

## Chinese Reduplicated Adjectives as Concrete Instantiations of Properties

This study examines the syntax, semantics, and pragmatics of Chinese reduplicated adjectives and proposes a unified analysis that treats them as tropes - spatio-temporally anchored manifestations of properties. Drawing on philosophical accounts of trope ontology (Mulligan et al. (1984), Lowe (1998; 2006), Moltmann (2009)), the paper argues that adjectival reduplication in Chinese is best understood as a derivational process of tropization. Through this process, adjectives that denote gradable properties are converted into trope nouns, which refer to concrete instantiations of those properties. Viewing reduplicated adjectives as individual-denoting elements provides a coherent explanation for their distribution, interpretation, and acceptability, and offers a reassessment of Zhu's (1982) distinction between 'property' and 'state' adjectives.

The analysis begins with the observation that reduplicated adjectives such as *pàngpàng-de* 'fat-fat' describe vivid, perceptible manifestations rather than abstract qualities. Their acceptability depends heavily on sensory accessibility (e.g., *pàngpàng-de* vs. unacceptable *nánnán-de* 'difficult-difficult'), discourse context (parallelism and repetition), and degree interpretation (favoring moderate, contextually appropriate readings; Liu (2013)). Syntactically, reduplicated adjectives typically require the nominalizer *de*, can occupy nominal positions, and resist negation and degree modification. These properties indicate that reduplication does not simply intensify adjectival meaning, but instead re-categorizes adjectives as nouns denoting tropes.

Four morphological types of trope nouns are identified: (i) *X-YY-de/XX-Y-de*, where the trope is anchored to an overt lexical carrier (e.g., *bīng* 'ice' of *lěng-bīngbīng-de* 'cold-ice-ice'); (ii) *XX-de/XXYY-de*, where the carrier is supplied by discourse (e.g., *hónghóng-de* 'red-red'); (iii) *X-li-XY-de*, in which reduplication functions as a semantically bleached marker of tropization (e.g., *húli-hútù-de* 'muddled-muddled'); and (iv) *XYXY-de*, where one component serves both as categorizer and carrier (e.g., *xuě* 'snow' of *xuěbái-xuěbái-de* 'snow-white'). In all types, reduplication introduces a POS-like type-shifter (Kennedy (2007)) that ensures a positive, 'just-right' interpretation anchored to a perceptible state.

The trope analysis accounts for key empirical characteristics. First, it explains the vividness, descriptiveness, and strong association with modifiers relating to perception, causation, evaluation, and ways of manifestation: these modifiers naturally select individuals rather than abstract properties. Second, it clarifies why reduplicated adjectives are incompatible with abstract or absolute adjectives. Third, it explains why negation employs *méi* 'not.have' rather than *bù* 'not': trope nouns pattern as objects of the possessive verb *yǒu/méi* 'have/not.have'. Fourth, as individual-denoting nouns, they cannot participate in comparatives, which target degrees rather than individuals. Finally, the analysis captures why rhetorical contexts enhance acceptability: discourse scaffolding reinforces concreteness, enabling marginal adjectives to be interpreted as tropes.

Overall, this study shows that reduplication in Chinese adjectival morphology serves as a morphological strategy of tropization, yielding trope nouns that denote vivid, perceptible, and contextually anchored manifestations of properties. By situating reduplicated adjectives

within a trope-theoretic framework, the study illuminates how Chinese encodes the transition from abstract properties to concrete individuals, contributing to broader discussions of nominalization, degree semantics, and the ontology of adjectival meaning.

### **References**

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