Chapter 3

Degree Expressions and Adjectives

In this chapter, I attempt to describe the grammatical constraints that govern the modification of the adjective in an adjectival phrase. In doing so, I begin with categorizing the types of degree expressions that modify the adjectival phrase.

Following that, each type of degree expression is further categorized into subtypes. In general, adjectival constructions modify nouns and adjectives themselves can be modified with the use of degree expressions. These degree expressions are adverbs that serve to modify adjectival constructions by answering the question of "how much" and "to what extent".

The occurrence of certain degree expressions are in complementary distribution in that no two or more degree expressions can co-occur in the same environment to modify the same adjectival phrase. However, some degree expressions can be reduplicated to become intensifiers that modify the adjectival phrase with an even more intensified degree than their unreduplicated counterparts.

Degree expressions generally modify adjectival constructions. Their functions of modification serve a fundamental purpose in separating the adjective from the verb in Singaporean Hokkien.

3.1 Structure of the Adjectival Phrase

In Singaporean Hokkien, the adjectival phrase is composed of an adjectival head which can be modified by a degree expression. The degree expression occurs before the head adjective and its usage serves the purpose of denoting personal subjective extent measurement. In other words, degree expressions answer questions that ask "how much" and "to what extent". Consider the question and response examples as follows:

(43) *ʔi*^{33} *lwa*^{21} *swi*^{42} *a*^{21}

he (she) how good looking SFP

3P Q_{DEG} ADJ QPRT

'How good looking is he (she)'

(44) ∅ *tsin*^{33} *swi*^{42}

real good looking

ADV ADJ

'really good looking'

Token (43) asks the extent of beauty, the response is (44), which is comprised of only an adjective phrase. In casual conversation discourse a participant who has been introduced into a context can be omitted in the following contexts if the introduced participant is constantly being referred to without change in participants. Therefore, the elided subject can be retained from previous context via this abovementioned discourse phenomenon; zero anaphora.

Regarding the adjectival phrase response, it is already appropriate for the sole adjective *swi*^{42} 'good looking' to occur as a response to the extent question. The underlined degree expression, which is an adverb, *tsin*^{33} 'real' serves as a modifier to the adjective to indicate that the degree of beauty exceeds normal.

At this point, I deem it crucial to remind the reader that the adjectival phrase is a type of stative verb phrase. Consequently, negation can be applied to the degree expression as well as to the adjectival phrase itself. However, negation will be discussed further in Chapter 4.

3.2 Types of Degree Expressions

The adjectival phrase in Singaporean Hokkien takes on a preceding degree expression. Degree expressions that modify the adjectival phrase can be

subcategorized into three types as follows: 1) intensifier degree expressions, 2) comparative constructions and 3) reduplication.

3.3 Intensifier Degree Expressions

Intensifier degree expressions are adverbs that modify an adjectival phrase. They cannot occur independently and thus they need to be attached in front of the adjectival phrase to achieve grammaticality. Functionally, they exhibit the extent of the semantic content of the adjectival phrase which they modify.

Intensifier degree expressions in Singaporean Hokkien can be further categorized into three types as follows: intensifying intensifier degree expressions, moderated intensifier degree expressions and excessive intensifier degree expressions. These three types of degree expressions show different degrees of the extent of the modified adjectival phrase's semantic content.

3.3.1 Intensifying Intensifier Degree Expressions

This type of intensifier degree expression magnifies the semantic content of the modified adjectival phrase. The meaning of the adjectival phrase gets intensified in terms of degree as illustrated in (45).

(45) *ʔi^{33}* *tsin^{33} (tsya^{42})* *hwã^{21} hĩ^{42}*

he (she)	real	happy
3P	ADV	ADJ

'He (She) is really happy'

In (45), the adjectival phrase *hwã^{21} hĩ^{42}* 'happy' is modified by the intensifying intensified degree expression *tsin^{33} (tsya^{42})* 'really'. This degree expression can comprise of either *tsin^{33}* or *tsin^{33} tsya^{42}* with no difference in meaning. Furthermore, it can be reduplicated to indicate an even more intensified meaning as in (46).

(46) i^{33} $\underline{tsin^{33}\ tsya^{42}}$ $\underline{tsin^{33}\ tsya^{42}}$ $hwã^{21}\ hĩ^{42}$

he (she)	real	real	happy
3P	ADV	ADV	ADJ

'He (She) is really, really happy'

Example (46) employs a duplication of the intensifying intensified degree expression to bring about an increased intensification of the semantic content of the adjectival phrase. Intriguingly, the construction that can take on reduplication is the entire intensifying intensified degree expression $tsin^{33}\ tsya^{42}$ rather than $tsin^{33}$. Apart from $tsin^{33}\ tsya^{42}$, another intensifying intensified degree expression that can modify an adjectival phrase is $si^{24}\ pe^{21}$ as illustrated in (47).

(47) i^{33} $\underline{si^{24}\ pe^{21}}$ $haw^{42}\ lyan^{42}$

he (she)	die father	boastful
3P	ADV	ADJ

'He (She) is very boastful.'

The intensifying intensified degree expression used in (47) is $si^{24}\ pe^{21}$, which literally means 'dead father'. This expression is colloqiual in nature and is considered a layman's term which is deemed vulgar in all cultural contexts. However, a high level social intimacy can permit this intensifying intensified degree expression to occur. It functions no differently from $tsin^{33}\ tsya^{42}$ 'really'. In fact, it resembles $tsin^{33}\ tsya^{42}$ in that it can be reduplicated to achieve a even greater degree of intensification as well. Consider example (48):

(48) i^{33} $\underline{si^{24}\ pe^{21}}$ $\underline{si^{24}\ pe^{21}}$ $haw^{42}\ lyan^{42}$

he (she)	die father	die father	boastful
3P	ADV	ADV	ADJ

'He (She) is very, very boastful"

The intensifying intensified degree expressions $tsin^{33}\ tsya^{42}$ and $si^{24}\ pe^{21}$ can be used interchangably as permitted by the social factor of intimacy. The former is

appropriate in all situations and venues whereas the latter is limited to people with very close ties speaking in smaller conversation groups and is considered derogatory for unfamiliar people to hear. There is another intensifying intensified degree expression *peŋ*^{42} which roughly transliterates to 'very'. Consider token (49):

(49) *i*^{33} ***peŋ***^{42} *swi*^{42}

he (she) very good looking

3P ADV ADJ

'He (She) is very good looking'

The intensifying intensified degree expression *peŋ*^{42} 'very' can be interchanged with the two above mentioned intensifying intensified degree expressions. However, it cannot be reduplicated to increase intensification to another level like its disyllabic counterparts.

3.3.2 Moderated Intensifier Degree Expressions

Degree expressions of this type denote a certain degree of extent. The degree of extent is significantly that of lesser than intensifying intensified degree expressions. Consider the following examples (50), (51), and (52):

(50) *i*^{33} ***syoŋ***^{33} ***toŋ***^{33} *swi*^{42}

he (she) quite good looking

3P ADV ADJ

'He (She) is quite good looking'

The moderated intensifier degree expression *syoŋ*^{33} *toŋ*^{33} 'quite' in (50) modifies the adjective *swi*^{42} 'beautiful'. The degree of intensification of *syoŋ*^{33} *toŋ*^{33} is less than that of intensifying intensified degree expressions. There is another moderated intensifier degree expression illustrated in (51):

(51) i^{33} $ts^ha^{33}\ put^{33}\ to^{33}$ swi^{42}

he (she)	moderate	good looking
3P	ADV	ADJ

'He (She) is moderately good looking'

This moderated intensifier degree expression $ts^ha^{33}\ put^{33}\ to^{33}$ exhibits a neutral degree. Upon being modified by $ts^ha^{33}\ put^{33}\ to^{33}$, the adjective gets placed in the middle of the degree continuum and does not incline to either poles. The degree of $ts^ha^{33}\ put^{33}\ to^{33}$ 'moderate' is lesser than that of $syo\eta^{33}\ to\eta^{33}$ 'quite'. Another moderated intensifier degree expression is illustrated in (52):

