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A Cross-Linguistic Study of Super and Intensifiers in the Real World

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ABSTRACT: *This study examined super in German (super) and in Mandarin Chinese (chao-ji 超級 'super' and chao 超 'super'), with data taken from corpora. We aim to test whether intensifiers function as semantically vacuous fillers, as Huddleston and Pullum (2002) proposed, and show the sociolinguistic features of intensifiers while moving toward grammaticalization. The results indicate that German super is flexible morphologically and syntactically, while super in Mandarin Chinese has several constraints. Semantically, Mandarin Chinese chao enhances the gradable property of states and chao-ji often emphasizes modern technology and events. In comparison, German super has advanced itself in terms of linguistic performance and gradually lost its role as an intensifier. The study of super and the use of intensifiers display interesting linguistic diversity and also reveal how men and women, teenagers and children play different participant roles in the process of moving intensifiers toward grammaticalization.*

Key words: *Intensifiers, Mandarin Chinese, German, Delexicalization, Grammaticalization, Descriptors.*

1. Introduction

Intensifiers are modifiers that serve to enhance the word it modifies, such as *super bright*, where the word *super*, an intensifier, indicates the intensity of the brightness. Ito & Tagliamonte (2003) found that although the most frequent intensifier is *very*, the use of *really* has spread widely among the youngest generation in the city of York in the northeast of England. Among intensifiers, Huddleston and Pullum noted that there exists a continuum in the strength of intensification from the mildest, like *damn*, to the strongest, like *fucking* (2002:558). "*Super*" is the intensifier we focus on in this paper, both in German and in Mandarin Chinese (hereafter Chinese), for which *super* in the latter is *chao ji* 超級 'super' or *chao*超 'super'.

The research goal of this paper is to test whether intensifiers function as semantically vacuous fillers, as Huddleston and Pullum (2002) proposed. In doing so, we compare the linguistic performance of *super* in the two languages and then approach the external sociolinguistic behaviors, in terms of e.g. gender and setting, of such intensifiers in society.

This paper is organized as follows: after the introduction, section 2 reviews related literature and introduces the methodology of the study. Subsequently, section 3 presents the roles of *super* in Chinese and German, starting with morphology, followed by syntax, semantics, and finally grammaticalization. Thereafter, section 4 delves into the use of general intensifiers in society, and section 5 concludes the paper.

2. Literature Review and Methodology

Linguists have researched intensifiers with various foci. Kaiser and Runner (2008) led experiments to investigate intensifiers in German and Dutch anaphor resolution. Pavic Pintaric (2012) determined the intensifier commonly used in fictional orality and the application of translation strategies. Greenbaum (1974) examined six verb-intensifier collocations in American and British English and concluded that each intensifier tended to collocate with a different kind of expression, for example, *very much* with expressions of favorable

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attitude, and *badly* with expressions of needing. Nevalainen and Rissanen (2002), concentrating on the adverbialization of intensifiers, compared *fairly* and *pretty*; they found that although nearly synonymous, their path to adverbialization differed.

In terms of the linguistic distribution of intensifiers, Lin's study (2001) on qualitative adjectives indicated that semantic competition influences syntactic structure. Zheng (2008) studied the development of *hěn* 很 '*very'* and suggested that its syntactic position dominated the transformation of this intensifier. Li (2006) studied *super* in Chinese and claimed that the abstract meaning of *super* was increasing. One of the counterparts of *super* in Chinese is *fēi cháng*非常 '*very*', which is an adjective with an adverbial usage dating from the Tang Dynasty (year 618-907) (Li 2006:165). English *very* and German *sehr* 'very' are intensifiers articulating a gradable property, while the German intensifier *so* conveys '*out of the blue*' and combines with adjectives, nouns and verbs (Umbach 2011).

