A Study of Contrastive Discourse Markers \textit{dan, danshi, buguo,} and \textit{keshi} in Written Mandarin

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Abstract

The present study aims to investigate the Mandarin contrastive markers \textit{dan, danshi, buguo,} and \textit{keshi} in order to better understand their pragmatic functions across four major newspapers in Taiwan: \textit{China Times, United Daily News, Liberty Times,} and \textit{Apple Daily}. It focuses on forty pieces of crime and damage printed news, including murder, suicide, accident, and robbery. Previous studies have focused on the pragmatic functions of these markers in spoken form, but comparatively fewer studies pay their attention to the pragmatic functions of these markers in written discourse.

Ross’s (1978) study shows that \textit{danshi} is preferred in written discourse. However, the current study finds that in addition to \textit{danshi,} \textit{dan} is also used in written discourse; moreover, compared with \textit{danshi}, it is more likely to be used in news articles. Put differently, in my data, among these discourse markers, \textit{dan} is the one most often used as a contrastive marker, while \textit{Keshi} is the least frequently occurring discourse marker, and it is more likely to be used in informal speech situation (Miracle, 1991). As for \textit{buguo}, it is often used to signal implicit contrast rather than explicit contrast. Since the four contrastive discourse markers in the data share contrast as their core meaning, \textit{dan} and \textit{danshi} can be said to introduce message which is in explicit contrast with the preceding one, while \textit{buguo} and \textit{keshi} express implicit contrast.

Keyword: Contrastive marker; Discourse marker; Mandarin Chinese; Newspapers

1. Introduction

The main aim of the study is to investigate the pragmatic functions of \textit{dan, danshi, buguo,} and \textit{keshi} in written Mandarin. In recent years, the Chinese discourse markers \textit{danshi, keshi,} and \textit{buguo} have been largely studied, but fewer studies pay their attention to the pragmatic functions of these markers in written discourse.
Discourse markers have been studied by different researchers and in different languages. They are also known by a variety of other terms, such as cue phrases, discourse connectives, pragmatic connectives, to name just a few. Several researchers have attempted to characterize discourse markers in a more general way; however, there is no general agreement on definition, classification, and terminology of discourse markers.

Discourse markers (DMs) are lexical expressions which link clauses or sentences by signaling relations between them, e.g., but, and, so, etc. According to Fraser (1999), “…DMs as a pragmatic class, lexical expressions drawn from the syntactic classes of conjunctions, adverbials, and prepositional phrases. With certain exceptions, they signal a relationship between the segment they introduce, S2, and the prior segment, S1. They have a core meaning which is procedural, not conceptual, and their more specific interpretation is ‘negotiated’ by the context, both linguistic and conceptual” (p.950).

In his studies of discourse markers, Fraser (1999) proposes two main classes of discourse markers. The first class of DMs involves the relationship between aspects of the explicit message of the second segment and either an implicit or explicit message of the first segment.

The first subclass of his first category is Contrastive Markers. They are linguistic devices that signal the interpretation of the second sentence contrasting with an interpretation of the first sentence. Consider the following example taken from Fraser’s study.

(1) a. A: Chris is a happy bachelor. B: **But** Chris is female.
   b. We left late. **Nevertheless**, we got there on time.

The second subclass is Elaborative Markers that signal the following sentence constitutes some sort of refinement on the preceding sentence:

(2) a. He did it. **What is more**, he enjoyed doing it.
   b. You should always be polite. **Above all**, you shouldn't belch at the table.

The third subclass is called Inferential Markers; they are expressions which signal that the second sentence is seen as a conclusion for the first sentence. Examples of Inferential Markers are illustrated in (3).

(3) a. The bank has been closed all day. **Thus**, we couldn't make a withdrawal.
b. There’s a fearful storm brewing. *So* don’t go out.

While Fraser’s first class relates to some aspects of the first sentence and the second sentence and they are called Contrastive Markers, Elaborative Markers, and Inferential Markers, his second class of DMs is distinguished by focus on topic, and so he calls them Topic Change Markers. The following are examples taken from his study.

(4) a. This dinner looks delicious. **Incidentally** where do you shop?

b. I am glad that is finished. **To return to my point**, I’d like to discuss your paper.

Discourse markers such as *but*, *however*, and *nevertheless* that signal a “contrast” relationship between the segment of discourse they introduce, S2, and the prior segment of discourse, S1 are called Contrastive Discourse Markers (CDMs).

2. Literature review

The Chinese contrastive conjunctions such as *danshi*, *keshi*, and *buguo* have been studied in recent years (Chao, 1968; Ross, 1978; Lü, 1980; Li and Thompson, 1981; Miracle, 1991; Wang, 2002). In addition to *danshi*, *keshi*, and *buguo*, some researchers paid their attention to *zhishi* and *raner* (Lü, 1980; Li and Thompson, 1981; Wang, 2002).

