

PA10.1 – Mandarin *dou* and its multiple semantic uses

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I. The form-meaning mismatch

- 1:many mismatches: *dou* imposes definiteness /maximality/distributivity on the plural nominal to its left.

(1) **San-ge-bianji** (dou) faxian le yi ge cuowu
three-clf-editor all find prf one clf mistake
'(The) Three editors (all) found one mistake.'

- "redundancy" in the presence of *mei* ('every').

(2) mei-(yi)-ge bianji (dou) faxian le yi ge cuowu
every-(one)-clf editor all find prf one clf mistake
'Every editor (*all) found one mistake.'

- But *dou* is required in many cases.

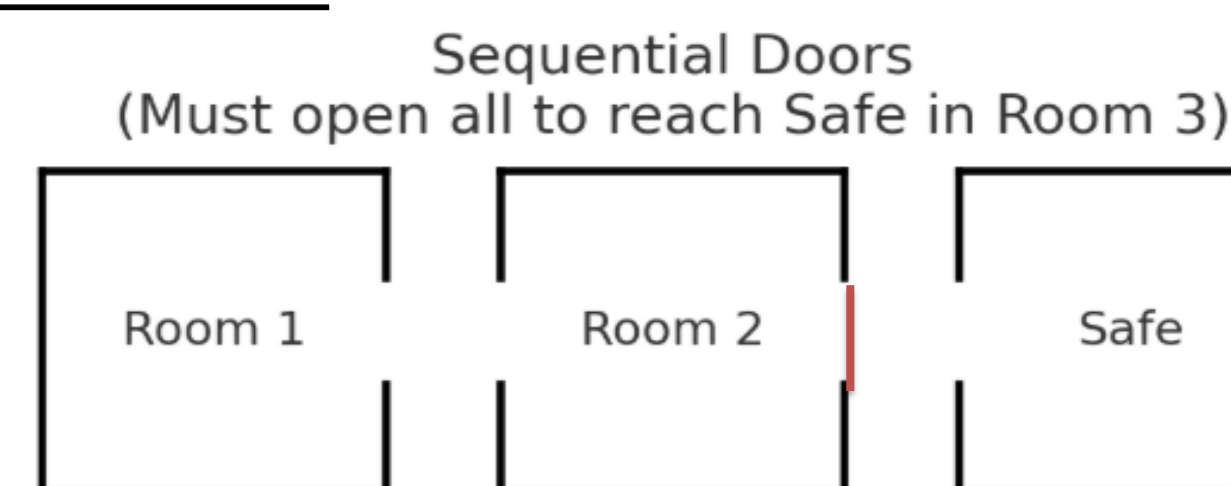
(3) mei-(yi)-ge bianji *(dou) faxian le cuowu
every-(one)-clf editor all find prf mistake
'Every editor found a mistake/mistakes.'

- Empirical questions.
 - Is *dou* truly **redundant** in *mei-dou* constructions?
 - Does *dou*'s contribution in other environments (maximality etc.) also arise in *mei-dou* constructions?
- Theoretical questions
how *mei* and *dou* interact compositionally?

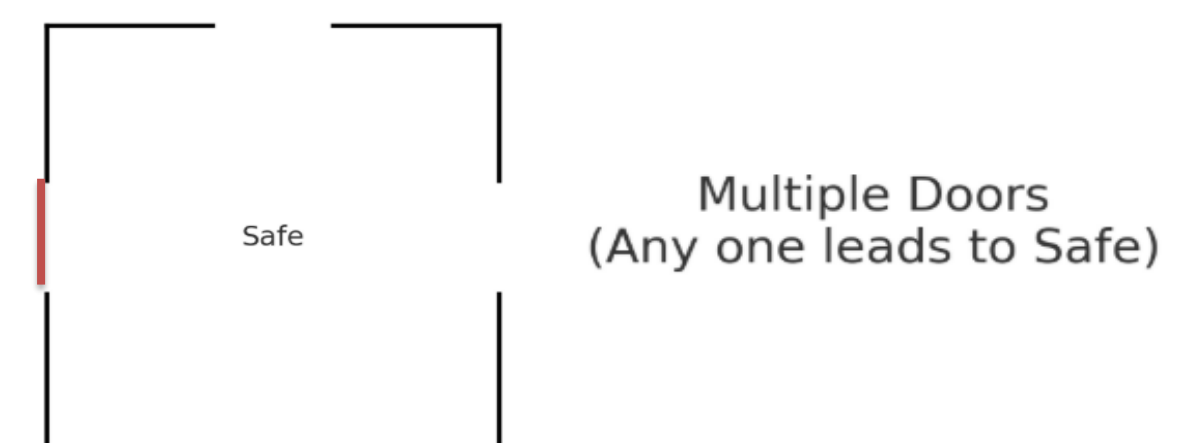
Expressions like "the doors" tolerate 'exception', depending on the context; "all the doors" do not (e.g. Križ, 2015).

- (4) a. The doors are open. false in A, true in B
b. **All** the doors are open. false in A and B

Context A



Context B



Proposal: Plural sentences denote a range of interpretations depending on what is **permissible** in the context (building on Križ and Spector 2021).

[[the doors are open]] = {**Door Max-SUM 1+2+3+4 is open**;
Door SUM 1+2+3 is open; Door SUM 1+2 is open; ...}

A plural sentences is true just in case one of its possibilities is true. Each possibility is generated by a permissibility function $f \in [\text{Max-SUM} \rightarrow \text{SUB-SUM}]$.

Universal quantifiers quantify over all f : the sentences is true in case all possibilities are true.

❑ **Stage 2: *mei* ≠ every/each as it allows exception.**

(5) mei-liang-ge chushi (dou) zuo le yi dao cai
every-two-clf cook all make prf one clf dish
'(All possible) Pairs of cooks made one dish.'

I propose that *mei* strengthens the permissibility function with **exhaustive participation**: all cooks must participate in making one dish.

[[mei-2-cook made 1 dish]]= { (a+b, c+d) made one dish;
(a+d, b+c) made one dish; ... (a+b, c+d, a+d, b+c,) made one dish; }

dou's role: *mei*-sentence is true *iff* all possibilities are true.

II. Methodology

- Empirical basis:
 - novel elicited data from native speakers of Mandarin Chinese,
 - attested examples and patterns documented in prior literature (e.g., Sun 2017; Wang 2023).
- Elicitation Method: Acceptability judgments combined with direct elicitation.

III. Results and discussion

A short answer: *dou* introduces bone fide truth-conditional differences.

In **Zhao (2024, 2025)**, I offer novel perspective that:

- ❑ **Stage 1**: Mandarin bare nouns demonstrate similar **exception tolerance**. Similar to 'all', *dou* does not allow exceptions.

IV. Consequences and outlook

- Morpheme multifunctionality = polysemy (not homophony), aligning with cognitive economy.
- Advances understanding of how semantics provides possible interpretations, while pragmatics selects, enriches, or weakens them based on context, relevance, and communicative goals.

Second cohort: Ateş Çalışır in PA10.2 will explore the polyfunctionality of *if*-like elements and to pinpoint the common core shared by **question-conditional-disjunction**.