(52) $t^hi\eta^{44}$ $tam^{21}\ po^{42}$ $kyam^{24}$

soup	a little	salty
N	ADV	ADJ

'The soup is a bit salty'

The moderated intensifier degree expression $tam^{21}\ po^{42}$ 'a little' in (52) is suspected to be derived from the adjectives tam^{21} meaning 'bland' and po^{42} meaning 'thin'. When used in a combination, these two adjectives change word class to become an adverbial degree expression. Their meanings also get transferred to the adjective being modified. The radial structure of the meanings of the adjectives tam^{21} 'bland' and po^{42} 'thin' which get carried to indicate degree is 'mitigation' or the degree of 'lessness'. The moderated intensifier degree expressions $syo\eta^{33}\ to\eta^{33}$ 'quite', $ts^ha^{33}\ put^{33}\ to^{33}$ 'moderate' and $tam^{21}\ po^{42}$ 'a little' can be placed on a continuum ranking from more intense to less intense as follows:

$syo\eta^{33}\ to\eta^{33}$	>	$ts^ha^{33}\ put^{33}\ to^{33}$	>	$tam^{21}\ po^{42}$
'quite'		'moderate'		'a little'

Figure 4. Continuum of Moderated Intensifier Degree Expressions

All of the abovementioned moderated intensifier degree expressions can be reduplicated. However, the reduplicated forms do not undergo intensity increase of meaning. Rather, they signify 'tentativeness' as portrayed in Tsao's study (2001).

Tentativeness, according to Tsao (2001:305) is a metalinguistic term used to describe a situation in which a state or action cannot be classified into a category.

This sense of 'tentativeness' is used in application to Southern Min adjectival reduplication to describe the semantic values of adjectives reduplicated in the XX pattern. This definition extends partially to Singaporean Hokkien, which is a regional variant of Southern Min. The XX pattern of reduplication as described in Section 2.3 when applied to monosyllabic adjectives can have two results; either the adjective becomes tentative or superlative in meaning.

Discourse context plays a vital role in determining which meaning is valid. However, reduplicated moderated intensifier degree expressions possess only tentative meaning. Therefore, the results of each of the moderated intensifier degree expressions in the continuum exhibited in Figure 4 upon undergoing reduplication are as follows:

a) *syoŋ^{33} toŋ^{33}* > *syoŋ^{33} toŋ^{33} syoŋ^{33} toŋ^{33}*

'quite' 'rather'

b) *ts^{h}a^{33} put^{33} to^{33}* > *ts^{h}a^{33} put^{33} to^{33} ts^{h}a^{33} put^{33} to^{33}*

'moderate' 'rather moderate'

c) *Tam^{21} po^{42}* > *tam^{21} po^{42} tam^{21} po^{42}*

'a little' 'rather little'

From examples a) to c), it is observed that the entire moderated intensifier degree expression is analyzed as a whole regardless of being disyllabic or trisyllabic. No part of the expression can be analyzed in isolation as the segments are fused together in order to function meaningfully. Hence, the patterns of moderated intensifier degree expressions upon undergoing reduplication yield the following results:

a) AB → ABAB
b) ABC → ABCABC

Reduplication of moderated intensifier degree expressions causes semantic content alteration; the meaning changes to a lesser extent.

3.3.3 Excessive Intensifier Degree Expressions

In Singaporean Hokkien, I have found only one excessive intensifier degree expression so far: *kwe^{42} t^{h}aw^{21}*. Consider example (53):

(53)	*i^{33}*	***kwe^{42} t^{h}aw^{21}***	***p^{h}ay^{24} k^{h}wan^{42}***	***lyaw^{42}***
	He (she)	over head	bad mannered	
	3P	ADV	ADJ	SFP
	'He (She) is too bad mannered'			

In (53), the adjective *p^{h}ay^{24} k^{h}wan^{42}* 'bad mannered' is modified by *kwe^{42} t^{h}aw^{21}*, which literally means 'over the head'. This degree expression intensifies adjectives with a negative connotation. An adjective that contains bad or undesirable meanings can take on this degree expression to magnify the degree of the negative feature exhibited.

I suspect that there may be more than one excessive intensifier degree expression to be discovered. Due to the limited data collection, future studies might reveal more of this kind of excessive intensifier degree expression.

3.4 Comparison Constructions

Apart from the implementing of intensifier degree expressions, Singaporean Hokkien also employs comparison constructions to exemplify degrees of adjectives. Chao (as in Cheng, 1979) claims that adjectives in Chinese lack morphological forms for describing comparatives and superlatives. As a consequence, comparisons are expressed by the usage of adverbs. Cheng (1979:31) acknowledges that Taiwanese is subject to Chao's observation as well. Similarly, Singaporean Hokkien also follows this observation as it is linguistically related to Taiwanese.

Comparative constructions in Singaporean Hokkien can be further classified into five subtypes: 1) equative comparison constructions, 2) figurative comparison

constructions, 3) differential comparison constructions, 4) comparative comparison constructions and 5) superlative comparison constructions.

3.4.1 Equative Comparison Constructions

When two entities have resembling qualities, an equative comparison construction is utilized to display their matching qualities. There are two constructions that show equative comparison. The first construction is illustrated in Figure 5 and the second one is illustrated in Figure 6.

N_1 COVERB N_2 COMPARISON DEGREE EXPRESSION ADJ

Figure 5. Grammatical Structure of Equative Comparison Constructions

An equative comparison between two nouns can be done according to the construction shown in Figure 5. N_1 is the subject of the comparison and N_2 is the entity that is being employed as the standard of comparison.

The coverb between the two nouns is a verb that has undergone semantic bleaching or grammaticalization and thus has lost its lexical meaning and starts to fulfill grammatical functions.

Coverbs are prevalent in serial verb languages such as Mandarin and Thai. Singaporean Hokkien, which is a Sinitic language related to Mandarin, has serial verb constructions and thus implements coverbs to fulfill a prepositional function in the serial verb phrase.

The comparison is a verb phrase that indicates the event of comparing. The degree expression is an adverb or adverbial phrase that demonstrates the equality of the nouns in comparison.

The adjective correlates to the equal degree of quality or feature in comparison between the two abovementioned nouns. Below is a sentence exemplifying equal comparison:

(54) *ʔah*^{33} *yaw*^{42} *ka*^{21} *ʔah*^{33} *hwi*^{33} *(pi*^{42} *kʰi*^{42} *lay*^{21}*)* *pẽ*^{21} *twa*^{21}

ah	Yaw	and	ah	Hwee	compare	rise	come	level	big
DIM	N_{PROP}	CoV	DIM	N_{PROP}	CoV	CoV	CoV	ADV	ADJ

'Ah Yaw and Ah Hwee upon compared are equally big'

The main event in (54) is the verb phrase of comparison is *pi*^{42} *kʰi*^{42} *lay*^{21}. This verb phrase is a serial verb construction consisting of 3 coverbs which are derived from the verbs *pi*^{42} 'to compare', *kʰi*^{42} 'to rise' and *lay*^{21} 'to come'.

The adverb *pẽ*^{21} 'level' denotes the equality of the physical attribute *twa*^{21} 'big'. This adverb can be reduplicated, becoming *pẽ*^{21} *pẽ*^{21} and the outcome of the reduplicated adverb bears no difference in meaning from the unreduplicated one.

There are two other adverbs that exhibit equality: *syo*^{21} *syaŋ*^{24} and *pẽ*^{21} *ʔyõ*^{21}. The meanings of these adverbs are not much different from the abovementioned adverb and from each other. Therefore I approximate their meanings transliterally as 'same' as all of them share the radial feature of the semantic quality 'sameness'.

