ta shou yidian hui geng hao kan*' on the viewpoint of his/her own expectation. As a result, in this perspective, the speaker is stating that the current should make some change to 'move forward' to his/her expectation. The speaker uses *yidian* to soften his/her utterance and states that 'a bit' change can be made so that the situation can be more desirable. As a result, for the hearer, *yidian* enhances the degree of the adjective *shou* 'thin'; however, to be more specific, *yidian* mitigates the room for the improvement between the reality and the speaker's expectation. As a result, the two *yidian* in the two situations both reach the goal of mitigating the differential between the speaker's expectation and the reality but in different ways because of the change of the speaker's perspectives.

The concept discussed above can be shown in Figure 3.1:

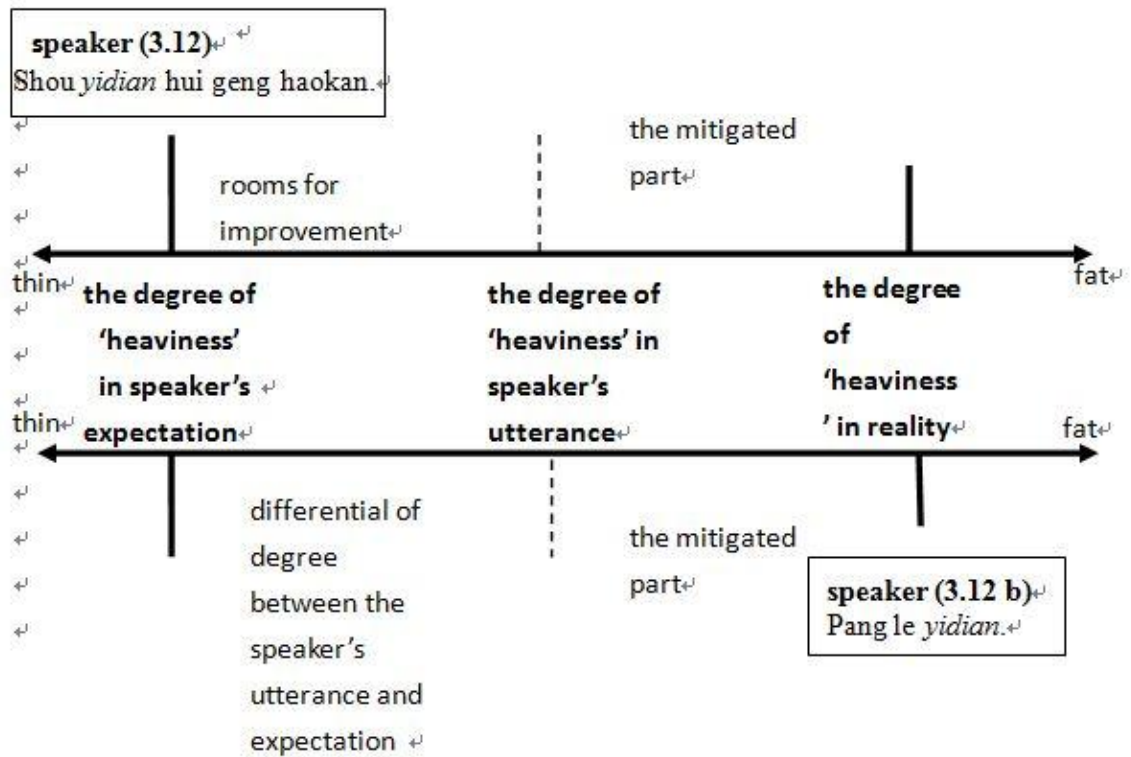


Figure 3.1 the concept of Situation 1 and Situation 2

3.3 The triggers that cause *yidian* to display its hedging function

3.3.1 Politeness principle

This paper agrees with Chen's (2011) suggestion that in some cases, the speaker flouts Gricean's Maxims (Grice 1975) to follow politeness principle (Leech 1983) as in (3.9), which is repeated here:

(3.9) A: 茶好喝嗎？

Chai hao he ma?

tea good drink SPF?

‘Is the tea good?’

B: 淡了一點。

Dan le *yidian*.

weak PFT a little

‘It’s a bit weak.’

In (3.9), Speaker A is producing a yes/no question with *ma*, the question marker, at the end of the sentence. Speaker B apparently flouts the Maxim of Relevance because he doesn’t respond ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to speaker A’s yes/no question. This is because Speaker B isn’t satisfied with the tea but he doesn’t want to be too harsh since Speaker A brews the tea for him. Therefore, instead of answering ‘No, it’s not,’ Speaker B employs expresses his dissatisfaction with the comment ‘a bit weak’ and *yidian* is used in the comment.

However, it seems that the use of *yidian* as a mitigator in some cases can’t be explained with Chen’s (2011) argument as in (3.5) which is repeated here:

(3.5) (NCCU)

A: ...她那個眼線就到這邊之後再勾起來

... Ta na ge yanxian jiu dao zhebian zhihou zai
3S that CL eyeliner then reach here after then
gou qilai
hook up

‘...She had drawn her eyeliner until here and then hooked up.’

B: [@@]

A: ...我就覺得這樣...有點太蠢了一點

... Wo jiu juede zheyang... youdian tai chun le yidian
1S then think like-this a little too stupid PFT a little
‘I think it’s a little stupid like this.’

It has been mentioned that in (3.5), Speaker A doesn’t really have to mitigate his utterance because the person he is neither making criticism against Speaker B nor talking about a person who Speaker B knows. However, Speaker A still employs *yidian* as a mitigator.

Data (3.15) is a data in Chen (2011) that requires further discussion:

(3.15) (Chen 2011: 51)

A: ...原來我被騷擾了...

...Yuanlai wo bei saorao le...

result in 1S by harass PFT

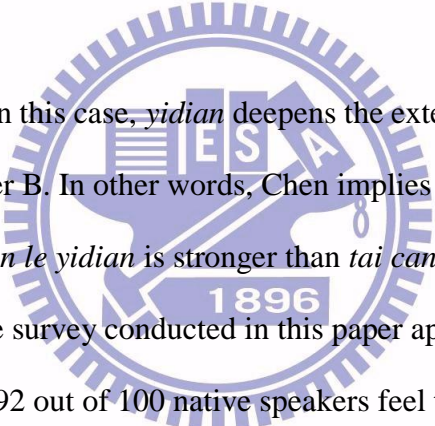
‘...it turned out that I was sexually harassed...’

B: ...你也太慘了一點吧....

...ni ye tai can le *yidian* ba...

2S also too miserable PFT a little ITJ

‘...how miserable it was...’



Chen (2011) argues that in this case, *yidian* deepens the extent of misery in the comment made by speaker B. In other words, Chen implies that in this example, the degree of misery in *tai can le yidian* is stronger than *tai can le* ‘too miserable’. However, the result of the survey conducted in this paper appears to be opposite. According to the survey, 92 out of 100 native speakers feel the stronger tone of misery in *tai can le*. Based on the native speakers’ judgment, *yidian* can be seen as a mitigator instead of showing speaker B’s sympathy. If speaker B wanted to show sympathy in this example, he would simply say ‘*tai can le*’, the stronger degree, because according to the Sympathy Maxim in Politeness Principle, speakers should maximize sympathy between themselves and the addressees (Leech 1983:132).

As a result, it seems that the politeness principle cannot account for the phenomenon why a hearer or addressee knows that the speaker is using *yidian* as a mitigator in every situation. There must be other factors that trigger *yidian* to be interpreted as a mitigator.

3.3.2 Constructions

It is discussed in section 3.2 that there are certain constructions in which *yidian* appears and is a mitigator. Therefore, the question whether it is the constructions that make *yidian* function as a mitigator such as the ‘*tai A le yidian*’ construction.