Chao (1968) mentions that *danshi* can be used to introduce a sentence after a speaker has completed a previous sentence. Lü (1980) suggests *danshi*, *keshi*, and *buguo* can draw forth a meaning opposite to that expressed previously and *buguo* is more likely to be used in casual speech. Ross (1978) argues that *danshi* is preferred in written discourse while *keshi* is preferred in spoken discourse. Li and Thompson (1981) observe that *danshi*, *keshi*, *buguo*, and *raner* are used more often in clause-initial position. Miracle (1991) examines the functional uses of *danshi*, *keshi*, and *buguo*, and concludes that *keshi* is more likely to be used in informal speech situations, while *danshi* is more likely to be used in more formal speech situations. Wang (2005) suggests that the *zhishi*, *buguo*, and *keshi* convey a contrast between propositions or utterances.

3. Methodology

The data in this study to investigate the pragmatic functions of *dan*, *danshi*, *buguo*, and *keshi* in written Mandarin come from four major newspapers in Taiwan: *China Times*, *United Daily News*, *Liberty Times*, and *Apple Daily*, and the present study
focuses on forty pieces of crime and damage printed news, including murder, suicide, accident, and robbery, etc.

4. Findings

4.1.1. Dan

Dan is observed to be used to explicitly draw forth a meaning opposite to what is expressed in the prior sentence. It could be lexically expressed, as in (5).

(5) 林 男 在 檢方 偵查 時 全盤 否認 指控
   lin nan zai jianfang zhenzha shi quanpan fouren zhikong
   surname man at police investigate time completely deny accuse
   “Mr. Lin completely denied accusations during the interrogation,”

   → 但 陳 女 則 完全 坦承
   dan chen nu ze wanquan tancheng
   but surname woman otherwise entirely confess
   “but Ms. Chen confessed all her crimes.”

The relationship between “completely denied accusations” (quanpan fouren zhikong) and “confessed all her crimes” (wanquan tancheng) is lexical opposition in meaning. And it often introduces a negative statement, as exemplified in (6):

(6) 檢方 原 令 郭 十萬 元 交保
    jianfang yuan ling guo shiwan yuan jiaobao
    police originally make surname one hundred thousand dollars release
    “The police asked Guo to pay one hundred thousand dollars as bail,”

   → 但 郭 筹 不 出來
   dan guo chou bu chulai
   but surname collect not come-out
   “but Guo was unable to collect the sum.”

   And dan can co-occur with suiran. The concessive marker suiran occurs in the first sentence, followed by dan the second sentence. The co-occurrence of suiran and dan marks an explicit contrast, carries forward an argument, and reinforces the contrast, as in (7):

(7) 雖然 耐炸油 是否 也 由 餒水油 煉製 仍 待 檢驗
    suiran naizhayou shifou ye you soushuiyou lian zhi reng dai jianyan
“Though it is under investigation that whether frying oil is also refined by used oil,”

“the Ministry of Education has already ordered schools to stop using this kind of edible oil.”

4.1.2. Keshi

*Kehsi* is rarely used in news reports but sometimes found in direct quotations, as manifested in (8):

(8) ...還 說 我 知道 這個 很 危險

…hai shuo wo zhidao zhe ge hen weixia

…and say 1SG know this very dangerous

“…and said that I know this is very dangerous,”

但 是 沒 辦法

danshi mei banfa

“but I just can’t…”

這 就是 我們的 使命

zhe jiushi women shiming

this is our mission

“this is our mission,”

可是 為什麼 是 妳 來

kehsi weishenme shi ni lai

but why be 2SG come

“but why you;”

妳 太 年輕

Ni tai nianqing

2SG too young

‘you’re too young.’
4.1.3. **Buguo**

The basic function of *buguo* is to express an implicit contrast in propositions, as exemplified in (9):

(9) 當時 曾 派員 至 現場 稽查
dangshi paiyuan zhi xianchang jicha
at that time already investigator to site investigate

“Investigators were sent to investigate the site,”

→ 不過 僅 查到 他 將 餓水油 賣 給 飼料 廠
buguo jin chadao ta jiang soushuiyou mai gei siliao chang,
but only investing 3SG use used oil sell to feed factory

“but they only found that he sold used oil to feed factories,”

沒有 賣 到 食品 廠
meiyou mai dao shipin chang
not sell to food factory

“not to food factories.”

5. **Conclusion**

This study has examined the functions of Mandarin contrastive markers *dan, danshi, buguo,* and *keshi* in four major newspapers in Taiwan. The analysis has shown that in addition to *danshi, dan* is also likely to be used in written Chinese, especially in newspapers, and it introduces a message which is in explicit contrast with the preceding one. As for *keshi*, it is the least frequently occurring discourse marker among them; *buguo* is often used to signal implicit contrast rather than explicit contrast. In my further study, more functions of these contrastive discourse markers will be discussed.

Reference


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