COHERENCE, FOCUS AND STRUCTURE: THE ROLE OF DISCOURSE PARTICLE *NE*

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Abstract

This paper examines the usage of *NE* in Chinese dialogues and monologues excerpted from a Chinese collection of narratives. The analysis of *NE* as a constituent in discourse structure shows that linguistically it functions like a grammatical connector. From a cognitive point of view, *NE* signals topic shift and focuses on new, contrastive information. It is argued that coherence is achieved through semantic contrastiveness, and pragmatic relevance. It is also argued that the prosodic feature of pause i.e. *NE*+{Pause}, serves to further emphasize the semantic contrastiveness in topic and comment.

Coherence is defined not merely in terms of structural relations but more importantly from the viewpoint of semantic connectivity. It is the focus on semantic connectivity signaled by *NE*, which underlies the semantic cohesion in topic shifts.

Keywords: Discourse particle, Coherence, Semantic connectivity, Semantic contrastiveness, Emphasis, Focus, Topic shift, Comment, Pragmatic relevance

1. Introduction

Understanding the *coherence principles* underlying discourse is necessary for participation in interaction in which that discourse occurs. Such analysis is crucial to theoretical linguistics in elucidating the basis of meaning in language. (Tannen 1984).

Coherence in conversation becomes an issue when there is topic switch, topic resumptions and topic drifting (cf. Hellman 1995: 197). Do interactants understand each other or agree on what they are talking about when such phenomena occur? "When we encounter incoherent discourse we may ask about the nature of the coherence we recognize as being absent" (Hobbs & Agar, In Hellman 1995: 197) This paper is concerned with the question of how coherence is achieved when a speaker decides to switch topic during a conversation. It studies the Chinese Mandarin/*Putonghua* discourse particle *ne* - its pivotal role in topic switch and its contribution to discourse coherence.

NE is both enigmatic (cf. Li & Thompson 1981) and multifarious in functions (cf. Lee-Wong 1998; Chang 1994; Huang 1994; Alleton 1981; Chu 1984, 1985).

To fully understand the workings of this particle (*ne*) undoubtedly requires a tremendous amount of further research, not only in sentence grammar, but also in discourse and pragmatic analysis (Chu

1984: 90).

The multi-faceted functional nature of NE, as illustrated in Examples (1) and (2) can be largely attributed to one of position of occurrence in an utterance or utterances. For instance, if we compare (1) with (2) we find that when NE occurs at the end of an utterance or a proposition (Example 1, underlined), it assumes the function of a modal particle – the modality of doubt and uncertainty. In contrast when NE occurs immediately after a subject (bold) in a proposition, it functions more like a topic marker [See Example (2)].

- (1) *Women yongyuan ting dan de hua, zuo yige*
 we always listen Party DE word be a CL
hao dan yuan.
 good Party member
Ke, na tian wo weishenme dui XX jizao NE, 'tongzhi' zhe
 but that day I why to XX impatient NE_ 'comrade' this
shi yige duome zhengui de chenghu...
 BE one CL highly valued DE term of address.

'We (should) always listen to the Party, be a good Party member. But that day why did I lose patience with XX NE_.'Comrade' is such a highly valued term of address.'

- (2) *Xianzai, wo yexu shi ni weiyi de tuzhe le.*
 at the moment I perhaps BE you only DE reader ASP
***Jianglai NE,** yexu ni you henduo henduo*
***in future NE_** perhaps you have many many*
de tuzhe...
 DE reader

'Now, I maybe your only reader. **In future NE_** you will perhaps have numerous readers.'

In this paper¹, we examine NE as used in dialogues or monologues at the utterance level and its occurrence in specific linguistic environment. There are two dimensions that NE is examined: The interactional and the informational or structural. The interactional dimension considers the relationship between Speaker and Hearer; the informational or structural dimension examines how the particle links one element to the preceding element. What is proposed in this exploratory study is that in conversational discourse the Chinese particle, NE **not only focuses on information that is new but also links this new information to the old i.e. the second proposition to the first. In line with this**

¹ I would like to thank the reviewer whose suggestions have contributed to the revision of the paper.

contention, two main arguments are extended:

- (1) *Ne* in a cognitive sense helps Speaker to introduce and organize new information and to focus the attention of Hearer on such information.
- (2) *Ne* as topic shift marker stated in (1) helps to structure coherence in discourse by means of semantic connectivity.

What is argued here is that through the **phenomenon of topic shift**, semantic contrastiveness is emphasized, and coherence is achieved by means of relevance, that of semantic connectivity exhibited by the set of propositions. By means of topic shift, NE causes the hearer to focus on the new topic and the comment that follows.

In this way, the discourse particle NE functions as an emphasis marker. The occurrence of emphasis-placement finds support in Werth's theory of coherence.

The participants in a conversation keep track of coherence, and this is manifested in their use of the machinery of *emphasis-placement*, by which non-anaphoric items are *contrastive*. (Werth 1981: 153) [Italics mine]

2. Coherence

Research literature shows the concept of coherence to be interpreted from diverse angles. Reinhart's (1980) concept of coherence involves formal, semantic and pragmatic elements. Enkvist (1978) considers signals of surface cohesion to be essential for well-formedness in text. According to Werth (1984: 73) coherence is "essentially a matter of logical or pragmatic configurations (including both semantic and pragmatic inferences) ... (that) includes both formal and semantic connectedness". He distinguishes four types of coherence and explains how each is manifested.

- (1) cohesion (formal connectivity)
- (2) collocation (lexical connectivity)
- (3) connectors (logical connectivity)
- (4) coherence (semantic connectivity)

When cohesion is perceived syntactically the linguistic forms include pronouns, noun phrases, ellipsis and emphasis. Collocation is partially explained by truth-conditionals. Connectors on the other hand are used to show "inter-sentential relationships, i.e. in essence propositional relationships. The logical connectors ... *and, or, if ... Then...*" (1984: 69). He maintains that connectors require connections of equivalence, implication, inclusion, temporality, causation, etc. In conversational analysis Werth views coherence and relevance as the same (1981).

In this paper, coherence is viewed from the point of *semantic connectivity*. However, in naturally occurring conversations, both formal and semantic connectivity can be present. One may ask, what is the contribution of each type of coherence to the meaning of discourse?

3. Focus, subjectivization and topic

Focus, a term derived from optics, has specific meanings for linguists. In language research the term focus is used in a number of ways – in the cognitive sense (cf. Grosz 1981), transformational sense (cf. Chomsky 1971) and textlinguistic sense (cf. Van Dijk 1977). Werth and Habel & Rickheit adopt the cognitive approach. Werth (1984) defines focus as “object of attention”, and he links it to the notion of ‘emphasis’ – a form of prominence. Habel & Rickheit (1995) define focus as something frequently used to denote that part of a sentence or a text, which carries *the most relevant semantic information*; the elements that are used to focus on other elements, themselves become objects of focus. Hajicová & Sgall, (1984) and von Stutterheim & Klein (1989) view focus as the actual user's focus of attention. The notion of ‘focus’ as used in this study is interpreted in the cognitive sense, encompassing notions of relevance (in semantic information), emphasis and prominence.

Closely related to the concepts of focus and topic is that of *subjectivization*, i.e. the placement of the subject in discourse-initial position. “Experiments reported in the literature support the assumption that one function of subjectivization consists of expressing the *focus* of attention on the part of the speaker, and to create such a focus on the part of the listener’ (Engelkamp & Zimmer 1983: 119). In other words, focus is expressed through subject placement in discourse-initial position. What is placed, logically becomes the *Topic*, that which is focussed. Geluykens (1992) draws a distinction between *sentence topic* and *discourse topic*. ‘Sentence topics can be defined either functionally as “what the sentence is about”(cf. Reinhart 1980), or formally, in terms of sentence position, e.g. first position in the clause”; ‘the notion of a discourse topic ... the concept of “what the discourse is about” is intuitively appealing...” (1992: 14). Generally, these discourse topics are realized as NPs in discourse-initial position and are linguistically marked, for instance, *shi* (Chinese), *-nun* (Korean) or *-wa* (Japanese) as in Lee, 2000:

- (i) *kumsok hualca-nun hankukin-i palmyenghae-ss-ta*
metal(printing)type-TOP Koreans invent-PAST-DEC
- (ii) *jin-shu huo-zi yin-shua shi han-guo ren faming de*
metal (printing)type-TOP Korean invent DE
- (i-ii) ‘The metal printing type, Koreans invented.’

