

Adjective Reduplication in the Yongdeng Dialect of Lanzhou

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Abstract. As one of the word-formation methods in modern Chinese, reduplication is an important grammatical device. The Yongdeng dialect, belonging to the Lanzhou cluster of the Lanyin Mandarin, is rich in adjective reduplication phenomena. This paper examines the adjective reduplication patterns in the Yongdeng dialect from three aspects: structural forms, grammatical meanings, and pragmatic functions. Based on the criterion of complete reduplication, the paper mainly discusses six patterns, namely "AA, AABB, ABAB, ABB, AACD, and ABCC". It analyzes their grammatical meanings of indicating degree and state, and reveals the vividness and figurativeness of adjective reduplication in the pragmatic use of the Yongdeng dialect.

Keywords: Yongdeng dialect, adjective reduplication, grammatical meaning, pragmatic function

1. Introduction

1.1. Research background and significance

Reduplication, as a word-formation and word-shaping device, has long been a research focus in Chinese grammatical studies. Born and raised in Yongdeng, the author finds that the Yongdeng dialect contains abundant and diverse adjective reduplication phenomena through investigation. Taking the dialect of Yongdeng County, Lanzhou City as the research corpus, and with reference to *A Dictionary of the Lanzhou Dialect* by Zhang Wenxuan and Mo Chao, this paper systematically sorts out and discusses the adjective reduplication patterns in the dialect, aiming to enrich the grammatical research of the Lanzhou dialect.

Existing published papers on the Yongdeng dialect of Lanzhou mainly focus on phonetic and grammatical levels, among which there are few studies specifically targeting reduplication as a grammatical device. By fully enumerating linguistic phenomena, this paper explores the grammatical meanings and pragmatic functions of adjective reduplication in the Yongdeng dialect, hoping to arouse local people's love and inheritance of the dialect and demonstrate the unique charm of the Yongdeng dialect. The research significance of this paper is mainly reflected in the following three aspects:

1. It helps to comprehensively understand the features and specific characteristics of adjective reduplication in the Yongdeng dialect.
2. It contributes to grasping the functions of reduplication as a grammatical device in the Yongdeng dialect.

3. It facilitates further summarizing and sorting out the pragmatic functions of adjective reduplication in the Yongdeng dialect, so as to guide people's daily communicative practice.

1.2. Research status

Academic research specifically focusing on the Yongdeng dialect is relatively scarce, with most relevant papers published in the past 10 to 20 years. For example, in *Phonetic Features of the Yongdeng Dialect*, Zhang Wenxuan elaborates on the initials, finals, tones, and character pronunciations of the Yongdeng dialect, and analyzes its phonetic similarities and differences with Mandarin, laying a solid foundation for the phonetic research of the Yongdeng dialect. Tuo Ao, in *Minority Language Phenomena in the Yongdeng Dialect of Gansu Province*, discusses and analyzes the minority language elements embedded in the local Chinese dialect from phonetic and grammatical perspectives, broadening the research ideas for the study of the Yongdeng dialect. In recent years, there have been even fewer papers dedicated to the Yongdeng dialect. The latest one, such as Gan Ting's *Syllable Structure and Syllable Quantity of the Yongdeng Dialect*, summarizes the syllable structure patterns of the Yongdeng dialect.

1.3. Human and geographical overview of Yongdeng County

Yongdeng County, under the jurisdiction of Lanzhou City, Gansu Province, is located in the central part of Gansu Province. It borders Gaolan County and Jingtai County of Gansu Province to the east, Minhe County of Qinghai Province to the west, Xigu District and Honggu District of Lanzhou City to the south, and Tianzhu Tibetan Autonomous County to the north. As a gateway to the ancient Silk Road, it serves as a vital hub on the Eurasian Continent. Historically, Yongdeng County belonged to the ancient Yongzhou and was a territory of the Xirong ethnic group. In the 17th year of the Republic of China, it was renamed Yongdeng County and directly governed by the Gansu Provincial Government. The Lanzhou dialect falls into the Northwest Mandarin, specifically the Lanyin Mandarin, and the Yongdeng dialect is a part of the Jincheng cluster of the Lanyin Mandarin. Due to historical factors, the formation of the Yongdeng dialect has been influenced by ethnic minorities living here, such as Tibetans, Manchus, Hui people, and Tu people. These influences have led to the interaction and integration between minority languages and the local language, endowing the Yongdeng dialect with its unique linguistic flavor [1].