The development of *super* has involved lexicalization and grammaticalization. Lamarre (2013) investigated compounding patterns of the Chinese preposition *wǎng* 'towards', and reported that *wǎng* can be a monosyllabic localizer that appears before verbs, whereas directional complements follow verbs. Chang (2015) studied the formation of the temporal adverbs *ji, bian*, and *jiu* in Chinese. She proposed that the conjunctional functions of *bian* was derived from consecutive and emphatic adverbs. The semantic development and part of speech of the collocations accompany the preposition or adverbs when undergoing grammaticalization. Related research on particles can also be found. For example, Han (2014) examined modern Shanghainese *ɦi kã* 'he says' and indicated that through grammaticalization, *ɦi kã* has risen to the topic position to serve as a topic-marking function. In German, Smirnova (2015) took the constructional perspective, and via two case studies, considered secondary grammaticalization as a non-linear path of diachronic changes. Meanwhile, Kong (2017) investigated the development of manner of speaking markers in English and Chinese, in which grammaticalization, lexicalization as well as pragmaticalization were the concerns.

One focus of the present paper concerns the linguistic role of the intensifier *super*. Our data were taken from the *Academia Sinica Balanced Corpus of Mandarin Chinese* (Sinica Corpus, Chen and Huang 2001), the *Chinese Mandarin Online Dictionary* (Committee of Official Language Promotion 1998), and the German *Digitales Wörterbuch der Deutschen Sprache* (DWDS, Digital Dictionary of the German Language, Geyken 2013). The Sinica Corpus includes the part-of-speech tagging of the balanced Modern Chinese Corpus, and contains more than 10 million words in Modem Chinese, including genres like novels, speeches, magazines, and newspaper reports. DWDS is a continuously expanding digital dictionary system based on large electronic text corpora. This corpus is built on the six-volume dictionary of German contemporary languages (WDG) and currently contains about 100 million words. Sources includes fiction, journalistic prose, technical texts, and utility texts.

The extracted data comprise 379 tokens of *chao jí* 超級 'super', 255 of *chao*超 'super' and 354 of German *super*. The data are categorized in EXCEL with analyzing fields such as part of speech, syllable number of the collocation, meaning of the collocation, phonetic transcription (of Chinese), word-to-word translation, and frequency. The collocations of *supers* are essential to understand the development of *super*; the syllables of the collocations render *supers* flexibility, the part of speech and meaning provide *supers* pragmatic strength for evolution. We present the results as well as statistical information in the data analysis.

Two previous studies are particularly relevant to the present research. The first is by Huddleston and Pullum (2002), who treated intensifiers as semantically vacuous fillers, since intensifiers do not augment the proposition of a sentence. Instead, they only allow the speaker to express subjectivity. One group of adjectival intensifiers they examined was expressive attributives (or expletives), such as "you're a *bloody* genius". The expletive, as the example shows, provides little meaning to the proposition, but yields the speaker's subjectivity (agitation, distastefulness, or even approval). In addition to lexical intensification, there are two constructional intensifiers in English, i.e. repetition and tautology (2002:561). Repetition is defined as the same adjective being repeated, such as "It was a *long, long* way". Note that only gradable adjectives can be used in such constructions; therefore, sentences like "I hurt my left, left leg" sound odd. When tautology is employed, two synonymous adjectives are used sequentially, such as "a *tiny little* bird", (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002:558). Moreover, we intend to test Huddleston's and Pullum's (2002) proposition that intensifiers function as semantically vacuous fillers.

The second study central to present research is by Ito & Tagliamonte (2003), who investigated the usage of intensifiers in the *York English Corpus*. They took a diachronic review of related studies and also displayed the

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subtle development of the intensifiers. When asked about how *really*, which can be found in letters of the early 18th century, could become an intensifier, Ito & Tagliamonte answered that the linguistic processes went step by step from the meaning of *true*, *real* to become a predicative adjective, just like the case of *very* as in the examples below (2003:269).

(i) a. The compyler here-of shuld translat veray so holy a story. (1485 OED vol 14:569, cited in Partington 1993:181)
b. For verray feere so wolde hir herte quake. (CT.F Fkl. 860)
c. He was a verray parfit gentil knyght. (Ch. CT A Prol. 72)
d. He was sike … and was verray contrite and sorwful in his herte. (Trev. Hidg. VI 93)
(Mustanoja 1960:326)

In line with Mustanoja (1960), they also suggested that to observe the gradual development of intensifiers, one should assess their syntactic function and identify when an intensifier begins to modify predicate adjectives, which signals the intensifier has reached its last stage in development (Ito & Tagliamonte 2003:275). In their work, they discovered a generation gap in York English, where speaking *really* marked the speaker as being younger in age. Following this rationale, the present research explores the use of intensifiers in society after examining the linguistic performance of *super* in Chinese and German.

3. *Super* in Chinese and German

This section investigates *super* from the aspects of Morphology, Syntax, and Semantics, as well as from a grammaticalization perspective. The discussion begins with Chinese followed by German.

3.1. *Super* in Morphology and Syntax

Let us first look at the morphological performance of *super*. Chinese *chao* can function as a mono-syllabic head (35.29%), as in (1a) and (1b), or a bi-syllabic head (56.47%), as in (3a); meanwhile, *chao-ji* is assigned to bi-syllabic (62.37%) or multi-syllabic heads (36.58%), such as in (3b) and (3c). In comparison, German *super* has no such constraints and is free to modify mono- (2a), bi- (2b) or multi-syllabic (2c) heads.

(1) In Chinese
a. *Yǒu yīgè chāobàngde jùhuì* 有一個**超棒**的聚會[1] 'There is a **super (good)** gathering.'
b. *Tái sù shēng yī guānguāng gōngchǎng rénqì chāo hāng* 台塑生醫觀光工廠人氣**超夯** 'Formosa Biomedical Technology Corporation Health Center is **super popular**.'

(2) In German
a. *Du bist wirklich ein* ***super Typ.*** 'You are really **super (guy)**.'
b. *Das Hotel ist super zentral und man kann von da aus wirklich alles* ***super bequem*** *und schnell zu Fuss erreichen.* 'This hotel has super location and one can really **super conveniently** and quickly reach everywhere on foot.'
c. *Freilich könne man die atomare Schrift nur mit einem* ***Super-Elektronenmikroskop*** *lesen*. 'Of course one can read the atomic writing only with a **super electron microscope**.'

Syntactically, *super* has regular syntactic roles in Chinese. *Chao* is often juxtaposed with adjectives or adjective-phrases (33.98%), as in example (3a), whereas *chao-ji* can collocate with adjectives (3a), verbs (3b), and nouns (3c). Bäcklund (1973:279) found that the majority of the English intensifiers (72%) are used with adjectival heads, and that adverbs of degree modifying nominals is a neoteric linguistic development since in the 1990s (Zhang 2000). Such a development correlates with grammaticalization, as discussed in the next section.

In German, *super* is flexible to collocate with nouns (4a), verbs (4b) and adjectives (4c), and can also appear in the sentence final position or act as an exclamation (4d).

(3) In Chinese
a. *Zhè xiǎohái zhēnshi chāo (jí) kě'ài de*這小孩真是**超(級)可愛**的 'This child is **super cute**.'
b. *Nǐ xiànzài gēnběn chāojí huíbàole* a你現在根本**超級回報**了啊 'Ultimately, you have been **super rewarded** now.'

[1] *Chao* and *chao-ji* will be referred to with their tones in examples.

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c. *Hòu sānbǎi wǔshí gōng chǐ de chāojí dà bīngshān*厚三百五十公尺的**超級大冰山** 'The **super iceberg** of 350 meters thick'

(4) In German

a. *Wow, richtig gut in Szene gesetzt, das war **super Licht!*** 'Wow, really well set in scene, that was **super light**.'

b. *Das habt ihr **super gemacht**.* 'You have **done** it **well**.'

c. *…du sprichst **echt super** Polnisch*. '… you speak **really super** Polish.'

d. *Der Zeitpunkt. **Super!*** 'The timing. **Super**!'