In (i) and (ii) ‘the metal printing type’ as underlying object of the verb ‘invent’ in grammatical relations is realized as the Topic of the sentences by means of the Topic marker *shi* and *-nun* respectively.

Similar to *shi*, *ne* in this study, is shown to mark Topic shift. For instance, in Example (1) in the first utterance, the Topic in discourse-initial position is *Xianzai* ‘now’; in the second utterance, the discourse topic is *Jianglail* ‘in future’. Unlike *shi*, which merely introduces a subject or *Topic*, *ne* at the same time introduces contrastiveness in information – in this example a change of referent from ‘the present time’ to ‘the future’

Example (1)

Context: This is a line from a letter in which the correspondent encourages the reader (a promising writer) to continue writing.

- (1) *Xianzai,* *wo* *yexu* *shi* *ni* *weiyi* *de* *tuzhe* *le.*
now I perhaps BE you only DE reader ASP

Jianglai NE, *yexu* *ni* *you* *henduo* *henduo* *de* *tuzhe...*
in future NE _perhaps you have many many DE reader

'Now, I may be your only reader. **In future NE**_you will perhaps have numerous readers.'

P1 'At present, perhaps I'm your sole reader.'

P2 'In future NE_perhaps you'll have many readers'.

The term *Comment* as used in this study refers to everything that follows the subject. In formal terms, it is the predicate; in Hallidayan terms, it is the rheme. Thus P1 (Proposition 1) comprises Topic and Comment:

[At the moment], {perhaps I'm your sole reader}.'
 [Topic] + { Comment }

4. Data and analysis

Data for this paper, intended to be illustrative than representative, are provided by Wang's text (1991) - a collection of narratives based on his personal experience of the Chinese Cultural Revolution in 1967. In his narration Wang makes prolific use of dialogues and monologues. A frequency count of the occurrences of NE as a discourse particle shows approximately nine percent of NE in utterance-medial position (the position where -NE- occurs after the discourse topic) out of the total text of 410,000 characters. Excerpts from this nine- percent occurrence of NE form the basis of analysis for this paper.

In the first section (4.1- 4.2) we will examine how coherence is managed through semantic connectedness in the absence of grammatical connectors; in other words, how NE focuses on Topic shift and the new information which follows. This analysis includes the prosodic feature of pause following NE (indicated by a comma in the text). In the second section (4.3), we analyse the functional role of NE in coherence management.

4.1. Linking semantic contrastiveness in topic and comment

In Examples (1) - (6) it can be seen that *semantic connectedness* is achieved not by structural relations but rather by underlying semantic cohesion realized as contrastive sets of propositions.

Proposition 1
 [Topic]+ {Comment}

Proposition 2
 [Topic]NE_ + {Comment}

Contrastiveness is explicit i.e. both members of the pair of opposites are present in the propositions. (cf. Geluykens 1992). Halliday considers contrast to be a kind of newness:

One form of 'newness' that is frequent in dialogue is contrastive emphasis (...) (Halliday 1985: 277)

He also regards it as a variety of what he calls marked focus':

Marked focus may be *focus on a reference* or other closed system item, whether final or not, or on a *lexical item* that is not final; here *what is structurally new is informationally contrastive*. (In Geluyken 1992: 82) [Italics mine]

The salient position of NE as captured in **Figure 1 illustrates its functional significance as an emphasis- marker**. Its focus on Topic2 and Comment is crucial to focusing the attention of Hearer. At the same time it signals that what follows (i.e. Comment) is relevant to what precedes (Proposition 1).

