Chinese cleft constructions: microparametric ‘lateral’ grammaticalization*

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Abstract
Historical-comparative analysis of Chinese cleft constructions shows that although all Chinese dialects use the copula to select and assign focus to its clausal complement headed by the nominal particle (de (的) in Mandarin, ge (個/慨) in southern dialects), there are microvariations in that Mandarin de can either occur in sentence-final position (VOde) or as a verbal suffix (VdeO) whereas dialectal ge can only occur sentence-finally (VOge) and not elsewhere (*VgeO). All this suggests that Mandarin de and dialectal ge are not identical, and indeed their etymological roots indicate that while both are nominal elements, de and its original form di (底) do not have inherent deixis or quantificational force whereas ge being derived from the general classifier ge (個) does, which pre-empts its reanalysis as a clausal element. The dialectal distribution of Chinese clefts allows us to refine Simpson and Wu’s ‘lateral’ grammaticalization.

Key words
Chinese, clefts, copulas, nominalizers, syntax

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1. Introduction
Chinese cleft structures consist of the copula selecting a clausal complement headed by the nominal particle de in Mandarin or its dialectal equivalent ge in which there is a cleft bipartition of focus and presupposition, as schematized below (Lee 2005:133, Paul and Whitman 2008:430, Hole 2011:1710):

(1) Subject COPULA focus presupposition DE/GE

There are dialectal microvariations here, since in northern varieties of Mandarin de can be affixed onto the verb in the embedded clause when it denotes past tense (2a-b), whereas ge is always sentence-final (2c-d):

(2a) 我是 昨天 買 票 的
wo shi zuotian mai piao de
I COP yesterday buy ticket DE

(2b) 我是 昨天 買-的 票
wo shi zuotian mai-de piao
I COP yesterday buy-DE ticket
‘It was yesterday that I bought a ticket.’ (Mandarin) (Simpson & Wu 2002:169)

(2c) 佢係 琴日 買書嘅
kui hai kamyat maa’i sue ge
he COP yesterday buy book GE

(2d) *佢係 琴日 買-嘅 書
kui hai kamyat maa’-i sue
he COP yesterday buy-GE book
‘It was yesterday that he bought a book.’ (Cantonese) (Lee and Yiu 1998:11)

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1 The main difference between Chinese clefts and *it*-clefts is that although both involve the copula assigning focus to the relative clause, Chinese has prenominal relative clauses which leads to cleft bipartition within the relative clause as opposed to between the relativized noun and the relative clause as in *it*-clefts (Long 2013:436-440).

2 The sentence-final nature of ge is widely attested in Chinese dialects (i-ii), despite some rare exceptions (iii):

i) 伊是 昨日 去日本 個
i si zonie qi Zeben ge
he COP yesterday go Japan GE
‘It was yesterday that he went to Japan.’ (Shanghainese) (Wu 2004:131)

ii) 伊是 昨日 去 日本 個
i si chahng khi jipun e
he COP yesterday go Japan GE
‘It was yesterday that he went to Japan.’ (Taiwanese) (Wu 2004:131)

iii) 我是 前年 到個 北京
o zi dzieie to-ke peqin
I COP two.years.ago arrive-GE Beijing
‘It was two years ago that I arrived at Beijing.’ (Xinhua dialect) (Wu 2005:279)
Simpson and Wu (S&W) argue influentially that the formation of Mandarin clefts is a case of ‘lateral’ grammaticalization (LG) where de is reanalyzed from being a sentence-final nominalizer (VOde) to a clausal particle (VdeO) which represents a ‘lateral’ reanalysis of de from the nominal (DP) to the clausal domain (TP). However, the general ban on the clause-medial positioning of ge (see footnote 2) belies the null hypothesis that de and ge are identical across Chinese dialects. This paper proposes to investigate the diachronic and synchronic relationship between de and ge in Chinese clefts: section 2 provides an empirical analysis and formal representation of Chinese clefts which are argued to be essentially copular constructions where the matrix copula verb assigns focus to its clausal complement headed by de or ge; section 3 examines the historical formation of Chinese clefts which are shown to be derived from nominalized clausal complements of the copula (Yap et al 2010) and the different etymologies of de and ge seem to account for their different distributions in Chinese clefts; section 4 discusses the theoretical implications of Chinese clefts for LG which seems to be parameterisable.

