

1 Introduction

Both the semantic and syntactic characteristics of *de* have been a source of contention in the literature for well over forty years now.

One reason for this disgruntlement may be that *de* wears many hats in Modern Mandarin and can combine with a large number of syntactic objects. When the target of modification is a noun phrase (NP), for instance, *de* may appear adjacent to an adjectival phrase (1), a possessive phrase (2), a prepositional phrase (PP) (3), or an inflectional phrase (i.e. as a complementizer) (4).

- (1) 胖 的 孩子
pang de haizi
fat DE child
'fat child'

- (2) 张三 的 卡车
zhangsan de kache
Zhangsan DE car
'Zhangsan's car'

- (3) 电影院 的 旁边
dianyingyuan de pangbian
cinema DE next-to
'next to the cinema'

- (4) 李斯 昨天 买 的 书
lisi zuotian mai de shu
Lisi yesterday buy DE book
'The book that Lisi bought yesterday'

Furthermore, there is a phonetically identical element that allows modification of verb phrases, but is distinguished orthographically. Examples (5) and (6) illustrate this use.

- (5) 跑 得 快
pao de kuai
run DE fast
'to run fast'

- (6) 紧张 地 问
jinzhang de wen
nervous DE ask
'to ask nervously'

2 Acquisition of de

Despite its widespread use in the adult grammar and considerable attention paid to its typological characteristics, nobody to date has examined the development of de in the grammar of Mandarin-speaking children. Like many

3 Method

4 Results

5 Discussion