Figure 1: On Linking: Semantic Connectivity

The data excerpted show *informationally contrastive propositions* to be a way of achieving underlying semantic connectivity in the spoken discourse of narratives in Chinese Mandarin. The examples illustrate Speakers' use of contrastiveness (**bold**) in a number of dimensions: Time, people, conditions and situations. Examples (2) – (4) are representative of the type of monologues (or inner speech) and dialogues of characters in the narrative text.

Contrastiveness of Time and Situation

Example (2)

Context: Speaker reminisces about the drastic change in his style of travelling – from a comfortable steamer to Hanbao (on an official trip) to the present little boat where he is crammed together with the faceless masses.

- (2) **Liang ge** ye **yiqian**, ta hai zuo zai si xiang Hanbaode Yibeihe
 two CL month ago he still sit at to Hanbao DE Yibei

kelunshang
 River steamer

XianzaiNE, ta he naxie heian zhong kan bu qing
 now NE_he and those dark see NEG clear

mianrong de lukemen ji zai yiqi.
face DE traveller squeeze together

'Two months ago he was still travelling on Hanbao's Yibei River steamer. Now NE_ he is crammed together with the faceless masses.'

P1 'Two months ago he was travelling on Hanbao's Yibei River steamer'

P2 'Now NE_ he is crammed together with the faceless masses.'

Example (3)

Context: This person recalls the time when he began his apprenticeship as a barber.

(3) *Jiefang na nian* *wo cai shiqi sui, hai mei chu shi,*
liberation that year I only seventeen years still NEG "master"

jiulai dao zheli.
arrive to here

Xianzai NE, *wo bu dang shi ge shifu, erqie shi zheng*
now NE_I NEG only BE CL master but BE whole

ge zhaodaisuo weiyi cong sijui nian qi sanshi
CL reception building only one from 49 year start 30

nian yiguan zhi dai xialai de "yuanlao" le.
year straight stay behind DE senior ASP

'Liberation that year, I was only seventeen, still not a master, arrived here. Now NE_I'm not only a master barber for the whole reception building, but also the only one left behind since 1949, 30 years on.'

P1 'That year of Liberation I was only 17 when I arrived here; I was still not a master barber.'

P2 'Now NE_I'm not only a master barber but also the only one (left) since the days of 1949, 30 years on, the only senior left behind, in this Reception Building.'

In this monologue which carries multiple propositions, contrastiveness is present in both Topic and Comment.

- a. Topic: Time: *Jiefang na nian*/'liberation that year' vs. *xianzai*/'now'
- b. Comment: Age and experience: *Shiqi sui, hai mei chu shi*/'seventeen years, still an apprentice' vs. *yuanlao*/'a senior'

Contrastiveness of People and Situation

Example (4)

Context: This is the beginning of spring and the writer observes how the sick in contrast to

the young have reacted to this seasonal change.

- (4) **Bingren** *renjiu* *guozhuo* *houhou maorong* *weijing*,
sick people still wrap thick woollen scarf
- nianqin** **ren** **NE,** *yijing* *yong* *tamen* *de wuyanliuse* *de*
young people NE_ already use their DE colorful DE
- maorong yi*, *shenzi* *yong* *qingrou* *er* *you* *jiebai*
woollen garment even use light also have white
- de* *danzhuang*.
DE single garment

'The sick are still wrapped up in their thick woollen scarves, the young NE_ are in their unpadded light summer garment.'

P1 'The sick are still wrapped up in their **thick woollen scarves**.'

P2 'The young NE_ are dressed in white, **light (summer) garment**.'

Contrastiveness:

- a. Topic: People: Bingren/'the sick' vs. *nianqin ren*/ 'the young (and healthy)'
- b. Comment: Garment: *Houhou maorong weijing*/thick woollen scarf' vs. *qingrou*/'light'... *danzhuang*/'unpadded'

Example (5)

Context: In this leave-taking scene, the couple, Quan Fu and Dao Shao display contrast in their emotions

- (5) *Lao Zhang* *tou xia hui* *hai* *lai!*, " **Quan Fu** *dage*...
old Zhang next time again come Quan Fu elder brother
- xiao mimi** *di* *shuo*.
smilingly DE say
- Da shao** **NE, mozhe** **yanlei**, *yong* *shou* *zhezai*
elder sister-in-law NE_wipe tears use hand cover
- yanmeishang*, *nayang shengqingdi* *kanzhe ta*.
eyebrow that deep emotion look him.

'Lao Zhang, come again next time', **Quan Fu Elder Brother** [polite term of address] **smilingly said**. **Elder sister-in-law NE_** deeply moved, wiping away her **tears looked silently** at him.'

P1 'Quan Fu (elder brother) **smilingly said**, "Old Zhang, come again next time.'

P2 'Dao Shao (elder sister-in-law) NE_ **wiping her tears, looked silently** and

sadly at him.'

Contrastiveness:

- a. Topic: Gender: Quan Fu dage/'Elder Brother Quan Fu' vs. *Dao shao*/'Elder sister-in-law'
- b. Comment: Feelings: Xiao mimi di shuo/'smilingly said' vs. 'mozhe yanlei/'wiped away tears'

Example (6)

Context: A new employee says he finds that contrary to expectation, the current organization has many weaknesses. In reply, the older colleague remarks that what he sees is what the truth is.

- (6) "Danrang, *xiangxiang* *zongshi haode*, *shiji* NE,
of course imagination always good DE reality/practice NE_

jiu *name* *huishi*."
BE that matter

'Certainly, imagination is always good, but reality isn't necessary so.'

P1 'Certainly, **imagination** (what you imagine) is always **good**.'

P2 '**Reality** NE_ is **contrary to what you imagine**.'

Contrastiveness

- a. Topic: Imagination vs. reality
- b. Comment: Imagination is always good vs. the reality that is not so

As shown in these examples, contrastiveness in time, people and situation is seen to be the result of a process of structuring pairs of opposites in propositions. This informational contrastiveness is highlighted by discourse particle NE, which occurs after Topic 2 in the second proposition. In this position, NE serves to focus Hearer on Topic 2 and on what follows as relevant, new and informational.

4.2. 'Focus' and emphasis in semantic contrast: NE+pause

The pause after NE, as a prosodic feature in an intonational unit is common in naturally occurring conversations. This prosodic feature, in the linguistic environment as shown in Figure 2 has functional significance. The pause increases the prominence and presence of NE and consequently emphasizes the 'focus on the part of the Speaker to create such a focus on the part of the listener' (Engelkemp & Zimmer 1983: 119). The focus is also directed to the immediately preceding element, - the Topic, in subjectivized position and the Comment which follows.

Figure 2: On 'Focus' and Emphasis

[Topic 1 + Comment] [Topic 2 + NE + { Pause } + Comment]

Apart from such Speaker intention, the pause allows Speaker to begin another proposition or to structurally construct another independent clause (underlined) as shown in Example (2).

- (2) *Liang ge ye yiqian, ta hai zuo si xiang Hanbao de Yibeihe kelunshang. Xianzai NE, ta he na xie hei an zhong kan bu qing mianrong de lukemen ji zai yiqi.*

'Two months ago he was still travelling on Hanbao's Yibei River steamer. Now NE he is crammed together with the faceless masses.'

P1 [{Topic: **Two months ago**}+[{Comment: He was travelling in Hanbao Yibei River steamer}].

P2 [Topic: **Now**}NE_ +[{Comment: He is crammed together with the faceless masses}].

4.3. Use of grammatical connector and NE in contrastive propositions

Data from Wang's narrative show the occurrence of grammatical connectors *er* and *ke* 'but' together with NE. Since connectors, like all conjunctions link and express contrast between two independent clauses or sets of propositions, is it therefore essential to have a grammatical connector when NE as discourse particle already signals a form of contrastiveness of the second pair of proposition to the first? (as shown in Figure 1 where the link is suggested by underlying semantic cohesion). The obvious answer is 'No'. Rather a grammatical connector should be seen as part of syntax where the speaker is consciously applying the rules of grammar to explicitly link contrastive propositions, as illustrated by Figure 3.

