

A semantic analysis of –ne as a topic marker: A grammaticalization perspective



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Overview

- Introduction
- Middle Chinese vernacular sources of -ne
 - 嚮 止開三上之孃 (ŋi>ne) topic marker
 - 裏 止開三上之來 (li>ni>ne) aspect marker / intensifier
 - 那 果開一去歌泥 (na>ne) alternative marker
- Proposal:
 - -ne as a topic marker
 - Formally: a discourse indexical; squiggle operator
- Comparison with Constant (2014)
- Further extensions to Old Chinese: 爾邇

Introduction

- Three windows of cross-validation
- Formal Diachronic Semantics
- Distributions of -ne

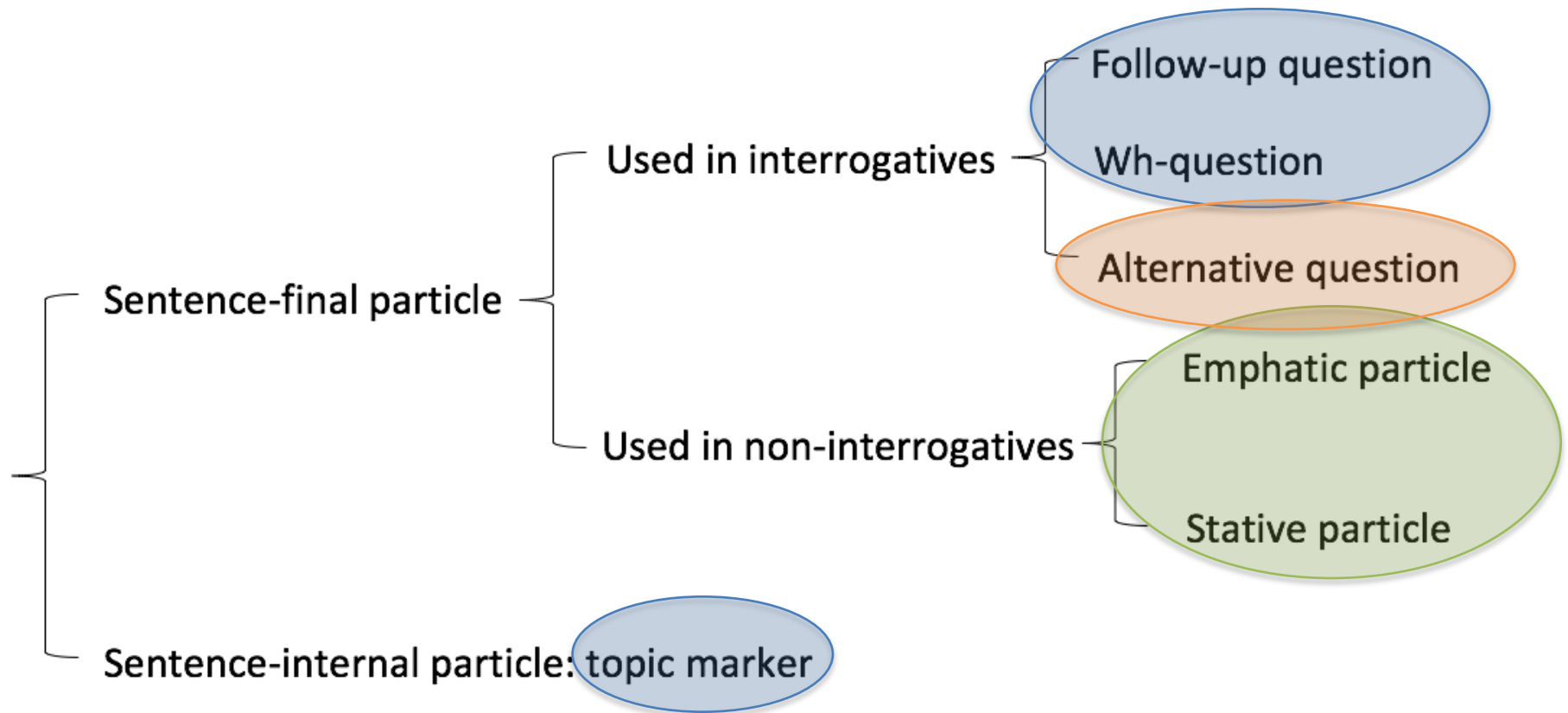
Intro: three windows

- To borrow a term from Wang (1998), we need three windows of cross-validation in many linguistic phenomena.
 - Theoretical account (not language-specific)
Alternative semantics makes –ne semantically redundant, thus not a question particle.
 - Synchronic distribution (language specific)
Constant (2014) uses synchronic arguments to show –ne is a contrastive topic marker
 - Diachronic semantics (possibly not lang. specific)
Do grammaticalization data support such claims?