Other than the standard structure, equative comparison constructions can omit the verb phrase of comparison *pi*^{42} *kʰi*^{42} *lay*^{21} on the condition that there is discourse context that can be retrieved. The abbreviated equative construction is illustrated in Figure 6 as follows:

N_1 COVERB N_2 DEGREE EXPRESSION ADJ

Figure 6. Grammatical Structure of Abbreviated Equative Comparison Constructions

As a result of applying discourse context realization that can be retrieved, an equative comparison construction can be formed by eliding the verb phrase to bring about an abbreviated equative comparison construction. Consider the following example:

(55) *gwa*^{42} *ka*^{21} *ʔah*^{33} *lyan*^{24} *syo*^{21} *syaŋ*^{21} *swi*^{42}

I	and	ah	Lian	same	good looking
1P	CoV	DIM	N_{PROP}	ADV	ADJ

'Ah Lian and I are equally good looking'

Without the verb phrase of comparison *pi*^{42} *kʰi*^{42} *lay*^{21}, this sentence is still understandable to the native speaker. There is actually no need for a verb phrase construction to be uttered. Grammatically, this phenomenon can be explained by evidence (see Section 2.2) that the adjective phrase is a verb phrase and therefore is the predicate of the two noun phrases.

In circumstances where the adjective has already been established, it is possible to omit the adjective as well. Participants of the conversation are well-informed of the adjective being referred to in comparison and thus will not get confused.

There is another intriguing observation about equative comparison constructions; they can take on negation and the negative particles occur preceding the adverb. More details shall be discussed in Chapter 4.

3.4.2 Figurative Comparison Constructions

When an entity is being compared to another in terms of figurative resemblance, a figurative comparison construction is employed to demonstrate that figurative similarity. Illustrated below is the structure of a figurative comparison construction:

N_1 ADJ COVERB N_2

Figure 7. Grammatical Structure of Figurative Comparison Constructions A

The figurative comparison construction as demonstrated in Figure 7 is composed of the following grammatical elements: 1) the subject of the figurative comparison construction (N_1), 2) the adjective that is figuratively portrayed (ADJ), 3) the figurative comparison coverb phrase, in which there are two types of figurative comparison coverbs; *ka*^{42} *na*^{42} and *tsʰin*^{33} *tsʰyũ*^{21}, and 4) the entity that is the standard of the comparison (N_2). Consider the given example:

(56) *ʔah*^{33} *han*^{42} *puy*^{24} *ka*^{42} *na*^{42} *ti*^{33}

ah Han fat as pig

DIM N_{PROP} ADJ CoV N

'Ah Han is as fat as a pig'

In (56), the first noun phrase *ʔah*^{33} *han*^{42} is being compared to the second *ti*^{33}. In reality, the first noun phrase is a human whereas the second is an animal. The two noun phrases belong to two different species of animals. However, the human gets assigned a physical characteristic, which is the state of being fat. That particular characteristic is a stereotypical physical trait of the pig. Therefore, the adjective *puy*^{24} 'fat' is followed by the coverb phrase *ka*^{42} *na*^{42} to exemplify a figurative comparison. In other words, the human is metaphorically referred to a pig due to his excessively obese physique.

Other than utilizing the coverb phrase *ka*^{42} *na*^{42}, a figurative comparison construction can be demonstrated by another coverb phrase as well: *tsʰin*^{33} *tsʰyũ*^{21}. This coverb phrase can be used in complementary distribution with *ka*^{42} *na*^{42} to express figurative comparisons without any difference in meaning. There is another alternative construction that can be used to express figurative comparison as in Figure 8:

N_1 COVERB N_2 DEGREE EXPRESSION ADJ

Figure 8. Grammatical Structure of Figurative Comparison Constructions B

The subject of the figurative comparison (N_1) gets compared with the standard entity (N_2) by employment of the figurative comparison coverb phrase *ka*^{42} *na*^{42}, which is inserted between the two noun phrases.

Following the standard entity of comparison (N_2), a degree expression *an*^{33} *ni*^{42} is positioned preceding and modifying the adjective which is the characteristic shared metaphorically by the two abovementioned noun phrases. The degree expression *an*^{33} *ni*^{42} approximately means 'to the extent of' or 'like this'.

Part of the degree expression, particularly *an*^{33} is described by Pulleyblank (1995:4) as a Classical Chinese interrogative pronoun glossed as 'how?' or "where?'. The first

instance of the meaning of *an*^{33} Classical Chinese corresponds to that of Singaporean Hokkien. Based on this piece of evidence, I draw a conclusion for now that *an*^{33} *ni*^{42} is a degree expression as both the Singaporean Hokkien and Classical Chinese *an*^{33} share a radial structure: 'degree of extent'. Illustrated below is an example of the alternative figurative comparison construction:

(57) *ʔah*^{33} *hɔŋ*^{33} *ka*^{42} *na*^{42} *pʰɔ*^{21} *sat*^{21} *an*^{33} *ni*^{42} *ho*^{42}

ah	Hong	As	Bodhisattva	like this	good
DIM	N_{PROP}	CoV	N	ADV	ADJ

'Ah Hong is as kind as the Goddess of Mercy'

In (57), the person *ʔah*^{33} *hɔŋ*^{33} is being figuratively compared to the Goddess of Mercy. The radial structure that is being discussed is the benevolent characteristic; 'kindness'. The former noun phrase who is a person gets metaphorically referred to as being a Goddess of Mercy because of her desirable characteristic, kindness.

Both structures of figurative comparison posited in Figure 7and Figure 8 can be used interchangeably with no difference in meaning. The former is more often used as it is shorter, thus fulfilling the balance between clarity and conciseness. Furthermore, the former construction is relatively productive. There are a significant number of figurative or idiomatic expressions that can be used to describe a characteristic of a noun phrase, which will not be covered in this thesis any further.

3.4.3 Differential Comparison Constructions

To express a difference between two entities in Singaporean Hokkien, differential comparisons are utilized. There are two ways to conduct differential comparison. The first method is to conduct differential comparison without degree of difference whereas the second method is to do so with degree of difference. Moreover, the structures of differential comparison will slightly vary according to the occurrence of the adjective in the differential comparison construction.

3.4.3.1 Differential Comparison without Degree of Difference

In Singaporean Hokkien, a differential comparison construction can be constituted without explicit reference to the degree of the compared entities. Structures of

differential comparison can be subcategorized by adhering to the grammatical function of the adjective.

An adjective influences the structure of a differential comparison by occupying one of the four grammatical functions: 1) a main predicate, 2) a verb object modifier, 3) a verb modifier and 4) a verb complement.

When the adjective functions as a main predicate, the differential comparison construction without degree of difference is illustrated as follows:

N_1 *(k^{h}a^{33})* ADJ *kwe^{42}* N_2

Figure 9. Grammatical Structure of Differential Comparison Constructions without Degree of Difference with Adjective Functioning as Main Predicate A

In Figure 9, N_1 is the subject of the construction. It is the compared entity of which the following adjective functions as the predicate, indicating the characteristic that is being compared.

The degree expression *k^{h}a^{33} - kwe^{42}* circumfixes the adjective *kwãy^{24}* 'tall'. This degree expression functions as an adverb showing difference between the compared entity (N_1) and the entity being used as the standard comparison (N_2). An example sentence demonstrating differential comparison without degree of difference is illustrated below:

(58)	***gwa^{42}***	***(k^{h}a^{33})***	***kwãy^{24}***	***kwe^{42}***	***li^{42}***
	I	more	Tall	over	you
	1P	ADV	ADJ	ADV	2P

'I am taller than you'

In (58), the subject is a first person pronoun *gwa^{42}* being compared to the entity of standard comparison, the second person pronoun *li^{42}*. These two persons differ in the physical characteristic: height. This characteristic is being predicated, thus the adjective *kwãy^{24}* 'tall' functions as a verb and takes on the circumfixing degree adverb indicating differential extent *k^{h}a^{33} - kwe^{42}* 'over'. This first part of the circumfixing adverb '*k^{h}a^{33}*' can be omitted. The second part of the circumfixing

adverb '*kwe*^{42}' is actually a verb meaning 'to cross' as in crossing a road as in the sentence *kwe*^{42} *be*^{24} *ts*^{h}*ya*^{33} *lɔ*^{21}. In this context, it denotes difference in comparison with the subject exceeding the compared entity.