Figure 3: On Explicit Syntactic Connectedness: Use of Grammatical Connector

If we examine carefully, Example (7) rephrased as (7)R such a grammatical connector like *ER*/'but' appears redundant.

Example (7)

Context: Preceding this utterance, the dialogue centers on an exchange between the two interactants who spoke of their past experiences. A third party joins in the conversation. He asks both why does one of them always looks tired and sad, whilst the other looks well and vibrant. The latter replies:

- (7) **Wu Tuo.** *Ta shi changchang bangzhe miankong,*
 Wu Tuo he BE always pulls ZHE long face
- er* **wo NE** *meiyou yi tian bu kaiwanxiao.*
 but I NE_ NEG one day NEG joke

'Wu Tao always **pulls a long face**, but I NE_ hardly a day passes without **joking**.'

P1 'Wu Tuo, he always **pulls a long face**.'

P2 'I NE_ hardly a day passes without **joking**.'

- (7)R Wu Tuo, ta shi changchang bangzhe miankong, wo NE, *meiyou yi tian bu kaiwanxiao*

'Wu Tao, he always has a **long face**, I NE_ hardly a day passes without **joking**.'

Further evidence to support the argument that a grammatical connector is redundant is shown in Examples (8) and (9). The R versions – (8)R and (9)R1 demonstrate very clearly that both meaning and structure remain intact when these propositions are constructed without the grammatical connector *ke/er*/'but.'

Example (8)

Context: Speaker jokingly tells Hearer how close she was sitting near him and yet he was not in the least interested in her presence.

- (8) **Wo** *zuo zai ni hougian bu yuan, ke ni NE,*
 I sit at you behind NEG far but you NE
- liang yanjing guanzhuyi kan qianbian le.*
 two eye interest see in front ASP

___ 'I sat not far **behind** you, but you, NE_ your two eyes were interested **in** (what's in) **front**.'

- (8)R Wo zuo zai ni hougian bu yuan, ni NE, *liang yanjing guang zhuyi kan qianbian le.*

'I sat not far behind you, **you**, NE_ your two eyes were interested in what's **in front**.'

Example (9)

Context: Because of the dearth of talent, Speaker is trying to persuade his friend, an ex-senior officer who is now retired to re-enter the workforce. He compares people of his calibre to rare hidden treasure.

- (9) *Deng dao* *Zhongguoren* *dou* *cheng le* *wenmang*,
wait till Chinese people all become ASP illiterate
- xiaoxue* *biye* *jiushi* *shengren!* *Er* *nimen zhexie*
elementary school graduates BE holymen whilst you these
- da* *ganbu* *NE* *bian* *chengle* *dazhe* *denglong*
big party cadre NE_ become ASP take lantern
- ye* *taohuan* *bu* *zhao* *de* *baobei!*"
also call NEG find DE treasure

'When **Chinese** all become illiterate, elementary school graduates will become holy men whilst you high party cadres NE_ will become rare gems.'

- (9)R1: *Deng dao* *Zhongguoren* *dou* *chengle* *wenmang*, *xiao xue* *biye* *jiu shi* *shengren!*
Nimen zhexie da ganbu NE, *bian* *chengle* *dazhe* *denglong* *ye* *tao huan* *bu* *zhao* *de* *baobei*

'When **Chinese all become illiterate**, elementary school graduates will be holy men. You high party cadres NE_ will become rare gems.'

Since a grammatical connector is shown to be redundant, is NE not similarly redundant as there is pre-existing underlying semantic cohesion? The answer is "No". There are two possible reasons. Firstly unlike a grammatical connector the discourse particle NE has value at the interactional level. In (9)R2 where NE is taken away, the intended signal on the part of the Speaker to *focus* Hearer on P2 (Topic 2 + Comment) is lost.

- (9)R2: *Deng dao* *Zhongguoren* *dou* *chengle* *wenmang*, *xiaoxue* *biye* *jiu shi* *shengren!*
Nimen zhexie da ganbu *bian* *chengle* *dazhe* *denglong* *ye* *tao huan* *bu* *zhao* *de* *baobei*.

