Conversation, continuation, and connectives

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Abstract

By examining the uses of the Mandarin connective na(me) in conversation, this paper attempts to address the functional motivations for the non-obligatory yet frequent occurrences of discourse connectives in conversation. Three types of relationship manifested between units of talk are marked by na(me): conditional relation, topic succession, and topic change. Although topic change appears to be the opposite of topic succession, it is argued that the topic change marked by na(me), in which continuation is anchored at the interactional dimension rather than the textual/ideational dimension, is a subtype of the distant topic succession. This paper suggests that the speaker-addressee interactionality both motivates and constrains the frequent occurrences of na(me) in conversation.

Introduction

From analyses of connectives such as and we know that the relatedness within or between linguistic strings is not created by the presence of a connective: without the connective, two linguistic units can still be interpreted as holding the same relationship if situated in felicitous contexts (Mann and Thompson, 1986; Schiffrin, 1987). Connectives are, in other words, not obligatory for the coherence of discourse. The purpose of this paper is to address the functional motivations for the non-obligatory yet frequent uses of discourse connectives. In this paper I focus my study on the behavior of one such connective in Mandarin, i.e., name (or its variant na), which can be roughly glossed as ‘so, (given ...) then (...)’.

134 occurrences of na(me) were identified as connective in my conversational data, marking three types of relationship manifested between units of talk in conversation: conditional relation, topic succession, and topic change. The ratios of each na(me) type are given in Table 1. The four
undetermined cases according to the present three-way analysis are ‘incomplete’ cases in which the utterance following na(me) is either interrupted by another interlocutor or it is a false start truncated by the speaker. I will not discuss them here.

While na(me) is not an obligatory element for any one of the three relationships, the three types have different correlations with different modes of communication. Although unsupported by figures from large-scale investigations, my observation is that topic succession na(me) and topic change na(me) typically occur in unplanned, spontaneous discourse modes such as conversation, but much less frequently in planned discourse modes such as expository essays. On the other hand, the conditional na(me) occurs in both types. The conditional na(me) is, in addition, easier to identify, usually not relying on information beyond the sentence containing it. Because of its occurrence in written language and its sentential resolvability, the conditional na(me) has been discussed in traditional treatments of Mandarin grammar (Chao, 1968).

In contrast, it is only recently that the behavior and function of na(me) as a connective at the discourse level have begun to be investigated. Both Biq (1988) and Miracle (1989) suggest that the unifying function of na(me) is ‘to establish the connection of and thus the relevance of the following unit of talk to a prior unit of talk’ (Miracle, 1989: 16).

Based on these preliminary findings, I will further examine in this paper how various types of na(me) accomplish their connecting function differently. In particular, despite its constituting only 0.7% of my data, I am curious about how na(me) can ever be used to signal topic change, a notion in opposition with connection, continuation, and relevance. I also want to know why the occurrence frequencies for topic succession na(me) and topic change na(me) are higher in conversation but lower in written language.

In the following, each type of na(me) is characterized in sections 1, 2,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Ratio of the connective na(me) types</th>
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<td>Na(me) Type</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Conditional</td>
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<td>2. Topic succession — immediate</td>
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<td>— distant</td>
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<td>3. Topic change</td>
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<td>(Underdetermined cases)</td>
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<td>Totals</td>
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and 3, respectively. Section 4 compares the distant topic succession with
topic change and traces their common characteristic to the deictic use of
na(me). Section 5 examines the motivations for the frequent uses of na(me)
in conversation. Section 6 summarizes the paper and points out areas
where further research needs to be done.

1. Na(me) and the conditional

Although the focus of this paper is on topic succession and topic change,
I will start with the conditional na(me), for this type displays the contin-
uation relation that recurs in the two latter types in a structurally most
concrete manner.

As shown in Table 1, the conditional na(me) constitutes 18.7% of the
total occurrences in my conversational data. Na(me) can be used to
connect the antecedent (premise) and the consequent (conclusion) of a
conditional relation, with na(me) preceding the consequent (Chao, 1968;
Lu, 1980; Liao, 1986). This use is similar to the ways then is used in
English. Na(me) can co-occur with conditional phrases affixed to the
antecedent, such as ruguo ... 'if ...', ... dehua ‘in the case of ...’, and
jiran ... ‘since ...’. (1) is an example.

(1) (MSB: 81)
(F says that doctors should pay attention to the ‘ordinary’ diseases
that people are most likely to contract.)

1F. Ruguo mei yige ren dou xiang qu yanjiu xinzang
if every one-M person all want go study heart
2 dehua, name ganmao shei zhi ne?
in-the-case-of cold who cure PRT
F. ‘If everyone wants to study heart (diseases), then who cures colds?’

Na(me) can also occur alone, prefacing the consequent clause without other
conditional markers affixed to the antecedent clause. (2) is an example.

(2) (MSB: 331)
(F says that acupuncture was looked down upon in the past when
the Chinese medical community was only interested in expensive
projects.)

