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Attitudinal nominalizer(s) in Chinese: Evidence of recursive grammaticalization and pragmaticization

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Abstract

This paper examines the life-cycle of versatile nominalizers in Chinese, with special attention to how they develop into attitudinal stance markers. Based on cross-dialectal and diachronic data, we first identify a wide range of extended uses of nominalization constructions within the Sinitic language family, among them relativizing and subordinating uses, then trace how these dependent nominalization constructions are reanalyzed as independent finite structures. Our analysis reveals a series of semantic and syntactic scope expansions that paves the way for nominalization constructions to be extended from referential uses to attitudinal uses. Our findings highlight the robustness of an (inter)subjectification process whereby nominalizers often combine with other particles at the right periphery to form complex sentence final mood particles, which have valuable implications for cartographic studies in diachronic syntax and also for diachronic pragmatics studies that focus on the interface between grammar and discourse—not only for Chinese, but for other languages with attitudinal nominalizers as well.

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1. Introduction

One of the things that often catch the attention of linguists investigating the grammar of a language with sentence final particles is that some of these particles have the same form as the nominalizer or relativizer, and sometimes also the genitive or possessive marker, and in many cases the subordinator as well (see, for example, Yap et al., 2014). This frequent syncretism between nominalizer (and often relativizer, genitive/possessive marker and/or subordinator) and sentence final particle has been noted in the case of Japanese *no* > *noda* > *nda*, Korean *kes* > *kesita/kesiya* and

Abbreviations: AGT, agent; CL, classifier; COND, conditional; CONN, connective; COP, copula; DEM, demonstrative; EMPH, emphatic marker; EXST, existential marker; GEN, genitive; INTJ, interjection; NEG, negator; NMLZ, nominalizer; PASS, passive marker; PERF, perfect marker; PRT, particle; REL, relativizer; RVC, resultative verb compound; SFP, sentence final particle; SUB, subordinator; SUF, suffix; TOP, topic marker; 1SG, first person singular; 3SG, third person singular.

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mal > *malita/maliya*, and also Mandarin Chinese *de* (的) > *dene* (的呢) / *deya* (的呀) / *dela* (的啦) / *de'a* (的啊) / *deba* (的吧) and Cantonese Chinese *ge³* (嘅) > *ge³lo¹* (嘅囉) / *ge³le¹* (嘅呢) / *ge³ze¹* (嘅咗), among others. A number of previous studies have addressed this phenomenon in terms of the semantic extensions of versatile nominalizers from the referential domain to non-referential ones, with the flow of grammaticalization along the following trajectory: referential > modification > pragmatic (see Horie, 2008, 2011; Rhee, 2008, 2011; Yap et al., 2010a; Yap and Wang, 2011; Yap et al., 2011a,b and papers therein; *inter alia*). This development parallels previous studies that support Traugott's observation that many instances of grammaticalization involve a development from propositional > textual > pragmatic uses (e.g. Traugott, 1982, 1989, 1995, 2010; *inter alia*).

An interesting question is whether this crosslinguistically robust phenomenon is also robust *within* each of the languages manifesting this nominalizer/pragmatic marker syncretism. That is, does a language such as Chinese, for example, exhibit frequent recurrence of this phenomenon in which nominalizers develop into sentence final particles in a cyclical or iterative fashion, such that a diachronic view of the grammar of the language reveals multiple life-cycles of attitudinal nominalizers?

In this paper, we will examine the development of attitudinal nominalizers in Chinese, initially drawing on examples from Modern Chinese such as Mandarin *de* (的), Cantonese *ge³* (嘅), Chaozhou *kai* and Taiwan Southern Min *e*, then going back in time to Old Chinese with examples such as Classical Chinese *zhě* (者). We then also consider the possibility that some other sentence final particles in Old Chinese such as *yě* (也), *zhān* (旃) and *yì* (毆) may also be derived from erstwhile attitudinal nominalizers. And we conclude with a discussion of the sources and extended uses of different types of nominalizers, in particular their potential for developing into attitudinal sentence final particles. Our findings will contribute to a broader understanding of how grammatical and pragmatic particles drift from the nominal domain to predication domains and beyond, to give rise to finite structures that also often include the speaker's subjective and intersubjective stances.

2. Previous studies on attitudinal nominalizers in Chinese

Earlier studies have identified a number of versatile nominalizers in Chinese. Expanding on the work of Jiang (1999) on Classical Chinese, Yap et al. (2010a) showed how a general noun *dǐ* (initially 氐, and subsequently 底) meaning 'foundation', 'base' or 'bottom' as shown in (1) eventually became semantically generalized and was sufficiently versatile to develop, among other things, into an indefinite/interrogative pronoun as in (2), then a nominalizer and relativizer, as in (3) and (4) respectively. Nominalizer *dǐ* (底) underwent phonological weakening to yield the phonological variant *de* (的) in Late Middle Chinese (ca. 8th to 10th century during the Tang period); over time, *de* subsequently replaced *dǐ* during the Early Modern Chinese period (13th to 16th century).

(1) 尹氏大師! 維周之氐。

yǐnshì dàshī wéi zhōu zhī dǐ
Yin (title) commander COP Zhou GEN foundation
'The commander Yin! (He) is the **foundation** of the Zhou dynasty.'
(*Shi Jing*, Pre-Qin period, i.e. pre-221 BC; Yap et al., 2010a:72)

(2) 興盛使軍人遙告敬則曰:

xīngshèng shǐ jūnrén yáo gào jìngzé yuē
(name of person) order military.person far tell (name of person) say
「公兒死已盡,公持許底作?」
gōng ér sǐ yǐ jìn gōng chí xǔ dǐ zuò?
your son die already totally, you hold much what do
'Xingsheng ordered his men to go tell Jingze:
Your son is gone; **what** do you hold on to now?'
(*Song Shu*, Southern & Northern Kingdoms, 420–589 AD; Yap et al., 2010a:74)

(3) 乞眼睛底是眼否

qǐ yǎnjīng dǐ shì yǎn fǒu
ask eye AGT.NMLZ COP eye NEG-Q.SFP
'**The ones who** ask about the eye (i.e. the eye of wisdom in the Buddhist sense), are (they) the eyes or not?'
(Translated as 'Isn't it the eye that desires eyes?') (*Zu Tang Ji*, Five Dynasties & Ten Kingdoms, 907–960 AD; Yap et al., 2010a:77)

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