'When **Chinese all become illiterate**, primary school graduates will be holy men. You high party cadres will become rare gems.'

Secondly, Speaker intention in stressing the importance and the rarity of such a group of people ('you, these high party cadres') in contrast to the illiterate masses is not effectively communicated in (9)R2 because of the absence of NE as a contrastive *emphasis-placement* device. Example (9)R2 appears to be just statements of observation which take on a matter-of-fact tone, unlike (9)R1 where the emphasis is on the new information following Topic shift: 'You high party cadres, NE _ **will become rare gems**'. This illustration explains why 'but/ *ke/er* at the level of syntax is identified as a grammatical connector. **The discourse particle NE in contrast, is better identified at the interactional and the illocutionary**

level as an emphasis marker, drawing the attention of hearer to what is focussed as important and pragmatically relevant. Similarly, with other examples such as Example (4) - if NE and its accompanied prosodic feature, the pause, were to be deleted, [See 4R] the emphasis on semantic contrastiveness of Topic 2 + {Comment} to Topic 1+ {Comment} as intended by Speaker is no longer intact.

- (4) **Bingren** renjiu guozhuo houhou maorongn weijing,
sick people still wrap up thick woollen scarve
- nianqin** **ren** **NE** yijing yong tamen de wuyanliuse
young people NE_ already use their DE colorful
- de maorong yi, shenzi yong qingrou er you jiebai
DE woollen garment even use light also you white
- de danzhuang.
DE single garment

'The sick are still wrapped up in their thick woollen scarves, the young NE_ are in their unpadded light summer garment.'

- (4)R **Bingren** renjiu guozhuo houhou maorong weijing,
sick people still wrap up thick woollen scarve
- nianqin** **ren** yijing yong tamen de wuyanliuse de
young people already use their DE colorful DE
- maorong yi, shenzi yong qingrou er you jiebai
woollen garment even use light also have white
- de danzhuang.
DE single garment

'The sick are still wrapped up in their thick woollen scarves, the young are in their unpadded light summer garment.'

These two examples support the argument that NE's role is not only structurally crucial to coherence management but also pragmatically significant in expressing Speaker intent.

5. Concluding remarks

This exploratory study has shown that as a discourse property, the contribution of particle NE to coherence (semantic connectivity and grammatical connectedness) is no less significant than conjunctions and adverbials are to text linguistics (cf. Stubbs 1983). The close examination of NE from two dimensions, the interactional and the informational, has shown that cognitively, NE plays a crucial role in drawing the attention of Hearer to new information, and linguistically achieves coherence management through semantic connectivity i.e. contrastiveness in propositions. What is unique about NE as a discourse particle is it explicitly focuses on new information and implicitly acts as a semantic

cohesive device. In this sense it is at once a linguistically cohesion-creating device and “an integral part of cognitive activity” (Harjicová & Segall 1984).

NE, to a degree, provides one of the kinds of cohesive cues, not unlike those actively constructed such as ‘well’. Like *well*, it can indicate a break in the discourse, a shift in topic, but unlike *well* it does not modify assumptions in what precedes. Neither does it act as a preface to close the topic or potentially the whole conversation. Instead, it acts as an emphasis-placement, fore-grounding what precedes and signaling what follows as relevant to the precedent.

The thesis in this paper that coherence in spoken discourse in Chinese can be achieved through the use of NE, a constituent in discourse structure, has been amply supported by data. Since, it’s role as a focus marker signaling semantic contrastiveness and pragmatic relevance has been convincingly demonstrated in the analysis, one might ask, ‘Should questions on proposition-connectedness be raised just as Werth has raised the question of sentence-connectedness (1984: 7). Do discourse particles play a role in semantic relationships, such as contrastive emphasis, in languages other than Chinese, is another question that can legitimately be considered. Clearly, any future framework for theoretical and empirical investigations into the nature of conversations or discourse analyses would stand to benefit from further research in discourse particles, in areas other than modality.

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