1F. Dui zhei zhong ni yi gen zhen neng zhi hao na mei
to this kind you one M needle can cure well NEG
2 ren kandeqi ni.
person respect you
F. ‘As for this kind (of practitioner, that is,) that you can cure diseases
with a single needle then nobody would think highly of you.’
In (2) the antecedent is ‘practitioners who can cure diseases with one needle (without using other expensive medical apparatus)’, with the subject being represented by an impersonal use of the second person pronoun, *ni*. The consequent, on the other hand, is ‘nobody would think highly of you, i.e., this kind of practitioner’. *Na(me)* is the only marker for the conditional relation between them.

Ford and Thompson (1986) showed that the conditional *if* clauses (i.e., the antecedent clauses) in English discourse are, as Haiman (1978) suggests, functionally like topics, creating backgrounds for subsequent propositions and connecting this subsequent discourse with the preceding discourse. As pointed out above, the antecedent clauses in Chinese may not be marked morpho-syntactically, but their topic-like function remains the same to the overall ideational structure. Always prefacing the consequent, *na(me)* indicates a warranted continuation relation between the preceding antecedent as the background/topic and the upcoming consequent as the elaboration/comment. This continuation relation between the prior discourse and the upcoming discourse recurs in the other two *na(me)* types.

There are two characteristics, one ideational and one formal, of the continuation relation marked by the conditional *na(me)*. First, the antecedent and the consequent form an ideational dichotomy, so the continuation relation is binary and automatic. Second, the antecedent and the consequent are positioned next to each other in discourse, rendering formal contiguity, and the continuation relation is thus locally resolvable. I will discuss these characteristics more in sections 2.4 and 6.

2. *Na(me)* and topic succession

In this second type of use, *na(me)* connects two units of talk of which the second unit, prefaced by *na(me)*, presents an elaboration or a further development of what is being said in the first. In their discussion of topic as a discourse element, Li and Thompson (1981) mentioned this use of *na(me)*, calling it ‘topic reintroduction’. In this paper, I will first discuss the organization of discourse topics (2.1). I will then discuss how *na(me)* is used for marking topic succession (2.2 and 2.3). Lastly, I will compare the conditional *na(me)* with the topic succession *na(me)* and discuss how *na(me)* is used with other connectives in discourse (2.4).

2.1. *Types of topic succession*

Linguistic discourse units are sequentially continued, but ideas and topics are hierarchically structured. While a well-developed model or theory of topic organization is still in the making (Mentis, 1988), the hierarchical
nature of the ideational structure in a discourse seems intuitively correct and will thus stand unquestioned for the purpose of this paper.

In examining how hierarchically arranged ideational structure is organized in sequentially continued linguistic discourse, I limit my discussion to the succession relationship (if there is any) between two immediately adjacent discourse units. Even within this limit, the characterization of topic succession is tremendously complex and challenging. For the purpose of this paper, I distinguish two major types of succession relationship, immediate and distant, with the acknowledgement that this framework is not ideal and needs to be refined for future work.

Basically, immediate succession refers to a topic relation in which the upcoming discourse unit is a direct ideational expansion of the immediately preceding unit, whereas distant succession refers to cases in which the upcoming unit is ideationally not directly related to the immediately preceding unit. In actual conversation, topic succession is further complicated by the interactional, collaborative characteristics of conversation. Two immediately adjacent discourse units may be uttered by two different speakers. Thus, for each subtype described above, there are two further subcategories: succession by the same speaker, and succession by a different speaker.

Several notions have to be vaguely defined. First, following Schiffrin (1987), I am using the term ‘unit’ (as unit of talk or discourse unit) in a deliberately vague way. A unit can be a sentence, a phonological cluster, or some other linguistic representation of a proposition, etc. As Schiffrin (1987) suggests, discourse markers and units of talk mutually define each other. Occurrences of na(me) may indicate boundaries of a discourse unit which cannot be well accounted for on syntactic, phonological, or semantic grounds.

Second, given the hierarchical nature of the whole discourse structure, whether the succession is immediate or distant, i.e., whether the upcoming unit is an ideational expansion of the immediately preceding unit or of some other unit in prior discourse, is a relative matter. Pragmatics affects the analytical decisions, especially when the succession is not between units of talk uttered by the same speaker. In analyzing my data, I relied on a combination of semantic, pragmatic, and syntactic factors to determine whether two immediately adjacent units joined by na(me), as they are situated in the larger discourse, are ‘about’ the same thing and thus form an immediate succession or not.

2.2. Na(me) and immediate succession

As shown in Table 1, over three quarters of the occurrences of na(me) are of the topic succession type. Furthermore, the immediate succession
na(me) constitutes 57.5% of all occurrences, and is thus the most frequently seen type of use.

(3) is an example of immediate succession, because na(me) prefaces the upcoming talk (about wallets), which is a direct elaboration on the immediately preceding talk (about the plentifulness of items in the store).

(3) (QNS: 673)
(S talks about the things on sale in a swank department store.)
1S. Yinwei tade dian ao, dongxi qishi hen duo.
   because its store PRT thing actually very many
2 Na, tade pijia ao, jiaru zai dazhe de shihou,
   its wallet PRT if at discount NOM time
3 qishi hen keneng shi zui pianyi.
   actually very possible be most inexpensive
S. ‘For the store actually has many things. And its wallets, if they’re on sale, could in fact very possibly be the cheapest (compared to the same ones sold elsewhere).’

For an immediate succession between two different speakers, (4) is an example.

(4) (SJS: 345)
(Y is telling a story about a baby who had allergies.)
1Y. Tamen nei shihou ye shi bu dong. Ta dui niunai
   3p that time also be NEG understand 3s to milk
2 guomin.
   allergic
3B. Oh:. Oh, na xianzai hao le?
   oh oh now OK CRS
Y. ‘They (the parents) didn’t know (what it was) at that time. (It was that) he was allergic to milk.’
B. ‘Oh. Oh, so (is he) OK now?’

B’s question in line 3 prefaced by na is a reaction (request for further detail) directed toward what she has just learned from Y’s preceding speech at lines 1 and 2.

2.3. Na(me) and distant succession

As discussed in 2.1, in a distant succession the discourse unit to be succeeded by the upcoming unit (prefaced by na(me)) is not the immediately preceding unit of discourse but some prior one. This kind of relation is strongly reminiscent of the long-distance discourse anaphora discussed in
Fox (1987). There are two examples of distant succession by the same speaker in (5). The two examples are in line 11 and line 19.

(5) (SJS: 21, 27)
(Z and B are conversing on the topic of disposable contact lenses.)
1Z. Wo kan baozhi shang xie shuo shenme xianzai you
I read newspaper on write say some now have
2 dai le jiu diu de nei zhong.
wear ASP then throw NOM that kind
3B. Ah?: (laugh)
4Z. You yi zhong (??) jiu shuo xiang nei ge mian xi niaobu
have one kind just say like that M exempt wash diaper
5 yiyang, na dai le jiu diu, dai le jiu diu.
same then wear ASP then throw wear ASP then throw
6 Shuo xianzai yijing zai, zai shengqing ba,
say now already at at apply PRT
7 kan nei ge shenme Yiyaqiu: you mei you
see that M some FDA have NEG have
   [uh: tongguo,=]
   see pass
   [Zhende a?
   really PRT
8B. shuo [pizhun.
say approve
  [Unhun.
un hun
9Z. =shuo [pizhun.
say approve
10B. [Unhun.
un hun
11Z. Na wo xiangxin na zhong shi hen hao,
I believe that kind be very good
12 dui ruanshi de ren hen hao,
to soft-style NOM person very good
13 jiu bu bi chonglaichongqu xilaixiqu.
then NEG need rinse-back-and-forth wash-back-and-forth
14B. Unhun, dui, keshi yao ta pianyi cai xing a.
un hun right but need it cheap only-then OK PRT
15Z. Dui a na dangran zhezhong yao yao nenggou diu
right PRT and of-course this-M need need able discard de
   NOM
16 yiding yao pianyi ba.
have-to need cheap PRT
17 Wo xiang shi zheiyang.
I think be this way
18 Wo bu zhidao.
I NEG know
19. Na wo hai zai deng neige shuobuding shuo
    I still in wait that-M maybe say
20. neige chulai wo jiu keyi dai ruanshide.
    that come-out I then may wear soft-style
Z. I read the newspaper and it said something like that there’re disposable ones (i.e., contact lenses) now.
B. Ah?: (laugh)
Z. There’s this kind (??), said was just like disposable diapers, and you throw it away after you use it, throw away after use. Said now (they’re) already applying (for patent), (they’ll) see if that FDA (whatever it is) have
    [uh: passed, [approved it or not.
B. [Really? Unhun.
Z. And I believe that that type (i.e., the disposable contact lenses) is very good. It is very good for people who wear soft ones, (‘cause) then (they) don’t have to clean them all the time.
B. Unhun, yeah, but it has to be cheap.
Z. Yeah, naturally this kind of disposable lenses has has to be cheap. I think so. I don’t know. And I am still waiting for that (i.e., the disposable type) maybe say when that (i.e., the disposable type) comes out then I can wear soft lenses.

In this segment about disposable contact lenses Z and B have touched on several subtopics. The segment of discourse in lines 1–3 reports the availability of this new product. Lines 4–5 describe what this product is like. Lines 6–10 talk about the patent application. Lines 11–13 discuss the advantages of the disposable contact lenses. Lines 14–18 focus on the pricing. Lines 19–20 present Z’s hope.

The na(me) in line 11 marks a distant succession because the advantages of wearing disposable contact lenses have nothing to do with the immediately preceding discourse unit regarding patent application. It is rather tied to the subtopic developed in lines 4–5, where the characteristics of disposable type, ‘throw away after use’, is being emphasized.

The na(me) in line 19 also marks a distant succession. The immediate prior unit of talk (line 18, ‘I don’t know’) concerns Z’s uncertainty about the pricing. The current unit, presenting Z’s hopeful wait for the new product, has nothing to do with the pricing issue but is rather an ideational expansion of the discourse unit expressed in lines 1–2 regarding the disposable type’s new availability.

The distant succession by a different speaker can be illustrated by the segment in (6).
(6) (MSB: 46)
(F and M are discussing the different medical treatments that a landlord and a peasant could respectively afford in the older Chinese society.)

1F. nongcun ni dizhu keneng you bing ye dei qu qing=
village you landlord may have illness also need go ask

2M. Shi a.
yeah PRT

3F. yisheng na nongmin jiu bu xing le.
doctor then peasant then NEG OK CRS

4M. Na ta you qian ziran 3s have money naturally keyi dao waitou qu can to outside go quing la,=

5F. Dui, right Dui right

6M. =shi bu shi?
be NEG be

F. In the village (if) you’re a landlord (you) would go get=

M. Yeah.

F. = a doctor when you’re sick but then peasants could not afford it.

M. In that case then he’s got money naturally he can get a doctor from outside, right?

F. Yeah. Yeah.

Although its referent is for all practical purposes ambiguous, the third person pronoun ta in line 4 is meant to refer to the landlord by M. It is clear from the larger context that M at this point is, so to speak, collaborating with F to make the contrast between the landlord’s life and the peasant’s life. Thus, the na(me) in line 4 connects M’s talk, not to the immediate prior unit about peasants (line 3), but to the unit further back about the landlords (line 1).

2.4. Summary

I have discussed and illustrated how na(me) is used to mark immediate and distant topic successions in conversation. The former is locally resolvable, whereas the latter is globally resolvable. Each type can be further categorized into successions accomplished by the same speaker and those by a different speaker.

In marking topic succession, na(me) indicates a continuation relation. It presupposes an established topic in prior discourse (not necessarily in the immediately preceding discourse unit), and prefaces the upcoming discourse unit as the further development of this topic. Compared to the
conditional relation discussed in section 1, the notion of topic succession is much less strictly defined. In the conditional relation, the continuation hinges on the mutually binding ideational relation between the antecedent and the consequent. The antecedent and the consequent are contiguous in the discourse, thus their continuation relation is locally resolvable. In topic succession, continuation is with respect to the ideational relation between two discourse units in the hierarchical structure of discourse. This continuation is not binary and automatic, but rather hierarchical and contingent. Furthermore, this continuation is not necessarily accompanied by formal contiguity, nor is it necessarily locally resolvable.5

Although non-obligatory, na(me) can be used for both types of topic succession. This ‘all-purpose’ state seems to render na(me) rather uninteresting. However, its usefulness lies in its contrast with other topic succession markers. Schiffirin (1987) discusses similar phenomena in English. As a marker for coordination of ideas and for speaker continuation, English and can occur in environments shared by other modes of connection such as but, so, or ‘zero marker’. She finds that while and is not seen to function at all levels at once, the ‘switching between and and other modes of connection can display global relations between higher-level units of discourse’ (Schiffirin, 1987: 131). In like fashion, the Chinese na(me) occurs with other topic succession markers (such as erqie ‘moreover’, keshi ‘but’, buguo ‘but’, ranhou ‘and then’, houlai ‘later on, then’, qishi ‘actually’, and suoyi ‘so’) to indicate the hierarchical structure of discourse.

Finally, the distant succession is the one that best illustrates the hierarchical nature of topic organization. It is also an important notion for the discussion in the next section.

3. Na(me) and topic change

In direct contrast to its function in marking succession between ideationally related topics, na(me) can be used to preface the beginning of some types of new topics in conversation.

In the following segment, five friends were chatting while eating.

(7) (QNS: 221)
(First conversation on tofu, then silence and eating for 12 seconds, and then;)
1S. Na ni yao zai zhei bian dai duojiu?
you want at this side stay how-long
2C. Dai dao Libai'er.
stay to Tuesday
S. So how long are you going to stay here?
C. To Tuesday.

The new topic, concerning C's plans for the following few days, has nothing to do with the preceding topic on tofu, and it is a completely new topic in the whole conversation never touched on up to this point.

Although (7) is the only example of na(me) used to preface a new topic in my data, forming only 0.7% of the total number of occurrences, the theoretical significance of this type of use should not be overlooked because of this relatively low percentage of occurrence. After all, it is curious that a connective that has been seen to mark conditional relation and topic succession, which both represent a continuation of the discourse, can be used to preface a new topic that is totally unrelated to any of topics established in previous linguistic discourse.

Topic cohesiveness is preferred to topic changes/jumps in conversation (Levinson, 1983). The marked status of topic changes in conversation is evidenced by, among other things, the presence of topic introducers prefacing the beginning of a new topic to smooth out the topic transition. To use na(me) to preface a new topic is, just like any other use of topic introducers, motivated by the pressures for topic cohesiveness.

However, as we will see in the following, in using na(me) for topic transition, it is through exploiting the interactional aspect of conversation that the conversationalist manages to get by the pressures for topic cohesiveness. Na(me), in effect, makes conversation participants believe that there has not been any topic change but rather that the upcoming talk is a continuation of what has been going on. In this sense, na(me) is a special type of topic change marker.

The English so can act similarly in making topic transitions in conversation. For example, in casual conversations we often say something like 'So what have you been doing lately?', to initiate a new topic. In terms of the distribution ratios in spoken data, this kind of use of certain connectives may be less than impressive compared to their other uses. This is precisely because topic cohesiveness is preferred to topic jumps in casual conversation.

In her study on 'troubles-telling exit devices', Jefferson (1984) calls this type of use of so (and and) a device for conversation restart, prefacing an upcoming talk which is topically disjunctive. Jefferson points out that attention to the coparticipant in conversation is a distinct feature of this type of topic restart device. While topic cohesiveness is being broken, this 'other-attentiveness' has the effect of preserving the interactional cohesiveness in conversation. She states:
Specifically, the one who proposes to depart from talk about a trouble does so with talk that is other-attentive. Whether blandly conventional — ‘I’ll see you Tuesday’ ... — or designed for this particular recipient — ‘Okay you go and get your clean trousers on ...’ ... — the talk that breaks from a troubles-telling exhibits attention to the coparticipant (Jefferson, 1984: 194).

At least in the case of na(me), it is not just in exiting from trouble-telling that this other-attentiveness is exhibited. Furthermore, I find that explicit references to coparticipant(s) are not the only way to accomplish other-attentiveness.

There are at least three ways that the other-attentiveness can be accomplished. Regardless of the content of the preceding discourse topic, virtually in every case where na(me) is used to preface a new topic, there is always an acknowledgement, direct or indirect, of the interactive dimension of conversation.

First and most frequently, na(me) prefaces a question directed toward the coparticipant(s), such as in (7) presented above, or in (8):

(8) Na nide giche mai le meiyou?
    your car sell CRS NEG
    ‘So have you sold your car?’

Questions, as the first part of an adjacency pair (Schegloff and Sacks, 1973), automatically pick out one (or more) of the conversation coparticipants as the addressee(s). They are thus able to accomplish a direct other-attentiveness effect.

Secondly, na(me) can also preface an upcoming new topic in the form of a statement, while the content of this statement is part of the shared knowledge between the speaker and the addressee. For example, the speaker can switch to a new topic about Xiao Zhang, a mutual friend of his/hers and the addressee’s, by using na(me) at the beginning, as in (9), if the speaker believes that Xiao Zhang’s going to the US is also known by the addressee.

(9) Na Xiao Zhang xia xingqi yao qu Meiguou le
    Little Zhang next week want go America CRS
    ‘So Little Zhang will be going to the US next week.’

In this case, although there are no overt references to the intended addressee nor is the intended addressee explicitly solicited for response (for example by a question), (s)he is implicitly solicited, as it were, to confirm his/her prior knowledge of the information in the speaker’s statement. In his/her action of soliciting confirmation from the addressee, the speaker can be said to have attended to the other-attentiveness effect.

Finally, na(me) can also be used with conversational mechanics such
as (semi-)conventional pre-closings. In this case references to coparticipants are not necessarily explicit, either. Example (10) includes some Chinese semi-conventionals for conversational pre-closing. Some of the English equivalents of these examples (for example, those of (10)b and (10)c) work in the same way in spoken English.

(10) a. Na ni ziji qu le.  
    you self go CRS  
    ‘So you’ll be going (there) by yourself.’

   b. Na women zai lianxi (le).  
    we again keep-in-touch CRS  
    ‘So we’ll keep in touch.’

   c. Na wo zou le.  
    I leave CRS  
    ‘So I should get going.’

All three pre-closings are not in question form, although in (10)a (one of) the coparticipant(s) is explicitly addressed. In (10)b (s)he is implicitly addressed, as women ‘we’ is here an inclusive ‘we’. In (10)c the coparticipant is not addressed at all since the statement is about the speaker. However, because the content and the function of these pre-closings directly bear on the interactional structure of conversation (Levinson, 1983), the occurrence of a pre-closing is, by itself, a manifestation of interactional cohesiveness and the other-attentiveness effect.

To summarize, the above three types of topic transition (with na(me)) all acknowledge the interactional dimension of conversation and display the other-attentiveness effect. As a marker for topic change, na(me) does not preface an upcoming new talk that does not display other-attentiveness. (This is probably also true for so and and in topic transition.) For example, unlike other topic introducers, na(me) cannot preface a new topic about the speaker him-/herself, when the speaker believes that the addressee has no prior knowledge of the content of this upcoming new topic. Consider the examples in (11) as starts of new topics.

(11) a. Hei, wo zuotian mai-le yijian. yifu, hao pianyi.  
    hey I yesterday buy-ASP one-M clothes very cheap  
    ‘Hey, I bought some clothes yesterday and it was a bargain.’

   b. Dui le, wo zuotian mai-le yijian yifu, hao pianyi.  
    right CRS I yesterday buy-ASP one-M clothes very cheap  
    ‘Oh (right), I bought some clothes yesterday and it was a bargain.’

   c. ??? Na, wo zuotian mai-le. yijian yifu, hao pianyi.  
    I yesterday buy-ASP one-M clothes very cheap  
    ??? ‘So, I bought some clothes yesterday and it was a bargain.’
If the speaker believes that his/her bargain purchase of some clothing the
day before is new information to the addressee, (11)a and (11)b will be
perfectly acceptable; (11)c will be anomalous, for this new topic is, so to
speak, 'outside' of the addressee's 'world'. There is no other-attentiveness
under such circumstances.