As with comparatives and superlatives, intensifiers do not survive negation. The syntactic structure of the *super* adjective phrase is discussed in herein. Together with its head, this adjective phrase, such as (1a) *chāo bàng*, is a head-final compound modifier that usually takes the syntactic structure of head + *chāo bàng* + de (such as *lǐ dà míng chāo bàng de*李大明超棒的 'Li Da-Ming is super good'). The *de* is a modal particle, and used here for marking the attribute and emphasizing manner of the subject as though he possesses such quality. Only in the use of *chao-ji* can the *de* be omitted. When the adjective phrase is used as an exclamation, the *de* is optional, in which case when speaking, a pause occurs before the head and its modifier, *lǐ dà míng chāo bàng de*李大明(.)超棒的. This phonetic realization before the *chao* construction marks the feeling of surprise or an extra comment of the subject's attribute or manner. In terms of phonetics, the intensifier *chao* is usually stressed or lengthened. Nevertheless, *chao* can not stand alone as an exclamation as *super* can in German.

3.2. *Super* in Semantics and Grammaticalization

According to *Shuowen jiezi* (Classics of the Character Etymology, Xu, AD.100-121), *chao* 超 originally meant 'jump'. Jumping is a much stronger action than, for example, sitting or walking; accordingly, we can say that *chao* meant "intensified action". This meaning is relevant to its later semantic and syntactic development. As described in *Xiandai hanyu cidian* (The Contemporary Chinese Dictionary, 2002), the meaning of Chinese *chao* has passed through much development, and can mean (a) exceed, (b) unusual, and (c) beyond a boundary or unlimited. This suggests delexicalization because its meaning is bleaching, as further exemplified below.

With respect to German *super*, *Duden Etymologie: Herkunftswörterbuch der deutschen Sprache* (Duden Etymology: Dictionary of Origin of German Language, Drosdowski, 1997) shows that *super* was derived from the Latin prefix meaning *über* 'more than' or *obendrauf* 'on top'. It underwent semantic broadening by the sixteenth century, and meant *sehr* 'very', *überaus* 'exceedingly', *äußerst* 'ultimate', or *höchst* 'top most'. These meanings have been widely used since the late twentieth century due to the influence of American English. When it is used independently, it means *erstklassig* 'top, first class', *großartig* 'great', or *toll* 'awesome'.

In terms of adjectival collocations, both Chinese and German *supers* can be used to describe the quantity or quality of the head; however, Chinese *chao* enhances the gradable property of states (10.80%), i.e. the degree of the temperature (5a) or convenience (5b), while *chao-ji* often describes modern, electronic products or skills (27.90%), such as computer skills (5c), or natural effects like icebergs (3c) or diseases (5d). They maintain the semantic prosody of being super 'very good'.

By contrast, German *super* can mean 'very good' (6a), 'good' (6b), or 'actually not good' (6c-6d). The latter case usually appears as adj/adv + super formulaic with collocates such as *absolut* 'absolutely', *echt* 'really', *natürlich* 'naturally; of course', *eigentlich* 'actually', *jedenfalls* 'in any case', or *schon* 'already'. Such collocates are degree adverbs or adverbs of manner that carry the semantic prosody of 'totality' (e.g. absolutely, really, naturally); however, their truth value can vary depending on the pragmatic purpose of the speaker. In other words, the formulaic [adjective + super] can show the speaker's personal opinion, which may not coincide with the facts or may even contradict the truth value oriented by the speaker's subjectivity.

Pragmatically, *super* in both languages, can function as a replacement for disappointment, irony, or politeness,[2] during which time its head can refer to atmosphere, feeling, mind, person, etc. German *super* has even stronger pragmatic use.

(5) In Chinese

a. *Jīnnián shì chāo lěng de dōngtiān*今年的冬天**超冷**的 'This winter is **super cold**.'

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[2] The author would like to thank the anonymous reviewer for the insight.

b. *Chúchén tuō dì chāo fāngbiàn* 除塵拖地**超方便** 'It is **super convenient** for dusting and mopping the floor.'
c. *Měiguó zhèngfǔ jìnzhǐ yīngtè'ěr shūchū chāojí diànnǎo jìshù zhì zhōngguó*美國政府禁止英特爾輸出**超級電腦技術**至中國 'The US government prohibits Intel from selling **super computer skills** to China.'
d. *Nà shí bàofā chāojí liúgǎn* 那時爆發**超級流感** '**Super flu** burst out at that time.'

