



***De* in Focus: Two Days of Vibrant Discourse at the 10th Inter-Regional Forum on Dialectal Grammar**

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Abstract

The 10th Inter-Regional Forum on Dialect Grammar took place at The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) in 2024, organized by the T. T. Ng Chinese Language Research Centre of the Institute of Chinese Studies. Centred on the sentence-final particle *de* across Sinitic varieties, the two-day programme featured a keynote address by Professor Yen-hui Audrey Li (CUHK / University of Southern California) alongside 26 academic presentations by authors from 15 institutions, marking the 10th anniversary of this regional scholarly dialogue.

Initiated in 2015 by The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) and Sun Yat-sen University (SYSU), the Inter-Regional Forum on Dialectal Grammar welcomed Fudan University (FDU) into its fold in 2017. Since then, the three institutions have taken turns hosting the Forum, passing the academic torch and forging a robust scholarly community dedicated to dialect grammar both at home and abroad.

On June 27–28, 2024, the 10th Inter-Regional Forum on Dialect Grammar was held at CUHK, organized by the T. T. Ng Chinese Language Research Centre of the Institute of Chinese Studies. At the opening ceremony, Professor Sze-Wing Tang, Director of the Centre, delivered the welcoming remarks and briefly introduced the history of the event. He noted that, operating under a system of open submissions, the Forum gathered a diverse cohort of scholars from 15 institutions, including Beijing Language and Culture University, Beijing Normal University, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Fudan University, Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, Hainan Normal University, Huazhong University of Science and Technology, Jinan University, Peking University, Renmin University of China, Shanghai Jiao Tong University, Sun Yat-sen University, Xiamen University, and Zhejiang University. Over two days of intense intellectual synergy, participants shared their latest findings and insights, making the milestone 10th anniversary edition a resounding success.

This year's Forum turned its focus toward an exceptionally subtle and intricate phenomenon in Chinese grammar – the sentence-final particle *de* across Chinese dialects. The deliberations centred on the multifaceted representations of dialectal *de*, the syntax, semantics, and functions of sentence-final *de*, and the underlying relationships between *de*, sentence-final particles, and attributive markers.

The keynote session was chaired by Professor Haihua Pan from CUHK. Professor Yen-hui Audrey Li, representing CUHK and University of Southern California, was invited to deliver the keynote address. Focusing on Taiwanese Southern Min, Professor Li demonstrated that the sentence-final *e* (the corresponding marker to Mandarin *de*) is by no means a monolithic entity; rather, based on tone, syntactic behaviour, and semantic constraints, it can be split into three distinct types.

Among them, the first type of *e* and the second light-toned *e* essentially remain within the internal structure of the noun phrase. The former connects possessors or arguments and must be retained as an independent fifth-tone group when the subsequent noun is omitted. The latter performs a nominalizing function, fusing with implicit components to form a free relative clause that carries a generic semantic reading and is subject to syntactic constraints regarding *wh*-words and movement. The third light-toned *e*, however, completely detaches from the domain of the noun phrase or tense/aspect particles. Serving

as a focus marker, it indicates the presence of a non-default information focus in the sentence, occupying an extremely low position in the syntactic hierarchy, which prevents it from co-occurring with specific *wh*-words located at higher syntactic positions.

Following the keynote address, the Forum transitioned into its regular presentation sessions. The first day featured a total of four sessions.

The initial session was chaired by Professor Andy Chi-on Chin from Hong Kong Metropolitan University (HKMU). During this slot, Niting Yan from SYSU analyzed the particle [ge³⁵/e³⁵] in the Yongchun dialect, while Miao Xiang Lim from CUHK provided a preliminary investigation into the sentence-final [e¹³] in propositional assertive sentences within Penang Hokkien.

The morning presentations continued with the second session, chaired by Dr. Jackie Yan-Ki Lai from City University of Hong Kong (CityUHK). In this session, Jiaying Huang (jointly representing CUHK and SYSU) discussed the nature, function, and origin of the sentence-final *ge* in Cantonese. Following this, Yuanlin Yang from CUHK examined the three-domain functions of the sentence-final particle *ge* in Cantonese from an interactional perspective. Concluding the session, Jiaxin Liang from Zhejiang University drew a comparison between Siyi Yue and Guangfu Yue to discuss the phonetic forms as well as the syntactic and semantic functions of the sentence-final [kə]/[kə] in Siyi Yue.

The afternoon began with the third session, presided over by Professor Peppina Po Lun Lee from HKMU. Dingxu Shi from Guangdong University of Foreign Studies (GDUFS) analyzed the dialectal counterpart of *de* in Shanghaiese. Next, Mengyuan Wang from FDU reported on the sentence-final force particle [kə²⁰] in the Jinhua dialect. Yujie Zhu from Xiamen University then investigated the particle [ge] in the Wenzhou Lucheng Wu dialect and the stylistic shaping of its functions. To close the session, Xueyuqing Pan and Xiaoyu Lu from Beijing Normal University took the Xianju and Linhai dialects as case studies to discuss the confirmation sentence-final markers in the Taizhou dialect of Wu.

The final session of the first day was chaired by Professor Winnie Chor from Hong Kong Baptist University. Yimin Sheng from FDU and Kehua Chen from SYSU collaborated to examine the tense-aspect functions of *de*-type force particles in different dialects. Yongfang Sun and Kaixuan Zhan from SYSU then delivered a report on the sentence-final [kə⁵²]/[kə⁴⁴] in the Anyuan Hakka dialect. They were followed by Yuting Wan from SYSU, who traced the evolution of the sentence-final [ke³¹] from anaphoric to deictic usage in Chengdu Hakka. Lastly, Yabing Huang from FDU discussed the sentence-final particle [ku] in the Poyang Gan dialect.

The academic dialogue continued into the second day, which was likewise divided into four structured sessions.

The morning opened with the fifth session, chaired by Dr. Tommy Tsz-ming Lee from CityUHK. Jingwen Huang from Beijing Language and Culture University analyzed the sentence-final *de* (的) and *de* (得) in the Chengdu dialect based on the framework of cartographic syntax. Chen Zhao from Huazhong University of Science and Technology then investigated the sentence-final particle [ti⁴²] in the Wuhan dialect. This was followed by Xiaoqian Pei from CUHK, who discussed the sentence-final *de* in the Changde dialect. Rounding out the session, Ruoyu Chen from Renmin University of China explored finiteness and the origin of the sentence-final *de* in the Gansu-Qinghai Sinitic varieties.

The dialogue then moved into the sixth session, moderated by Dr. Kin Wing Kevin Chan from Hong Kong Shue Yan University moderated the sixth session. Huayong Lin and Zifei Wu from SYSU examined two distinct sentence-final [kə] particles in the Lianjiang and Maoming Yue dialects. Qingwen Zhang, Hang Cheng, and Xiaojun Luo from GDUPS then took Mandarin, Cantonese, and Min as examples to analyze the grammatical nature of the Chinese sentence-final particle *de* from the perspective of stress. The session concluded with Dejun Qiu from Hainan Normal University, who investigated the particle [kə³³] in Yangchun Yue of western Guangdong and discussed the formation and conditions of the sentence-final use of structural particles.

In the afternoon, the academic exchange proceeded to the seventh session, chaired by Professor Lawrence Yam Leung Cheung from CUHK. Shuling Ke from SYSU analyzed and compared the affirmative marker [kai⁵⁵] and related modal elements in the Chao'an dialect. Yang Xiao from Shanghai Jiao Tong University followed with a comparative study on the co-occurrence of sentence-final *de* and *le* in Mandarin and Chaoyang Min. Subsequently, Jiayu Tan from SYSU conducted a synchronic and diachronic investigation of the sentence-final functional equivalent of Mandarin *de* in Min and Hakka dialects.

Bringing the afternoon's presentations to a close, Dr. Paul S. Law from CUHK hosted the eighth session. Quan Wan from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences addressed the sentence-final *de* in the Zhenjiang dialect, focusing on its nature as a force particle. Dongxiao Huang from Peking University then examined the multifunctional sentence-final particle [kə?] in the Haimen dialect. Concluding the presentation lineup, Jingmin Shao from Jinan University proposed a new interpretation of the sentence-final force particle *de* and discussed the unique characteristics of its counterpart in Shanghaiese.

At the Forum's closing ceremony, Professor Sze Wing Tang offered a masterful summary of the two days of rich discussions and sketched a clear blueprint for the future study of sentence-final *de* in Chinese dialects.

Professor Tang pointed out that future academic exploration must strengthen and deepen research across the dimensions of semantics, phonology, syntax, and diachronic origins. In terms of semantics, scholars must pay strict attention to the

rigorous definition and standardized use of academic terms, clearly delineating core concepts such as “confirmation”, “assertion”, and “affirmation”. A lack of precision in terminology will hinder effective theoretical communication among scholars and impede high-level cross-dialectal comparative research. In terms of phonology, close attention should be paid to subtle supra-segmental features, deeply exploring the intrinsic correlation between intonation, tonal variation, and meaning. In terms of syntax, scholars should adeptly utilize modern syntactic theories as a unified formal framework for cross-dialectal comparison, exploring the hierarchical height of different *de* projections to help us understand the structural characteristics of sentence-final *de* more thoroughly.

Finally, viewed from the perspective of diachronic origins, the components corresponding to sentence-final *de* across various dialects are mostly related to nominal structures in their historical roots. By extension, the underlying logic of the predicate structure composed of *de* may be intimately bound to the grammatical characteristics of nominal predicate sentences. Professor Tang inspiringly proposed that attempting to uniformly derive the various complex grammatical effects of sentence-final *de* – such as aspect, focus, force, and modality – from the inherent properties of nominal predicates constitutes an exceptionally illuminating and academically potent new direction.

As the 10th Inter-Regional Forum on Dialect Grammar drew to a close amid vibrant academic exchanges, it not only deepened the microscopic description of dialectal particles, but also opened a wider vista for the typological exploration of Chinese grammar.

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聚焦句末“的”字：第十屆方言語法博學論壇兩日研討紀要

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提要

第十屆方言語法博學論壇於 2024 年在香港中文大學舉行。本屆論壇由香港中文大學中國文化研究所吳多泰中國語文研究中心主辦，為期兩天，全面聚焦漢語方言句末的“的”。適逢論壇舉辦第十年，此次特邀香港中文大學、南加州大學的李豔惠教授作主旨演講，來自 15 所院校的學者亦呈現了 26 場精彩的學術報告。