

It is not what you think that is clefted in Chinese V *de* O clefts

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Topic & Goals: This paper investigates the V *de* O clefts in Mandarin Chinese. I argue that there is no overt focus-presupposition bipartition in this pattern (unlike English-type clefts): the focus/presupposition interpretation comes from a specificational copula (whether phonologically spelled out or not) which selects a small clause structure, and an event *pro* as the small clause predicate. I claim the clefted object to be the pronounced part of a full VP, which denotes the type of event existentially presupposed and is modified by a relative clause marked by *de*.

Background: Chinese V *de* O clefts get their name in previous literature (Paul & Whitman 2008; Hole 2011 a.o.) for their focus marking function as well as the lexical composition comparable to cross-linguistic cleft constructions. The following observations are commonly claimed about this pattern: (i) only arguments/adjuncts can bear the focus (i.e. only term focus available); (ii) focus has to immediately follow the copula; (iii) markers of tense/aspect/modality (TAM) are forbidden in spite of the obligatory past tense reading; (iv) the pattern is subject to the exclusiveness condition. For syntactic accounts, *shi* (if present) is generally treated as the copula whereas various analyses exist for *de*: it has been analyzed as T⁰ (Simpson & Wu 2002), Asp⁰ (Paul & Whitman 2008), C⁰ (Hole 2011), etc. Additionally, it is often argued that there is an overt focus-presupposition bipartition in the structure (e.g. Paul & Whitman 2008, Hole 2011).

Analysis: First, I show that other focus types (1d-f) than term focus (1a-c) are in fact possible in V *de* O clefts, given the right predicates, prosody and context (contrary to the common claim mentioned above):

- (1) a. *Shi Zhangsan mai de mianbao.* [subject focus]
be Zhangsan buy DE bread
'It was Zhangsan who bought the bread.'
- b. *Zhangsan shi zai zheli mai de mianbao.* [adjunct focus]
Zhangsan be at here buy DE bread
'It was here that Zhangsan bought the bread.'
- c. *Zhangsan shi mai de mianbao.* [object focus]
Zhangsan be buy DE bread
'It was bread that Zhangsan bought.'
- d. *Zhangsan shi mai de mianbao.* [verb focus]
Zhangsan be buy DE bread
'Zhangsan BOUGHT the bread (, instead of baking it himself).'
- e. *Zhangsan shi mai de miaobao.* [VP focus]
Zhangsan be buy DE bread
'It was buying bread that Zhangsan did.'
(as an answer to "What did Zhangsan do for the family dinner?")
- f. *Shi Zhangsan xian da de wo!* [proposition focus]
be Zhangsan first hit DE 1SG
'(It is the case that) Zhangsan hit me first!'
(as an answer to "Why did you hit Zhangsan?")

Second, I attribute the adjacency effect to some pragmatic factor (i.e., non-focused information is usually given and thus tends to be topicalized), instead of the alleged syntactic bipartition. This is clear with object focus (as in 1c): obviously the focus does not immediately follow the copula in this case. Evidence also comes from examples like below, where focus can be shifted to elements non-adjacent to *shi* (via stress placement):

- (2) Zhangsan *shi* *zuotian* *qi-che* *qu* *de* *Faguo*.
 Zhangsan be yesterday ride-bike go *DE* France
 i. ‘It was yesterday that Zhangsan went to France by bike.’
 ii. ? ‘It was by bike that Zhangsan went to France yesterday.’
 iii. ? ‘It was France that Zhangsan went to by bike yesterday.’
 iv. ‘It was yesterday by bike that Zhangsan went to France.’
 v. * ‘It is/was the case that Zhangsan went to France by bike yesterday.’

(i-iii) are obtained with stress on the respective focused constituent, (iv-v) with no particular stress on any element. The different availability of readings (iv/v) shows that the event in question is intrinsically presupposed and cannot be conveyed as totally new information.

All these effects can be explained if we assume that a specificational copula is always involved, selecting a small clause, and that the small clause predicate is a null *pro* referring to an existentially presupposed event. As a case of predicate inversion, the event *pro* is raised above the copula, with topical elements preceding it (cf. Cheng’s (2008) proposal for other *shi...de* sentences). Regarding the nature of *de* here, I claim this functional element to be a modification marker/relativizer: it marks the modification of a VP by a relative clause. This VP, partially spelled out at PF as the clefted object, denotes the type of event that is existentially presupposed; the modifying relative clause usually provides new information about the event. The derivation can be schematized as:

(Topic) *e-pro*_i COP [_{sc} [RC-*de* VP] [_{ti}]].

More specifically: (i) the presupposed existence of an event entails uniqueness/exclusiveness; (ii) any constituent within vP can be focused by adding phonological prominence to it (including the apparent proposition focus case, where it is still vP, a causing event, that is focused); (iii) the ban on TAM elements simply follows from the fact that they contradict with the existential presupposition of the event.

Keywords: syntax-semantics interface, Chinese V *de* O clefts, specificational copula, event *pro*, modification marker/relativizer

Selected References:

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