

韵律语法研究

Studies in Prosodic Grammar

第三辑

Volume 3

2018年第2期 (No.2 2018)

主编 冯胜利 马秋武



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目 录

Variations in the Role of Stress and Focus Marking in Tonal Languages: Evidence from Chinese [Num + Cl + <i>de</i> + NP] Expressions Li, Yen-hui Audrey & Feng, Shengli	1
Mandarin <i>Wh</i> -Phrases and Prosody Shyu, Shu-ing & Tung, Tsung-lin	32
谈超音步 端木三	77
Variation in Prosody-Syntax Matching: The Case of Mandarin Tone 3 Sandhi Lin, Yen-Hwei	96
汉语的声调应何时教? 怎么教? 曹文	112
试析河南武陟(大虹桥乡)方言的名词变韵 朱玉柱	123
《现代汉语八百词》中的韵律现象及其韵律语法的早期探索 王永娜	143

CONTENTS

Variations in the Role of Stress and Focus Marking in Tonal Languages: Evidence from Chinese [Num + Cl + <i>de</i> + NP] Expressions	Li, Yen-hui Audrey & Feng, Shengli	1
Mandarin <i>Wh</i> -Phrases and Prosody	Shyu, Shu-ing & Tung, Tsung-lin	32
On the Super-foot	Duanmu, San	77
Variation in Prosody-Syntax Matching: The Case of Mandarin Tone 3 Sandhi	Lin, Yen-Hwei	96
When and How Shall Tones Be Taught in Chinese Learning?	Cao, Wen	112
A Tentative Analysis of the Vowel Variations in Nouns in Wuzhi Dialect (at Dahongqiao Village) of Henan Province	Zhu, Yuzhu	123
The Prosodic Phenomena and Preliminary Explorations of Prosodic Grammar in <i>Eight Hundred Words in Modern Chinese</i> (《现代汉语八百词》)	Wang, Yongna	143

Variations in the Role of Stress and Focus Marking in Tonal Languages: Evidence from Chinese [Num + Cl + *de* + NP] Expressions

Li, Yen-hui Audrey & Feng, Shengli

Abstract: The available literature disagrees on what the empirical generalizations should be regarding the conditions under which the marker *de* is possible after classifiers in Mandarin Chinese [Num + Cl + *de* + NP] expressions (Num for Number Projection, Cl for Classifier Projection). Online search also generates data contradicting generalizations presented in many relevant works. A field survey of speakers of “Taiwan Mandarin” vs. *Putonghua* “common language” (standard Mandarin in Chinese mainland) on their judgments about the acceptability of noun phrases [Num + Cl + *de* + NP] with the [Num + Cl] expression denoting a quantity reading (in contrast to a property reading) reveals that such disagreement could be due to dialectal differences: speakers of “Taiwan Mandarin” accepted a post-classifier *de* more than the *Putonghua* speakers, regardless of classifier

types. Research shows that such a dialectal variation is expected under an analysis that takes the occurrence of *de* as a phonological phrasing strategy to reflect focus on the quantity of the noun phrase, with different dialects in the Chinese language family differing in their use of this strategy due to the varying roles of stress (prosodic strong-weak contrast).

Keywords: focus-marking strategies; phonological phrasing; stress; tonal language; Chinese NPs with post-classifier *de*; quantity vs. property

1. Introduction

A prominent controversy in the grammatical studies of Chinese is the question of under what conditions the linker^① *de* is acceptable after a classifier in a noun phrase [Num + Cl + NP] (Number Projection, Classifier Projection, and Noun Phrase). Different empirical generalizations on the possibility of *de* have been made (cf. Chao, 1968, Section 7.9; Li & Thompson, 1981: 104-113; Tai & Wang, 1990; Cheng & Sybesma, 1998, 1999; T'sou, 1976; Paris, 1979: 32; Tang, 2005: 444; Hsieh, 2008: 42; X.-P. Li, 2011, Section 3, Chapter 5; Her & Hsieh, 2010: 540; Her, 2012: 1223; Zhuang & Liu, 2012; Y.-H. A. Li, 2013: 101-105; Zhang, 2013: 79-80 and Section 5.5, among others). Proposals to account for the possibility or impossibility of *de* in the works just cited range from what occupies the Num or Cl position, whether the Num and Cl form a

① There have been different terms used for the grammatical marker *de*, because of its multiple usages in Chinese. Zhu (1961) is the first one describing in great details the multiple functions of *de*. Chao (1968, Section 5.3.6., Chapter 5) further expands the coverage and how the term “linker” or “particle” is used. Paris (1979), Li & Thompson (1981: 113-116) describe different usages of *de* within nominal phrases and use terms such as “nominalizer” or “particle”. The term “modification marker” has been used widely but we cannot trace the origin of this term. The term “linker” was used in Dikken (2006) in relation to a predication relation. The use of “linker” in this paper does not carry any analytical or theoretical assumptions or claims.

constituent, to what semantic or prosodic information is conveyed by the presence or absence of *de*. In addition to the disagreement among published works on what the correct empirical generalization regarding the distribution and grammatical properties of *de* should be, online search generates data contradicting the empirical claims made in many of the relevant works. Such disagreement on data judgments needs to be addressed in order that adequate empirical generalizations can be identified and a proper analysis formed. It will be shown, through a field survey of data judgment on relevant expressions by speakers from different regions, that such disagreement is due to dialectal variations. The result of the field survey shows that “Taiwan Mandarin” speakers accepted the use of *de* in [Num + Cl + *de* + NP] more freely than speakers from Chinese mainland speaking *Putonghua*, the standard variety of Chinese and official language in Chinese mainland, whose pronunciation is based on the Beijing dialect. This difference between Chinese mainland and Taiwan Mandarin speakers gives us a clue to evaluating the available proposals for the distribution of *de* and supports a focus-prosody approach to the issue.

Focus in natural languages is commonly expressed through stress, as captured by Reinhart’s (1995: 62) Stress-Focus Correspondence Principle.^① Questions have been raised regarding how stress behaves in tonal languages^② and how such languages encode focus phonologically. In a recent work that extensively discusses strategies to mark focus in different types of languages, Féry (2013: 720) observes that “It is not an accident that the languages predominantly using focus markers are tone languages with minimal use of intonation for pragmatic purposes. These languages cannot add tonal information like pitch accents or boundary tones as freely as intonation languages and are obliged to use other grammatical reflexes for the expression of focus.” Pierrehumbert & Beckman (1988), Kanerva (1990), Downing et al. (2004), Koch (2008), among others, have proposed that, instead of stress, some languages use the strategy of phonological

① “Focus” in this work includes information focus and contrastive focus. It does not matter what kind of focus is involved, and focus can be marked in some overt manner. Prosodic prominence is a common manifestation of focus.

② For a recent summary and review of relevant issues, see Duanmu (2014).

phrasing to mark focus — making the focused part an independent unit in contrast to the unmarked pattern of being part of another phonological phrase.^①

The data and analysis discussed in this work will show that stress (more precisely, prosodic strong-weak contrasts) and phonological phrasing strategies can play different roles in different varieties within a tonal language family — Chinese. The use of these strategies is related to the prominence of prosodic strong-weak contrasts and the way prosodic units are formed. Different varieties of a tonal language, Chinese in this case, may not exhibit the same behavior, resulting in differences in how focus is manifested. *Putonghua*, which has prominent prosodic strong-weak contrasts, naturally weakens some syllables in phrases or a syllable of bisyllabic words (such as *pútáo* “grape”, *lǎopo* “wife”, etc.), and generally has a prosodically more prominent word in a phrase or a sentence (see Feng, 1995, for instance). Focus in this linguistic variety is commonly encoded via prosodic strong-weak contrasts. By comparison, “Taiwanese” (a Southern Min dialect of the Chinese language family, spoken in Taiwan) is prominent in the formation of tone groups, with each syllable within a tone group taking a full tone. The strategy of phonological phrasing in such a language becomes more important in focus encoding. In a noun phrase [Num + Cl + NP] in “Taiwanese”, when the Num+Cl part is emphasized (regardless of whether it is information or contrastive focus), the linker^② *e*, counterpart of the Mandarin *de*, can be inserted for proper phonological phrasing. “Taiwan Mandarin” (or “TM”) has been deeply affected by “Taiwanese” in many ways (e.g., Kubler, 1985), including many phonological properties of “Taiwanese” adopted in

① The term “phonological phrase” in this work is a convenient label referring to the unit formed according to the strategy of phonological phrasing encoding focus. It is not used in contrast to other prosodic units such as Intonational Phrase, Intermediate Intonational Phrase, etc. (see, for instance, Pierrehumbert, 1980). The exact status of such a unit for the purpose of focus-marking is not a concern of this work.

② There have been different terms used for the grammatical marker *de*, because of its multiple usages in Chinese. Zhu (1961) is the first one describing in great details the multiple functions of *de*. Chao (1968, Section 5.3.6., Chapter 5) further expands the coverage and how the term “linker” or “particle” is used. Paris (1979), Li and Thompson (1981: 113-116) describe different usages of *de* within nominal phrases and use terms such as “nominalizer” or “particle”. The term “modification marker” has been used widely, but I cannot trace the origin of this term. The term “linker” was used in Dikken (2006) in relation to a predication relation. The use of “linker” in this paper does not carry any analytical or theoretical assumptions or claims.

“Taiwan Mandarin”. Not surprisingly, the phonological phrasing strategy is also more commonly used in “TM”. Such differences in the prominent use of focus encoding in the two varieties of Mandarin are demonstrated by the distribution of the linker *de* within noun phrases, as supported by the result of a field survey among college and graduate students speaking “TM” vs. *Putonghua*, which shows significant differences in accepting the linker *de* in noun phrases of the form [Num + Cl + *de* + NP] between the two groups.^① Such a difference among different varieties of Chinese not only provides a better understanding of the controversies in the literature regarding the acceptability of noun phrases of the form [Num + Cl + *de* + NP], but also helps evaluate the available analyses proposed for the construction.

Our discussion will begin in Section 2 with a brief description of the main properties of the construction in question [Num + Cl + *de* + NP]. Then, Section 3 discusses the disagreement on data in the literature; Section 4 shows that, indeed, college and graduate students from Chinese mainland and Taiwan do differ in their acceptability of [Num + Cl + *de* + NP], according to field surveys conducted in Taiwan, Chinese mainland, and Hong Kong (in college classes with students mostly from Chinese mainland); Section 5 shows that this difference is not accounted for by all the analyses proposed in the literature except an analysis like the one in Y.-H. A. Li (2013) and Li & Feng (2015), which treats *de* as a marker for phonological phrasing to encode focus and considers the important factor of dialectal variation in how focus is manifested; Section 6 discusses directions of further research and concludes the paper.

2. Major properties of [Num + Cl + *de* + NP]

This section briefly summarizes the main properties of [Num + Cl + *de* + NP] that must be considered by an adequate analysis of this construction, illustrated as below:

① Different dialect groups, such as Southern Min (including “Taiwanese”), Northern Wu, Southern Wu, etc. have different tone group formation and sandhi rules (see, a good recent summary and review by Zhang, 2014). It would be important to compare focus-marking strategies in these groups, which, unfortunately, is outside the scope of this paper.

(1) 三磅的西瓜

sān-bàng de xīguā

three-pound DE^① watermelon

“three pounds of watermelon(s)”^②

“three-pound watermelon”

As indicated by the translation, the expression in (1) has two interpretations. One is about the quantity of watermelon in terms of weight — watermelon of the quantity of three pounds. Let us refer to this interpretation as “quantity reading”. The other denotes the kind of watermelon whose property can be expressed in terms of its weight — the kind of three-pound watermelon. This interpretation will be referred to as “property reading”. The two readings can be more clearly distinguished in contexts favoring one reading or the other. For instance, an adverb like *yíòng* “altogether” requires the occurrence of a quantity expression. The following example allows only a quantity reading:

(2) 他一共吃了三磅的西瓜。

Tā yíòng chīle sān-bàng de xīguā.

he altogether ate three-pound DE watermelon

“He ate three pounds of watermelon altogether.”

Similarly, the following example about a person’s eating capacity favors a quantity reading:

(3) 他很会吃；十分钟就吃了三磅的西瓜。

Tā hěn huì chī; shí-fēn zhōng jiù chī-le sān-bàng de xīguā.

he very capable eat ten-minute then eat-LE three-pound DE watermelon

“He is good at eating. He ate three pounds of watermelon in 10 minutes.”

① The marker *de*, the subject of this paper, will simply be glossed as DE. The grammatical marker *le* is also glossed as LE. When it is attached to a verb, it can be a perfective aspect marker. When it is at the end of a sentence, it expresses change of state. When a sentence ends with *V-le*, it potentially has the combination of the two functions.

② “Watermelon” as a noun can be countable or uncountable. It does not matter if whole watermelons or pieces of watermelon are in question when what is expressed is the quantity of three pounds. Therefore, the plural morpheme *-s* is in parentheses in this example. However, for the sake of clearer presentation, the optional *-s* will not appear again in the rest of the paper.

A property-reading Num + Cl expression can occur with another Num + Cl, as illustrated in (4) below.

(4) 他拿了一个三磅的西瓜。

Tā ná-le yí-ge sān-bàng de xīguā.

he take-LE one-CL three-pound DE watermelon

“He took a three-pound watermelon.”

In this example, *ge* is a generic or default classifier and is the classifier to count watermelons. The Num + Cl expression “three pound” is a modifying expression describing the property of the following noun, just like an adjectival phrase or a relative clause modifying an NP — the watermelon in question is a three-pound type. Such a modifier, just like other nominal modifiers in Chinese, can occur before or after unit words (classifiers) — *yí-ge* in the example above and the one below with *yí-ge* and “three-pound” changing their ordering:

(5) 他拿了三磅的一个西瓜。

Tā ná-le sān-bàng de yí-ge xīguā.

he take-LE three-pound DE one-CL watermelon

“He took a three-pound watermelon.”

The two readings, quantity vs. property, can be further distinguished in the context where the NP following *de* is not present overtly [Num + Cl + *de* + ____] (conveniently referred to as “NP-ellipsis”), which can be due to deletion of the NP or base-generation of an empty element.^① In the context of NP-ellipsis, only the property reading is available, illustrated by the following examples.

(6) a. 西瓜，他要三磅的，我要五磅的。

Xīguā, tā yào sān-bàng de. wǒ yào wǔ-bàng de. —property reading

watermelon he want three-pound DE I want five-pound DE

“Watermelons, he wants three-pound ones, and I want five-pound ones.”

① The term “NP-ellipsis” is not intended to mean derivation by ellipsis or deletion. It simply means the NP position is not occupied by an overt noun phrase. See Y.-H. A. Li (2014) for relevant issues and analyses for NP-ellipsis in Chinese.

b. 我, 西瓜要三磅的。

Wǒ, xīguā yào sān-bàng de. —property reading

I watermelon want three-pound DE

“I, watermelons, want three-pound ones.”

c. 西瓜, 把三磅的卖完的人不多。

Xīguā, bǎ sān-bàng de mài-wán de rén bù duō. —property reading

watermelon BA three-pound DE sell-finish DE people not many

“Watermelons, the people that sold off three-pound ones were not many.”

Under the quantity reading, the NP in [Num + Cl (+ *de*) + NP] can be null only if *de* does not appear:

(7) a. 西瓜, 他要三磅 (*的), 我要五磅 (*的)。

Xīguā, tā yào sān-bàng (*de), wǒ yào wǔ-bàng (*de). —quantity reading

watermelon he want three-pound I want five-pound

“Watermelon, he wants three pounds, and I want five pounds.”

b. 他要三磅的西瓜, 我要五磅 (*的)。

Tā yào sān-bàng de xīguā, wǒ yào wǔ-bàng (*de). —quantity reading

he want three-pound DE watermelon I want five-pound

“He wants three pounds of watermelon, and I want five pounds.”

(8a–c) Summarize the facts presented so far.

(8) In a noun phrase [Num + Cl (+ *de*) + NP] in Mandarin Chinese

a. The Num + Cl expresses the quantity or describes the property of the NP — quantity reading vs. property reading.

b. NP-ellipsis following *de* is possible only with the property reading.

c. NP-ellipsis is impossible under the quantity reading if *de* is present.

3. The acceptability of a post-classifier *de*?

The examples above use the classifier *bàng* “pound”, which is a unit to measure the weight of entities. Chinese has different kinds of unit words to measure or count entities. Chao (1968, Section 7.9) distinguishes 9 kinds of measure words, among which

are classifiers or individual measures (such as the generic *gè*, or *tiáo* for long and thin objects), group measures (such as *qún* “group”), partitive measures (such as *sānfēnzhīyī* “one-third”), container measures (such as *bēi* “cup”), standard measures (such as *gōngjīn* “kilo”), etc. Gradually, the distinction between the two terms “classifier” and “measure” became more frequently made as the two major types of unit words, although “classifier” is often used ambiguously to refer only to individual measures as in Chao (narrow sense), or any unit word occurring after Num (broad sense) (see, for instance, Li & Thompson, 1981:104-113; Tai & Wang, 1990, among others). Cheng and Sybesma (1998, 1999) use the term “massifier” (for mass classifier) and “count-classifier”^① to refer to the two major types.^② For convenience, this work adopts these two terms and use “classifier” as a generic term covering both massifiers and count-classifiers. What is pertinent to this work is the observation made in Chao (1968: 289-290) that *de* is not inserted if a unit word is a count-classifier or if there is a demonstrative: **liǎng-tiáo de shé* “two-CL DE snake”, **nà-bàng de ròu* “that-CL DE meat”. In contrast, when a classifier is a massifier, *de* is optional. The same observation is made in T’sou (1976), Paris (1979: 32), among others. Cheng and Sybesma (1998: 388, 1999: 515) highlight this distinction and make the (im) possibility of *de* following a classifier as a diagnostic for distinguishing count-classifiers and massifiers. According to Cheng and Sybesma (1999: 515), “a modification marker *de* can intervene in [massifier + N], but not in [count-classifier + N] sequences”.

However, many works have subsequently presented counterexamples showing that the possibility of *de* does not distinguish between massifiers and count-classifiers. For instance, Tang (2005: 444), Hsieh (2008: 42), X.-P. Li (2011, Chapter 5, Section 3), Her

① Following Tai & Wang (1990), Croft (1994), Peyraube (1998), among others, Cheng and Sybesma (1998, 1999) roughly distinguish classifiers into two groups: classifiers that create a unit of measure, and those that simply name the unit in which the entity denoted by the noun naturally occurs. They refer to the classifiers that create a unit of measure as massifiers (short for mass classifiers), and to the ones that simply name the unit of natural semantic portioning as count-classifiers (in contrast to terminological distinctions used in others such as Tai and Wang’s measure vs. classifier).

② Zhang (2013) makes finer distinctions of unit words. However, for the purpose of this work, the distinction between count-classifier and massifier suffices.

& Hsieh (2010: 540), Her (2012: 1223), Y.-H. A. Li (2013: 101-105), and Zhang (2013: 79-80 and Section 5.5), among others, show that *de* may follow all types of unit words. Nonetheless, some of these authors note that the use of *de* with count-classifiers is more restricted than with massifiers, although they do not agree on what the restrictions are. Tang notes that information weight plays a role in determining when *de* is possible — *de* is allowed to follow a count-classifier and more complex numbers, or when complex and heavy modifiers are involved. Her & Hsieh present a similar observation: *de* is allowed with computationally complex numbers. On the other hand, Hsieh notes that *de* is used with number expressions of indeterminacy or approximation. She also notes emphasis plays a role: *de* may follow a count-classifier when the quantity is emphasized. Zhang notes that *de* is possible with all types of classifiers and that the context for *de* to show up has nothing to do with the count-mass contrast. She suggests that *de* can be a boundary marker between phrases or when quantity is emphasized. X.-P. Li allows *de* and classifiers with certain numerals (such as round numerals) and in certain contexts, essentially when a unit word has a measure function. Y.-H. A. Li lists varieties of examples from various webpages showing that count-classifiers are followed by *de* [see (13a–c) below for instance].

Sybesma (1992), cited in Cheng (2012), further made an observation that if the typical quantity-measuring massifiers were not used in the quantity measure sense, *de* was not possible. This was illustrated by the following examples with *de* and a massifier unacceptable because the context was for an individual (entity) reading, rather than a measure reading. (9a) is used, not (9b), to order a glass of wine in a restaurant: [Cheng, 2012: (25a, b)].

(9) a. 一杯酒

yì-bēi jiǔ

one-cup wine

b. 一杯的酒

yì-bēi de jiǔ

one-cup DE wine

The following example appeared in Sybesma [1992: 107, ex. (100a, b)], quoted in Cheng (2012), her (10a-b).

(10) a. # 他用小碗喝了三杯酒。

Tā yòng xiǎo-wǎn hē-le sān-bēi jiǔ.

he with small-bowl drink-LE three-cup liquor

“He drank three cups of liquor from a small bowl.”

b. 他用小碗喝了三杯(子)的酒。

Tā yòng xiǎo-wǎn hē-le sān-bēi (zi) -de jiǔ.

he with small-bowl drink-LE three cup-DE liquor

“He drank three cups of liquor from a small bowl.”

According to these authors, the sentence in (10a) is gibberish, indicated by #, but (10b) is not. In (10a), when *bēi* “cup” is used without *de*, the default interpretation is that the wine is consumed from the cup: the actual cup/glass is part of the scene. In contrast, when *bēi* “cup” is used with *de*, as in (10b), the wine need not be consumed from the cup/glass; in this case, *bēi* “cup” merely provides a measure for the amount of liquor that was consumed.

Unfortunately, it is not always easy to distinguish the so-called measure reading and the individual reading through the use of *de*. For the example above, when the scenario is a bowl of wine, whose content is equivalent to the amount of three cups of wine, then, the measure reading is clear — cups do not even exist in the scenario. However, when cups are present in the scenario, the distinction between the measure and individual readings is not clear.

Consider this scenario: I am ordered by my doctor to drink three cups of wine every day. The doctor and I must both have the quantity in mind, rather than the concrete entities of cups.

Under this scenario, the following sentence is acceptable, although *de* does not appear, regardless of whether cups are present in the context: