



Contrastive topic marking across Sinitic Wu language varieties

Dawei Jin¹ & Wei Zhou²

Shanghai Jiao Tong University dawejin@sjtu.edu.cn
Zhejiang University blue8jing@zju.edu.cn

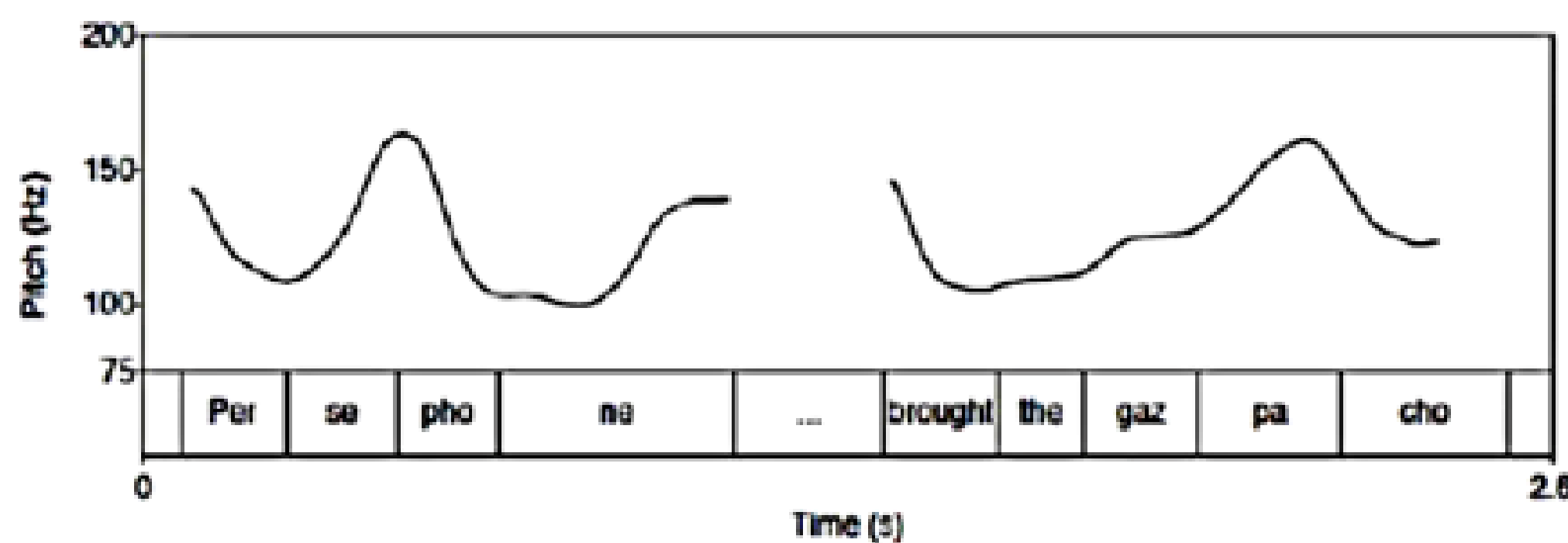
Introduction

Contrastive topics (CTs) are understood as indexing the existence of *at least two* alternative entities that participate in the pragmatic function of partial resolution (Büring 2003, 2010).

(1) Q: What did Persephone and Antonio bring to the house party?

A: [Persephone]^{CT} brought a potato soup. [Antonio]^{CT} brought a roasted chicken.

English expresses contrasting topics with a unique intonation pattern (e.g. the contrast topic sentence introduced by *Persephone*, Büring 2003; Constant 2014).



Pitch track of *[PERSEPHONE]^{CT} ... brought [the GAZPACHO]^{Th.}
L+H* L-H% H* L-L%

Proposal 1 Contrastive topics are parallel to thematic topics, overlapping with the latter by means of *aboutness*. There is a basic information structure category for contrastive topics, formulated independent of and without reference to thematic topics (Büring 2003, Gyuris 2002, 2008, 2009, 2012, Tomioka 2010 and Constant 2014).

Proposal 2 Contrastive topics is a subcategory of thematic topics that involves *contrastivity* (Krifka 2007, Vermeulen 2009, 2011, 2012, Neeleman and Vermeulen 2012).

Contrastive topic marking in East Asian languages

Explicit topic marking offers evidence for understanding the relation between thematic topics and contrastive topics.

Prediction: Thematic topic markers should apply to contrastive topics according to Proposal 2, but not Proposal 1.

East Asian languages:

Constant (2014) identified a Japanese/Korean-type pattern of topic marking and a Mandarin-type.

- In the former type, contrastive topics and thematic topics are marked in the same way (**Japanese** *-wa* and **Korean** *-(n)eun*).
- The characterization of contrastive topics as a category on its own right finds motivation in the **Mandarin**-type
- The Mandarin topic particle *-ne* is solely contrastive-marking and hence should be treated as a realization of the contrastive topic operator.

Wu languages (Sinitic, Sino-Tibetan)

- noted for a richer array of lexically encoded, dedicated topic particles than Mandarin (Xu & Liu 2002; 2012; Jin 2020).
- internal variation (in terms of the inventory of topic particles)
- the pattern of topic marking across Wu dialects provides a fertile ground for investigating the interplay between topic particle and topic type.

Empirical investigation

- **five** Wu varieties, each representing one distinct subfamily of the Wu language family (Xu & You 1984)
- 3 speakers per variety
- we looked into whether the topic particle(s) within a given Wu variety can felicitously be placed in the following environments in Figure 1 (* indicates unacceptability in said environment).

Figure 1 The distribution patterns of topic operators in five Wu varieties

	Suzhou	Yuyao	Ningbo	Wenzhou	Jinhua
contrastive topic	məʔ, *a, zi	məʔ, pin, *a	məʔ, pin	pi	nei, *məʔ, *a
thematic topic	məʔ, a, zi	*məʔ, pin, a	*məʔ, *pin	*pi	*nei, *məʔ, a
conditional	məʔ, *a, zi	məʔ, pin, *a	məʔ, pin	pi	nei, *məʔ, *a
contrastive focus	*məʔ, *a, *zi	*məʔ, *pin, *a	*məʔ, *pin	*pi	*nei, *məʔ, *a

Patterns

- 1) pattern of differential marking of thematic and contrastive topics that is attested across Wu language varieties
 - 2) markers overlap in different dialects, but distribution not identical.
 - 3) point to distinction between thematic and contrastive topic marking.
 - 4) expected by Proposal 1 (contrastive topics is a basic information structure category, Büring (2003), inter alia.)
 - 5) our results further indicate that conditional-marking parallels contrastive topic-marking, but not thematic topic-marking.
 - If a topic particle marks a CT, it always marks a conditional antecedent clause as well (and vice versa).
 - Why conditional clauses are well-suited to be contrastive topics?
- We can make sense of this distribution by considering it more plausible to treat conditional clauses as contrastive topics, by presenting a contrasting hypothetical possibility (e.g. Constant 2010), contra a thematic topic interpretation of conditionals as presenting an aboutness possibility in discourse (e.g. Ebert et al. 2014).

References

- Büring, Daniel. 2003. On D-trees, Beans, and B-accents. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 26(5):511–545.
- Gyuris, Beáta. 2002. *The Semantics of Contrastive Topics in Hungarian*. Ph.D. thesis, Eötvös Loránd University.
- Tomioka, Satoshi. 2010. A Scope Theory of Contrastive Topics. *Iberia* 2(1):113–130.
- Krifka, Manfred. 2007. Basic Notions of Information Structure. *Working Papers of the SFB632*.