In the ‘*tai A le yidian*’ construction, *tai* ‘too’ can indicate an unfavorable state. According to Xiao (2012), *tai* is polysemous and one of the meanings is ‘describing an adjective reaching to a higher degree than is allowed’ (Xiao 2012: 35). Therefore, *tai* shows that the speaker thinks that the degree of the state denoted by the adjective is a lot more than allowed. As a result, *yidian* is used to hedge the strong tone of *tai*. Additionally, Shuai (1999) discusses the ‘*tai A le yidian*’ construction and he also suggests that *yidian* in this construction can mitigate the strong tone brought about by *tai*.

Although the ‘*tai A le yidian*’ construction may be an example to support the idea that it is the constructions that make *yidian* function as a mitigator, it seems that the explanation is only appropriate to the ‘*tai A le yidian*’ construction. As mentioned in the previous section, there are several constructions other than the ‘*tai A le yidian*’ construction in which *yidian* is a mitigator such as ‘*bijiao A yidian*’. In the case of the ‘*bijiao A yidian*’ construction, it is not persuasive to conclude that this construction can trigger the function of hedging of *yidian*. Besides, if the ‘*bijiao A yidian*’ construction could trigger *yidian* to be interpreted as a mitigator, (3.16) could be a problem:

(3.16) 我想設計得比較簡單一點....

Wo xiang sheji de bijiao jiandan yidian...

I S want design DE compare simple a little

'I want to design the house and make it looks a bit simpler...'

In (3.16), the speaker is a house designer and she is expressing how she will design the house and that she will design the house into a style of simplicity. In this case, most native speaker will agree that *yidian* remains its semantic meaning rather than function as a mitigator. As a result, the '*bijiao A yidian*' construction won't trigger *yidian* to display its hedging function. There must be other factors come into play.

3.4 Subjectivity and intersubjectivity

Through the discussion in the last section, it seems that there are other factors which cause the speakers to employ *yidian* as a mitigator. The paper suggests that subjectivity and intersubjectivity can be seen as the main factors. According to Lyon (1982):

The term subjectivity refers to the way in which natural languages, in their structure and their normal manner of operation, provide for the locutionary agent's expression of himself and his own attitudes and beliefs.

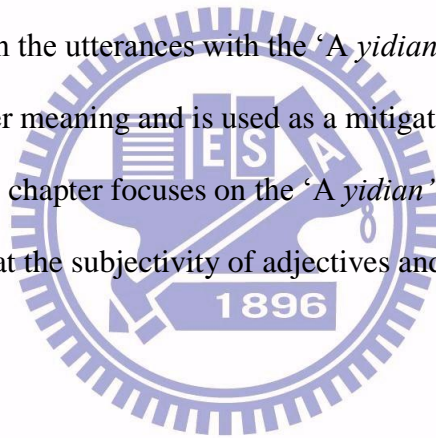
(Lyons 1982: 102)

Traugott (2010) further extends Lyon's (1982) viewpoint on subjectivity and provides her view about intersubjectivity:

...intersubjectivity in my view refers to the way in which natural languages, in their structure and their normal manner of operation, provide for the locutionary agent's expression of his or her awareness of the addressee's attitudes and beliefs, most especially their 'face' or self-image".

(Traugott 2010: 3)

According to Lyon (1982) and Traugott (2010), when speakers are talking, speaker's stance and illocutionary force may be involved in their utterance; in other words, subjectivity is involved. In terms of the 'A *yidian*' construction, objectively, *yidian* denotes the differential between the compared objects (Liu 2007). When subjectivity is involved in the utterances with the 'A *yidian*' construction, *yidian* is endowed with the speaker meaning and is used as a mitigator. Before the discussion goes on further, since the chapter focuses on the 'A *yidian*' construction, it is necessary to take a look at the subjectivity of adjectives and adjectival evaluations in Mandarin Chinese.



3.4.1 The subjectivity of adjectives and adjectival evaluations in Mandarin Chinese

The expression of subjectivity is hard to avoid in utterances. Some scholars argue that all utterances involve subjectivity to a certain extent (Stubbs 1996: 197, Martin and White, 2005:92). Subjectivity can be found through the speaker's linguistic choice. Some subjective meanings are expressed explicitly while others are conveyed implicitly. Some scholars such as Verhagen (1995, 2005) and Scheibman (2002) suggest that even common adjectives, such as *expensive*, *big* or *easy*, can reveal subjective features. Pander Maat (2006) discusses the combination between

gradable adjectives and subjective meanings. Thompson and Tao (2010) suggests that predicate adjectives reflect subjectivity when they are used to assess the world.

Shang (2011) further discusses the subjectivity in adjectives in Mandarin Chinese and provides some suggestion to the objectivity and subjectivity of adjectival evaluations. Shang (2011) suggests that when the speaker uses adjectives to make evaluation, the evaluation is made through the comparison between the compared objects and a reference point which can be explicitly presented or implicitly accessed. According to Shang (2011), when the reference points are explicitly presented, it can be judged that the speaker is making the evaluation relatively objectively even if the quantifications of the evaluated entities and the reference points cannot be calculated by measuring instruments because the reference points represent measurable properties (Shang 2011: 155-156).

On the other hand, when the reference points are implicitly accessed, Shang (2011) suggests that the evaluation is made relatively subjectively. When the reference points are not mentioned, Shang (2011) proposed that there are some aspects frequently used as implicit reference points such as normality and expectation. In Shang's (2011) terms, normality refers to the normal, consistent and stable state or pattern of entities generalized by conceptualizers from a range of similar or related entities, or from the continuous performances of a particular entity. Expectation, in Shang's (2011) definition, refers to the speaker's predicitive judgment or wish regarding the entities or events.

Since this thesis focuses on the hedging function of *yidian* in the 'A *yidian*' construction and proposes that it is subjectivity that triggers the speakers to employ *yidian* to display its hedging function, Shang's discussion is truly insightful. However, it should be noted that the following discussion only focuses on the subjectivity of adjectives because subjectivity is not tied to one particular expression or category

(Scheibman 2002: 60). Shang (2011) also suggests that the adjectives can be seen as certain lexical items demonstrating the speaker's subjectivity but it doesn't mean that the subjectivity of a sentence is totally attributed to the adjectives (Shang 2011: 70).

In the thesis, it is proposed that the mitigating meaning of *yidian* is interpreted under the condition that subjectivity is involved in the speaker's utterance and that it is necessary to mitigate the utterance. In the following, there is detailed discussion on subjectivity and reasons for speakers to use *yidian* to mitigate their utterances.

3.4.2 Subjectivity and reasons to use *yidian* as a mitigator for speakers

It is proposed in this thesis that due to subjectivity and intersubjectivity, *yidian* is endowed with the speaker meaning for mitigation in different situations. Four main situations are discussed in the thesis – following politeness principle, downtoning directives, self protection, and avoiding assertion.

I. Mitigating to follow politeness principle

According to Leech (1983), politeness pertains to a relationship between to participants :*self* (or speaker) and *other* (or hearer). Therefore, with subjectivity involved in the utterances, especially comments, the speaker uses *yidian* to follow politeness principle and avoids or reduces the conflict between himself/herself and the addressee as in (3.17):

(3.17) (Academia Sinica)

A: 你喜歡自然一點。

Ni xihuan ziran yidian.

2S like natural a little

‘You prefer a more general outfit.’

B: 自然一點就好了，而不要這樣子...太過於打扮。

Ziran yidian jiu hao le, er buyao] zheyangzi... tai guoyu daban.

natural a little fine ITJ and NEG in-this-way too overly dress-up

‘To be more general is fine instead of being too peculiar...like this.’

In (3.17), the speaker doesn't agree with the addressee on the judgement of an outfit and judge the outfit with an implicit reference point, his own expectation, which is rather subjective (Shang 2011). The comment *Ziran yidian* ‘more general’ indicates that the speaker considers the outfit not general enough or quite peculiar. Since this comment may cause face threat to the addressee, the speaker employs *yidian* as a mitigator to hedge his subjective comment and to follow The Tact Maxim – to minimize the expression which implies cost to the hearer (Leech 1983).

Data (3.18) is another example to show that the speaker intends to use *yidian* to mitigate to follow politeness principle:

(3.18) 我應該教得比你們老師清楚...一點

Wo yingai jiao de bi nimen laoshi qingchu... yidian

1S should teach DE compare 2P teacher clear a little

‘I teach a bit more clearly than your teachers.’

In (3.18), the speaker is a cram school teacher and tells the students that he can teach better than their teachers at school. In his comment, although there is an explicit reference point, the evaluation of *qingchu* ‘clear’ is quite subjective. The

reason is that in addition to the fact that the quality of teaching is subjective, the phrase *yinggai* implies an uncertainty that the teacher is not really sure about his comment. However, he makes an subjective conclusion that he can teach better. To follow the Modesty Maxim (Leech 1983), the teacher employs *yidian* with its speaker meaning to hedge his compliment toward himself. The pause between the adjective *qingchu* and *yidian* shows that the teacher intends to use *yidian* to *mitigate* his comment.

II. Downtoning directives

It has been observed that *yidian* is employed when the speaker is giving suggestions or orders to the addressee, as in (3.13):

(3.13) (NCCU)

看 PPT 然後那你就把它改得白話一點...

Kan PPT ranhou ni jiu ba ta gai de baihua *yidian*

look PPT then 2S then BA 3S correct DE colloquial a little

你不要就是只有寫一個什麼...什麼...

ni buyao jiushi zhiyou xie yi ge sheme... sheme...

2S NEG just only write one CL what what

‘Read the PPT and then correct it to become more colloquial. Don’t just write something...something...’

In (3.13), the speaker is asking the addressee to make some change to the words on the power point slide. This reflects the subjectivity of the speaker because by making the suggestion, the speaker is implicating that he consider the current situation not

satisfied enough. In this case, the speaker evaluates the situation and suggests that the words should be more colloquial, which is a subjective judgment. Therefore, he employs *yidian* to downtone his illocutionary force in suggestions.

Note that in Point I and II, the speakers hedge the illocutionary force in their comments or orders because they are aware of the ‘face’ of their addressees. In these cases, intersubjectivity comes into play.

When it comes to giving orders, a question remains unsolved is that the mitigation meaning of *yidian* isn’t sensed by the addressees in some imperatives in which intersubjectivity and illocutionary force is involved. A better explanation may be that in some cases, when the speaker is making an order with ‘(V)*A yidian*’ construction, he or she is expressing that the current situation is really undersirable and needs improving immediately. Since the situation is urgent, *yidian* in imperatives of making orders won’t sound like a mitigator, as in the repeated data (3.7) and (3.14):

(3.7) (Zou 1999: 2)

你輕一點，我的胳膊都快被你折斷了！

Ni qing *yidian*, wo de gebei dou kuai bei ni zheduan le!

2S light a little 1S Poss arm all almost by 2S broke ITJ

‘Be tender! You almost break my arm!’

(3.14) 放尊重一點！

Fang zunzhong *yidian*!

Put respect a little

‘Be more respectable!’

In (3.7), the speaker is telling the addressee that his arm hurts so much that an urgent change is necessary while in (3.14), the speaker thinks that the hearer has said something quite inappropriate and therefore orders that the hearer corrects himself immediately. Therefore, the mitigation meaning of *yidian* isn't be sensed in the two data because the speakers don't intend to mitigate their utterances.

III. Mitigating to do self-protection

It is found in the data that *yidian* is used as a mitigator for the sake of self-protection, as in (3.10) and (3.20):

(3.10) Student: 你的課真的很無聊。
Ni de ke zhede hen wuliao.
2S Poss. class really very boring
'Your class is really boring.'



Teacher: 我只是「衰」了一點教英文。
Wo zhishi sui le *yidian* jiao yingwen.
1S only unlucky PFT a little teach English
'I am just a bit unfortunate and teach English.'

(3.20) (Acamedia Sinica)

A: 這題的確是困難了一點。困難了一點。
Zhe ti dique shi kunnan le *yidian*. Kunnan le *yidian*.
this CL certainly be difficult ASP a little difficult ASP a little

B: 終於承認了是不是？

Zhongyu chengren le shi bu shi?

finally admit ITJ be NEG be

‘You finally admit that, don’t you?’

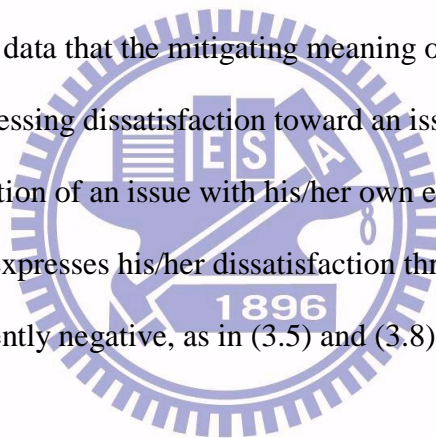
In (3.10), the student is making criticism against the teacher. Irritated by the student, the teacher gives an emotional response to the student to protect his own face. The adjective *sui* ‘unfortunate’ reflects that the teacher’s response is highly subjective. First, being an English teacher, the teacher may have limited realization of the instruction in other subjects. Therefore, the teacher may not understand the difficulty other teachers of other subjects can encounter in teaching. However, the teacher makes the judgment that he is unfortunate to teach English. Second, it’s not appropriate for the teacher to choose the word *sui* to describe his situation as an English teacher because it is his own choice to be an English teacher. As a result, the mitigator *yidian* is used in order to mitigate the subjective comment of the teacher. Besides, *yidian* can be seen to be used to do self-protection by the teacher because with the degree of *sui* being downtoned, it is less possible that the student further asks the teacher why he doesn’t choose to be a teacher of other subjects, which would make him more embarrassed.

Data (3.120) is another example in which the speaker employs *yidian* to do self-protection. In (3.120), *zhongyu* ‘finally’ in Speaker B’s utterance shows that Speaker A doesn’t consider the question difficult at the beginning and *chengren* ‘admit’ reflects that Speaker A doesn’t want to face the fact. Although Speaker A admits that the question is difficult at last, he uses *yidian* to mitigate the degree of the difficulty of the question in order to save his own face.

IV. Mitigating to avoid being too assertive

In some cases, it is found that the speaker uses *yidian* to hedge his/her common so that s/he won't sound assertive to the addressee. Martin (2008) mentions that speaker tend to convey inexactitude, i.e. to employ hedging strategy, to reduce their assertions (Martin 2008: 2). This phenomenon is more obvious when the speaker is commenting on issues which are related to neither him/her nor the addressee. The reason is that actually, in this situation, the speaker's utterance won't really cause face threat to the hearer; however, the speaker still employs *yidian* to mitigate his/her utterances.

It is observed in the data that the mitigating meaning of *yidian* is mostly sensed when the speaker is expressing dissatisfaction toward an issue. In some cases, the speaker makes an evaluation of an issue with his/her own expectation as the reference point (Shang 2011) and expresses his/her dissatisfaction through an value adjective whose meaning is apparently negative, as in (3.5) and (3.8):



(3.5) (NCCU)

A: ...她那個眼線就到這邊之後再勾起來

... Ta na ge yanxian jiu dao zhebian zhihou zai
3S that CL eyeliner then reach here after then
gou qilai
hook up

‘...She had drawn her eyeliner until here and then hooked up.’