Upon taking a closer look at the phrase *kwãy*^{24} *kwe*^{42} 'to be taller than (someone)', this phrase can also be analyzed as a serial verb construction. This is due to the fact that both of the components of this phrase can be seen as verbs. The adjective *kwãy*^{24} can contain a predicative meaning 'to be taller' and the verb *kwe*^{42} means 'to cross' respectively.Notwithstanding, I maintain my analysis that this phrase is an adjectival phrase comprised of an adjective modified by a degree adverb. To substantiate my claim, I hereby posit examples from Thai below:

(T-01) ***T*^{h}*əə*^{33}** ***swey*^{24}**

she, you beautiful

3P, 2P ADJ

'She (you)' is (are) beautiful'

(T-02) ***naŋ*^{24} *sɨɨ*^{24}** ***lem*^{42}** ***nii*^{45}** ***dii*^{33}**

Book this good

N CLF DEM ADJ

'This book is good'

(T-03) ***p*^{h}*uu*^{42} *yiŋ*^{24}** ***k*^{h}*on*^{33}** ***nan*^{45}** ***swey*^{24}*** ***dii*^{33}***

female human that beautiful good

N CLF DEM ADJ ADV

'That woman is somewhat beautiful"

For examples (T-01) and (T-02) some schools of grammar would analyze the adjectives *swey*^{24} 'beautiful' and *dii*^{33} 'good' as verbs to conform to a subject-predicate structure. As demonstrated in Section 2.2 (Distinguishing adjectives from verbs), Thai adjectives behave identically to Singaporean Hokkien adjectives in that they

can be predicated. Furthermore, they can be negated which is evidence that adjectives are somehow similar to verbs in both Thai and Singaporean Hokkien. Despite the fact that the adjective *dii*^{33} 'good' is analyzed as a predicated adjective in (T-02), it is analyzed as a degree adverb in (T-03). The adjective 'good' undergoes grammaticalization when it follows an adjective and thus the original meaning 'good' gets weaken to 'somewhat'. The radial structure shared by the words *dii*^{33} 'good' in examples (T-02) and (T-03) is 'degree'.

This instance of grammaticalization also occurs in Singaporean Hokkien in (58). The verb *kwe*^{42} 'to cross' undergoes grammaticalization when it follows the adjective *kwãy*^{24} 'tall'. The meaning of the verb gets reduced from a concrete action to a more abstract manner which in this case enters the domain 'to exceed'. What remains is the radial feature 'moving from a place to another'. It is the entity 'place' that becomes more abstract in the grammaticalization process. Because *kwe*^{42} 'to cross' modifies the adjective *kwãy*^{24} 'tall', it is analyzed rather as an adverb denoting degree 'of exceeding' and thus achieving the meaning of 'over' in example (58). From the examples presented above, I maintain my analysis that the phrase *kwãy*^{24} *kwe*^{42} is an adjectival phrase rather than a serial verb construction.

There is another method to describe differential comparison without degree of difference while retaining the adjective as the main predicate. Consider Figure 10 illustrated as follows:

N_1 *pi*^{24} N_2 *k*^{h}*a*^{33} ADJ

Figure 10. Grammatical Structure of Differential Comparison Constructions without Degree of Difference with Adjective Functioning as Main Predicate B

In Figure 10, the subject (N_1) is being predicated by the construction *pi*^{24} N_2 k^{h}a^{33} ADJ which is a coverb *pi*^{423} 'compare' followed by a noun phrase and an adjectival phrase respectively. The noun phrase that follows the coverb is the entity used as the standard of comparison (N_2). The compared entity is in turn followed by an adjectival phrase which is comprised of the degree expression *k*^{h}*a*^{33} and the adjective respectively. An example sentence is given as follows:

[3] Both *pi*^{24} and *pi*^{42} refer to the coverb of comparison 'compare'. Their tones vary due to tone sandhi whereas their meaning do not vary.

(59) *li*^{42} *pi*^{24} *gwa*^{42} *k*^{h}*a*^{33} *puy*^{24}

you compare I more fat

2P CoV 1P ADV ADJ

'You are fatter than me'

In (59), the first entity *li*^{42} 'you' is being perceived as *k*^{h}*a*^{33} *puy*^{24} 'more fat' than the second *gwa*^{42} 'I'. It is noteworthy here that the degree expression *k*^{h}*a*^{33} is obligatory and therefore cannot be elided from the construction. In practice, sentences constituted according to (58) and (59) are considered identical. In English, both constructions yield the same transliteration: 'N_1 is more ADJ than N_2.'

When the adjective functions as the modifier of the verb object, the differential comparison construction without degree of difference is illustrated as follows:

N_1 V *pi*^{42} N_2 *k*^{h}*a*^{33} ADJ *(ʔe*^{21}*)* N_{OBJ}

Figure 11. Grammatical Structure of Differential Comparison Constructions without Degree of Difference with Adjective Functioning as Verb Object Modifier

In Figure 11, there is a main verb in the construction. Comparison is indicated by the coverb *pi*^{42} and the degree of difference is demonstrated by the degree expression *k*^{h}*a*^{33}. The adjectival phrase modifies the main verb by functioning as an object. Consider the following example:

(60) *gwa*^{42} *k*^{h}*i*^{42} *pi*^{42} *li*^{42} *k*^{h}*a*^{33} *tswey*^{21} *(ʔe*^{21}*)* *ts*^{h}*u*^{21}

I rise compare you more many of house

1P V CoV 2P ADV ADJ NOM N

'I built more houses than you did'

In (60), the comparison is about the act of 'building houses' *k*^{h}*i*^{42} *ts*^{h}*u*^{21}. The first noun phrase *gwa*^{42} 'I' is the subject of the predication of building houses. The verb *k*^{h}*i*^{42} 'to build' follows the noun phrase and functions as the main predicate of the sentence. The coverb *pi*^{42} 'compare' denotes comparison and precedes the second noun phrase *li*^{42} 'you' which is the standard of comparison.

The degree expression k^ha^{33} 'more' depicts the difference of comparison and the adjective *tswey*^{21} 'many' modifies the following object noun phrase ts^hu^{21} 'house'. The object noun phrase ts^hu^{21} can optionally take on the nominalizer $ʔe^{21}$. Other than the nominalizer $ʔe^{21}$, a classifier can also precede the noun in this type of construction. Consider the following construction:

(61)	*gwa*^{42}	k^hi^{42}	*pi*^{42}	*li*^{42}	k^ha^{33}	*tswey*^{21}	(*keŋ*^{33})	ts^hu^{21}
	I	rise	compare	you	more	many		house
	1P	V	CoV	2P	ADV	ADJ	CLF	N

'I built more houses than you did'

In (61), the free translation 'I built more houses than you did' can be expressed in 3 ways: without any word between the adjective and noun object, with a nominalizer between the adjective and the noun object, and with a classifier between the adjective and the noun object. All of the above methods do not yield difference in meaning. Rather, they are merely varieties of expressing difference in comparison.

When the adjective functions as the modifier of the main verb, the differential comparison construction without degree of difference is illustrated as follows:

N_1 *pi*^{42} N_2 k^ha^{33} ADJ V

Figure 12. Grammatical Structure of Differential Comparison Constructions without Degree of Difference with Adjective Functioning as Main Verb Modifier

The constructions as of Figure 12 and Figure 11 are similar in that they both contain a main verb. However, the adjective in Figure 11 does not function like the one in Figure 12. The former functions as a modifier of the verb object whereas the latter functions as a modifier of the main verb. Consider the example sentence as follows:

(62) *li*^{42} *pi*^{24} *ʔi*^{33} *k*^{h}*a*^{33} *tsa*^{42} *lay*^{24}

you compare he (her) more early come

2P CoV 3P ADV ADJ[4] V

'You came earlier than him (her)'

In (62), the adjective *tsa*^{42} 'early' modifies the verb *lay*^{24} 'to come'. The differential comparison is demonstrated by the occurrence of the coverb *pi*^{24} 'compare' and the degree difference adverb *k*^{h}a^{33} 'more'.