The contrast in (11) makes it clear that the feature of other-attentiveness
is required when na(me) is used in topic transition. This is the reason that
at the beginning of this section I stated that na(me) can preface some, but
not all, types of new topic. Why is this so?

A parallel drawn between the conditional na(me), the topic succession
na(me), and the topic change na(me) provides some clue. Just as the
conditional na(me) presupposes a formerly established antecedent
and prefaces an upcoming consequent, and the topic succession na(me)
presupposes a formerly established topic and prefaces an upcoming elabora-
tion on this topic, the topic change na(me) also both presupposes a
formerly established feature of other-attentiveness, i.e., attention toward
the interactional aspect of conversation, and prefaces an upcoming elabo-
ration on this attention. In other words, na(me) connects the new topic
to the preceding talk at the interactional dimension of discourse rather
than at the ideational or the textual dimensions. Since the preaced new
topic possesses the other-attentiveness feature, and na(me) indicates con-
tinuation, it appears that whatever came before na(me) has always pos-
sessed the other-attentiveness feature. Since both the preceding talk and
the following talk are now characterized by other-attentiveness, the topic
transition between talk units becomes smooth, and discontinuity is
lcssened.

This twist, making a topic change (between ideationally disjunctive
topics) into a seeming continuation of talk (between interactionally seem-
ingly cohesive actions), is a manipulation on the part of the speaker, who
exploits the interactional aspect of conversation. However, precisely
because of this, the manipulation is highly constrained by its dependence
on the form or the content of the upcoming talk. Without the other-
attentive feature (as represented by the question form, by the fact that
the content is shared knowledge between speaker and addressee, or by
the conventional pre-closings) in the upcoming talk, neither cohesiveness
at the interactional dimension nor a continuation of conversation can be
established. Thus, whereas the use of na(me) in topic change is motivated
by pressures for conversational topic cohesiveness, this use is both facili-
tated and constrained by the interactional aspect of conversation.
4. **Na(me), topic succession, and topic change**

4.1. *From textual to pragmatic*

From the discussion in sections 2 and 3, it should be clear that the way *na(me)* works in topic succession is different from the way it works in topic change. In the former case, it is in the ideational/textual dimension where *na(me)* exerts its connective function and displays textual cohesiveness; in the latter case, *na(me)* exerts its connective function and displays interactional cohesiveness (when textual cohesiveness is seriously broken) in the interactional dimension.

However, the boundary between textual cohesiveness and interactional cohesiveness is not always distinct. Recall that one type of topic succession is distant succession. Topic change prefaced by *na(me)* can be seen as a type of very-distant topic succession, and it is one way for the speaker to show his/her efforts in achieving discourse coherence.

Since the feature of other-attentiveness assumes a certain amount of shared background between the speaker and the addressee, the new topic prefaced by *na(me)* is put forth as if to pick out something from this shared background, especially from the part of information that is established between the speaker and the addressee prior to the current discourse. For example, in (7) when S asks C the question regarding his plan for the following few days, S is, as it were, proceeding on the premise of the mutual knowledge between him and C that C is visiting, which was established prior to the linguistic discourse that contains the topic change *na(me)*.

In order to draw a contrast, we can characterize the kind of distant topic succession identified in section 2, on the one hand, as ‘textual’, since the topic to be continued is traceable in the current linguistic discourse. On the other hand, interactionally cohesive topic changes are ‘pragmatic’, or very-distant, topic successions. For this type, the prior topic to be picked up and continued is only traceable through extra-linguistic contexts.

4.2. *From deictic to connective*

The connective *na(me)* is semantically related to the distal demonstrative *na* ‘that’ (as opposed to *zhe(i)* ‘this’) (cf. Xu, 1988) for the semantic non-symmetry between *zhe(i)* and *na*). The English *then* seems to share the same semantic patterns, which range from distal deixis (as opposed to *now*), to conditional (as opposed to *if*), and to textual connection (as synonymous with *moreover*) (Schiffrin, 1987).
The demonstrative *na* can be combined with other linguistic elements to refer to the distal deictic end in temporal, spatial, and other orderly/scalar dimensions (for example, *natian* 'that day', *nakuaidi* 'that piece of land', *nayang zuo* 'do (it) that way/in that manner', and *name mang* 'so (= that) busy'). The deictic sense exists in the connective *na(me)* also. In fact, as Schiffrin points out, all discourse markers have indexical functions. Since the conditional *na(me)*, the topic succession *na(me)*, and the topic change *na(me)* all presuppose an established entity which is to be continued in some manner by the upcoming discourse, these different types of connective use point to both the prior discourse and the upcoming discourse. However, the distal (as opposed to proximal) sense of the demonstrative *na* is especially distinct in distant (textual) topic succession *na(me)* and topic change (i.e., ‘very’-distant pragmatic topic succession) *na(me)*. The distal semantic value has helped to develop these distant uses of *na(me)* as a connective. 

5. Interactionality

As stated earlier, topic succession *na(me)* and topic change *na(me)* do not occur regularly in typical written discourse such as expository essays. On the other hand, they are typically seen in conversation. Why is there this discrepancy between different modes of communication?

While there are other factors (such as stylistic considerations) at work, one explanation can be offered from the functional point of view. Assuming that the use of a non-obligatory linguistic element contributes something to the production and processing of speech, and to communication as a whole, the motivation for the typical uses of topic succession *na(me)* and topic change *na(me)* in conversation but not in expository essays may lie in the contrast between the maximal speaker-addressee interactionality characteristic of the former and the minimal author-reader interactionality characteristic of the latter.

In the following, I not only discuss the behavior of *na(me)* in expository essays and conversation, but also in lectures. Again, these are observations and speculations without figures from large scale studies supporting them.

First, the non-occurrence of topic change *na(me)* in expository essays is directly related to the ideational cohesiveness in this particular mode of communication. It is also indirectly correlated with the low author-reader interactionality in this mode. Expository essays are typically planned and organized ahead of the production. Ideational cohesiveness
throughout the text is an assumed quality. Shifts between completely unrelated topics are taboo. Thus, topic change na(me) is unlikely to occur.

The ideational cohesiveness is, in turn, partially due to the author’s complete control over the text, and there is no detracting caused by author-reader interactionality. Now, topic change na(me), as we have seen in section 3, depends on (and is constrained by) interactionality. Naturally, there is no chance for it to occur in an expository essay.

The lecture is a mode of spoken communication in which the speaker also enjoys a somewhat less but similarly high degree of control over the content of the discourse (and in which there is a low degree of speaker-addressee interaction). The occurrence of topic change na(me) in lectures is most likely with the (semi-) conventional pre-closings only, such as in (12).

(12) Name jintian jiu jiang dao zher.
    today just lecture to here
    ‘So (I will) stop (my lecture/talk) at here today.’

Next, the relatively lower degree of occurrence of topic succession na(me) in expository essays (as opposed to in conversation) is partly correlated with the low degree of author-reader interactionality in the written mode, and partly with the graphic and spatial nature of that mode.

First let us see why topic succession na(me) is frequent in conversation. As conversations are interactional, turns taken to speak are commodities negotiated among co-participants. Assuming the preference for topic cohesiveness, a person who can offer a continuation of the current topic, or of a topic established in prior discourse, would have higher priority for the right to speak in the next turn than his/her coparticipants who cannot make such an offer. In the spontaneous situation of conversation, a discourse marker like na(me) signalling continuation enables the speaker to make a claim for higher priority in the negotiation for the right to speak.

Although topic succession na(me) may be used in expository essays, the frequency of occurrence is greatly reduced for two reasons. First, in expository essays there is no competition for the right to speak. That right belongs exclusively to the author. (S)he has no need to make a claim, so to speak, on something (s)he is already entitled to. Thus, the author’s total control and the lack of author-reader interactionality reduce motivation for overt marking of continuation to ‘gain the upper hand’.

However, this is not the whole story if we consider what happens in lectures. Lectures maintain about the same low speaker-addressee interactionality, but occurrences of topic succession na(me) in this mode seem
to be higher than they are in expository essays. This discrepancy can probably be attributed to the fact that the author of an expository essay has means other than connectives to signal the organization of ideational structures, for example, punctuation, paragraph arrangements, and lexicalized phrases. These, to a speaker (conversationalist or lecturer) who needs to carry on spontaneous exchanges, are either not available, or psychologically less accessible than discourse connectives.7

To summarize, the non-occurrence of topic change na(me) in expository essays is due to the presumed ideational cohesiveness in a completed essay which, in turn, is partially led to by low author-reader interactionality. The low occurrence of topic succession na(me) in expository essays is partly due to the same low author-reader interactionality and partly to the availability of other means for signalling continuation in written language. On the other hand, speaker-addressee interactionality in conversation facilitates (and constrains) the occurrence of topic change na(me). The speaker-addressee interactionality is also responsible for the need to compete for a chance to speak. This competition in turn motivates the frequent use of topic succession na(me). Speaker-addressee/author-reader interactionality is thus fundamental in determining the occurrences of the connective na(me) in various types of linguistic discourse.

6. Summary and concluding remarks

In this paper, I have discussed how the connective na(me) is used in marking conditionals, topic successions, and topic changes in Mandarin conversation. In each case na(me) fulfills its connective function by prefacing the upcoming talk that is a continuation of some entity (a condition, a topic, or simply a set of information) that is already established (in one way or another) as part of the shared background between the speaker and the addressee. The three cases differ from each other in two major respects. First, in the conditional case the continuation marked by na(me) is binary and automatic, but in topic succession and topic change the continuation is hierarchical and contingent. However, from the binary and automatic to the hierarchical and contingent is the same notion of continuation, only broadened. Second, in conditional and topic succession the continuation marked by na(me) is primarily anchored in the ideational/textual dimension, whereas in topic change the continuation is primarily anchored in the interactional dimension (through other-attentiveness). However, I have argued that topic change is a pragmatic type of distant topic succession, as opposed to the textual type of distant topic
succession. Topic change *na*(me) is thus, paradoxically, not in opposition with topic succession *na*(me).

I have furthermore offered a functional explanation for the salient occurrence of the (non-obligatory) topic succession *na*(me) and topic change *na*(me) in conversation: the motivation is attributed to the speaker-addressee interactionality characteristic of conversation, which pressures the participants to make overt claims on continuation (in one way or another) in order to gain priority in the competition for the right to speak. The low occurrence or absence of topic succession *na*(me) and topic change *na*(me) in expository essays is also partially attributed to the low degree of author-reader interactionality.