Intro: formal diachronic semantics

- An emerging field that explores the mechanisms (cognitively motivated) that underlie common grammaticalization paths (von Stechow 1995, Eckardt 2006, Deo 2015)
 - Using precise formalisms to model the evolutionary paths of grammatical items.
 - -ne is a good object of study here.

Intro: distribution of -ne



Jiang and Cao (2005)

Intro: distribution of -ne

Zhangsan xihuan tiaowu. Ni ne?

Zhangsan like dance. You NE

“Zhangsan likes dancing. What about you?”

Zhangsan xihuan tiaowu. Lisi xihuan zuo shenme ne?

Zhangsan like dance Lisi like do what NE

“Zhangsan likes dancing. Then what does Lisi like to do?”

Zhege wenti ne, women hai yao yanjiu yixia.

This CL issue NE we still need discuss a little

“As for this issue, we still need to discuss it more.”

Intro: distribution of -ne

Zhangsan xihuan tiaowu (ne) haishi Lisi xihuan tiaowu(ne)?

“Does Zhangsan like dancing or does Lisi like dancing?”

- Either one of the two instances of -ne is optional

Intro: distribution of -ne

Zhangsan zheng gaoxing ne

Zhangsan right happy NE

“Zhangsan is right in the middle of being happy.”

Zhangsan gaoxing zhe ne

Zhangsan happy DUR NE

“Zhangsan is quite happy for sure!”

Intro: summary

- -ne is distributed in six environments.
- But their functions can be reduced.
- What can grammaticalization tell us about their functions.
- Different sources might hint at different functions.

Three sources of -ne

- Jiang (2005): aspect marker -ne < 裏li [-li for short]
- Textually attested around 10th century
- It also develops into a sentence-final intensifier.
- This is probably a shift of focus from the holding of a state to the state itself, as shown in the previous examples of “Zhangsan being happy”.
- Thus
Locative>>stative aspect>>stative intensifier

Three sources of -ne

- Sun (1992):
- Earlier examples of -li are in non-interrogatives.
- By Ming Dynasty, it can be used in questions. Thus interchangeably with -ne.
- Later it stopped being written as 裏哩里 and the written form was mostly 呢

Three sources of -ne

- Jiang (2005): alternative marker -ne < 那 na
- -ne is compatible with A-not-A questions.
- Should A-not-A questions be considered a contraction of alternative questions?

Zhangsan xi-bu-xihuan tiaowu ne?

Zhangsan like-not-like dance NE

“Does Zhang like or not like dancing?”

- I will not discuss alternative questions or A-not-A here, leaving it for future research.

Three sources of -ne

- Sun (1992):interrogative -ne < 嚮 nǐ [-ni for short]
- Zǔ Táng Jí (Song Dynasty):

五祖老嚮!

Wǔ Zǔ lǎo nǐ !

five patriarch old thus

The Fifth Patriarch is old like this!

背後底嚮?

bèi hòu dǐ nǐ?

Back behind DE PAR

What about the one behind you?

Three sources of -ne

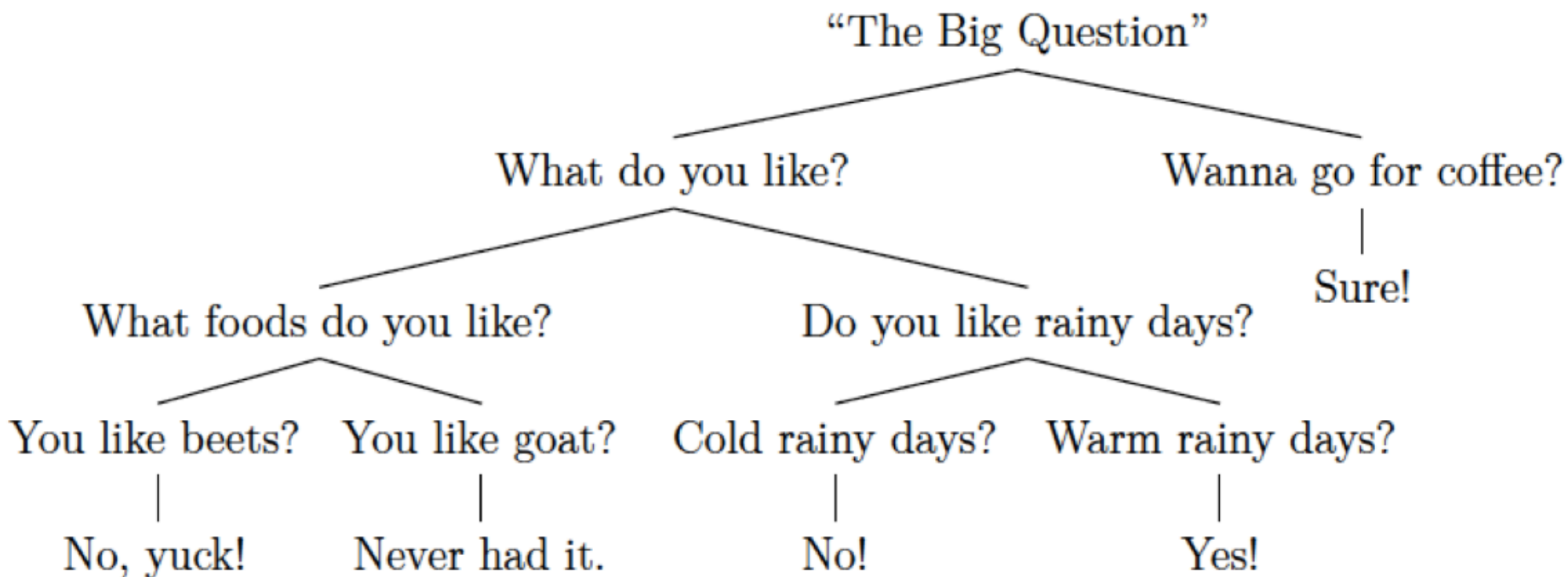
- According to the Guangyun: 嚮, 指物兒
- Sun (1992) interprets it as “...的樣子”, and “老嚮” is “老的樣子”.
- But according to the context where these examples are used, the individual that was described was within the immediate space of the speaker.
- Thus –ni can be interpreted as “like that/this”. It is attached to an adjective and “points” to the individual as described.

Three sources of -ne

- Thus I propose the following grammaticalization path:
- Deictic word >> Topic marker

QUD (Roberts 2009)

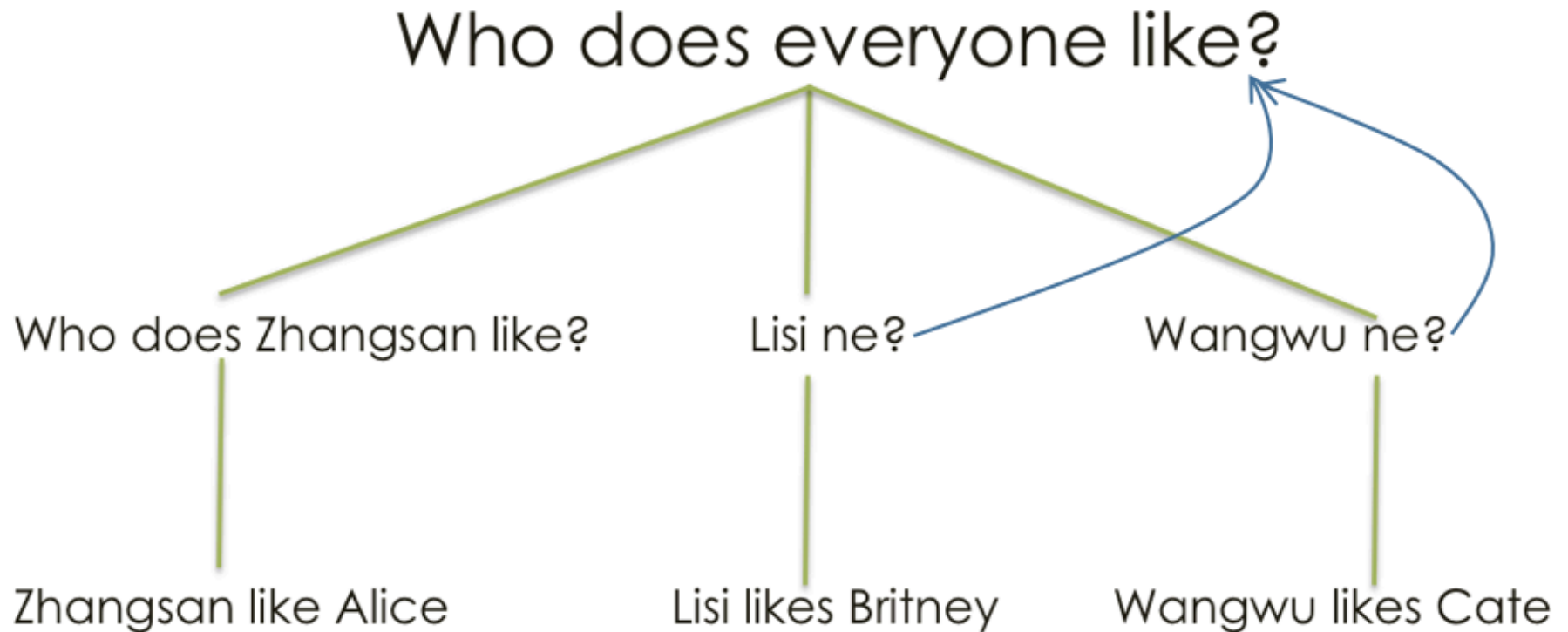
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Constant (2014) Illustration

QUD

- Topic markers are actually discourse indexicals.
- It points towards a node in the QUD structure.



The squiggle operator

- Rooth (1992) posits a squiggle operator to derive the correct focus intonation placement.
- John likes **coffee_F**
- This sentence is an answer to “What does John like?”, but not “Who likes coffee?”

The squiggle operator

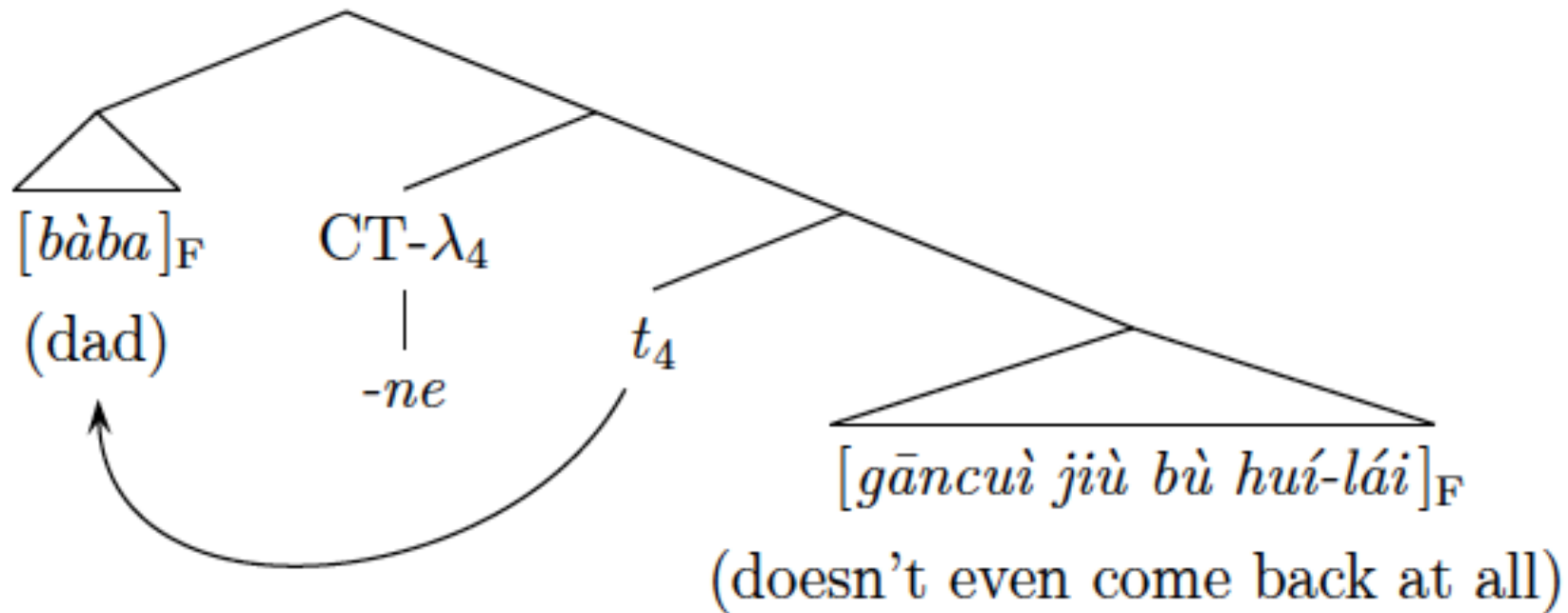
- $A = [\text{John likes } \mathbf{\text{coffee}}_F] \sim \delta$
- The indexed set δ of alternatives is e.g.:
- $B = \{\text{John likes coffee, John likes tea, John likes soda}\}$
- The congruence requirement is that
 - B is subset of the focus semantic value of A
 - A is an element of B

