

Diachronic formation of Chinese cleft (*shi-de*) constructions

Chinese cleft constructions consist of copula *shi* assigning focus to its immediately adjacent element in its complement ending in *de*, which can either be sentence-final (VOde) or come between the verb and the object (VdeO):

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.’ (Simpson and Wu (S&W) (2002:169))

S&W (2002:171-175) argue that VdeO is derived from VOde (V *de*_i O *t*_i), which constitutes a ‘lateral’ reanalysis of *de* from being a determiner to a past-tense marker (D > T(past)) as well as formal simplification (D_{Agree} > T_{Merge}) (Tse (2013), cf Roberts and Roussou (2003)). Recent analyses (Zhan (2012), Long and Xiao (2011)) have shown that VOde and VdeO are derived from two different types of relative clauses. In this paper, I propose to revise S&W’s account and defend their ‘lateral’ hypothesis. It is noted that VdeO only assigns narrow focus and necessarily denotes past tense with no negators or tense/mood/aspect (TAM) markers allowed, whereas VOde assigns narrow/broad focus and permits all TAM material and negators (Lee (2005:175-186), Paul and Whitman (2008:427-433), Hole (2011:1710-1712)). It can be argued that sentence-final *de* is a sentence-final particle, namely a head-final complementiser (C) which permits all TAM markers and negators in the embedded clause as well as A’-movement for either specific constituents in the embedded clause or the whole clause itself (cf Hole (2011:1724-1727), Meng (2014:107-115)), whereas verb-adjacent *de* is a past-tense marker (T(past)) suffixed onto the verb via V-to-v movement (cf Paul and Whitman (2008:435-438)), which pre-empts all functional heads above little v (TAM, negation) and only permits A’-movement for specific constituents in the embedded clause. As *de* is argued to be an original clause-final nominalizer (n) which becomes a determiner (D) when it selects nominal complements (Aldridge (2008:243-249), Yap et al (2011:62-72)), *de* is reanalyzed either from a nominalizer to a sentence-final particle (n > C) (VOde, ex. 2)) or from a determiner to a past tense suffix (D > T(past)) (VdeO, ex. 3):

2) Fei shi pusa xingcang ci shi suren zuo di
NEG SHI 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*)

3) wukong, ni shi na shi xiu-lai de yuanfa?
wukong you SHI which life obtain-AFF DE karma

‘Wukong, which life is the karma that you have obtained?’ > ‘which life was it that you obtained your karma?’ (*Xiyou ji*)

De hence undergoes ‘lateral’ reanalysis from nominal to clausal, which, interestingly, shows inverse structural correspondences between the nominal and clausal domains (n > C, D > T), as well as formal simplification (D_{Move} > C_{Merge}, D_{XP-Move} > V_{Move}).

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