

The ambiguity of V+T+(de)+N in Mandarin Chinese

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In this talk, we focus on a phrase in Mandarin Chinese (cf. 1) – which we call V+T+(de)+N – that is highly versatile in terms of its interpretation.

- (1) wo [xie_V le san-tian_T (de) zuo-ye_N]
I write ASP three-day DE homework
- a. ‘The homework that I wrote for 3 days’ (with *de*)
 - b. ‘I wrote three days of homework’ (with/without *de*)
 - c. ‘I’ve been working on my homework for three days’ (with/without *de*)

This phrase consists of the following parts: (i) V, a verb with an aspect marker; (ii) T, a time modifier; (iii) the particle *de*, which in some interpretations of the phrase can be optional; and (iv) N, a noun (phrase). As far as we are aware, this phrase has not received much attention in the literature, but in some descriptive grammars, it has sometimes been introduced as “pseudo-” or “quasi-attribute” (cf. Chao 1979: 164; Huang 1981: 42; Wang 2010: 179) making reference to what the durative adverbial *san-tian* seems to modify. In (1a)–(1c), we provide three possible interpretations of (1). Depending on whether the particle *de* is realised or not, five different morphosyntactic structures corresponding to these interpretations for (1) can be proposed.

In our talk, we first deal with four of the possible structures for (1) and show how, on the basis of these structures, we can provide a straightforward analysis for the apparent bracketing paradox in (2), where the durative adverbial *san-tian* is syntactically combined with the N(P) *zuo-ye*, but it modifies the verbal event of *xie*.

- (2) wo [xie_V le [_{NP} san-tian_T de zuo-ye_N]]
I write ASP three-day DE homework

References

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