B: [@@]

A: ...我就覺得這樣...有點太蠢了一點

... Wo jiu juede zheyang... youdian tai chun le yidian
1S then think like-this a little too stupid PFT a little
‘I think it’s a little stupid like this.’

(3.8) A: 你說他怎樣?

Ni shuo ta zenyang?

2S say 3S how

‘What did you said about him?’

B: 他就是比較情緒化一點...

Ta jiushi bijiao qingxuhua yidian...

3S then compare emotional a little

‘He is a bit emotional...’

In (3.5), Speaker A comments the situation with *chun* ‘silly’. This comment is

highly subjective because with no explicit reference points, the speaker is making evaluation of the make-up with his own expectation (Shang 2011). Besides, the adjective *chun* reflects the subjective evaluation by the speaker that the make-up is ridiculous to him. The pause before the comment *youdian tai chun le yidian* shows the hesitation of the speaker when making such an subjective comment. As a result, the hearer interprets *yidian* as a mitigator to hedge the speaker's comment.

Similarly, in (3.8), Speaker B is commenting a person in a subjective way. The adjective *qingxuhua* 'emotional' shows that Speaker B considers it undesirable that the person he refers to cannot control his temper well. Since *qingxuhua* is a negative judgment to people and Speaker B is make the evaluation with his own expectation, *yidian* is interpreted as a mitigator.

Sometimes, the speaker makes comments with adjectives which don't designate apparently positive or negative meanings. In these cases, the speaker can express their dissatisfaction with *le*. According to Liu, Pan and Gu (2004), *le*, when used after an adjective, expresses that the state denoted by the adjective is not ideal. Data (3.21) is one of the examples:

(3.21) (Academia Sinica)

A: ...那個廣告學，畢竟窄，窄了一點。

...Na ge guanggaoxue, bijing zhai, zhai le *yidian*.

that CL advertisement after all narrow narrow ITJ a little

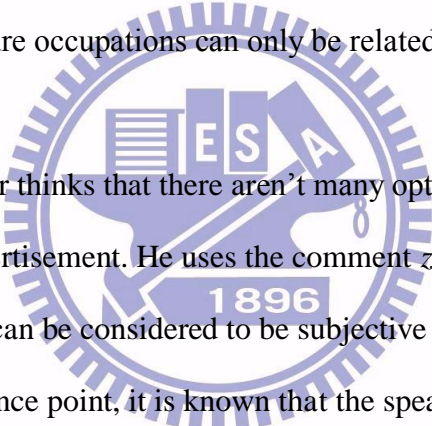
‘...The options (for future occupations) are a bit narrow for people majoring in advertisement.’

B: 恩。只能是廣告吧。

En. Zhi neng shi guanggao ba.

well only can be advertisement ITJ

‘Well, the future occupations can only be related to advertisement.’



In (3.21), the speaker thinks that there aren't many options for occupations for students majoring in advertisement. He uses the comment *zhai le yidian* to judge the situation. This comment can be considered to be subjective in two aspects. First, without an explicit reference point, it is known that the speaker is making an evaluation with normality (Shang 2011), i.e. the normal diversity of options for a students graduating from a college. The criterion for the normality in this situation varies among people because people may judge the future development of a major with various factors and different viewpoints. Second, the use of *le*, which shows that the speaker doesn't consider the situation ideal, reflects the subjectivity nevertheless because the judgment of the idealness of a situation may different by different people. As a result, due to the subjectivity of the utterance, *yidian* is employed to mitigate the assertion of the comment.

To sum up, it has been discussed that *yidian* is designated with the speaker meaning and displays its hedging function when subjectivity is involved in the

speaker's utterances. The speaker may employ *yidian* as a mitigator in order to follow politeness principle, downtone the illocutionary force, do the self-protection or to avoid being too assertive. It should be noted that without the reason for mitigation, *yidian* seems more inclined to be understood as its propositional meaning instead of being used as a mitigator if even if subjectivity is involved in the utterance, as in (3.16):

(3.16) 我想設計得比較簡單一點....

Wo xiang sheji de bijiao jiandan yidian...

I S want design DE compare simple a little

'I want to design the house and make it look a bit simpler...'

In (3.16), the speaker is a designer and she is expressing how she will design the house and that she will design the house into a style of simplicity. Without an explicit reference point, it is known that the criterion of simplicity lies in the speaker's mind. As a result, the speaker's utterance can be considered subjective. Although there is subjectivity involved, *yidian* in this example won't be interpreted as a mitigator because it isn't necessary for the speaker to mitigate her utterance. First, the speaker is not making a comment on the design; instead, she is talking about how she will make the design. Second, there isn't apparently negative meaning attached to the adjective *jiandan* 'simple' and nor does the context show the dissatisfaction of the speaker with the style of simplicity. As a result, *yidian* has more tendency to be understood as its propositional meaning – the differential between the compared objects (Liu 2007), instead of being interpreted as a mitigator.

With examining the subjectivity of the adjectival evaluations (Shang 2011) and other elements contributing to subjectivity, it can be explained why *yidian* won't be

interpreted as a mitigator in some cases, as in (3.22):

(3.22) A: 這一題是困難一點喔，大家都答錯！

Zhe yi ti shi kunnan *yidian* o, dajia dou da cuo!
this one CL be difficult a little ITJ everyone all answer wrong
'This question is a bit more difficult because everyone all answers
incorrectly!'

B: 大家都答錯了！

Dajia dou da cuo le!
everyone all answer wrong ITJ
'Everyone all answers incorrectly!'

In (3.22), Speaker A is making an evaluation of the question in an objective way. The objectivity can be known because Speaker A judges that the question is harder on the basis that no one answers correctly. Therefore, it can be said that Speaker A is making an evaluation with an explicit reference point (Shang 2011). Although the reference point is not presented overtly in the surface structure, it can be implied through the context that the reference point is the rate of correctness in another question. Since the speaker is making an objective comparison, *yidian* is understood as its propositional meaning.

Data (3.23) is quite interesting because there are two *yidian* with the first *yidian* having more tendency to be understood as the propositional meaning while the second one being more inclined to be interpreted as the speaker meaning – the mitigating meaning:

(3.23) (Academia Sinica)

A: 升大二都是比較忙一點。...

Sheng da er dou shi bijiao mang yidian....

rise college two all be compare busy a little

‘After becoming a sophomore, you will always be a little busier...’

B: 真的啦！忙就是忙一點，也蠻值得的。

Zhende la! Mang jiushi mang yidian, ye man zhide de.

real ITJ busy just busy a little also quite worthwhile DE

‘Truly! You will just be a bit busy, but it’s quite worthwhile.’

In (3.23), although the evaluation of *mang* ‘busy’ is immeasurable and the criterion of being busy varies individually, Speaker A is making the comment in a relatively objective way. In the utterance of Speaker A, it can be known through the context that Speaker A is making the evaluation of the school work of a sophomore with the reference point of the school work of a freshman. On the contrary, Speaker B is making the comment more subjectively. The reason is that in the utterance of Speaker B, *zhende la* ‘truly’ and *jiushi* ‘just’ shows that Speaker B wants to persuade the hearer that he will be just a bit busy in his sophomore year. The two linguistic choices also reflect that Speaker B has designated *mang* with a negative meaning. Besides, Speaker B further comments that being a sophomore is not that bad because the business of the year will be worthwhile, which is also a subjective comment. Since Speaker B tries to tell the hearer about the advantages of being a sophomore, *yidian* is employed to mitigate the degree of being busy and do self-protection. Compared to the second *yidian*, the first *yidian* is more inclined to be understood as its propositional meaning due to the relative objectivity in the utterance of Speaker A.

The contrast between the two *yidian* in (3.23) also indicates that not every *yidian* in ‘A *yidian*’ construction is used as a mitigator. It is with the subjectivity of the speaker’s utterance and the reasons for mitigation that *yidian* displays its hedging function; otherwise, the propositional meaning of *yidian* is more obvious.

3.5 Summary and further discussion

3.5.1 Summary

To summarize for the chapter, first, it is observed that *yidian* displays the pragmatic function of hedging in several constructions related to ‘A *yidian*’. When making comments, the speaker may stand on two different point of views. If the speaker is standing on the perspective of reality or fact, the ‘*bijiao* A *yidian*’, ‘A *le yidian*’, and ‘*tai* A *le yidian*’ constructions with the *yidian* being a mitigator can be used in the speaker’s comment. The adjectives in these constructions stand for the current states. The speaker can also make comments on the point of view of his or her expectation in mind, the expectation which the speaker thinks more desirable than the current situation. In this case, the ‘A *yidian*’ construction can be produced. In this construction, the adjective is the desirable state that lives up to the speaker’s expectation.

Second, it is suggested in the paper that subjectivity and intersubjectivity are the main factor for the speaker to employ *yidian* as a mitigator and for the addressee to interpret *yidian* with its mitigating meaning rather than its semantic meaning. Note that it is proposed that subjectivity alone doesn’t lead to the interpretation of the mitigating meaning of *yidian*. In addition to subjectivity, there should be a reason for the speaker to mitigate his/her utterances. Four reasons for mitigating the utterances

are suggested in this thesis -- following politeness principle, downtoning directives, self protection, and avoiding assertion.

Additionally, it is explained in the paper that in some situations when a speaker is giving orders or direct requests, he or she is expressing that the current situation is really undesirable and needs improving immediately. Since the situation is urgent, *yidian* in imperatives of making orders won't sound like a mitigator even though there is intersubjectivity and illocutionary force involved in imperatives. This suggestion is against some previous studies which claim that *yidian* is always used to hedge speakers' illocutionary force in imperatives.

3.5.2 The continuum of the propositional meaning and the speaker meaning of *yidian*

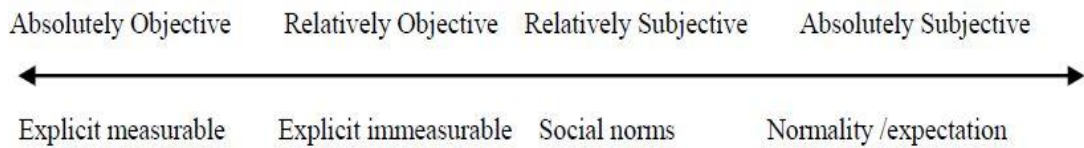
In the last section, it is proposed that when there is subjectivity involved in the utterances with the 'A *yidian*' construction, *yidian* can be interpreted as a mitigator in the context where it is necessary for the speaker to mitigate his/her utterance. Besides, some examples are provided and show that *yidian* remains its propositional meaning because the speaker is making the adjectival evaluation in an objective way. Therefore, it seems that part of the subjectivity in the 'A *yidian*' construction can be checked with Shang's (2011) view on the subjectivity of the adjectival evaluation.

However, it is important to note that the propositional meaning and the speaker meaning of *yidian* are not dichotomous. Instead, it is more appropriate to claim that the propositional meaning and the speaker meaning of *yidian* form a continuum. This is because although whether the reference points are explicit or not can be used as a guideline to judge the objectivity or subjectivity of the speaker's evaluations, the objective and subjective evaluations also form a continuum:

The more individualized or idiosyncratic the reference point is, the more subjective the adjectival evaluation is. The more measurable and explicit the reference point is, the more objective the adjectival evaluation is.

(Shang 2011: 162)

Figure 3.1 can show Shang’s assumption of the continuum of objectivity and subjectivity with respect to adjectival evaluations in Mandarin:



(Shang 2011: 164)



Figure 3.1 Objectivity-subjectivity continuum

If Shang’s (2011) view on the continuum of the objectivity and subjectivity of adjectival evaluation is combined with the reasons for the speaker to mitigate his/her utterances, the story becomes more complicated, as in (3.24):

(3.23) 我在家裡，我的功課是比我弟弟好一點...

Wo zai jia li, wo de gongke shi bi wo didi
1S at home in 1S Poss homework be compare 1S brother
hao yidian...
good a little

‘In my family, my school performance is a bit better than my brother’s...’

In (3.24), in terms of the objectivity of the adjectival evaluation, the speaker is making the evaluation objectively. The reason is that the speaker is evaluating his school work with an explicit reference point – his brother’s school work. In addition, the comparison between the school works can be made objectively. Though objective the comment is, the meaning of *yidian* in this example lies in the gray area between the propositional meaning and the speaker meaning. This is because there is a reason for the speaker to mitigate his utterance – the speaker is complimenting himself. Therefore, to follow the Modesty Maxim (Leech 1983), the mitigating meaning may be involved in *yidian* in (3.24).

With the examples provided in the two sections, the generalization of the continuum of the propositional meaning and the speaker meaning of *yidian* in the ‘A *yidian*’ construction can be made:

If a speaker makes a relatively subjective utterance and it is necessary for the Speaker to mitigate his/her utterance, the speaker meaning of *yidian* is more obvious. The propositional meaning of *yidian* can be more obvious under either of the two conditions – the speaker makes a relatively objective utterance or the speaker’s utterance is subjective but it isn’t so necessary to hedge the utterance. The meaning of *yidian* lies in the gray area of the propositional and

speaker meaning when the speaker is making a relatively objective utterance but the mitigation of the utterance is necessary.

The assumption of the continuum of the propositional and the speaker meaning of *yidian* can be shown in Figure 3.2:

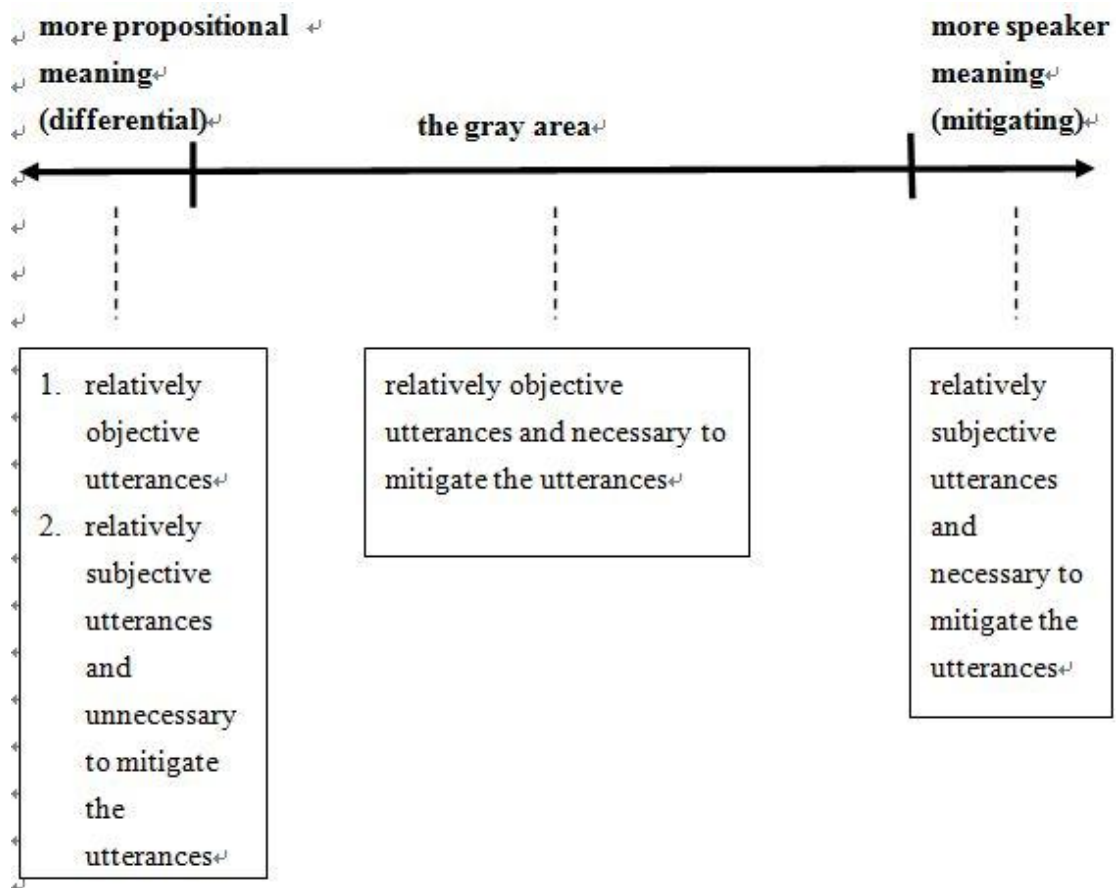


Figure 3.2 The continuum of the propositional and the speaker meaning of *yidian* in The 'A *yidian*' construction

Chapter 4 Grammaticalization and subjectification of *yidian*

In Chapter 3, it is discussed that subjectivity and intersubjectivity should be considered the main factors that cause *yidian* to be interpreted as a mitigator and display its hedging function. Since subjectivity and intersubjectivity denotes the synchronic state (Traugott 2010), it can be said that Chapter 3 focuses on the interaction between the meaning change of *yidian* and subjectivity and intersubjectivity from a synchronic viewpoint. In this chapter, this issue is discussed from a diachronic viewpoint. Subjectification and intersubjectification refer to the diachronic process. Grundy (1995) discusses from a diachronic aspect that semantic and syntactic changes seem to follow the process where pragmatic function comes into play and trigger purely semantic items to acquire different interpretations. Sometimes, the speaker attitude is the trigger of the changes. In the following sections, after reviewing subjectification and intersubjectification and their interaction with grammaticalization, it is discussed how these mechanisms influence the interpretations of *yidian* diachronically.

4.1 Subjectification and intersubjectification

In Traugott's (2010) term, subjectification is a process that meanings are recruited by the speaker to encode and regulate attitudes and beliefs; it's also the development of meanings that express speaker's attitude or viewpoint. Intersubjectification is the process that the subjectified meaning is recruited to encode meanings centered on the addressee (Traugott 2010:4). As a result, theoretically, intersubjectification comes after subjectification just as what Traugott and Dahser (2002) schematize:

Pramatic-semantic tendency

non-subjective > subjective > intersubjective

Figure 4.1 path of directionality in semantic change

(Traugott & Dasher 2002: 40)

How does subjectification interact with grammaticalization? In grammaticalization, subjectification is more likely to occur in primary grammaticalization (the shift from lexical/constructional to grammatical) than in secondary grammaticalization (the development of already grammatical material into more grammatical material) (Traugott 2010: 8). In Traugott's (2010) terms, this is because primary grammaticalization often requires prior strengthening of pragmatic inferences that arise in very specific linguistics contexts prior to their semanticization and reanalysis as grammatical elements. Traugott (2010) also mentions that subjectified elements tend to be positioned at the periphery of a constituent or clause. The subjectification can be checked through the example of the grammaticalization of *a bit of* discussed in Traugott's (2010) paper. There are six stages in the grammaticalization of *a bit of* (in the paper, Traugott numbers the pre-partitive use of *a bit of* stage 0):

(stage 0) Pre-partitive → (stage I) Partitive → (stage II) Extended partitive → (stage III) Degree modifier → (stage IV) Adverb degree modifier → (stage V) Adjunct

The occurrence of subjectification is at stage three, the use of *a bit of* as a degree modifier. Traugott points out that when used as a degree modifier, *a bit of* is endowed with quantificational scalar meaning 'somewhat', expressing a downtoning meaning

and is similar to the meaning of *a little*, typically with an evaluative behavioral term as shown in (4.1):

(4.1) “I’ve got something to tell you, my dear,” said Caleb in his hesitating way... “You see, I’ve been *a bit of a fool* again, and put my name to a bill”

(1871 Elliott, *Middlemarch* [Uva])

A bit of is subjectified at this stage because instead of being interpreted as *a small part of something*, *a bit of* in (4.1) is interpreted as *somewhat of a fool*.

The fact that *a bit of* is subjectified at stage three agrees with what Traugott (2003b) mentions in her paper – subjectification is more likely to occur in primary grammaticalization. In a partitive construction, the partitive use of *a bit of* at stage two, *a bit of NP* can be bracketed in the manner:

[a bit [of NP]]

In the structure, *bit* is the head and *of NP* is the modifier or complement. However, at stage three, with *a bit of* functioning as a degree modifier, there is rebracketing and head-modifier shift in degree modifier construction:

[a bit of [NP]]

As a result of the reanalysis, *NP* becomes the head and *a bit of* turns into a degree modifier, which simultaneously conveys speakers’ intention of downtoning.

In addition to subjectification, *a bit of* is found to be used intersubjectively as a hedge as in (4.2):

(4.2) Your beauty is a little bit of a jilt

(1771 S. Foote, Maid of Bath [OED bit 2, 4.b.])

Recalled that there are several processes in the grammaticalization of *yidian*, which is repeated in Figure 4.2:

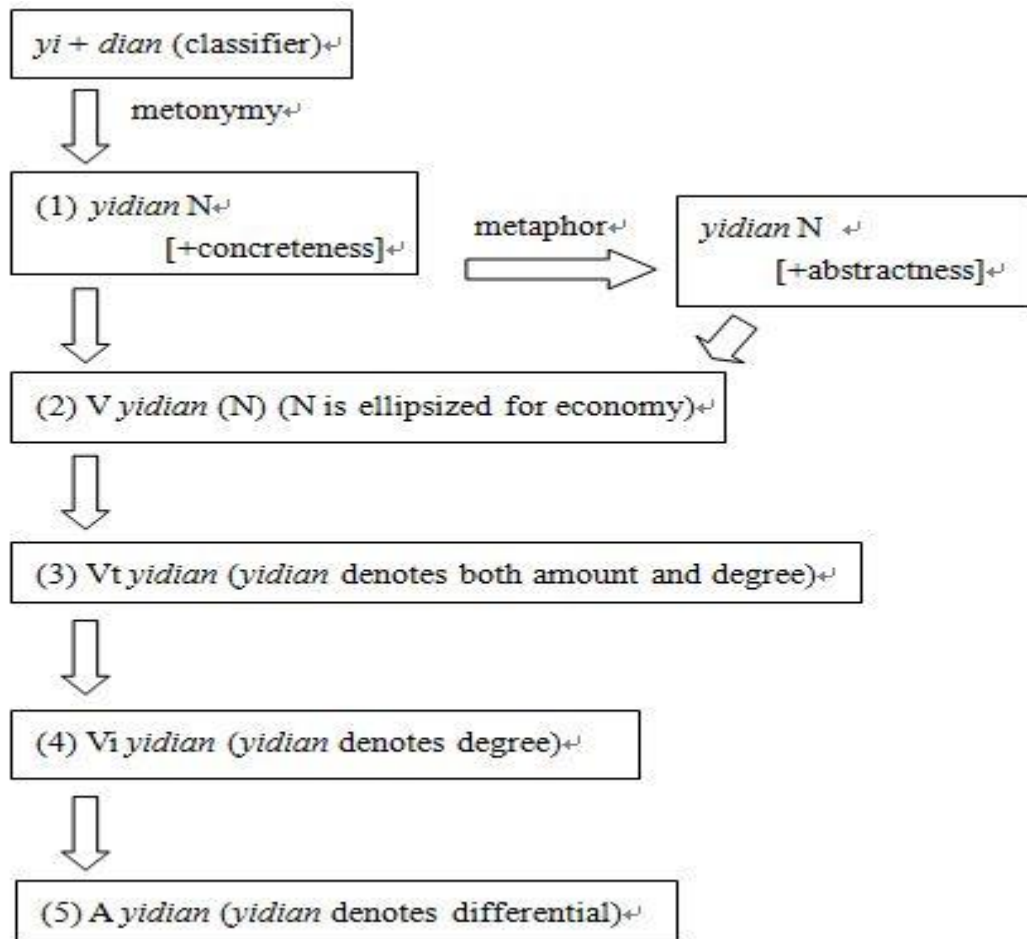


Figure 4.2 the grammaticalization of *yidian*

Two triggers are shown in the semantic change of *yidian* in figure (4.2) – metonymy and metaphor. Metonymy occurs when *dian*, a classifier, combines with *yi* and together become a quantifier while metaphor comes into play when the meaning of *yidian* extends to denote degree. In the following section, the emphasis is put on how subjectification and intersubjectification triggers *yidian* to acquire different interpretations such as being seen as a mitigation marker.

4.2 Subjectification and intersubjectification in the grammaticalization of *yidian*

When *yidian* is used as a quantifier, the meaning of ‘little’ in *yidian* strengthens when it is used in negative constructions as in (4.3):

(4.3) 天色美晴，空色青碧，無一點翳。

Tianse mei qing, kongse qing bi, wu *yidian* yi.

sky beautiful sunny sky blue green NEG a little haziness

‘The sky is beautiful, sunny, and clear.’

(入唐求法巡禮記)

In (4.3), the negation marker *wu* is used to negate the NP *yidian yi*. The expression of speaker involvement is strengthened and with the context of negation, invited inferences are evoked and the hearers can infer them (Traugott and Dasher 2002: 5).

In (4.3), the meaning of ‘little’ in *yidian* is strengthened to *nearly zero in amount* with the context.

Over time, the context of negation is broadened to utterances in which there are illocutionary forces and thus, speaker’s meaning is strengthened as in (4.4) and (4.5).

In (4.4), *yidian* is a quantifier while in (4.5), *yidian* is the complement of the verb.

(4.4) 休想我一點狂心蕩...

Xiu xiang wo *yidian* kuangxin dang...

NEG think 1S a little frenzy swing

‘Don’t even think that I would go crazy a bit...’

(元刊雜劇三十種／泰華山陳搏高臥雜劇／第四折)

(4.5) 家事產業都是我的，誰敢分我一點兒...。

Jiashi chanye dou shi wo de, shei gan fen wo *yidianer*...

housework business all be 1S Poss., who dare share 1S a little

‘Family business all belongs to me. Who dare share a bit...’

(醒世姻緣／第七十六回 狄希陳兩頭娶大 薛素姐獨股吞財)

In (4.4), the speaker is employing an imperative to express some kind of prohibition, and in (4.5), with the word *gan* ‘dare’, the listener knows that the speaker is expressing some kind of warning. Therefore, according to Searle’s classification of illocutionary forces, (4.4) and (4.5) fall into the category of directives, in which the speaker tries to get the hearer to do or not to do something (Searle 1976: 11). Besides the illocutionary forces, the meaning of *yidian* strengthens particularly in the sentences which may put negative impact on the hearers psychologically.

After the step where *yidian* can function as the complement of verbs, the development comes to the step where *yidian* functions as the complement of adjectives. As the discussion in Chapter 3, it is known that pragmatically, *yidian* in the ‘A (*le*) *yidian*’ construction can be seen as a mitigator as in (4.6):

(4.6) 只是兒子望他成人性兒太急了一點。

Zhishi erzi wang ta cheng ren xinger tai ji le *yidian*.

only son hope 3S become person personality too hasty PFT a little

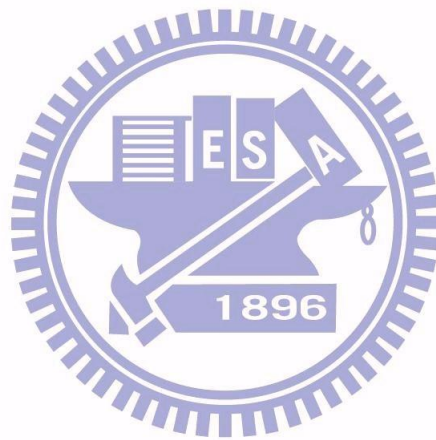
‘She only wants his son to grow up and she is a bit too hasty.’

(紅樓夢 / 第八十四回 / 試文字寶玉始提親 探驚風賈環重結怨)

Theoretically, *yidian* in (4.6) should be seen as denoting the differential of the degree. However, native speakers would agree that *yidian* in (4.6) functions as a mitigator. That is because in (4.6), the speaker is making criticism. In order not to make his statement to categorical, *yidian* is used to downtone the statement. Therefore, subjectification comes into play. Recalled that the meaning of ‘little’ of *yidian* strengthens in utterances with illocutionary forces, the meaning of ‘little’ is specified in (4.6) because the speaker produces some kind of criticism, which can be categorized into the representatives of illocutionary forces because the speaker believes that something is being the case and is negative (Searle 1976: 10). Therefore, since *yidian* in ‘A (le) *yidian*’ use denotes the differential of degree, now that the meaning of little of *yidian* strengthens, which also reduces the differential, the reading of mitigation produces.

To sum up, at the beginning, it is found that the meaning ‘little’ in *yidian* strengthens in negative constructions. Then, the strengthening of the meaning broadens into the utterances in which the speakers is expressing some kind of illocutionary force and subjectification or intersubjectification are involved in the utterances. With the flow of grammaticalization, *yidian* can function as the complement of adjectives as in the ‘A (le) *yidian*’ construction and denotes the differential of the degree. If this construction is employed in the utterances with illocutionary forces, the meaning ‘little’ strengthens, which leads to the minimization

of the differential denoted by *yidian*. Therefore, the mitigation meaning of *yidian* is on-record. The interaction between grammaticalization and subjectification can be shown in Figure 4.3:



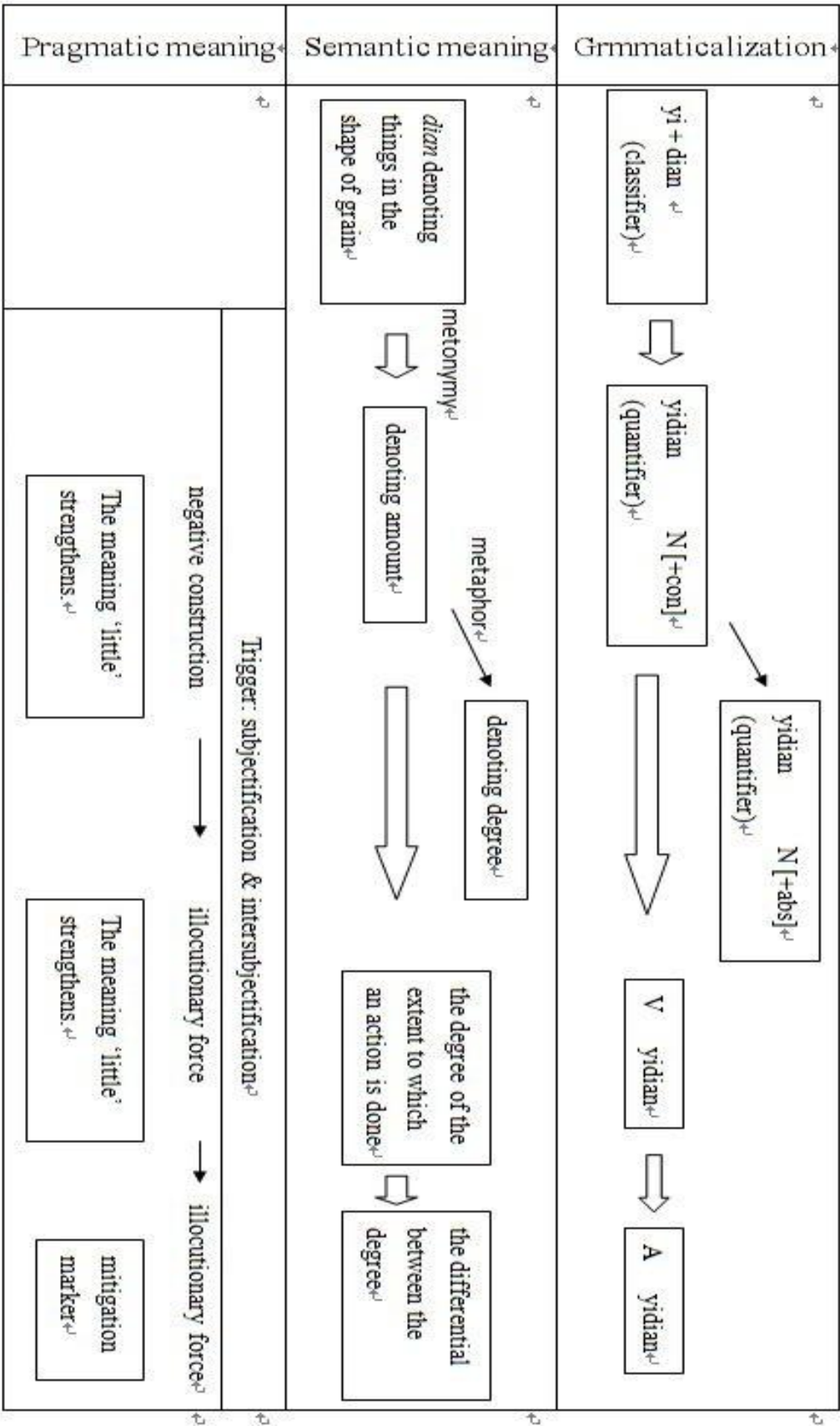


Figure 4.3 The grammaticalization and subjectification of *yidian*

Chapter 5 Conclusion

The thesis focuses the discussion on the grammaticalization of *yidian*. In terms of the development of grammaticalization, from the synchronic data, it is hypothesized that *yidian* is originally used as a quantifier. After host-class expansion, it develops into an extended quantifier that denotes the degree of the following noun semantically. Through a bridging stage, the ellipsis of ‘V *yidian* N’, and reanalysis, *yidian* can be used as the complement of the verb. In the ‘V *yidian*’ stage, the use of ‘V_t*yidian*’ appears first and the use of ‘V_i*yidian*’ occurs. In the ‘V *yidian*’ use, *yidian* denotes the degree to which an action is done. Following the use of ‘V *yidian*’, with the similarity between verbs and adjectives, *yidian* develops its use in ‘A *yidian*’ through analogy. There are two readings in the ‘A *yidian*’ construction, a dynamic one and a stative one. In both of the readings, the subject is either compared to itself or an unspecified object. Therefore, *yidian* refers to the differential between the different states denoted through the adjective.

The hypothesis of the development of the grammaticalization of *yidian* can be supported with diachronic data. From the diachronic data, it is observed that *yidian* develops from the combination of *yi* and *dian*, which is a classifier, in Tang Dynasty. After the trigger of metonymy, *yi* and *dian* combine and *yidian* is used as a quantifier in Song Dynasty. The host-class expansion of *yidian* happens in Yuan Dynasty, and semantically, *yidian* can denote the degree. In Qing Dynasty, *yidian* develops into the complement of verbs. At first, the use of ‘V *yidian*’ originates from the ellipsis of ‘V *yidian* N’. Then, with the context in which the noun is hard to retrieve, the construction ‘V_t*yidian*’ appears. The use further generalizes to intransitive verb, and thus, *yidian* functions as a complement in ‘V_i*yidian*’. Finally, with the similarity between verbs and adjectives, *yidian* can also be the complement of adjectives

through analogy. The development from ‘V *yidian*’ to ‘Adj. *yidian*’ is found in Qing Dynasty.

With the grammaticalization of *yidian*, it is found that when subjectification is involved, *yidian* will display pragmatic functions which leads to the change of the meanings of *yidian*. The paper first discusses the hedging function of *yidian* and how subjectivity and intersubjectivity trigger *yidian* to acquire the mitigating meaning in synchronic perspective. Before discussing the issue further, the constructions *yidian* may interpret as a mitigator are spelled out. It is observed that when making comments, the speaker may stand on two different point of views. If the speaker is standing on the perspective of reality or fact, the ‘(tai) A le *yidian*’ and ‘*bijiao* A *yidian*’ constructions with *yidian* being a mitigator can be used in the speaker’s comment. The adjectives in these constructions stand for the current states. The speaker can also make comments on the point of view of his or her expectation in mind, which s/he thinks more desirable than the current situation. In this case, the ‘A *yidian*’ construction can be produced. In this construction, the adjective is the desirable state that lives up to the speaker’s expectation, and since the desirable state is unrealized currently, the hearer or addressee can infer the implication ‘not A enough’.

Additionally, the ‘A *yidian*’ construction is usually used in imperatives. It is argued in the thesis that not every *yidian* in imperatives is meant to hedge the illocutionary force of the speakers. In addition to the result of the survey conducted to native speakers, the argument can be supported by the fact that *yidian* in imperatives of making orders is not the main role in downtoning the speaker’s illocutionary force. Furthermore, whether *yidian* displays the function of hedging in imperatives of making orders is quite context-based. Therefore, A better explanation may be that in some cases, when the speaker is making an order with ‘A *yidian*’ construction, he or she is expressing that the current

situation is really undersirable and needs improving immediately. Since the situation is urgent, *yidian* in imperatives of making orders won't sound like a mitigator because the speaker doesn't intend to hedge his or her tone.

After spelling out the constructions and briefly discussing *yidian* in imperatives, it is suggested in the thesis that subjectivity and intersubjectivity should be seen as the main factors that trigger *yidian* to display its hedging function. Besides, subjectivity and intersubjectivity can also account for why *yidian* displays its pragmatic function in one case but maintain its semantic meaning in another in the same construction.

Finally, it is discussed in diachronic perspective how subjectification and intersubjectification interact with the grammaticalization of *yidian*. In the beginning, it is found that the meaning 'little' in *yidian* strengthens in negative constructions. Then, the strengthening of the meaning broadens into the utterances in which the speakers is expressing some kind of illocutionary force and subjectification or intersubjectification are involved in the utterances. With the flow of grammaticalization, *yidian* can function as the complement of adjectives as in the 'A (le) *yidian*' construction and denotes the differential of the degree. If this construction is employed in the utterances with illocutionary forces, particularly the category of directives and representatives, the meaning 'little' strengthens, which leads to the minimization of the differential denoted by *yidian*. Therefore, the mitigation meaning of *yidian* is on-record.

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CHAMBER On line <http://cls.hs.yzu.edu.tw/HLM/home.htm>

Chinese and Academia Balanced Corpus of Modern Chinese

<http://www.sinica.edu.tw/ftms-bin/kiwi.sh>

The NCCU Corpus of Spoken Chinese <http://140.119.172.200/>

