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All structures great and small: on copular sentences with shì in Mandarin

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APPENDIX A

Shì and adjective predicates

It is well-known that in Mandarin copula *shì* is only used in sentences such as (1) where the predicate is nominal (e.g. Pustet 2003). It is not allowed when the predicate is an adjective (see the ungrammaticality of (2)).

- (1) 张三是老师。
Zhāngsān shì lǎoshī.
Zhangsan COP teacher
'Zhangsan is a teacher.'
- (2) *张三是高。
**Zhāngsān shì gāo.*
Zhangsan COP tall
Intended: 'Zhangsan is tall.'

When nothing intervenes between the subject and a simple adjective, the sentence is either 'incomplete/ungrammatical' when the adjective is non-gradable (e.g. (3)) or can only have the comparative reading when the adjective is gradable (e.g. (4a)). As for sentences with gradable adjectives, it has been widely accepted that if the positive interpretation is intended, a degree adverb *hěn* is obligatory (e.g. (4b)) and the meaning

of this *hěn* is bleached if not pronounced with an extra stress.

- (3) * 这个答案错。
 * *Zhè-ge dá'àn cuò.*
 DEM-CLF answer wrong
Intended: ‘This answer is wrong.’
- (4) a. 张三高。
Zhāngsān gāo.
 Zhangsan tall
 ‘Zhangsan is taller (than someone known from the context).’
 b. 张三很高。
Zhāngsān hěn gāo.
 Zhangsan very tall
 ‘Zhangsan is tall.’ (Sybesma 1999: 27)

As observed in Fang (2017, 2018), the *hěn*-form like (4b) is only the default form for relative adjectives (i.e. adjectives corresponding to open scales). Absolute adjectives (i.e. adjectives corresponding to closed scales) in fact allow the use of *shì* when an extra sentence final *de* is also added (e.g. (5b)). Additionally, the *shì ... de* form is also the only predicative form of non-gradable adjectives (6a), since Mandarin non-gradable adjectives are incompatible with *hěn* (i.e. (6b)).¹

- (5) a. 这个杯子是满的。
Zhè-ge bēizi shì mǎn de.
 DEM-CLF cup COP full DE
 ‘This cup is full.’
 b. 这个杯子很满。
Zhè-ge bēizi hěn mǎn.
 DEM-CLF cup very full
 ‘This cup is very full.’
- (6) a. 地球是圆形的。 (Fang 2018: 412)
Dìqiú shì yuánxíng de.
 Earth COP round.shape DE
 ‘The Earth is round.’

¹The classification of adjectives follows Kennedy and McNally (2005).

- b. *地球很圆形。
 **Dìqiú hěn yuánxíng.*
 Earth very round.shape
Intended: ‘The Earth is round.’

Sentences in (7)-(9) below present the combination of three subcategories of absolute adjectives and three different ways of predication. All (a) sentences are formed by adjectives with upper-closed scales; (b) sentences are formed by adjectives with lower-closed scales; and (c) sentences are formed by adjectives with totally-closed scales (Kennedy & McNally 2005). In (7), bare adjectives are the predicates and they have comparative interpretations. In (8), adjectives are combined with *hěn* and they have positive interpretations. Unlike (4b), *hěn* here actually has the intensify degree meaning. Lastly, in (9), adjectives are combined with *shì ...de* construction (which may be viewed as a copula *shì* plus a *de*), and they have positive interpretations.

- (7) a. 这条路直。
Zhè-tiáo lù zhí.
 DEM-CLF road straight
 ‘This road is more straight.’
- b. 这双袜子干。
Zhè-shuāng wàzi gān.
 DEM-CLF socks dry
 ‘This pair of socks is drier.’
- c. 这个杯子满。
Zhè-ge bēizi mǎn.
 DEM-CLF cup full
 ‘This cup is fuller.’
- (8) a. 这条路很直。
Zhè-tiáo lù hěn zhí.
 DEM-CLF road very straight
 ‘This road is very straight.’
- b. 这双袜子很干。
Zhè-shuāng wàzi hěn gān.
 DEM-CLF socks very dry
 ‘This pair of socks is very dry.’

- c. 这个杯子很满。
Zhè-ge bēizi hěn mǎn.
 DEM-CLF cup very full
 ‘This cup is very full.’
- (9) a. 这条路是直的。
Zhè-tiáo lù shì zhí de.
 DEM-CLF road COP straight DE
 ‘This road is straight.’
- b. 这双袜子是干的。
Zhè-shuāng wàzi shì gān de.
 DEM-CLF socks COP dry DE
 ‘This pair of socks is dry.’
- c. 这个杯子是满的。
Zhè-ge bēizi shì mǎn de.
 DEM-CLF cup COP full DE
 ‘This cup is full.’

It is worth pointing out that what we have seen in the previous examples are all simple adjectives, according to Zhu’s (1982) simple-complex adjective dichotomy. ‘Simple’ is defined in terms of the form that they are usually monosyllabic or disyllabic; whereas complex adjectives are all multi-syllabic. Complex adjectives are generally formed by reduplication of simple adjectives or the combination of modifiers and simple adjectives. Semantically speaking, simple adjectives are regarded as adjectives introducing inherent properties while complex adjectives describe the states. Crucially, one typical syntactic property of complex adjectives is the incompatibility with degree adverbs such as *hěn* (e.g. (10)), which is ascribed to their inherent degree meaning.

- (10) a. *这条路很笔直 (的)。
 **Zhè-tiáo lù hěn bǐzhí (de).*
 DEM-CLF road very pen.straight DE
Intended: ‘This road is as straight as a pen.’
- b. *这双袜子很干干 (的)。
 **Zhè-shuāng wàzi hěn gāngān (de).*
 DEM-CLF socks very dry-RED DE
Intended: ‘This pair of socks is very dry.’

- c. *这个杯子很满满 (的)。
 *Zhè-ge bēizi hěn mǎnmǎn (de).
 DEM-CLF cup very full-RED DE
 Intended: 'This cup is very full.'

Complex adjectives are included here because they introduce the third type of predicative form of adjectives which only *de* is used, as shown in (11a). Note that *de* in (11) is obligatory while *shì* is not needed. In fact, the occurrence of *shì* in (12) changes the meaning (or perhaps the information structure) of the sentences.

- (11) a. 这条路笔直 *(的)。
 Zhè-tiáo lù bǐzhí *(de).
 DEM-CLF road pen.straight DE
 'This road is as straight as a pen.'
- b. 这双袜子干干 *(的)。
 Zhè-shuāng wàzi gāngān *(de).
 DEM-CLF socks dry-RED DE
 'This pair of socks is very dry.'
- c. 这个杯子满满 *(的)。
 Zhè-ge bēizi mǎnmǎn *(de).
 DEM-CLF cup full-RED DE
 'This cup is full.'
- (12) a. 这条路 (是) 笔直 *(的)。
 Zhè-tiáo lù (shì) bǐzhí *(de).
 DEM-CLF road COP pen.straight DE
 'This road is as straight as a pen.'
- b. 这双袜子 (是) 干干 *(的)。
 Zhè-shuāng wàzi (shì) gāngān *(de).
 DEM-CLF socks COP dry-RED DE
 'This pair of socks is very dry.'
- c. 这个杯子 (是) 满满 *(的)。
 Zhè-ge bēizi (shì) mǎnmǎn *(de).
 DEM-CLF cup COP full-RED DE
 'This cup is full.'

In sum, there are three predicative forms of adjectives in Mandarin, illustrated in the table below. Adding *hěn* is one way which is crucial to

relative adjectives. The use of *shì* (with the combination of *de*) is also crucial to non-gradable adjectives as it is actually the only predicative form for this type of adjectives. Furthermore, the use of *de* is especially pivot to non-gradable complex adjectives.

Table A.1: Types of adjectives and their predicative forms

				<i>hě'n+A</i>	<i>A+de</i>	<i>shì+A+de</i>
non-gradable	simple			-	-	+
	complex			-	+	+
gradable	simple	absolute	upper	+	-	+
			lower	+	-	+
			totally	+	-	+
		relative		+	-	-

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