(6) In German
a. *Danke das ich bei euch **super Information** bekommen habe*. 'Thank you that I got **super information** from you.'
b. *Wir wurden in Schweden **super empfangen***. 'We were **super welcomed** in Sweden.'
c. *Das ist **theoretisch super** und praktisch undurchführbar. Es funktioniert nicht*. 'This is **theoretically super** and practically unfeasible. It won't work.'
d. ***Das Prinzip ist super**, die Umsetzung könnte aber schwierig werden*. '**The principle is super**, the transformation however could be difficult.'

In Chinese, *super* can be used to classify the degree of manner and attribute of certain objects to express a gradable property. Be that as it may, the meaning of *super* has been reduced in terms of intensity and can now weaken the gradable property of the head, as in example (5b), which often means "very convenient" or just "convenient", but not necessarily "*very much* convenient" any more, though its positivity remains. Similarly in German, example (6a) often means "good information" or "just useful information", but not necessarily "*excellent* information" any more.

Although *super* in both languages is being delexicalized, it is especially notable in German. In terms of semantics, Chinese *chao-ji* often emphasizes heads that refer to modern technology and events, while German *super* has advanced itself in terms of linguistic performance syntactically, morphologically, semantically and pragmatically, and has gradually lost its role as an intensifier. This loss, however, can be expected as delexicalization is one of the general processes of grammaticalization (Sinclair 1992; Partington 1993).

Grammaticalization can be observed both diachronically and synchronically. One way to examine the gradual change of delexicalization is to study the patterning according to function (Mustanoja 1960:326-27). For example, Partington (1993) reported that a relationship exists between delexicalization and collocational patterns; that is, the more delexicalized an intensifier is, the more widely it collocates. To be more specific, some intensifiers favorably collocate with certain groups of lexical items, while others commonly collocate with broader choices. As demonstrated in the above discussion of Chinese *chao*/*chao-ji* and German *super*, it was shown that *chao*/*chao-ji* collocate with a smaller set of lexical items in comparison with German *super*. Partington (1993) suggested that delexicalization and "width of collocation" can be considered the same linguistic event. Thus, in comparing Chinese and German, it could be said that German *super* is more advanced in its delexicalization.

Furthermore, if we look back to the original meaning of *chao*, "jump", a verb with an independent semantic property, we can see that it had bleached long ago and has now developed into a dependent morphosyntactic element that can collocate with adjectives to intensify the degree.

Partington (1993) demonstrated that the delexicalization of *awfully* is advanced because its head can have positive connotations (e.g. *cute*, *funny*, and *pretty*) or have negative ones (e.g. *boring* and *silly*), whereas *terribly* tends to collocate only with negative expressions. In the case of *super*, both in Chinese and German, it can collocate with positive-connotation heads as in (1a), (1b), (3a), (3c), and (5b) for Chinese and (2b), (4a), and (6b) for German, as well as negative modifiers, as in (5a) for Chinese and (6c) for German. Note that (6c) can be paraphrased as *super Theory* 'super theory', but it is often said as *theoretisch super* 'theoretically super' and with a further supplement as to why the topical subject is actually not doable. *Super* contains the semantic prosody positivity, however, pragmatically, *super* in *theoretisch super* functions as a replacement for disappointment in which "only super theoretically, but not practically" is expressed. The speaker's thought and feeling is thus covertly presented. The same with (6d) *Das Prinzip ist super...* 'The principle is super…' meaning *super Prinzip* 'super principle', where the head-initial structure is used for the negative connotation of the topic when put into practice. Other German examples with negative modifiers include *super schlecht* 'super bad', *super hässlich* 'really ugly', and *super unwohl* 'super uncomfortable', among others.