When the adjective functions as a verb complement, the differential comparison construction without degree of difference is illustrated as follows:

N_1 V *pi*^{42} N_2 *k*^{h}*a*^{33} ADJ

Figure 13. Grammatical Structure of Differential Comparison Constructions without Degree of Difference with Adjective Functioning as Verb Complement A

There are two ways to construct a sentence indicating differential comparison without a degree of difference with the adjective functioning as a verb complement. The difference between the two varieties of constructions lies in the occurrence of the verb. In Figure 13, the verb follows the entity that is used to compare (N_1). Consider the following example sentence:

(59) *ʔi*^{33} *tsyaʔ*^{21} *pi*^{24} *li*^{42} *k*^{h}*a*^{33} *tsyoʔ*^{21}

he (she) eat compare you more less

3P V CoV 2P ADV ADJ

'He (she) eats less than you do'

In (59), the adjective *tsyoʔ*^{21} 'less' is the complement of the main verb *tsyaʔ*^{21} 'to eat'. The differential comparison between N_1 *ʔi*^{33} and N_2 *li*^{42} is indicated by the comparison

[4] I have classified *tsa*^{42} 'early' as an adjective which may appear unorthodox as in the example sentence the word 'early' is actually a modifier of the verb *lay*^{24} 'come'. Modifiers of verbs are normally classified as adverbs. However, in Singaporean Hokkien adjectives can modify nouns as well as verbs.

coverb pi^{24} and the differential adverb k^ha^{33}. An alternative method to bring about this type of differential comparison is shown in the following figure:

N_1 pi^{42} N_2 V k^ha^{33} ADJ

Figure 14. Grammatical Structure of Differential Comparison Constructions without Degree of Difference with Adjective Functioning as Verb Complement B

The verb can also be preceded by the standard entity of comparison (N_2) as shown in Figure 14. As a result, a sentence constituted according to this construction yields the same outcome.

(64)	$ʔi^{33}$	pi^{24}	li^{42}	$tsyaʔ^{21}$	k^ha^{33}	$tsyoʔ^{21}$
	he (she)	compare	you	eat	more	less
	3P	CoV	2P	V	ADV	ADJ

'He (she) eats less than you do'

As shown in (64), the free translation's meaning is not different to that of (59) at all. The only difference is the occurrence of the verb that either follows the comparing entity or follows the entity of standard comparison. However, the focus is on the adjective that functions as a complement to the verb and therefore the position of the verb does not affect the meaning of the constructions.

3.4.3.2 Differential Comparison with Degree of Difference

In Section 3.4.3.1, differential comparison without degree of difference was demonstrated. In this section, differential comparison with degree of difference is discussed. Degree of difference between the compared entities can be indicated by a quantative expression or an adjectival phrase denoting quantity. Quantitative expressions are expressions that exhibit quantity. The construction of a quantitative expression is as follows:

NUMERAL $N_{MEASURE}$

As the construction suggests, quantitative expressions are demonstrated by noun phrases denoting measure. I support this claim by stating the fact that noun-like constructions can take on numerals (Givón, 1984:60).

Apart from quantitative expressions, adjectival phrases can denote measure as well. Adjectival phrases that indicate measures are of those which describe number such as 'many' or 'little'. There are a variety of constructions that exhibit differential comparison with degree of difference. Consider Figure 15 as follows:

N_1 pi^{24} N_2 ADJ ke^{33} QNT

Figure 15. Grammatical Structure of Differential Comparison Constructions with Degree of Difference A

The compared entity (N_1) is the subject of the construction. The optional coverb pi^{24} demonstrates comparison. N_2 is the standard entity of comparison. The adjective indicates the characteristic of comparison being used. Following the adjective is the coverb denoting difference of degree ke^{33} which literally means 'to add'. The coverb ke^{33} is in turn followed by a quantitative expression (QNT) which is explicit reference to the degree of the difference between the compared entities N_1 and N_2. Consider the example sentence given below:

(65)	*ʔi*^{33}	*pi*^{24}	*li*^{42}	*taŋ*^{21}	*ke*^{33}	*gɔ*^{21}	*pɔŋ*^{21}
	he (she)	compare	you	heavy	add	five	pound
	3P	CoV	2P	ADJ	CoV	NUM	$N_{MEASURE}$

'He (She) is five pounds heavier than you are'

In (65), the degree of comparison in discussion is the weight domain. Weight can be measured and thus is expressed as an adjective *taŋ*^{21}. Explicit reference to the comparison of weight is exhibited as a numeral-measure noun construction *gɔ*^{21} *pɔŋ*^{21} 'five pounds'.

The difference of degree is demonstrated in the form of the serial verb construction *pi*^{24} N_2 ADJ *ke*^{33} 'compared to N_2, (N_1) is more ADJ than'. Both *pi*^{24} and *ke*^{33} are coverbs which can also function as main verbs meaning 'to compare' and 'to add' respectively. For the latter coverb *ke*^{33}, a more appropriate transliteration should be 'to exceed'. Therefore, the free translation should be rendered either as 'He (She) exceeds you by five pounds in terms of weight' or 'He (She) is heavier then you by five pounds' for a more logical understanding.

Apart from the construction exhibited in Figure 15, differential comparison with degree of difference can be done with an alternatisve method as well. Consider Figure 16 as follows:

N_1 ADJ *ke*^{33} N_2 QNT

Figure 16. Grammatical Structure of Differential Comparison Constructions with Degree of Difference B

The variety of differential comparison with degree of difference exhibited in Figure 16 is slightly different from Figure 15. The coverb *pi*^{24} is omitted and the adjective is predicated instead. The result is a different construction but still yielding the same purpose. Consider the following example:

(66) ***ʔah*^{33}** ***ts*^{h}*wan*^{44}** ***kwãy*^{24}** ***ke*^{33}** ***gwa*^{42}** ***tam*^{21} *po*^{42}***

ah	Chuan	tall	exceed	I	a little
DIM	N_{PROP}	ADJ	CoV	1P	N_{QNT}

'Ah Chuan is a bit taller than I am. '

As demonstrated in (66), differential comparison with degree of difference explicitly expressed can be done without the use of a coverb. The meaning of the sentence does not get altered with or without the coverb. In the abovementioned token, the quantitative expression that occurs is not a numeral-measure noun but an adverb. However, as it occurs in the QNT slot of the construction the adverb is analyzed as a quantitative noun instead.

Apart from the two methods of demonstrating differential comparison with degree of difference mentioned above, there is another alternative. Consider Figure 17 illustrated below:

N_1 ADJ *kwe*^{42} N_2 QNT

Figure 17. Grammatical Structure of Differential Comparison Constructions with Degree of Difference C

Compared to Figure 16, Figure 17 differs only in the coverb *kwe*^{42} 'to cross (a limit)'. This coverb is similar to *ke*^{33} 'to add' in that both of them exhibit characteristics of

exceeding limits of an adjective used in comparison. Example (67) is given below in elaboration:

(67) *ʔa*^{33} *gek*^{44} *kway*^{24} *kwe*^{42} *ʔa*^{33} *heŋ*^{44} *sã*^{33} *ts*^{h}*un*^{21}

ah	Gek	tall	over	ah	Heng	three	inch
DIM	N_{PROP}	ADJ	CoV	DIM	N_{PROP}	NUM	$N_{MEASURE}$

'Ah Gek exceeds Ah Heng three inches in terms of height'

The free translation in (67) may seem odd. A more idiomatic translation of this sentence should be 'Ah Gek is three inches taller than Ah Heng'. In examples (65), (66) and (67), the degree of difference is explicity demonstrated in the form of noun-like constructions. Constructions of this sort limit the occurence of adjectives that can be used. They need to be those that can be measured. Thus, this observation leads to the assumption that quantitative expressions are utilized for the measurement of characteristics that are more specific in nature.

3.4.4 Comparative Comparison Constructions

Differential comparative constructions as discussed in Section 3.4.3 are used to express differences between two entities with or without explicit reference to the degree of differences. This section is about comparative comparison constructions.

There is a word used as a comparative degree expression which is the word *ko*^{42}. This degree expression functions similarly to an intensifier in that it takes the degree of difference to another level of difference. In other words, it resembles the comparative form in English according to the following example:

(E-01)

he	is	even	taller	than	you	are
3P-masc-SG	COP	ADV_{COMP}	ADJ	PRT_{COMP}	2P	COP

'He is even taller than you are'

Notice the underlined comparative adverb 'even' in (E-01). The word *ko*^{42} functions most closely to it to formulate a comparative comparison construction in Singaporean Hokkien.

