

## On Mermaid Construction “*shi ... de yangzi*” in Mandarin Chinese

**Introduction.** Non-coreferential “*shi ... de yangzi* (‘appearance’)” has been considered a case of Mermaid Construction (MMC) denoting evidentiality in Mandarin Chinese (Ono 2013, 2015).

(1) *Ta shi song-le yi-kou qi de yangzi.*  
3SG COP release-ASP one-CL breath DE appearance

‘He/She seems to be relieved.’

(2) [NP *Ta*][Copula *shi*][Clause *song-le yi-kou qi*][DE *de*][NP *yangzi*].  
Non-coreferential

He (2021) suggests that MMC “*shi ... de yangzi*” disallows NP/DP topicalization out of Clause and could co-occur with [Numeral-Classifier].

**Remaining Questions.** Note that (i) a DP topic might be base-generated in MMC “*shi ... de yangzi*”; (ii) (3) would receive an appearance-denoting reading instead of an evidential reading due to *yi-fu*.

(3) [*Na-ben shu*]<sub>i</sub>, *Xiaoming shi yi-fu yijing kan guo e<sub>i</sub> de yangzi.*  
that-CL book Xiaoming COP one-CL already read already DE appearance

‘As for that book, Xiaoming has the appearance showing that he has read (it).’ N ✓ Evidential ×

I re-examine the syntactic properties of “*shi ... de yangzi*” as MMCs.

**N reading vs. Evidential reading.** I argue that syntactically there are two types of “*shi ... de yangzi*” as MMCs in Mandarin Chinese, namely appearance (N)-denoting type and evidential type.

One piece of evidence comes from the presence/absence of island effects (Ross 1967). I adopt PP fronting to examine whether MMC “*shi ... de yangzi*” would exhibit Complex NP Constraint regarding the island-sensitivity of PP fronting in Mandarin Chinese (Paul & Whitman 2008, 2017). Consider (4).

(4) a. *Xiaoming shi zai Beijing gongzuo-le hen jiu de yangzi.*

Xiaoming COP LOC Beijing work-ASP very long DE appearance

‘Xiaoming has the appearance showing that he has worked in Beijing for a long time.’ N ✓

‘It seems that Xiaoming has worked in Beijing for a long time.’ Evidential ✓

b. [*Zai Beijing*]<sub>i</sub>, *Xiaoming shi t<sub>i</sub> gongzuo-le hen jiu de yangzi.*

LOC Beijing Xiaoming COP work-ASP very long DE appearance

‘Xiaoming has the appearance showing that he has worked in Beijing for a long time.’ N ×

‘It seems that Xiaoming has worked in Beijing for a long time.’ Evidential ✓

Another piece of evidence comes from the possibility of co-occurrence with [Numeral-Classifier]. Co-occurrence with [Numeral-Classifier] is disallowed when evidential reading is intended (see 5).

(5) *Xiaoming shi yi-fu zai Beijing gongzuo-le hen jiu de yangzi.*

Xiaoming COP one-CL LOC Beijing work-ASP very long DE appearance

‘Xiaoming has the appearance showing that he has worked in Beijing for a long time.’ N ✓

‘It seems that Xiaoming has worked in Beijing for a long time.’ Evidential ×

It should also be noted that gap-filler dependencies are allowed only when N reading is intended (see 6).

(6) *Xiaoming shi e<sub>i</sub> hen huaji de yangzi<sub>i</sub>.*

Xiaoming COP very funny DE appearance

‘Xiaoming has a very funny appearance.’ N ✓

‘It seems that Xiaoming is very funny.’ Evidential ×

**Conclusion.** This study re-examined MMC “*shi ... de yangzi*” and suggested that syntactically there are two types of MMC “*shi ... de yangzi*”, appearance-denoting type and evidential type.

### References

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