Mandarin *ne* as Contrastive Topic

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In this talk, I propose that topic-final and sentence-final uses of the Mandarin discourse particle *ne*, as in (2–3), are instances of contrastive topic (CT) marking, parallel to the English (1). I go on to discuss several implications of *ne* for theories of CT in general.

More specifically, I propose that *ne*’s distribution can be captured using a modified version of the pragmatics for CT laid out in Büring 2003. I draw out two corollary predictions of Büring’s analysis as to where CT will be licensed, and show that *ne* indeed follows the familiar pattern. The appearance of *ne* in questions like (4) is unexpected on Büring’s account; however I show that such examples can be incorporated via simple modifications to Büring’s CT-congruence condition and the definition of CT-value. The inability of *ne* to co-occur with the Y/N question marker *ma*, as in in (5), is analyzed as only surface deep, reflecting a phonological haplology constraint. Uses of *ne* like (6) that fail basic CT diagnostics are taken to be the (unrelated) aspectual morpheme discussed by Chan (1980), contra Wu (2005), Chu (2006), and Li (2006).

Identifying *ne* as CT has several implications for the analysis of CT intonation and meaning generally. First, Mandarin provides support for the claim that CT marking resides at a distance from the focalized element, and is *not* a special type of focus marking. This fact is especially clear in cases of sole CT like (3–4), where *ne* is fixed sentence-finally irrespective of the CT constituent’s position, and falls in line with recent theories that treat CT as a focus-sensitive operator (Tomioka 2010; Wagner 2008ab). Second, I argue that like Mandarin, English-type languages that mark CT prosodically do have CT questions, as in (7), however the typical CT prosody is *overridden* by the question contour. Third, the impossibility of Mandarin *ne* in examples like (8) suggests that seemingly exceptional cases of English CT-marking like (9), which are discussed by Wagner (2008ab) as CT, are actually CT *imposters*.

Finally, I show that *ne* provides an excellent diagnostic for formal sub-question-hood within a discourse strategy. This diagnostic, in turn, reveals the fact that questions of *clarification* like (10), which might intuitively be thought of as sub-questions, nevertheless resist CT-marking. Examples like these motivate a mechanism of *interruption* which allows for adjacent discourse moves to address unrelated discourse strategies.

(1) A: Well, what about PERSEPHONE? What did SHE eat?  
B: [ PERSEPHONE ]<sub>CT</sub> … ate [ the GAZPACHO ]<sub>F</sub>.  
(L+)H* L H%  
H* L L%

(2) ZHÈI piān wénzhāng *ne*, wǒ juéde zhíde kàn.  
This CL paper NE I think worth read  
‘*This* paper NE, I think is worth reading.’

(3) A: *Is* Zhangsan *going* to the conference?  
B: tā SHUǑ yào qù *ne*… dānshì tā hái méi mǎi jī-piào.  
he say will go NE but he still have not buy plane-ticket  
‘He said *he’s* going NE… but he still hasn’t bought a plane ticket.’
(4) A: Do you want to go out for hotpot tonight?
   B: Not really.
   A: (nà) nǐ xiǎng bù xiǎng chī [SHUǏ-ZHǓ-YÚ]CT ne?
   then you want not want eat water-boil-fish NE
   ‘Then do you want to have boiled fish NE?’

(5) Context: He can play violin.
   NǏ hui { ma | #ne | #ne ma | #ma ne } ?
   you can MA NE NE MA MA NE
   ‘Can you?’

(6) tā ná-zhe huār ne.
   she hold-ASP flower NE
   ‘She is holding a flower NE.’

(7) (And) is [PERSEPHONE]CT going?

(8) A: I heard someone hit someone today, but I don’t who hit who.
   B: (shì) zhāngsān (#ne) dā-le lǐsì (#ne).
   be Zhangsan NE hit-ASP Lisi NE
   ‘Zhangsan (#NE) hit Lisi (#NE).’

(9) A: I know one of the visitors attacked one of the zookeepers, but I don’t know which
   visitor attacked which zookeeper.
   B: PERSEPHONE attacked the LION trainer.
   (L+)H H L H% H% L L%

(10) A: Why is Lu Dahai still waiting for you here?
    B: shéi shì lǔ dàhǎi (??ne) ?
    who be Lu Dahai NE
    ‘Who is Lu Dahai (??NE) ?’ [Shi 1997: 134]

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