Formation of Chinese clefts: microparametric ‘lateral’ grammaticalization

Chinese cleft constructions typically consist of a matrix copula verb (ex. 1a-c)) selecting an embedded clause headed by a particle homophonic with the adnominaliser (e.g. Mandarin 是 shi... 的 de and its dialectal correspondences), and although northern varieties permit an alternation between sentence-final de (VOde) and sentence-medial de in the form of a verbal suffix intervening between the verb and its object (VdeO) (ex. 2a) (Simpson and Wu (S&W) (2002), Paul and Whitman (P&W) (2008)), southern dialects utilize ge-forms which typically occur only in sentence-final position (VOge) and not elsewhere (*VgeO) (ex. 2b)), which yields a clear and sharp divide between northern (de) and southern (ge) Chinese cleft formation with significant microparametric variation (Tang (2011), Sio (2011)). In this paper, it is proposed that these differences can be traced back to the historical origins of de as a phrase-final nominalizer (de 的 < di 底 < zhe 者) (Lu (1943), Liu (2008), Aldridge (2008), Yap et al (2010)) and those of ge as a classifier (ge 個) (Cao (1995)) respectively, which give rise to different cleft constructions due to their differences in inherent deixis. This constitutes empirical support and refinement to S&W’s (2002;196-199) influential ‘lateral’ grammaticalization which argues that de undergoes ‘lateral’ reanalysis from being an adnominaliser (D) to a past-tense suffix (T(past)), since de and ge do show ‘lateral’ reanalysis from nominal to clausal and their differences give rise to a sophisticated variationist account of ‘lateral’ grammaticalization.

It has recently been shown that Chinese cleft constructions are formed in the Medieval period where copula shi selects nominalized relative clauses which are reanalysable as cleft clauses (Long and Xiao (2009, 2011), Zhan (2012), Han (2012)), especially in contrastive contexts where focus is prominent (ex. 3a)) and the nominal interpretation of de/ge is weakened by the omission of a nominal complement (ex. 3b)). In sentence-medial position, on the other hand, de and ge differ in terms of referentiality, since the former in being reanalyzed from phrase-final nominalizer to linker (Liu (2008), Yap et al (2010), cf den Dikken (2006)) does not necessarily denote definiteness and may hence be reanalyzed as a verbal suffix denoting past tense, especially when it is used with generic and non-real is nominal complements which weaken its nominal interpretation (ex. 3c-d)) while the latter does denote definiteness as a determiner (Li and Bisang (2012)) and hence pre-empts reanalysis as a clausal element as it always selects specific and known nominal complements which makes its deictic force harder to suppress (ex. 3e)). These microparametric variations in the nominal hierarchy between de (n) and ge (CL (+D)) hence yield different cleft constructions in northern (VOde/VdeO) (ex. 2a) and southern (VOge/*VgeO) dialects (ex. 2b)), and while both de and ge seem to undergo ‘lateral’ categorial reanalysis from nominal to clausal, their differences in deixis give rise to different types of ‘lateral’ grammaticalization where the two northern variants (VOde/VdeO) form inverse correspondences between the nominal and clausal domains where higher and lower clausal elements like VOde and VdeO (CP/TP) are reanalyzed from lower and higher nominalisers (nP/DP) respectively, and ge, which is inherently definite as a determiner, can only be reanalyzed in clause-final position (VOge) and not elsewhere (*VgeO). Furthermore, southern Chinese ge, in addition to being ‘laterally’ reanalyzed from nominal to clausal, shows signs of being merged relatively low in the hierarchy of C-elements in the inventory of Chinese sentence-final particles (SFP) (cf Paul (2015)) and can also combine with other SFPs in forming composite particles (gaa3, gaa4, gak3, ge2 (Fung (2000), Li (2006)), which entails further layers of C features and renders it a unique form of ‘lateral’ grammaticalization.
Examples:

1a) ni shi bu shi zuotian lai de you COP NEG COP yesterday come DE
   ‘Is it or is it not yesterday that you came?’ (S&W (2002:196))

1b) you/bu shi ta jiejie kai de men again/NEG COP his sister open DE door
   ‘It was again/not his sister who opened the door.’ (P&W (2008:439))

1c) hui shi wo mingtian zai gongyuan-li yao jian ta de FUT.AUX COP I tomorrow at park-LOC FUT.AUX see him DE
   ‘It will be I who will see him in the park tomorrow.’ (modified from Cheng (1983:76))

2a) wo shi zuotian mai piao de / wo shi zuotian mai de piao I COP yesterday buy ticket DE I COP yesterday buy DE ticket
   ‘It was yesterday that I bought the ticket.’ (S&W) (2002:169))

2b) kui hai kamyat maai sue ge / *kui hai kamyat maai ge sue he COP yesterday buy book GE he COP yesterday buy GE book
   ‘It was yesterday that he bought the book.’ (Cantonese, Lee and Yiu (1998))

3a) fei shi pusa xingcang ; ci shi sumen zuo di NEG COP divine.beings behaviour this COP laymen do DE
   ‘This is not the behaviour of divine beings; this is the doings of laymen.’ > ‘… it was laymen who did this.’
   (Dunhuang bianwenji 敦煌变文集)

3b) ni shi xiaode ge (ren) you COP understand GE person
   ‘You are the one who understands.’ > ‘You do understand.’ (broad focus) (Shange, Duyang 山歌，篤癢)

3c) niang yuan shi qinao-shang qi de bing Mother originally COP angry-LOC contract DE illness
   ‘As for my mother, it was originally illness that was contracted via anger.’ > ‘It was via anger that my mother originally contracted illness.’ (Jinpinglei hua 金瓶梅詞話)

3d) Wukong ni shi na shi xiu-lai de yuanfa? Wukong you SHI which life obtain-AFF DE karma
   ‘Wukong, as for you, it was the karma of which life that was obtained?’ > ‘Wukong, which life did you obtain your karma?’
   (Xiyouji 西游記)

3e) jie shi you ge bing / que shi shengren shuo ge yingzi all COP have GE illness but COP saint mention GE shadow
   ‘They all have an illness’ / ‘But it was the shadow mentioned by saints.’ (Zhuzi Yulei 朱子語類)

References: