Expressing (inter)subjectivity with universal quantification: A pragmatic account of Plural NP + dou expressions in Mandarin Chinese

Haiping Wu a, Hongyin Tao b,*

a California State University, Department of Asian and Asian American Studies, F03-336, 1250 Bellflower Boulevard, Long Beach, CA 90840, USA
b University of California, Asian Languages and Cultures Department, 290 Royce Hall, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1540, USA

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A B S T R A C T

Dou ‘all, already, even’ is one of the most frequently used adverbs in Mandarin Chinese. While there is a vast literature on the nature and development of this token (widely known as a ‘universal quantifier’), there is virtually no analysis of dou expressions in interactive discourse. In this paper we use conversational data to investigate the discourse contexts and social interactive functions of dou expressions. Our findings show that quantification expressions with dou are more commonly used for (inter)subjectivity - building rapport, establishing common ground, and mitigating (apparently) conflicting stances - than for objectivity. We propose a continuum of rapport and the underlying intersubjectivity principle to account for the diverse range of uses of dou expressions in conversation. We take this to show that a discourse pragmatic approach can shed new light on seemingly objective expressions in Chinese and beyond. © 2018 Elsevier B.V. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Dou ‘all, already, even’ is one of the most frequently used adverbs in Mandarin Chinese, with an overall ranking of #26 among all words in Chinese according to one influential frequency count (BJYYXY, 1986). It is typically treated by linguists from formal semantic and syntactic points of view, where the focus is almost exclusively on its semantic scope and quantification functions. For example, among the most widely accepted accounts, Lü et al. (1980) treats dou as a universal quantifier indicating totality, with its scope covering what follows it in a sentence. Similar proposals have been made by many other scholars, with differences mainly in theoretical orientation and descriptive detail. Notably, there is virtually no analysis of dou expressions in interactive discourse, examining how it is used by speakers in natural contexts. In this paper we take an interactional linguistic approach and attempt to answer the following questions: how and why do speakers use dou expressions in a particular discourse context? What social interactive achievements do dou expressions help accomplish when used in naturally occurring conversations? And how can an appeal to social interaction help us better understand the nature of a very common quantifier in dou? We will show that a discourse pragmatic approach can shed new light on seemingly objective expressions in Chinese and beyond.

* Corresponding author.
E-mail address: tao@humnet.ucla.edu (H. Tao).

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2. Review of previous studies of *dou*

As a high frequency adverb, *dou* has received extensive treatment via diverse theoretical approaches. Given the vast literature involved, in this section, we can only give a brief overview of some of the most representative accounts.

First, many of the most influential studies come from the descriptive grammar tradition, with a focus mostly on the semantic scope and the direction of the semantic scope. Scholars such as Lü et al. (1980), Ma (1983), Wang (1988), Lan (1988), and Xu (1985) are among the earliest who proposed that *dou* has three semantic meanings: 1) to totalize a referential entity as a domain adverb (henceforth *dou*₁), as exemplified by example (1) below; 2) to convey an emphatic tone in the meaning of ‘even’ (henceforth *dou*₂) as exemplified by example (2); and 3) to denote the perfective aspect in the sense of ‘already’ (henceforth *dou*₃) as illustrated by example (3).

**Dou 1: 'all, every'**
(1) Tamen quan jia dou zai gongchang shangban.  
3PL whole family all at factory work  
'Their whole family are ALL working in a factory.'

**Dou 2: 'even'**
(2) Wo dou wang le jintian shi muqin jie.  
1SG even forget PFV today COP mother festival  
'I even forgot that today is Mother's Day.'

**Dou 3: 'already'**
(3) xianzai dou zhongwu 12 dian le, zaman kuai qu shitang chi fan ba!  
now already noon 12 o'clock PFV 1PL fast go cafeteria eat meal PRT  
'It's 12 o'clock already, let's go for lunch at the cafeteria.'

Some scholars (e.g., Xu and Yang, 2005; H. Wang, 1999; Jiang, 1998) do not agree with this classification of *dou* but suggest instead that *dou*₁ (i.e., 'all, every') is the fundamental meaning, from which *dou*₂ ('even') and *dou*₃ ('already') were derived. Despite the claimed differences among these approaches, all of them agree that totalizing a referential entity, or what is called the 'universal quantifier' function, as described by formal syntacticians (e.g., Lee, 1986; Jiang, 1998; Pan, 2006), is the semantic core of *dou*.

Notably, more recent studies on *dou* expressions have moved beyond the framework of formal syntax and semantics. For example, a number of studies on *dou* expressions have made reference to the notions of subjectivity and objectivity in quantification (Zhang, 2003; Xu and Yang, 2005; Huang, 2010). Zhang (2003) contends that for *dou*₁ to be used appositely in a sentence, the head noun should not only be semantically plural, but also designate a subjectively perceived large amount, as exemplified in example (4). He observes that if a NP is used to represent a small amount of entities (usually quantified by an item indicating small amounts, e.g., *shaoshu* 'few'), even when it is in the plural form, it cannot be universally quantified by *dou* as illustrated by (5). Huang (2010) further extends this notion to the realm of temporal adverbials, and argues that *dou* tends to quantify temporal adverbials that designate a subjectively perceived lengthy period of time or high frequency (e.g., *shichang* 'always', *yizhi* 'constantly'), rather than a short span of time or low frequency (e.g., *ou'er* 'occasionally', *youshi* 'sometimes').

(4) duoshu tongxue dou bu tongyi zhe ge fang'an.  
majority student all not agree this CL plan  
'Most students DOU not do agree with this plan.'

(5) *shaoshu tongxue dou bu tongyi zhe ge fang’an.  
few student all not agree this CL plan  
'*Few students DOU do not agree with this plan.'

Notable developments also include studies on the grammaticalization and subjectification processes of *dou*. Zhang (2005) attempts to trace the historical development of *dou*, and finds that it has evolved from a noun or a verb, via the adverb of scope, to the adverb of mood, which can also be used to denote aspect. He also argues that because of the co-occurrence of *lian* ‘even’ in the construction *lian*...*dou*... ‘even...DOU...’, the function of *dou* has shifted from universal quantification to the reinforcement of subjective mood. While the aforementioned studies have pointed to the subjective nature of some of the *dou* expressions, none of them examined natural conversation data, interactive contexts, or social interactive functions of such expressions.
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