-ne as the squiggle

- I propose -ne is the squiggle operator which introduces the set of questions as the indexed set (following Büring 2003)
- [**Zhangsan**_{CT} xihuan shei_F]ne] →
- A=[**Zhangsan**_{CT} xihuan shei_F]~8
- B={Zhangsan xihuan shei, Lisi xihuan shei, Wangwu xihuan shei}
- B is a subset of the alternative semantic value of A
- A is an element of B

Comparison to Constant (2014)

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Comparison to Constant (2014)

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- Although semantically the topic raising account is equal to the squiggle operator account, the contextual nature of the indexicality is hidden in Constant's (2014) theory.
- For example, follow-up questions like “Lisine” clearly shows that –ne needs to refer to the larger context or the QUD discourse structure.

Comparison to Constant (2014)

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- It is difficult to explain the sentence-final position of *-ne*. Constant (2014) discusses IP raising but discards it in favor of IntP clitic. But he does not provide a full semantic derivation.
- The squiggle operator account proposed here is essentially a pragmatic one. It does not resort to the left-periphery explicitly.

Merge of three –ne's

- Constant (2014) uses haplology to explain the double interpretation of the aspect marker –ne and the topic marker –ne
- However, diachronic data suggest it could have been a merge of three sources, i.e. no haplology.
- Also there could be more than two simultaneous readings.

Merge of three -ne's

Zhangsan daodi zuo shenme ne?

Zhangsan “in the world” do what NE

What in the world is Zhangsan doing.

- Emphatic, Aspect Marker, Topic Marker.

Extension to OC

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- So far:
- Deictic >> Topic Marker /Discourse Indexical

Extension to OC

- Ōta (1958) argued that –ni was derived from Classical Chinese 爾 ěr
- Both ěr and –ni can be used as predicates, having a clear deictic function.
- Sun (1992) gives the following examples

<p>不爾 (Hàn Shū) Bù ěr (if)not like this, ...</p>	<p>嚟 ! (Zǔ Táng Jí) nǐ (just) like this/that</p>
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Extension to OC

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- Sun (1992) also cites Yang's (1928) example of ǎr used with interrogatives.

何譏爾

Gōngyáng Zhuàn

Hé jī ǎr

What criticize ER

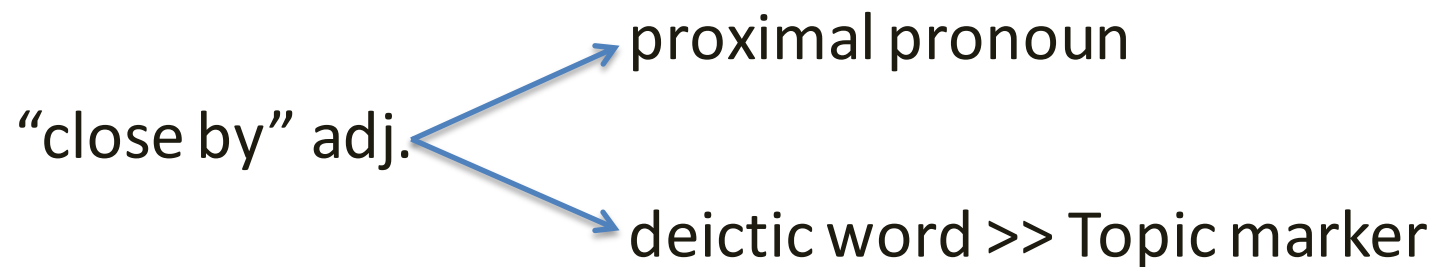
“Why (is this written to) criticize (him)?”

Extension OC

- Thus functionally -ěr and -ni are quite similar in Classical Chinese and later vernacular writing.

Extension to OC

- 爾 is related to 邇 (close by).
- 爾 is also the proximal pronoun “you”
- Thus



Conclusion

- Diachronic data support the claim that –ne is a topic marker (from theoretical and synchronic perspectives)
- The semantics of –ne is a discourse indexical, equivalent to the squiggle operator, which picks out a contextual antecedent set.
- The grammaticalization path is
- “close by”>>deictic word>> Topic Marker

thank you!

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