2. Chinese clefts (VOde/VdeO, VOge/*VgeO)

It is well known that the two types of cleft structures have different empirical properties (Paul and Whitman 2008, Hole 2011), since in addition to the fact that verbal suffix de (VdeO) obligatorily marks past tense (2a-d), VOde and VOge permit a range of tense, aspect and mood (TAM) values (3a-b, d-e) and negation (3g-h), all of which are prohibited in VdeO (3c, f, i):

(3a) 他 是 明天 才 會 去 北京 的
ta shi mingtian cai hui qu Beijing de
he SHI tomorrow only.then will go Beijing DE
‘It will be tomorrow that he will go to Beijing.’ (Mandarin) (S&W 2002:189)

(3b) 我 係 要 去 美國 嘛
ngoh hai yiu hui meigwok ge
I COP will go America GE
‘It is the case that I will go to America.’ (Cantonese) (Fung 2000:149)

(3c) *他 是 明天 才 會 去-的 北京
*ta shi mingtian cai hui qu-de Beijing
*he SHI tomorrow only.then will go-DE Beijing
‘It is only tomorrow that he will go to Beijing.’ (Mandarin) (S&W 2002:177)

(3d) 張三 是 上 個 星期 去-了/過 北京 的
Zhangsan shi shang ge xingqi qu-le/guo Beijing de
Zhangsan COP last CL week go-ASP Beijing DE
‘It was last week that he went to Beijing.’ (Mandarin) (Hole 2011:1713)

(3e) 佢 係 打-緊 字 嘛
kui hai daa-gan ji ge
he COP hit-ASP word GE
‘He is typing words.’ (Cantonese) (Fung 2000:151)
Moreover, while VODe and VOge allow for narrow focus on the subject (4a-b) and the adjunct constituent (4d-e) closest to the copula as well as broad focus on the entire embedded clause with or without an overt subject (4g-h, j-k), VdeO only permits narrow focus (4c, f, i, l):

(4a) 是 張三 寫 詩 的
shi Zhangsan xie shi de
‘It is Zhangsan who writes poems.’ (Mandarin) (Hole 2011:1711)

(4b) 係 我 叫 佢 嗑 吸 先 嘅
hai ngoh giu kui tau-ha sin ge
‘It was I who told him to take a rest first.’ (Cantonese) (Fung 2000:151)

(4c) 是 張三 寫-的 詩
shi Zhangsan xie-de shi
‘It was Zhangsan who wrote poetry.’ (Mandarin) (Hole 2011:1710)

(4d) 張三 是 用 毛筆 寫 詩 的
Zhangsan shi yong maobi xie shi de
‘It is with a brush that Zhangsan writes poetry.’ (Mandarin) (Hole 2011:1711)
In conformity with the typological characteristics of clefts which often consist of copulas assigning focus to relative clauses (see footnote 1), the Chinese copula may be argued to assign focus to its complement ([u-Foc]) in which there may be left-dislocation in the form of A’-movement which derives cleft focus (cf Kiss 1998), and VOde/VOge and VdeO can be argued to be CP and TP respectively (Paul and Whitman 2008:445-448) in which given Minimality the
closest constituent is attracted to the focus projection on the left-periphery of de and ge, and since phrase-final de and ge have scope over the embedded clause, they allow for all TAM values and negation in the embedded clause as well as A′-movement for either individual constituents or the entire clause itself which constitute narrow and broad focus (5a) whereas verbal affix de bans all other TAM values and negation and only permits A′-movement for individual constituents (5b):

(5a)

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{PredP} \\
\text{SpecPred} \\
\text{subject} \\
\text{Pred}^4 \\
\text{shi} \\
\text{[u-Foc]} \\
\text{SpecFoc} \\
\text{subject}_j \\
\text{adverb}_k \\
\text{TP}_i \\
\text{[i-Foc]} \\
\text{FocP} \\
\text{Foc} \\
\text{CP} \\
\text{SpecC} \\
\text{C'} \\
\text{TP}_i \\
\text{C} \\
\text{TP} \\
\text{t}_j \text{t}_k \\
\text{de/ge} \\
\text{t}_i \\
\end{array}
\]

Figure 1: VOde/VOge

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3 This is supported by the fact that cleft bipartition only exists in the presence of the clausal particle (i) (shi-de proper (Paul and Whitman 2008:414), whereas its omission yields informational focus by association (ii) (bare shi (Paul and Whitman 2008:415), which suggests that de and by extension ge hold the landing-site for A′-movement:

(i) 他 是 在 北京 學 言語學 的, 不 是 在 上海 學 的
ta shi zai Beijing xue yuyanxue de bu shi zai Shanghai xue de
he COP at Beijing learn linguistics DE NEG COP at Shanghai learn DE

*不 是 在 北京 學 法文 的
bu shi zai Beijing xue fawen de
NEG COP at Beijing learn French DE

‘It was in Beijing that he studied linguistics, not in Shanghai *not French.’ (Paul and Whitman 2008:415)

(ii) 他 是 在 北京 學 言語學 不 是 在 上海 學 言語學
ta shi zai Beijing xue yuyanxue bu shi zai Shanghai xue yuyanxue
he COP at Beijing learn linguistics NEG COP at Shanghai learn linguistics

也不 是 在 北京 學 法文
ye bu shi zai Beijing xue fawen
also NEG COP at Beijing learn French

‘He studies linguistics at Beijing, not in Shanghai, and not French either.’ (Paul and Whitman 2008:414)

4 In representing copula shi, I adopt Bowers’ (1993) hypothesis that copulas instantiate unique functional heads (Pred) with the subject in its specifier, which is arguably superior to the raising verb analysis which entails problems for the adjacency in cleft-focus assignment (Paul and Whitman 2008:437-438).
Chinese clefts, then, are copular constructions whose clausal complements have different empirical properties due to the structural differences between sentence-final particles (VOde/VOge) and verbal suffixes (VdeO), which leads us to their diachronic formation.

