Title: De-phrases, shi...de sentences, what are they and how should we teach them?

Significance:
Both de-phrases and shi...de sentences are important grammatical points to teach in CFL practice. My paper uses innovative research methods to discuss these grammar points and combines linguistic analysis with teaching material evaluations. The proposal for a better sequence of the grammar points and a more authentic representation of the language will help CFL learners to avoid errors and acquire the most frequently used functions of the structures more early.

Theoretical Framework/background:
I adopt Teng (2003)’s proposed framework to incorporate grammar points for pedagogical use, which includes three parts: function, structure, and usage. Importantly, I argue that an attempt at an accurate description of “grammar” should start out from “usages” and “function”, instead of from “structures. Ever since Teng (1979), shi...de sentences have been considered Chinese cleft sentences. Given my argument of a “usage-oriented” analysis of pedagogical grammar, I raise doubts to the “cleft sentence” proposal. Two research questions are asked: (1) Is shi...de sentence a special, integral construction that should be treated differently from a copula sentence with a de-phrase? (2) What usages of shi...de sentences should we teach, and what do we teach first?

Research Procedure:
Different from previous analysis which assumes the existence of shi...de structure (and explores its usage consequentially), my analysis is entirely corpus-driven: About 150 examples of shi...de were drawn from the Sinica Corpus. These data point to the lack of a clear-cut distinction between copula sentences with de-phrase and shi...de sentences. Earlier researches such as Zhu (1978) are also called on to argue for a more holistic analysis of shi...de sentences and de-phrases.
Secondly, major CFL textbooks (e.g. Integrate Chinese, Interactions, Chinese Link) are examined to see (a) whether teaching materials represent the functions of those grammar points accurately and (b) whether the introduction of the relevant grammar adheres to principles such as communication frequency. Some learner errors will also be discussed.

Major Findings: Based on corpus data, the primary function of shi...de sentences is “categorization”, a function associated with the nominalization function of -de. Therefore, shi...de sentences at least share much in common with a copula sentence with –de, and the categorization shi...de sentences should be taught first, ideally soon after we introduce students to the nominalization function of –de. Unfortunately, current textbooks often give a slanted representation of shi...de, focusing on its emphatic function, which is observed only in few of our shi...de examples. With a revision of the sequencing and explanation of shi...de’s primary functions, we can help students to acquire the structure with better communicative competence.

References
Linguistics, 7(1), 101-113.
(500 WORDS)