A number of notions touched on in this paper seem to deserve further research. First, the framework for topic succession proposed here needs to be refined and modified, especially in consideration of its application to the interactional type of discourse such as conversation. Second, switches between topic succession *na*(me) and other succession alternatives remain to be examined for how they display the hierarchical structure of discourse topic organization. Third, a large-scale study of the behavior of topic succession *na*(me) (and other connectives of similar function) in different modes of communication is necessary in order to verify the claims made regarding interactionality and other factors affecting the use of non-obligatory linguistic elements in discourse.

Notes

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1. For the phonetic variations of the connective at issue here, see Chao (1968). The connective is represented as *na*(me) throughout the text. Two forms, *name* and *na*, are used in transcribing the occurrences of the connective in the conversational data. Both *na* and *name* have other grammatical functions (for example, as demonstratives) (see section 4.2). All occurrences of *na*(me) throughout this article refer to the connective use, unless noted otherwise.

2. Not all examples used in this paper are drawn from naturally occurring conversational data. Constructed examples are used either to illustrate a point or when appropriate conversational examples are not available. They are (8)–(12). The rest are conversational examples, and are all marked with index symbols such as (XYZ: 123). The conversational data used here come from two kinds of casual conversation. One set constitutes
a one-hour two-party conversation between a female and a male. The other set constitutes three multi-party conversations, each 45 minutes in length. I was a participant in all three multi-party conversations, although each time with a different group of friends. I want to thank Sandy Thompson for making the first set of tape recordings accessible for my use. I also want to express my appreciation for the interest and good humor of those who allowed me to tape-record their speech. Some transcription and translation conventions used for the conversational examples are explained below:

[ ] the starting point of an overlap between two speakers’ speech
:
= lengthened syllable
- Mandarin key words discussed in the text and their English equivalents in the translation are both underlined.
( ) The English in the parentheses are my efforts at paraphrasing the Chinese speech for a more colloquial English translation.
(??) Undiscernible speech

3. I take casual conversations and expository essays as the two extremes in a continuum of modes of linguistic communication (cf. studies on written language vs. spoken language, as comprehensively reviewed in Chafe and Tannen (1987)). Given the plurality of the variables affecting speech and writing, the occurrence of topic succession na(me) and topic change na(me) in planned discourse types is possible (let alone in other modes of communication which fall in the middle range of the continuum). The point here, however, is their relatively higher frequency (thus typicality) of occurrence in the unplanned, spontaneous types such as conversation. See further discussion in section 5.

4. For example, Miracle (1989) provides examples in which a speaker uses na(me) to preface an upcoming unit that is triggered by the lack of (linguistic) response from his addressee to his question uttered at the preceding turn.

5. Although the conditional na(me) and the topic succession na(me) have these differences, the distinction can be blurry at times. In particular, it is often difficult to determine whether an occurrence of na(me) is a conditional unaccompanied by other conditional markers or an immediate succession. This vagueness is especially complicated by the interactional and collaborative nature of conversation, when speaker A’s preceding speech provides the basis for speaker B’s speech at the next turn. For example:

(i) (SJS: 67)
(Z was curious at why B is never bored with studying.)

1Z. Ni nian name jiu de shu ni, ni, ni bu hui jue de

you study that long NOM book you you NEG will feel

2 hen fan na? Hai yuanyi a?

very bored PRT still willing PRT

3B. Bu hui a, bu hui a.

NEG will PRT NEG will PRT

4Z. Na ni hen liaobuqi.

you very outstanding

Z. You’ve studied so long, don’t, don’t, don’t you get bored?

[ ] You’re still willing to do it?
B. [ ] No, no.
Z. (That being the case,) Then you’re amazing.

Z’s speech in line 4 (‘Then you’re amazing’) is apparently triggered by B’s response in line 3 (‘No, no’). However, B did not intentionally set up her line as an antecedent/
premise to obtain Z’s comment as the consequent/conclusion. I analyze this na(me) as a case of immediate succession. Just like the distinction between immediate succession and distant succession, the analyses of individual cases are bound to be subjective as the semantic and pragmatic factors involved therein are difficult to measure, given the present state of our knowledge about topic and discourse.

6. The grammatical category of the connective na(me) has been questioned recently by Jin (1988). He suggests that the connective na(me) is categorically a ‘pro’ (or a demonstrative) and refers to the preceding clause/unit of talk in discourse. While I regard that categorizing grammatical morphemes/words demands not only semantic but also syntactic considerations, I believe the point at issue is the indexicality in the semantic value of na(me). As pointed out in the text, it is the distal indexicality that establishes the association among connectives, demonstratives, and pronouns.

7. While the frequency discrepancy for the two kinds of na(me) in conversation and expository essay writing is here attributed to the different cognitive demands of language production and comprehension in these two modes, the social functions that these (and other) linguistic modes serve remain to be investigated as they might turn out to be factors affecting the distribution of linguistic features (Besnier, 1988).

References


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