Diachronic formation of Chinese cleft (*shi-de*) constructions: Mandarin and dialects

Chinese cleft constructions consist of the copula (*shi* or dialectal equivalent) assigning focus to its immediately adjacent element in its complement ending with an adnominaliser (*de* in Mandarin or dialectal *g*-equivalents), and while *de* is attested as either sentence-final (VOde) or sentence-medial (VdeO), *g*-forms are generally sentence-final (VOge) and not otherwise (*VgeO) (Lee and Yiu (1998), Tang (2011), Shyu (2016)):

1a) Wo   shi   zuotian   mai   piao   de
    I   SHI   yesterday buy   ticket DE

1b) Wo   shi   zuotian   mai   de   piao
    I   SHI   yesterday buy   DE   ticket

    'It was yesterday that I bought the ticket.' (Mandarin, from Simpson and Wu (S&W) (2002:169))

2a) kui   hai   kamyat   maai   sue   ge
    He   COP   yesterday buy   book   GE

2b) *kui   hai   kamyat   maai   ge   sue
    He   COP   yesterday buy   GE   book

    'It was yesterday that he bought the ticket.' (Cantonese, from Lee and Yiu (1998:5))

It has recently been argued that Chinese cleft constructions are formed in copular constructions where the clausal complement of the copula, which is usually the nominalized relative clause is reanalyzed from being nominal to clausal (Long and Xiao (2009, 2011), Han (2012), Zhan (2012), Long (20130), which, in formal terms, constitutes a type of 'lateral' reanalysis where the nominal elements (*de/ge*) are 'laterally' re-analysed from being nominal to clausal, especially when their original deictic force [+D] is weakened (Tse (2018), cf Simpson and Wu (2002)). In the case of *de* (< *di*), there are clear instances of such weakening in both VOde and VdeO where the nominalized relative clauses (VOde/VdeO) are not necessarily referential/definite and *de* may hence be reanalyzed as clausal particles (C/T(past) respectively)):

3a) fei   shi   pusa   xingcang   ci   shi   suren   zuo   di
    NEG   COP   saint behaviour   this   COP   layman   do   DE

    'It is not the behaviour of saints; this is the doings of laymen (> it was the laymen who did this).' (*Zhenzhou liji Huizhou chanshi yulu*)

3b) wukong,   ni   shi   na   shi   xiu-lai   de   yuanfa
    Wukong   you   COP   which life obtain-RES   DE   enlightenment

    'Wukong, as for you, of which life is your enlightenment obtained? (> Which life was it that you obtained your enlightenment?)' (*Xiyouji*)

As for *ge,* examples of VOge are attested while *VgeO is not attested:

4) wo   bian   shi   zhao   xiang   ge
    I   then   COP   wear   light   GE

    'Then I shall be the one who is in trouble (> then I shall be in trouble.).' (*Tongshang, yierchu*)

This discrepancy between *de* and *ge* can be accounted for in terms of their etymological origins, the fact that *de* is derived from an original nominalizer *di* on a par with classical Chinese *zhe* (Lu (1943), Aldridge (2008), Yap et al (2010)) whereas *ge* is widely argued to be derived from the general classifier *ge* (Cao (1994)), and since *de* being derived from nominalizer *di* does not necessarily denote referentiality/definiteness, it can be reanalyzed as a clausal particle when its deictic force is suppressed. Classifier *ge*, on the other hand, is widely attested with referentiality/definiteness in dialects (Bisang (2012)), and so its deictic force is more inherent and hence more difficult to be suppressed, which entails that it is only reanalysable as a sentence-final particle in sentence-final position (VOge, cf ex. 4)) but not as a sentence-medial particle (*VgeO). There are hence microparametric variation between Chinese dialects in the nominal hierarchy (*de* (n/D), *ge* (CL/D)) which yields different cleft constructions, since while the deictic force of *de* is not inherent and hence not guaranteed (VOde/VdeO), the deictic force of *ge* seems to be stronger and hence not attested in the sentence-medial position (VOge/*VgeO).

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