2. Structural forms

Reduplication has always been a research focus in the field of grammar. As a typical isolating language, Chinese generally does not express grammatical meanings through morphological changes. Instead, reduplication, as a typical word-formation and word-shaping grammatical device in modern Chinese, enhances the expressiveness of the language. From a synchronic perspective, this paper lists a large number of linguistic phenomena to explore the grammatical and semantic functions of adjective reduplication patterns in the Yongdeng dialect of Lanzhou.

In modern Chinese, adjectives can be divided into state adjectives, property adjectives, and non-predicative adjectives (distinguishing words). Among them, non-predicative adjectives cannot be reduplicated, while some of the other two types can form new words or change word forms through reduplication. Huang Borong and Liao Xudong point out in *Modern Chinese* that some property adjectives can be reduplicated, using morphological changes to indicate the deepening or moderation of the degree of a quality [2]. Some monosyllabic property adjectives can be attached with reduplicative affixes or other affixes. However, state adjectives, which already denote specific states and intensified degrees, do not need to be reduplicated, such as "qīhēi" (pitch-black) and "xuèhóng"

(blood-red) [2]. Therefore, the occurrence of adjective reduplication is conditional, including factors such as the quantity of adjectives and the descriptive nature of the adjectives' inherent meanings.

In the Yongdeng dialect, the analogical productivity of adjective reduplication is relatively high, which is related to the unique communicative habits of people in Northwest China—forthright, bold, humorous, vivid and figurative. Among all reduplication patterns, the ABB pattern is the most typical. This paper discusses adjective reduplication based on the criterion of complete reduplication, revealing its distinct colloquial characteristics.

2.1. Complete reduplication

2.1.1. AA pattern

Table 1. Examples of the AA reduplication pattern of adjectives in the Yongdeng dialect

Yongdeng Dialect	Mandarin Chinese	Yongdeng Dialect	Mandarin Chinese
nènnèn de	tender and fresh, especially referring to meat	guāguā de (hānghāng de)	silly or foolish
léngléng de	distinct in layers or ridges	lànglàng de	to waste effort
pípi de	describing a child as naughty	shāshā de	mostly describing melons as fully ripe

2.1.2. AABB pattern

Table 2. Examples of the AABB reduplication pattern of adjectives in the Yongdeng dialect

Yongdeng Dialect	Mandarin Chinese	Yongdeng Dialect	Mandarin Chinese
jiūteiu31jiūteiu3wāwa31	describing someone as behaving in an ungenerous manner	mímíděngděng	drowsy or half-asleep
kēngkēngwāwā	describing a road as bumpy, also pronounced as "kēngkēngdiētiē31wā"	zhǒuzhǒubābā	describing someone as behaving affectedly or putting on airs
āānshēngshēng	describing a child as obedient and well-behaved	Chǔchǔjiùjiù [3]	shrinking back from responsibility, afraid to make one's presence felt
mómóchìchì	describing a person as inefficient in handling affairs	Yángyánghūnhūn [3]	muddled or confused

2.1.3. ABAB pattern

The ABAB reduplication pattern is relatively special in the Yongdeng dialect. It is formed by reduplicating the base form AB. Some words remain adjectives after reduplication, with their syntactic functions and lexical meanings unchanged but undergoing a process of "degree modulation"—the degree meaning is intensified and the emotional color becomes stronger. For example, "yīléngyīleng" (layer by layer) and "báipàngbáipàng" (fair and plump), which still retain their descriptive functions.

However, some words change their word classes after reduplication, taking on a declarative tone and often functioning as predicates in sentences, such as:

hónghuǒ (prosperous) — hónghuǒhónghuǒ (prosperous and thriving)
qīngshēn (light and agile) — qīngshēnqīngshēn (light and nimble in movement)

Table 3. Examples of the ABAB reduplication pattern of adjectives in the Yongdeng dialect

Yongdeng Dialect	Mandarin Chinese
yīléngyīleng	bit by bit; little by little
báipàngbáipàng	fair and plump
dīxīdīxī	little by little; slowly, mostly used to describe fluids
xīliūxīliū	describing the taste of being spicy
wōlowōlo	describing someone as eating with great relish