There are several methods of constituting a comparative comparison construction depending on how the adjective functions grammatically: 1) as the main predicate, 2) as a modifier of the object of the verb, 3) as a modifier of the main verb, or 4) as a verb complement. Consider Figure 18 as follows:

N_1 ko^{42} k^ha^{33} ADJ kwe^{42} N_2

Figure 18. Grammatical Structure of Comparative Comparison Constructions with the Adjective Functioning as the Main Predicate

As shown in Figure 18, a comparative comparison construction with the adjective functioning as the main predicate can be formulated by inserting ko^{42} after the comparing entity (N_1) in a differential comparison construction. For the sake of clarification, consider (69) as given below:

(69)	gwa^{42}	ko^{42}	k^ha^{33}	puy^{24}	kwe^{42}	li^{42}
	I	even	compare	fat	over	you
	1P	ADV_{COMP}	ADV	ADJ	CoV	2P

'I am even fatter than you are'

As demonstrated in (69), the adjective puy^{24} is the main predicate of the sentence. In fact, this sentence resembles the differential comparison construction one presented in (58). The only difference is that (69) has incorporated the comparative adverb ko^{42} 'even'. Thus the differential comparison is altered to a comparative comparison sentence.

A differential comparison construction with the adjective functioning as the modifier of the object of the verb can also be transformed into a comparative comparison construction. Consider the following figure:

N_1 pi^{24} N_2 V ko^{42} k^ha^{33} ADJ $(ʔe^{21})$ N_{OBJ}

Figure 19. Grammatical Structure of Comparative Comparison Constructions with the Adjective Functioning as Verb Object Modifier

The construction in Figure 19 is slightly varied from the one in Figure 11. The difference is the insertion of the comparative adverb ko^{42} 'even' before the adjective

which functions as a modifier of the noun which in turn functions as the object of the verb.

(70)	*ʔi*^{33}	*pi*^{24}	*li*^{42}	*tsyaʔ*^{21}	*ko*^{42}	*k*^{h}*a*^{33}	*tswe*^{21}	*(ʔe*^{21}*)*	*piŋ*^{21}
	he (she)	compare	you	eat	even	more	more	of	rice
	3P	CoV	2P	V	ADV_{COMP}	ADV	ADJ	NOM	N_{OBJ}

'He (She) eats even more rice than you do'

Example (70) is actually a differential comparison construction that has incorporated the comparative adverb *ko*^{42} 'even' to formulate a comparative comparison construction. In other words, this example carries the differential comparative to another level of difference which is intensified.

A differential comparison construction with the adjective functioning as the modifier of the main verb can be transformed into a comparative comparison construction as well. Consider the following figure:

N_1 *pi*^{24} N_2 *ko*^{42} *k*^{h}*a*^{33} ADJ V

Figure 20. Grammatical Structure of Comparative Comparison Constructions with the Adjective Functioning as Main Verb Modifier A

As suggested in Figure 20, this construction is actually a differential comparison sentence that has inserted the comparative adverb *ko*^{42} 'even' after the standard entity of comparison (N_2) to indicate an intensified level of differential comparison.

Apart from the construction displayed in Figure 20, there is another alternative for formulating a comparative comparison construction with the adjective modifying the main verb. This is accomplished by inserting the comparative adverb *ko*^{42} 'even' after the comparing entity (N_1). Consider Figure 21 as follows:

N_1 *ko*^{42} *pi*^{24} N_2 *(k*^{h}*a*^{33}*)* ADJ V

Figure 21. Grammatical Structure of Comparative Comparison Constructions with the Adjective Functioning as Main Verb Modifier B

Figure 21 differs from Figure 20 in the position of the comparative adverb *ko*^{42} 'even' and the obligation of the intensifying adverb *k*^{h}*a*^{33} 'more'. The two constructions are

more or less identical to each other in terms of meaning regardless of their slightly different grammatical structure. For the sake of clarity, examples (71) and (72) are given as follows:

(71) *ʔi*^{33} *pi*^{24} *li*^{42} *ko*^{42} *k*^{h}*a*^{33} *ban*^{21} *kya*^{24}

he (she)	compare	you	even	more	slow	walk
3P	CoV	2P	ADV_{COMP}	ADV	ADJ	V

'He (She) walks even slower than you do'

(72) *ʔi*^{33} *ko*^{42} *pi*^{24} *li*^{42} (*k*^{h}*a*^{33}) *ban*^{21} *kya*^{24}

he (she)	even	compare	you	more	slow	walk
3P	ADV_{COMP}	CoV	2P	ADV	ADJ	V

'He (She) walks even slower than you do'

Upon observing the examples (71) and (72), it is found that the occurrence of the comparative adverb *ko*^{42} 'even' after the comparing entity (N_1) or after the standard entity of comparison (N_2) results in an identical free translation. The two sentences are merely variants of a comparative comparison construction.

A differential comparison construction with the adjective functioning as the complement of the verb can be transformed into a comparative comparison construction. Consider Figure 22 given below:

N_1 V *pi*^{24} N_2 *k*^{h}*a*^{33} *ko*^{42} ADJ

Figure 22. Grammatical Structure of Comparative Comparison Constructions with the Adjective Functioning as Verb Complement A

As suggested in Figure 22, this construction is a variant of comparative comparison with the adjective functioning as a complement of the verb. The position of the verb is central to the analysis of this type of comparative comparison. Illustrated below is the construction which is given in comparison to the construction given in Figure 22:

N_1 pi^{24} N_2 V k^ha^{33} ko^{42} ADJ

Figure 23. Grammatical Structure of Comparative Comparison Constructions with the Adjective Functioning as Verb Complement B

The comparative adverb ko^{42} 'even' is inserted before the adjective phrase in both varieties. The only difference in the constructions in Figure 22 and Figure 23 is the occurrence of the coverb pi^{24} 'to compare', which either gets inserted after the comparing entity (N_1) or after the standard entity of comparison (N_2) respectively. Examples (73) and (74) are given in elaboration of the abovementioned constructions:

(73) ***gwa*^{42} *tyaw*^{21} *pi*^{24} *li*^{42} *ko*^{42} *k*^{h}*a*^{33} *hiŋ*^{21}**

I	jump	compare	you	even	more	far
1P	V	CoV	2P	ADV_{COMP}	ADV	ADJ

'I jump even farther than you do'

(74) ***gwa*^{42} *pi*^{24} *li*^{42} *tyaw*^{21} *ko*^{42} *k*^{h}*a*^{33} *hiŋ*^{21}**

I	compare	you	jump	even	more	far
1P	CoV	2P	V	ADV_{COMP}	ADV	ADJ

'I jump even farther than you do'

As examples (73) and (74) suggest, the comparative adverb ko^{42} 'even' gets inserted before the adjectival phrase to transform a differential comparison sentence into a comparative comparison sentence. Regardless of the position of the coverb pi^{24} 'to compare', the meaning of each sentence is identical. Moreover, it is observed that the coverb of comparison pi^{24} always co-occurs with the second person pronoun li^{42}. The difference in the occurrence results in a slightly varied structure of comparative comparison construction.

Apart from the different levels of comparison discussed: equative comparison, figurative comparison, differential comparison and comparative comparison constructions, there is a superlative comparison construction. This last type of comparison shall be discussed in Section 3.4.5.

3.4.5 Superlative Comparison Constructions

Sections 3.4.1, 3.4.2, 3.4.3 and 3.4.4 discussed comparison constructions of the equative, figurative, differential and comparative sort. There is another sort of comparative construction worthy of discussion; the superlative comparative construction.

In Singaporean Hokkien, superlative comparative constructions are utilized for expressing qualities that are considered on top of the differential comparison continuum. In other words, entities that are considered 'the most' in terms of a characteristic are described by using the following superlative comparative construction:

ADV CL	SUPERLATIVE COMPARISON
(NP *pi*^{24} *kʰi*^{42} *lay*^{21})	N_1 (*si*^{21}) *syaŋ*^{21} (*te*^{21} *ʔit*^{42}) ADJ

Figure 24. Grammatical Structure of Superlative Comparison Constructions

To formulate a superlative comparison sentence, the construction illustrated in Figure 24 is utilized. NP stands for a noun phrase, which usually refers to at least two entities in comparison. The noun phrase can either be a numeral-classifier-noun construction, for instance, *niŋ*^{21} *ʔe*^{21} *laŋ*^{24} 'two persons', a collective noun *loŋ*^{24} *tsoŋ*^{42} 'all', or a compound noun construction consisting of two entities with a coverb occurring in between N_1 *ka*^{21} N_2 'N_1 and N_2'. Following the noun phrase is the verb phrase comprised of the coverbs *pi*^{24} 'to compare' *kʰi*^{42} 'to rise' and *lay*^{24} 'to come'. The head of the verb phrase is the coverb *pi*^{24} 'to compare' as the semantic content of the coverb is retained whereas the coverbs *kʰi*^{42} 'to rise' and *lay*^{24} 'to come' have undergone grammaticalization and thus have lost their lexical meanings to become part of the verb phrase *pi*^{24} *kʰi*^{42} *lay*^{21} 'compared together'.

The noun phrase and serial verb construction functon as a unit to form an adverbial clause of comparison. N_1 is the entity that functions as the subject of the main clause which describes the superlative characteristic. The copula *si*^{21} 'is' functions as a main verb which requires an adjective that functions as an object complement. The adverbial phrase *syaŋ*^{21} *te*^{21} *ʔit*^{42}, transliterated as '(being the) same as the most first', functions as the superlative comparison degree expression of the adjective. The adverb *syaŋ*^{21}, transliterated as 'same', is actually a derivation of the equative comparison adverb *syo*^{21} *syaŋ*^{24} which is transliterated as 'same' as well. In the

context of superlative comparison, this adverb is utilized figuratively to reflect equality of an entity to having an extreme characteristic.

The adverbial clause of comparison NP *pi*^{24} *k*^{h}*i*^{42} *lay*^{21}, the copula *si*^{21} and the last two words *te*^{21} *ʔit*^{42} can be omitted due to discourse context background information. The adverbial clause of comparison can be omitted from the utterance due to the fact that the context is usually apparent when the superlative comparison is being uttered. The omission of the copula is also not uncommon as verbs and adjective structures can occur following the noun phrase without it in Singaporean Hokkien.

It is optional to include *te*^{21} *ʔit*^{42} 'the first', which is an ordinal-numeral construction, in the sentence as the superlative comparative construction implies that the subject of the sentence (N_1) inevitably is the entity that is described as bearing the superlative characteristic in comparison. Therefore, the ordinal-numeral construction can be elided without loss of information during utterence of the sentence.

(75)	*sã*^{33}	*ʔe*^{21}	*laŋ*^{21}	*pi*^{24}	*k*^{h}*i*^{42}	*lay*^{21}	*ʔi*^{33}	*syaŋ*^{21}	*te*^{21}	*ʔit*^{42}	*swi*^{42}
	three	of	human	compare	rise	come	she	same	number	one	good looking
	NUM	CLF	N	CoV	CoV	CoV	3P	ADV	ORD	NUM	ADJ

'Of the three people compared together, she is the most good looking'

Example (75) is an instance of a superlative comparison construction of which the noun phrase of the adverbial clause of comparison is a numeral-classifier-noun construction *sã*^{33} *ʔe*^{21} *laŋ*^{24} 'three people'. The ordinal-numeral constuction *te*^{21} *ʔit*^{42} 'number one' following the superlative comparison adverb *syaŋ*^{21} 'same' is retained.

The free translation reflects the source language. A more idiomatic translation may be 'She is the most good looking among the three' for the sake of naturalness. Consider example (76) below for a slightly varied superlative comparison construction:

(76)	*loŋ²⁴ tsoŋ⁴²*	*pi²⁴*	*kʰi⁴²*	*lay²¹*	*ʔa³³*	*meŋ²⁴*	*syaŋ²¹*	*kut⁴⁴*	*lat⁴⁴*
	all	compare	rise	come	ah	meng	same	smooth	strength
	N	CoV	CoV	CoV	DIM	N_{PROP}	ADV	ADJ	N

'Compared to all (people), Ah Meng is the most hardworking'

As depicted in (76), the NP of the adverbial clause of comparison is a collective noun *loŋ²⁴ tsoŋ⁴²* 'all'. The ordinal-numeral constuction *te²¹ ʔit⁴²* 'number one' following the superlative comparison adverb *syaŋ²¹* 'same' is left out of the main clause as background information which can be retained by contextual clues. The proper noun 'Ah Meng' is the subject of the construction and therefore hints that the collective noun refers to people. The last example of superlative comparison construction is given as follows:

(77)	*ʔa³³*	*syu⁴²*	*ka²¹*	*li⁴²*	*pi²⁴*	*kʰi⁴²*	*lay²¹*	*ʔi²¹*	*syaŋ²¹*	*te²⁴*	*kʰyaŋ²¹*
	Ah	Siu	and	you	compare	rise	come	she	same		capable
	DIM	N_{PROP}	CoV	2P	CoV	CoV	CoV	3P	ADV	ADV	ADJ

'Comparing Ah Siu and you, she is the most capable'

Example (77) is another variation of making a superlative comparison sentence. The compound noun phrase of the adverbial clause of comparison is made up of a proper noun 'Ah Siu' and the second person pronoun *li⁴²* 'you' joined by a coverb *ka²¹* 'and'. In the main clause, the third person pronoun is synonymous to the proper noun 'Ah Siu'.

In practice, the subject of the main clause can be co-referential to either the preceding or following entity in the noun phrase of the adverbial clause of comparison. Commonly, the context will determine the subject of superlative comparison accurately.

3.5 Reduplication of Singaporean Hokkien Adjectives

Reduplication is very commonplace in East and Southeast Asian languages, especially of those that exhibit tones (Goddard, 2005:68). Singaporean Hokkien is

not an exception to this claim. Robert Cheng (in Cheng 1979:53) remarks that reduplication is utilized to express degree of adjectives by answering the question, 'to what extent?'. Furthermore, he states that the reduplication of adjectives is in complementary distribution with other types of degree expressions.

Reduplication is related to phonology, which is not the primary focus of this thesis. However, I still acknowledge the fact that the phonological structure of reduplication plays a significant role in determining the semantic structure of adjectives. As a matter of fact, I shall describe the grammatical make up of reduplicated adjectives and attempt to provide sufficient phonological and semantic background information as required.

3.5.1 Reduplicated Expressives

In section 2.3, a type of reduplication was discussed. A monosyllabic adjective can be reduplicated into an XX form to result in either an intensified or mitigated meaning depending on the context of the utterance. This section focuses on another type of reduplication in which the pattern of the reduplication is not XX. The syllabic structure of this type of reduplication is composed of the adjective which functions as the base of the structure. Following the adjectival base is the reduplicated portion of the structure, which may be of the same word forming an ADJ-AA structure or may be of different words thus forming an ADJ-AB structure. Both structures are elaborated further in sections 3.5.2 and 3.5.3.

3.5.2 ADJ-AA Reduplicated Expressives

This type of reduplicated expressives is formed by the emergence of a base adjective followed by two identical morphemes. Tone sandhi affects the way the construction is articulated. Illustrated below is a figure of ADJ-AA reduplicated expressives:

BASE ADJ $A^{TONE\text{-}X}$ $A^{TONE\text{-}Y}$

Figure 25. Construction of ADJ-AA Reduplicated Expressives

As demonstrated in Figure 25, the base adjective is followed by two identical morphemes. The first morpheme following the base adjective is reduplicated, yielding the outcome of having two morphemes that resemble each other in terms of syllabic structure.