3. Historical formation of Chinese clefts
Recent philological analyses point out that Chinese cleft constructions are reanalyzed from copular constructions in which the copula selects nominalized relative clauses headed by *de* and *ge* (Zhan 2012, Long 2013). While both *de* and *ge* are used as adnominalisers in Chinese, *de* is widely held to stem from the Medieval Chinese phrase-final nominaliser (*n*) *di* (底) (Liu 2008, cf Aldridge 2008) and *ge* is commonly argued to be derived from the classifier (CL) *ge* (Cao 1995) which can stand as a phrase-initial determiner and assign specificity (del Gobbo 1999).\(^5\) *De* and *ge*, therefore, form different types of relative clauses when used as complements to the copula. VOde and VOge are regularly found in equative copular constructions where the clausal complement is reanalysable as a cleft in contrastive contexts (7a) or when the nominal complement is omitted (7b-c), which weakens their nominal character:

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\(^5\) The inherent specificity of *ge* may have to do with the fact that it is originally used as a quantifier for countable nouns in Classical Chinese and is hence inherently individualizing (Yap et al 2010, Bisang and Li 2012).
非是菩萨行藏，此是俗门作底
非是 divinity 行藏，此是俗门 do 底
‘This is not the behaviour of divinity; this is the doings of laymen (> 'it was laymen who did this').’ (*Dunhuang bianwenji 敦煌变文集*)

师云：‘人人尽有底衣即是。’
师 say everyone all have 底 DE 衣 do 什摩?
‘The teacher says, ‘The clothes which everyone has is then.’’

僧云：‘既是人人尽有底，用被作什摩?’
僧 say as COP everyone all have 底 DE use 衣 do 什摩?
‘The monk said, ‘If it is the clothes which everyone has (> if it is the case that everyone has it), what use is there for garments?’’ (*Zutangji 祖堂集*)

师指面前狗子云：‘明-明-个，明-明-个。’
师 point 面-LOC 前 face-LOC 狗子 dog say 明-明-个, 明-明-个
‘The teacher points at the dog in front and say, ‘Fair-skinned, fair-skinned.’’

僧便问师：‘既是明-明-个，为个摩头在里许?’
僧 then ask teacher as COP 明-明-个, 为个摩头 在里许?
‘The monk then asks the teacher, ‘If it is the one that is fair-skinned (> if it is the case that it is fair-skinned), why is its head inside?’’ (*Zutangji 祖堂集*)

Clause-medial *de* and *ge*, on the other hand, are found in copular constructions where the subject and the complement are not co-referential (Long 2013:425) and the contrast in deixis entails that *de* is attested with abstract and generic nouns and is hence reanalysable as a cleft denoting past tense due to the fact that the object is the result of the verb (7d) whereas *ge* tends to select specific and referential ones and its nominal character is hence retained (7e):

娘原是气恼-上起的病
娘 原 是 氣恼-上 起 的 病
‘As for my mother, it was originally the illness that was contracted by getting angry (> it was by getting angry that my mother contracted illness).’ (*Jinping meici hua 金瓶梅詞話*)

則是茶坊-裡 見個粗-眉毛、
則 是 茶坊-裡 見個 粗-眉毛、
‘It was in the tea lounge that I saw a thick-brow, big-eye flat-nose...’
略绰-口的官人
luechuo-kou de guanren
sharp-mouth DE official
‘Then it was the case that in the lounge he saw a thick-browed, big-eyed, flat-nosed, sharp-mouthed official.’ (Nansong Huaben Xuanji 南宋話本選集)

The difference in deixis between *de* and *ge*, therefore, seems to account for the discrepancy between VdeO and *VgeO in Chinese clefts, which has important implications for S&W’s LG.

4. ‘Lateral’ grammaticalization: microparametric view

The reanalysis of Chinese *de* and *ge* in Chinese clefts shows that while both seem to conform to S&W’s LG hypothesis of a ‘lateral’ reanalysis from nominal to clausal, the inherent deixis of *ge* ([i-D]) pre-empts its reanalysis as a clausal element in clause-medial position as it selects definite and specific objects whereas *de* is reanalyzable in both clause-final and clause-medial positions due to its general lack of deixis, which shows structural correlations between the nominal and clausal domains (n/CL > C, De > T/Asp), which can be schematized thus:

(8)

имер parametric variation in ‘lateral’ grammaticalization

LG, therefore, can be parameterized according to the hierarchy of nominal elements, as higher elements (CL) cannot be as easily reanalyzed ‘laterally’ as lower ones (De/n).

References


