Cantonese GE (喲) vs Mandarin DE (的): microparametric variations in the nominal domain:
Keith Tse (謝嘉麒) (University of York/Ronin Institute (英國約克大學/浪人學會))
Recent research has revealed that although Cantonese GE (喲) and Mandarin DE (的) are both broadly
classifiable as possessive adnominalisers in the nominal domain merged in roughly the same low position on the
nominal spine below θ(ponstrative), Num(ber), Q(uantifier), CL(assifier) and Adj(ective) (Zhu (1980), Sio and
Sybesma (2008)), there are subtle microparametric variations in the Chinese D(eterminer)P(hrase) (del Gobbo
(2007), Cheng and Sybesma (1999), Sio and Song (2015)), namely the fact that DE has a bigger collocaional
range than GE in that the former can select predicational complements in subject position whereas the latter
cannot (1a)), even though both are possible in object position (1b)):
1a) ta de laoshi dang de hao / *kui ge louisi zo dak ho
he DE teacher serve DE good he GE teacher do DAK good
‘He serves well as a teacher.’ (Tang (2011:149-150))
1b) ta dang ta de laoshi / kui zo kui ge louisi
he serve he DE teacher he serve he GE teacher
‘He does his job as a teacher.’ (Tang (2011:151))
Furthermore, there is evidence that these constructions are not truly nominal since the classifier is strictly
prohibited (2a)), and even though the adnominaliser is possible in object position (1b)), it is ungrammatical in
Cantonese with idiomatic verb phrases (2b)), even though common VO structures are possible (2c)):
2a) zhe ge/*tou niu chuì-de tai guohuo le
This CL cow blow-DE too over.the.top SFP
‘This bluff (blow-cow) is too over the top.’ (Tang (2011:150))
2b) wo ting-bu-dong ta you-DE-mo / *ngo teng-ng-ming kui jau-ge-mak
I listen-NEG-understand he hu-DE-mour I listen-NEG-listen he hu-GE-mour
‘I do not understand his humour.’ (Tang (2011:152, 154))
2c) ta chi wo de cu / kui haap ngo ge cou
he sip I DE vinegar he sip I GE vinegar
‘He is jealous (sip-vinegar) of me.’ (Tang (2011:152))
There are hence discrepancies between Cantonese GE and Mandarin DE as well as the subject and object
grammatical relations which call for closer scrutiny. It is widely argued that the object construction consists of
light verbs denoting activity in which there is possessor raising to a higher A(rgument)-position (Huang (2008), cf
Pylkkänen (2008)), which yields the adnominal particles (DE/GE) as remnant expletives in their respective DPs,
and here DE shows higher flexibility in selecting non-figurative objects such you-DE-mo (2b)) whereas GE can
only be used with metaphorical objects like haap-ge-cou (2c)). In subject position, on the other hand, as possessor
raising is impossible, both DE and GE are functional elements in the nominal domain and here their relative
referentiality displays microparametric variation, since while Mandarin DE can be used to mark non-transitive
objects like ta-de-laoshi as selected by dang ‘to serve as’ (1a)), Cantonese GE cannot (1a)) which indicates a
higher level of referentiality as it seems to be incompatible with such non-transitive verbs zo ‘to serve as’ which
selects a predicational complement like kui-ge-lousi (1a)). The more abstract selection as seen in Mandarin DE
brings it closer to den Dikken’s (2006) linker hypothesis, which is supported by the fact that DE is derived
historically from predicational constructions in which DE marks the predicational relationship between two
nominal elements (Yap et al (2010)), whereas GE is originally a classifier (個) with referential force which, in
southern-central dialects, continues to function as a determiner (Xu and Matthews (2011)). GE and DE, therefore,
have subtly different selectional features which may be argued to stem from their different etymological origins
References:
Nominalization in Asian Languages: diachronic and typological perspectives, John Benjamins, pp. 125-146.
Proceedings of the 22nd International Conference on Head-Driven Phrase Structure Grammar, Nanyang Technological University,
nominalization in Mandarin and Cantonese’, in Yap, F.-H., Grunow-Harsta, K. and Wrona, J. (eds), Nominalization in Asian
Languages: diachronic and typological perspectives, Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, pp. 147-161;
in Yap, F.-H, Grunow-Harsta, K. and Wrona, J. (eds), Nominalization in Asian Languages: diachronic and typological perspectives,
into an attitudinal nominalizer’, in van Linden, A., Verstraete, J.-C. and Davidek, K. (eds), Formal Evidence in Grammaticalization
Xinandai hanyu yafa yanjiu.