ABSTRACT

The particle “de” is an important symbol used in modern Chinese to depict the modifiers of a head word (中心名词). Though this may be so, the usage of the particle “de” is not inevitable: there are times when the usage of “de” between a modifier and its head is necessary, otherwise the expression will become syntactically inappropriate or even semantically affected; there are times when the usage of “de” between a modifier and its head is not allowed or the expression will become unnatural or even grammatically wrong; there are also times when the usage of “de” is dispensable, meaning that its existence or non-existence will not bring about much problem to the syntactic structure or semantic meaning of the expression, but it may induce some rhetoric effects on the expression, thus attaining its pragmatic value.

As such, this thesis aims to explore the general pattern of the usage of the particle “de” in the context of different modifiers grouped in the three big categories of noun, verb and adjective. In addition, this study also provides further insight by investigating the reasons and conditions when these general laws apply or do not apply, adopting a syntactic, semantic and pragmatic approach.

The study indicates that the usage of the particle “de” relies mainly on the type of relationship established between a modifier and its head. Generally speaking, if the relationship between a modifier and its head is a
stable one, the presence of “de” is not required. But on the other hand, if
the combination of a modifier and its head is a temporary relationship, then
the usage of “de” is deemed to be necessary. The study also implies that
although the usage of the particle “de” may be dispensable in some
examples, its existence will still bring about differences to the semantic
meaning of the expression as compared to its non-existence. One of them is
its ability to emphasize the classification or a certain aspect of the head.

Finally, the study concludes that a grammar analysis should not be
made solely from a grammatical point of view. It should also tackle the
problem with a semantic and pragmatic approach. Only then can this
analysis be more complete and more useful in the explanation of the
exceptions and irregularities in a grammatical rule.