The tones of each of the morphemes following the base adjective are exhibited as X and Y to accentuate their differences. Consider the example given as follows:

a) *ʔɔ*^{33} *so*^{21} *so*^{24}

black

ADJ RDP RDP

'black'

In a), the adjective *ʔɔ*^{33} 'black' functions as the base adjective of the reduplicated expressive construction. Following it is the morpheme *so*^{21}, which has particularly no apparent meaning whether occurring on its own or being reduplicated. However, this reduplicated morpheme construction *so*^{21} *so*^{24} upon modifying the base adjective adjective *ʔɔ*^{33} 'black' does result in creating an extension of the semantic content of the base adjective. The semantic extension is of an idiomatic one which intensifies the meaning of *ʔɔ*^{33} 'black' in a specific way, thus the free translation of 'black' in a) can be possibly suggested as 'black (in a particular way)'. This category of reduplicated expressives exhibits reduplication of a morpheme and utilizes tone sandhi to differentiate between the base morpheme and the reduplicated counterpart. The result is an idiomatic expression that is arbitrary. One has to simply memorize these expressions and retrieve them for usage according to contextual circumstances.

3.5.3 ADJ-AB Reduplicated Expressives

This type of reduplicated expressives is made up of a base adjective followed by two unidentical morphemes. Consonance and alliteration are the phonological devices that influence the way the construction is uttered. Consonance reduplicates the same consonant or the set of consonants in the syllable excluding the vowel in the reduplicated construction and alliteration accounts for the reduplication of an initial consonant of the words in the reduplicated construction.

3.5.3.1 The Dilemma of Consonance and Alliteration

The reiteration of the consonant or the entire segment with the exception of the tone of the preceding syllable in the following reduplicated syllable is called consonance. Singaporean Hokkien utilizes this phonological device to formulate idiomatic

expressions regarding an adjective. Figure 26 illustrated below describes the constitution of ADJ-AB reduplicated expressives produced by consonance:

BASE ADJ C_AVC_B C_AVC_B

Figure 26. Construction of ADJ-AB Reduplicated Expressives by Consonance

As displayed in Figure 26, the base adjective is followed by a morpheme which may or may not have any semantic content. The tone of the morpheme is not reduplicated. Instead, the vowel of the syllable of the morpheme gets reduplicated and transferred to the second morpheme. Consider the following example given:

b) *san*^{24} *pi*^{33} *pa*^{44}

skinny

ADJ RDP RDP

'skinny'

As shown in example b), *san*^{42} 'skinny' functions as the base adjective of the reduplicated expressive. Following it is the morpheme *pi*^{33} which carries no semantic content whether occurring in isolation or in a combination of morphemes. The initial consonant of the morpheme is reduplicated and transferred to the next morpheme. The reduplicated resultant is *pi*^{33} *pa*^{44}, which is an idiomatic expression of the base adjective. The expression is a collocation that describes the adjective 'skinny' in a specific way. Therefore, the free translation of example b) can be suggested as 'skinny (in a specific way)'. One can look at this phonological rendering of reduplication as alliteration as well. This is due to the fact that alliteration, in which the reduplication of the initial consonant of the preceding syllable gets duplicated and transferred to the initial consonant of the following syllable(s), can be considered as a subcategory of consonance. Of the data collected from language resources persons, there is only one example given in b) that exhibits consonance. Upon further collection of data, more light is expected to be shed on this phonological phenomenon.

Reduplicated expressives, whether it is of the ADJ-AA or ADJ-AB type, produces a massive compilation of idiomatic expressions that accompany an adjective. The meaning of the reduplicated adjectival expression still shares radial features of the

base adjective. However, an arbitrary and unique connotation gets entailed on that particularly reduplicated adjectival construction. In other words, reduplicated expressions are a special kind of adjectives in which random words which may or may not have meaning get attached to the base adjective. The result of the union is a type of degree extent of the adjectival phrase of which the semantic content shifts from the original meaning of the base adjectival to a certain extent while still retaining part of the base meaning determined by the base adjective.

3.5.3.2 Reduplicated Expressive Alternative Classification

In earlier sections (3.5.2 to 3.5.3.2), reduplicated expressives have been classified according to their phonological compositions. This section attempts to classify reduplicated expressions via methodology of semantic criteria.

Reduplicated expressives can be organized according to their semantic categories. As they are idiomatic extensions of adjectives, it is most appropriate to arrange them by taking into consideration the semantic properties of the base adjectives in the reduplicated expressives. Given below are several instances of classifying reduplicated expressives according to semantic categories:

a) Reduplicated Expressives Pertaining to Shape and Size

Expression	Meaning
san^{24} *pi*^{33} *pa*^{44}	skinny (idiomatic connotation)
k^{h}*wa*^{42} *lɔŋ*^{42} *sɔŋ*^{21}	baggy (as of trousers)
ʔwe^{24} *ts*^{h}*ak*^{21} *ts*^{h}*ak*^{44}	short (as of stature)

b) Reduplicated Expressives Pertaining to Taste

Expression	Meaning
kyam^{21} *lyu*^{33} *lyu*^{44}	salty
kyam^{21} *tɔk*^{33} *tɔk*^{21}	salty (a stingy person)
tsyã^{24} *p*^{h}*u*^{21} *p*^{h}*u*^{42}	very bland, tasteless

c) Reduplicated Expressives Pertaining to Color

Expression	Meaning
ʔaŋ^{21} ki^{33} ki^{44}	red
ʔaŋ^{21} kɔŋ^{42} kɔŋ^{21}	red
ts^{h}ẽ^{33} sut^{33} sut^{21}	green (as of pale face)
ɔ^{3} so^{21} so^{24}	black
ɔ^{33} lu^{33} lu^{44}	black
ɔ^{33} k^{h}am^{21} k^{h}am^{24}	black (as of sky when it is going to rain)
ɔ^{33} k^{h}yat^{33} k^{h}yat^{21}	black
peʔ^{21} ts^{h}aŋ^{33} ts^{h}aŋ^{44}	white
kim^{33} taŋ^{33} taŋ^{44}	golden bright

d) Reduplicated Expressives Pertaining to Feelings

Expression	Meaning
syo^{44} kun^{24} kun^{42}	hot (as of boiling liquid)
leŋ^{24} peŋ^{33} peŋ^{44}	cold (as of ice)
leŋ^{24} ki^{33} ki^{44}	cold (as of a dish left out in the open)
niŋ^{24} ko^{21} ko^{24}	softs
teŋ^{21} k^{h}ɔk^{44} k^{h}ɔk^{21}	hard
lyam^{21} t^{h}i^{33} t^{h}i^{44}	sticky

As given in examples a) to d), all of the reduplicated expressives are idiomatic extensions of single adjectives. When the base adjective is analyzed in isolation, the semantic property is basic in meaning. When the base adjective is followed by a reduplicated morpheme construction, the semantic property still retains its basic meaning. However, the connotation of the semantic property gets altered to apply to other domains. The radial structure of the basic meaning extends from its normal domain according to its collocation to other domains for which there are no rules to

govern the tendency of extension. Therefore, reduplicated expressives need to be learned individually according to their occurrences and domain applications.

Apart from phonological criteria, semantic properties can also be utilized to categorize reduplicated expressions. The phonological phenomena is associated with the production of the reduplication. Reduplication of the tones, consonance and alliteration determine whether the morpheme is entirely or partially reduplicated.

The semantic properties of the reduplicated expressions contribute to helping speakers or learners of Singaporean Hokkien comprehend them in order to learn how to apply them appropriately context-wise. As the constitution of these expressions are arbitrary, coupling their phonological constructions together with their semantic associations will benefit language learners greatly.

This chapter has analyzed how an adjectival construction can be modified. This modification is demonstrated by the use of degree expressions. Degree expressions are adverbs that modify the adjectival phrase by answering the questions "how much" and "to what extent". Degree expressions have three functions: 1) to show intensification, 2) to show comparison and 3) to show unique language features via the usage of reduplication. In general, degree expressions occur in complementary distribution; it is not possible to demonstrate intensification and comparison at the same time. On the other hand, certain degree expressions can be reduplicated to achieve an intensifying effect. The degree expression can only modify the adjective and not the verb. This feature of degree expression acts as a useful instrument in making a boundary between the adjective and verb in Singaporean Hokkien.