Mandarin *ne* as Contrastive Topic

Noah Constant
University of Massachusetts, Amherst

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 (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]$_{CT}$ …   ate [the GAZPACHO]$_F$.
            (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 SHUŌ yào qù **ne**… dànshì 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) <u>Context</u>: *He can play violin.*
 NǏ   huì { **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**) dǎ-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* 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]

References

Büring, Daniel. 2003. On D-trees, Beans, and B-accents. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 26:511–545.

Chan, Marjorie K. M. 1980. Temporal Reference in Mandarin Chinese: An Analytical-Semantic Approach to the Study of the Morphemes le, zai, zhe, and ne. *Journal of the Chinese Language Teachers Association* 15:33–79.

Chu, Chauncey C. (屈承熹). 2006. A Contrastive Approach to Discourse Particles—A Case Study of the Mandarin UFP Ne. *Wàiguóyǔ (Shànghǎi Wàiguóyǔ Dàxué Xuébào)* [Journal of Foreign Languages (Journal of the Shanghai Foreign Language University)] 3:7–29.

Li, Boya. 2006. Chinese Final Particles and the Syntax of the Periphery. PhD Dissertation, Leiden University.

Shi, Yu-zhi. 1997. On the properties of the WH-elements in Chinese. *Journal of Chinese Linguistics* 25:131–145.

Tomioka, Satoshi. 2010. Contrastive Topics Operate on Speech Acts. *Information Structure: Theoretical, Typological, and Experimental Perspectives*, ed. by M. Zimmermann and C. Féry, 115–138. Oxford University Press.

Wagner, Michael. 2008a. A Compositional Analysis of Contrastive Topics. *Proceedings of NELS 38*, ed. by M. Abdurrahman, A. Schardl, and M. Walkow, University of Massachusetts, Amherst: GLSA.

Wagner, Michael. 2008b. Contrastive Topics Decomposed. Cornell University, ms.

Wu, Guo. 2005. The Discourse Function of the Chinese Particle NE in Statements. *Journal of the Chinese Language Teachers Association* 40:47–82.