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Subjectification is also apparent in the above examples in that the degree of *super* depends on the speaker, rather than the epistemic fact. In terms of exclamation, *Super*! (4d) can sometimes mean the exact opposite of *super*, constituting a subjectivity understood based on the correct deictic realization. Though Chinese *chao*/*chao-ji* have not yet reached this stage, it is slowly moving in this direction. Zhang (2000) reported three phases of grammaticalization mechanisms for Chinese adverbs: initially, content words like nouns or verbs transform into adverbs; then, the internal structure of the adverb bleaches; and, finally, the adverb undergoes further bleaching and becomes a functional marker, such as a conjunction and an interjection. Accordingly, from a verb meaning 'jump' to acting as an intensifier, it is clear that Chinese *chao*/*chao-ji* is on the move.

We can thus declare that *super* in both Chinese and German is undergoing grammaticalization, with German *super* being more advanced in its evolution.

4. Discussion: Intensifiers in Society

We now examine the external factor that generates the development of intensifiers, namely, society. The social factors involve the person, gender, age, education and setting. Umbach (2011) found in the novel she investigated that intensifiers were used particularly when adults talk to youngsters. "Neutral" intensifiers like *zu Tode* 'to death' also appeared, such as *zu Tode langweilen* 'bored to death'. The novel reflects the social tendency that when adults talk to children, intensifiers are often used for hyperbolic effect to draw children's attention. On the other hand, Labov (1985:44) noted that *really* is one of the most frequently used intensifiers in colloquial discourse in American English. Speakers tend to utter the intensifier *really* in informal or familiar conversation rather than in formal speech or writing. Similarly, Stenström (1999) also found that *really* is the most popular intensifier of adjectives among teenagers in London.

Ito & Tagliamonte (2003) investigated *very* and *really* in British English to identify the interface between education and gender in using *really* (see Fig. 1). They not only found that younger and more educated women tended to use *really* more, they also discovered that there is a relationship in terms of gender and education and the use of the intensifier in the middle-aged generation, where less educated young men seldom use *really*, as shown by the arrow in the Figure.

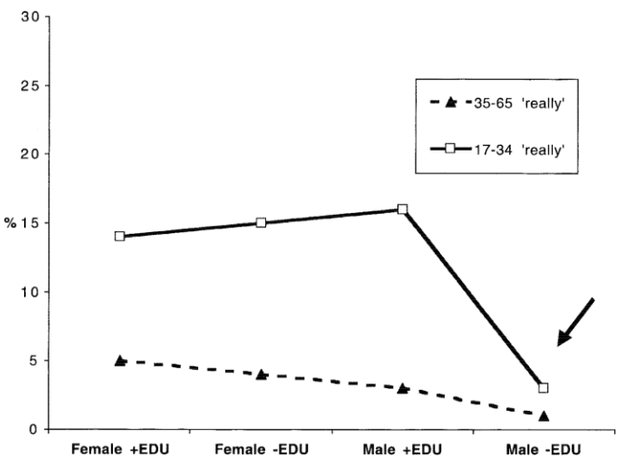


Fig-1. Distribution of really by age, gender, and education (Ito & Tagliamonte 2003: 276)

Additionally, Fig. 1 indicates that females (either +educated or –educated) tend to use *really* more than male speakers do. In Ito and Tagliamonte's words, "women lead in the change from one intensifier to another" (2003:277). Ito & Tagliamonte even pointed out that it is at the time when "the newcomer expands in function" (2003:277); that is to say, newcomers like to use intensifiers like *really* as hyperbole to draw attention. Stoffel (1901) and Jespersen (1922) noted in their studies from roughly a hundred years ago that ladies are fond of saying *He is so* charming!, and *It is so* lovely!. Stoffel realized in 1901 that gender is an essential factor that influences the use of intensifiers. A direct quotation from his examination is that "ladies are notoriously fond of hyperbole" (Stoffel 1901:101). Two decades later, Jespersen (1922:250) confirmed that "The fondness of women for hyperbole will very often lead the fashion with regard to adverbs of intensity". As such, the leading

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role of female speakers in the development of intensifiers has been identified for many years.

Age plays a role as well. Ito and Tagliamonte further stated that "In fact, the younger educated males are just as likely to use *really* as the women" (2003:277). In addition, they discovered a significant generation gap in York English: the intensifier *very* is used by the generation aged over 35 while younger people tend to use *really*. For the younger generation with "right" topics and settings, intensifiers are used with high frequency, which accords with Peng (2009:83), who indicated that intensifier expressions are uttered particularly by youth when they act in a pettishly charming manner or show emotions in colloquial talk. However, these intensifier expressions do not appear in written form, and are only colloquialisms. There is an increase in intensification across generations, for example, in Taiwan *guài* 怪 'strange', *kuáng* 狂 'crazy', and *bào* 爆 'explode' are used among the youth in expressions like *guài rè de* 怪熱的 'quite hot', *hěn kuáng* 很狂 'just super, crazy', *bào è*爆餓 'very hungry', or *bào hǎo chī* 爆好吃 'very delicious'. Recent innovations include *hěn liū* 很六 'very six', *hǎo liū* 好六 'good six' and *niúbī*牛B 'cattle B' all of which mean 'someone or something is really good'. The same evolution is happening with German *super*, which is now losing its emphasizing tone. Accordingly, instead of *super gut* 'super good', the following are often used: *voll gut, mega gut, krass gut, total gut, endgut, cool gut, tiptop, todschick hamma, hammer, spitze* and *genial*, which all mean 'super good'. Even an "endearment" form, *supi* 'super good' has developed among girls.

One interesting phenomenon is also that old and new intensifiers compete with each other. Bolinger (1972:18) observed this phenomenon and noted that as each new intensifier "has appeared on the scene it has elbowed the other aside." Meanwhile, previous preferences do not simply die out; rather, they remain used in specific (syntactic, pragmatic) contexts, and the newcomer never takes over the whole linguistic territory as a substitute intensifier.

Intensifiers in society have their unique movement and natural development for which no specific speakers can dictate their change. Nevertheless, particular groups of speakers do dominate their development naturally and tactfully in specific settings.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, we investigated *super* from the aspects of morphology, syntax, and semantics, as well as from a grammaticalization perspective. In closing, the development of intensifiers as generated by society was presented.

We found that (1) morphologically: Chinese *chao-ji* is assigned for bi- or multi-syllabic heads with *chao* being for mono-syllabic heads as well. German *super* has no such constraint. (2) Syntactically: German *super* is flexible in collocating with nouns, verbs or adjectives (e.g. *super Licht, echt super*), whereas Chinese *chao* only juxtaposes with adjectives and *chao-ji* with nouns (e.g. *chāo jí dà bīng shān* 超級大冰山 'super iceberg') and verbs (*chāo jí huí bào* 超級回報 'super reward'). German *super* can also appear in the sentence final position or act as an exclamation (*Super*!). (3) Semantically: both Chinese and German *super* can be used to describe the head in terms of quantity or quality. While Chinese *chao* enhances the gradable property of states (*chāo lěng* 超冷 'super cold'), *chao-ji* mostly describes modern, electronic products or skills, natural effects or diseases. In contrast, German *super* can mean 'very good', 'good', or 'actually not good' (a pragmatic substitute for disappointment, irony, politeness, e.g. *theoretisch super*), and its heads can refer to atmosphere, feeling, mind, person, etc. As a result, in terms of grammaticalization, the development of *super* in German is more advanced than in Chinese due to its broader collocation width.

The results further indicate that, semantically, while Chinese *chao-ji* often emphasizes modern technology and events; German *super* has advanced itself in terms of linguistic performance syntactically, morphologically, and semantically and has gradually lost its role as an intensifier. On this point, we agree with Huddleston and Pullum (2002) that intensifiers function as semantically vacuous fillers. In addition, we propose that intensifiers have a special semantic function that allows syntactic flexibility as well as pragmatic participation.

The external factors involved in the development of intensifiers in society were presented as well. Intensifiers are favored by different speakers of different ages and gender in various settings. Teenagers, women and younger educated males are fond of using intensifiers. In some settings, intensifiers are particularly popular, such as in colloquial conversation to keep up with the current fad, to draw the hearer's attention or when adults talk to young children. Once an intensifier is accepted by a language community and is used frequently, it can be said that grammaticalization has begun.

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The use and development of intensifiers display interesting linguistic phenomena, and show not only language diversity but also similar linguistic development.

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