2.2. Incomplete reduplication

2.2.1. ABB pattern

In the ABB reduplication pattern, A is usually a monosyllabic adjective, thus serving as the base form, while BB acts as an affix indicating a state without independent lexical meaning (a few exceptions carry descriptive meanings, e.g., "biēgǔgǔ de", where "gǔgǔ" denotes a bulging and full state). The BB part is generally not used independently. After reduplication, the emotional color of the adjective becomes more intense and the descriptive meaning more vivid and figurative. The ABB pattern is abundant in the Yongdeng dialect and occupies a dominant position among all adjective reduplication patterns. Different from Mandarin Chinese, where the base form A is usually an adjective, in the Yongdeng dialect, A can be a noun, an adjective, or a verb.

Lv Shuxiang argues in *A Dictionary of 800 Modern Chinese Words* that the collocation between the monosyllabic adjective A and the suffix BB is conventional, varying from dialect to dialect and from person to person. For rhetorical purposes, such collocations can even be coined occasionally [4]. This fully demonstrates the flexibility of the ABB pattern, which can be recreated according to different contexts to better convey speakers' meanings and emotions.

Table 4. Examples of the ABB reduplication pattern of adjectives indicating state in the Yongdeng dialect

bāxīxī	bī qiàqià
fātātā (fáxìngxìng)	hóngdiūdiū
báijījī (báishēngshēng)	míngjiūjiū
mùléngléng	zhǒnbēngbēng
zǐ gēnggēng	hēidōngdōng (hēichūchū)
hēijiūjiū	báizhāzhā
qīngchùchù	báisēnsēn
huī chūchū	huángléngléng
chángsuōsuō (xiáxiá)	duǒnjiéjié (qiàqià)
gǎijījī	zhǎiliūliū

Table 5. Examples of the ABB reduplication pattern of adjectives indicating property in the Yongdeng dialect

bīngjiūjiū (bīngshèshèn)	dàchīchī (dàkuāg ^h ua33kuā, dàhuànguàng)
shālūlū	jiǎoxìngxìng
luànzhāzhā (luànmámá, luànzāozāo)	málālā
nángxìngxìng	nújījī
qìchuōchuō	qiáobābā
qīnzhāzhā	ròunāngnāng
xizīzī	yáchūfufu33chūfufu33
zhāwāwā	zhālālā
xuánhūhū (luóluó)	zìnàinài
zhǒugēnggēng	hāngxìngxìng
guàizhāzhā	shòujījī
cuishēngshēng	qīngpiēpiē
lāsūsū	māsūsū

2.2.2. AACD and ABCC patterns

Table 6. Examples of the AACD and ABCC reduplication patterns of adjectives in the Yongdeng dialect

Yongdeng Dialect	Mandarin Chinese
kēngkēngdiēwō (wā) de	describing a road as bumpy
zhǒuzhǒu (chǔchǔ)bāniē de	describing an object as wrinkled and not smooth
luàngǔdūdū de [3]	describing things as messy and disorganized or people as upset and flustered
qìgǔdūdū de [3]	describing someone as holding one's breath in anger

3. Grammatical meanings

"Degree" is an important cognitive category, and when this cognitive category is expressed through linguistic forms, it forms a linguistic category [5]. Most scholars in the field of grammar hold that the process of a word evolving from its base form to its reduplicated form is essentially a process of adjusting the "degree". Adverbials and complements have a relatively "high degree level", while predicates and attributes have a relatively "low degree level" [6]. This fully illustrates the importance of "gradation" in reduplication. Among various reduplication forms, adjective reduplication is more expressive and plays an emphatic role, which is related to its inherent function of describing qualities and states (including shape description, color description, and sound description). In the Yongdeng dialect, the ABB pattern is particularly prominent and widely used in people's daily communication. It can either express speakers' distinct emotional attitudes, including commendatory and derogatory meanings, or indirectly adjust the "degree category" of sentences to convey information more accurately.

3.1. Indicating degree

The modulation of "degree" by adjective reduplication is mostly reflected in gradation. Adjectives generally function to modify and restrict other elements, depicting the qualities and states of things, thus carrying degree meanings. Gradation reflects the differences between these degrees.

3.1.1. Intensification of degree

Reduplicated forms used as adverbials or complements all carry intensified degree meanings. This is because adverbials and complements serve to modify, restrict, illustrate, and supplement the described elements, inherently aiming to expand the degree of description. After reduplication, their descriptive function becomes even stronger. For example:

As a complement: Nǐ zhè yīfu ràng nǐ chuān de chǔchǔbānīē de ti3. (Originally meaning that the clothes are worn in a messy and unsmooth way, the reduplicated form intensifies the degree meaning through the description of the clothes' state. It vividly conveys the speaker's disgust and incomprehension towards the listener, while hoping that the listener will change the clothes or iron them as soon as possible.)

As an adverbial: Tā bǎ wǎn yī liào, jíhóuhóu de pǎo dào xuéxiào lǐ qù le. ("Jíhóuhóu" describes a state of extreme anxiety. Compared with the word "zháojí" (anxious), it vividly portrays the state of "him", better reflecting his flustered and hurried manner. Here, "hóuhóu" implies the state of gasping for breath.)

It is worth noting that the intensification of degree is within a reasonable range, that is, an appropriate exaggeration of the adjective. Speakers make restrained and reasonable intensification based on the described objects.

3.1.2. Attenuation of degree

Adjective reduplication patterns indicating attenuated degree are relatively rare in the Yongdeng dialect, mostly appearing in the AA pattern. Reduplicated forms that can indicate attenuated degree usually have a base form that inherently possesses the quality of "smallness" or can denote "smallness". For example:

Mèimei shuǐzháo le, dēnghuì kuǎnkuǎn de kāimén a!

Zhè yǔ dīxīdīxī xià le yītiān le.

In these examples, "kuǎnkuǎn de" (gently) and "dīxīdīxī de" (drizzling slightly) both inherently carry the meaning of "smallness". "Kuǎnkuǎn" implies a light and gentle movement, vividly describing the small amplitude of opening the door. "Dīxīdīxī" conveys a drizzling feeling, but to a lesser degree than "xīxīlīlī" (drizzling), tending to mean tick-tock. Therefore, the grammatical meaning of the above examples in the sentences is to indicate the attenuation of degree.

3.2. Indicating state

Liu Danqing holds that various reduplicated forms as state adjectives are mainly used to reproduce the state of things and provide subjective descriptions of them [7]. This is specifically reflected in three aspects: variability, figurativeness, and subjectivity [7]. Based on Liu Danqing's viewpoint, this paper elaborates on the function of "indicating state" in the grammatical meanings of adjective reduplication in the Yongdeng dialect.

3.2.1. Variability

Due to the descriptive nature of state adjectives, their reduplicated forms are mostly used to present a certain state of things and express speakers' subjective emotions, thus possessing variability. For example:

Zhè dàbáicài yīnggāi shì jiāng (gāng) chǎn xià xa31 de, nènshǎnshǎn de.

Diànhú lǐ de shuǐ wēnchūchū de, tsua21 (a fusion of zěnmē de) pào chá ne.

"Nènshǎnshǎn" means tender and fresh, mostly used to describe meat as tender. However, in this example, it is used to describe the freshness of vegetables. Using the single word "nèn" (tender) alone cannot directly express the state of the Chinese cabbages just being harvested, while the reduplicated form highlights its descriptive function. Similarly, "wēnchūchū" describes the water temperature as not high, which is a neutral word in itself. In the context of this example, it implicitly carries a derogatory meaning, indicating that the water is too cold and suggesting the listener to boil some more hot water. The use of the reduplicated form better conveys the speaker's dissatisfaction.

3.2.2. Figurativeness

Reduplicated forms all carry distinct figurative colors, which can directly appeal to the listener's imaginative thinking and arouse impressions related to vision, hearing, taste, touch, etc. (hence the term "reproduction") [7]. Whether reduplicated or not, adjectives are highly figurative, helping people to better convey meanings and communicate. However, after reduplication, their inherent figurativeness becomes more three-dimensional, vividly engaging various sensory organs in communication. For example:

Hóngtángtáng de xǐbào tiē dào dànmén shàng le./Hóngsè de xǐbào tiē dào dànmén shàng le.

By comparing the two examples, "hóngtángtáng" vividly depicts the bright red color of the announcement of good news, better reflecting the joy and delight of the person involved. Both characters in "tángtáng" are pronounced in the first tone, with the second "táng" elongated and retroflexed, making the expression more vivid and figurative.

Other examples include:

Liǎn dòng de qīnggōugōu de, kuài dào lúzi gēnqián kǎo yīxià xa31 qù tēhi31.

Compared with the expression "qīngsè de liǎn" (a blue face), "qīnggōugōu" vividly portrays the color state of the face, evoking a visual impression and indirectly setting off the coldness of the weather outside.

3.2.3. Subjectivity

Reduplicated forms have a reduced ability to refer to things but an enhanced function of describing things. For rhetorical needs, they can even be coined [4]. Therefore, when using reduplicated forms, speakers tend to make subjective descriptions, conveying information according to their own subjective attitudes and emotional colors. At this time, the emotional meaning embodied in the language outweighs the explanatory meaning. For example:

Jiāngteiaŋ⁵⁵ (gānggāng) cóng dìli huílái, fáhēnghēng de, xiǎng tǎng yī zhèn.
Xiāchuōchuō de wǎng rén shēnshàng zhuàng lǐ!

4. Pragmatic functions

4.1. Adding emotional colors

4.1.1. Derogatory meaning

By sorting out and counting the adjective reduplication forms in *A Dictionary of the Lanzhou Dialect*, the author finds that a relatively large proportion of them carry derogatory meanings, which is also the case in the Yongdeng dialect. In daily communication, people mostly use reduplicated forms to express their hidden dissatisfaction, contempt, and other negative emotions. For example:

Zhè gǎiwá yītiān huàixìngxìng de, jiù zhī dào chōuyān dǎjià.
Shuōhuà zhíchūchuō de, lián gè miànzi dōu bù gěi.

4.1.2. Commendatory meaning

The process of an adjective evolving from its base form to its reduplicated form involves "degree modulation". Generally, when the degree dimension is reduced or the base form itself is a commendatory term, it indicates that the speaker expresses feelings of love, appreciation, and other positive meanings, achieving the effect of expressing affection through diminution. For example:

Gǎiwá de shǒushouzi dōu miándūndūn de.
Zhè wá gǎijījī de, xīnténg zhe!

4.1.3. Neutral meaning

It indicates that the speaker neither expresses praise nor criticism, but only objectively describes a certain state or property. For example:

Diànhú lǐ de shuǐ wēnchūchū de, zài dāshàng xiē.
Wǒ zuóge (zuótiān) mǎi le ge yuándūduō de mòhézi.

4.2. Adding expressive functions

4.2.1. Colloquial expressive function

With the passage of time and historical changes, the Yongdeng dialect has long been integrated with some minority dialects, forming its unique colloquial characteristics. Adjective reduplication forms are generally used in people's daily communication, carrying a colloquial flavor that reflects the simplicity, cordiality, and straightforwardness of people in Northwest China. Coupled with the stress and elongation of intonation, they further embody distinct vividness and figurativeness.

4.2.2. Descriptive expressive function

Most adjective reduplication forms carry rhetorical colors, expressing exaggeration and being able to directly and vividly describe the qualities and states of people or things. For example:

Tā de zuògōng xìfā, zá (féng) xià de yī fu zhǎnyěyě de.

Zhǎnyěyě: describing something as very flat and smooth.

Píngzi lǐ de kělē pūchìchì de mào chūlái le.

Pūchìchì: describing the sound of fluid spurting out.

Duān shànglái le yī pánzi dàlūlū de pútao.

Dàlūlū: describing round and granular things as large and nice-looking.

5. Conclusion

As one of the word-formation methods in modern Chinese, reduplication is an important grammatical device and a research focus in Chinese grammatical studies. Through investigating the adjective reduplication patterns in the Yongdeng dialect of Lanzhou, this paper classifies and sorts out a large number of linguistic phenomena, compares the similarities and differences between base forms and reduplicated forms, discusses the grammatical meanings and pragmatic functions of adjective reduplication in the Yongdeng dialect, demonstrates the unique communicative habits of people in Northwest China, and reflects the simplicity, cordiality, and straightforwardness of the Northwest region. On this basis, the paper further analyzes the grammatical meanings of adjective reduplication in the Yongdeng dialect, hoping to provide corpus for the research of Chinese dialects.

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