

**MANDARIN-SPEAKING CHILDREN'S DISTAL DEMONSTRATIVE IN
CONVERSATIONAL DISCOURSE***

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore Mandarin-speaking children's uses of the distal demonstrative *na(ge)* in child-adult conversations. Three types of data were utilized: 4-year-old naturalistic data, 4-year-old and 5-year-old controlled conversations. Five discourse-pragmatic functions of the distal demonstrative were identified: the deictic use, the endophoric use, the connective use, the pause-filler function, and the unidentified use, a peculiar use found in child discourse, which further reveals children's inability to properly manage common ground in discourse. A comparison of the distribution of different functions across the data groups shows that children may have acquired the semantics and some pragmatic functions of the distal demonstrative in early years, but they may not yet fully develop the ability to establish common ground and manage coherence until they are five.

Key words: distal demonstrative, common ground, child discourse

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the course of language acquisition, an integral part of linguistic knowledge that children are required to acquire is the ability to organize a discourse. Once able to compose an extended discourse, a child may be considered as a mature conversationalist (Ninio & Snow 1996). To become a mature conversationalist, it is indispensable for children to learn both universal pragmatic principles and language-specific devices which govern the information flow in a discourse. In other words, children are required to learn the principles that determine how deictic expressions are used and how new/given and/or presupposed information is organized across utterances in coherent discourse (Kail & Hickmann 1992, Hickmann 1995, Hickmann & Hendriks 1999).

In addition, children are also required to learn that discourse is a 'joint activity', in which interlocutors cooperate to achieve the conversing project (Clark 1985, Clark 1992, Clark 1994). According to Clark's framework, before the interlocutors initiate the project, they first presuppose their mutual knowledge, or 'common ground' (Clark 1994: 989). Children thus need to know what world knowledge and personal experiences they share with each other or what their 'communal common ground' is before they converse with their interlocutors (*ibid.*). By world knowledge, Clark means the cultural communities to which the interlocutors belong. Personal experiences can be 'perceptual' experiences the interlocutors have gone through and 'conversational' ground they establish in the process of conversation (*ibid.*). In other words, these personal experiences are 'personal common grounds' (*ibid.*). Both common grounds, i.e., world knowledge and personal common ground, compose the initial context or base for a conversation. With the unfolding of a conversation, interlocutors create a new ground—conversational ground—in every move, based on the current ground. Jointly, a discourse is accomplished.

Most studies exploring children's management of information flow or deictic expressions rely on experiments, such as MacWhinney and Bates' (1978), Hickmann and Liang's (1990), and Kail and Hickmann's (1992). MacWhinney and Bates conducted experiments to examine what sentential devices are adopted by preschool children to represent givenness and newness of information. In their experiments, six sentential devices were investigated: ellipsis, pronominalization, emphatic stress, indefinite article, definite article, and initialization.

Experiments were designed to test the correlation between these six different sentential devices and the distinction of givenness and newness of information among four age groups (3-year-olds, 4-year-olds, 5-year-olds, and adults). Their experiments showed that an increase in newness is strongly related to an increase in emphatic stress and a decrease in ellipsis. On the other hand, an increase in givenness entails an increase in the use of ellipsis and the indefinite article, but the increase in pronominalization and definite article is not equally prominent. MacWhinney and Bates suggested that by age three, children have partially acquired the sentential relations between given/newness and particular sentential devices.

In 1990, Hickmann and Liang studied how Chinese adults and four-to-ten-year-old children introduce and maintain references in controlled narratives. This study focuses on the distinction between the linguistic forms used to encode given and new information; particular attention was given to the use of word order and preverbal definite nominals to maintain given referents. The results showed that almost without exceptions, Chinese adults use postverbal indefinite nominals to introduce new referents and preverbal definite nominals to maintain given referents. In contrast, children tended to use preverbal definite nominals to introduce referents and postverbal indefinite nominals to maintain referents. In addition, Chinese children were found to rely more on word order in the distinction of given and new referents.

The findings in Hickmann and Liang's (1990) study are contrary to those in MacWhinney and Bates's (1978). In MacWhinney and Bates' experiments, they found that the correlation between givenness and definite article is not significant. Hickmann and Liang, however, found that it is a cross-linguistic tendency that given and/or presupposed information is marked for definiteness, even though there are certain language-specific principles. In the case of Chinese, children made use of word order strategies (i.e., preverbal nominals vs. postverbal nominals to make definiteness vs. indefiniteness distinctions). Given the discrepancy between these two studies, how to structure information in discourse may be subject to both universal and language-specific factors, and word order, according to these two studies, may be a language-specific factor.

The studies reviewed above attempt to examine how given and new information are realized respectively via what kind of sentential devices. Other studies, on the other hand, investigated the correlation between

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sentential devices and information flow from the perspective of sentence devices. Xu (1987), for example, discusses the referential functions of the demonstrative *zhe* 'this' and *na* 'that' in adult discourse. Xu proposed that although 'proximity' is sufficient to account for the distinction between *zhe* and *na* and their respective compounds, such as *zhege* 'this one', *nage* 'that one', *zhexie* 'these', and *naxie* 'those', in Mandarin 'psychological and factual grounds' are stronger than proximity. Xu also suggested that Mandarin speakers' decisions as to which demonstrative to use in a discourse depend on both the proximity of the referents and on speaker's psychological distance with reference to the referents.

In addition, Huang (1999) examines the pragmatic functions of Mandarin demonstratives in discourse and how definite articles emerge in Mandarin spoken discourse. He identifies eight discourse-pragmatic functions of demonstratives: (1) the deictic use, referents available immediately in the setting; (2) the endophoric use, either referents already denoted in the preceding linguistic context, namely, anaphoric use, or referents to be denoted in the following linguistic context, i.e., cataphoric use; (3) the unavailable use, referents turned out to be available with the help of following relative clauses; (4) the identifying use, referents identified on the basis of mutual knowledge; (5) the referent-introduction use, referents introduced into the discourse as the focal topic with *nage* 'this one'; (6) the connective function, the use of *na* 'that' to mark either epistemic connections in conditionals or loose connections between utterances; (7) the discourse marker function, the use of *zheyangzi* 'this way' to mark the end of a turn; and (8) the pause-filler function, to mark planning or lexical retrieval difficulties. Among these functions of Mandarin demonstratives, adult interlocutors tend to exploit the identifying use to refer to their mutual or shared knowledge, which resembles 'common ground' proposed by Clark (1994: 989). Huang further argues that when the interactional contexts are specific or mutually known to the interlocutors, and when the speaker and the hearer both believe they share enough knowledge to identify a referent, definite determiners usually appear in the discourse.

Based on the research reviewed above, it appears that in Mandarin discourse interlocutors usually use definite articles, or distal demonstrative *na(ge)* 'that' in particular, to refer to mentioned or given information and/or mutual or shared knowledge. In addition, children seem to use deictic expressions differently in comparison with adults. Only at a late age do children demonstrate a pattern similar to an adult

use of deictic expressions in discourse. Nevertheless, few studies have been dedicated to the exploration of Mandarin-speaking children's use of definite articles or demonstratives. Although Hickmann and Liang (1990) have conducted a cross-sectional study on Mandarin-speaking children's management of information flow, their findings were based on controlled narratives instead of naturalistic conversations. Moreover, Hickmann and Liang's (1990) study aims at proposing a general pattern of children's management of information flow. However, the complexity of a particular deictic expression in information management may be compromised in such a study, since it is still unclear how children use a particular deictic expression or definite articles and whether this pattern remains in a non-controlled context, e.g., a naturalistic conversation where children may have more chances to talk about their own personal experiences. It is thus desirable to explore how children use a particular deictic expression in conversational discourse. As an endeavor to examine children's use of deictic expressions in spontaneous conversations, this study therefore aims to explore how Mandarin-speaking children deal with shared knowledge and the distal demonstrative *na(ge)* in adult-child conversations. In addition, it is agreed that children, especially young children, tend to talk about the 'here-and-now' in interactions (e.g., Brown 1973, Sachs 1983, Eisenberg 1985, Weist 1989, Huang 2000). Therefore, when children are given toys or props to play with they may mostly talk about the objects with which they are playing. As mentioned in Huang (1999), one use of the distal demonstrative is to refer to the referents in the physical context of conversations, namely the deictic use. It is thus assumed that when children are given toys or props to play, it will be easy for them to identify the referents in their utterances. As a result, there may be more deictic uses and fewer unidentified uses of the distal demonstrative.¹ If this were the case, the results would not only support the fact that children do focus more on the 'here-and-now' when interacting, but also imply that contextual factors may have an effect on how children use the distal demonstrative.² In order to additionally investigate the potential influence of the difference between the two data types, the study will

¹ Please refer to Section 2 for the definition of the deictic use and the unidentified use of the distal demonstrative.

² The difference between these two types of data is that the children in the controlled groups were given props to play with while interacting with the experimenter, whereas the child in the naturalistic groups were not specifically given any props to play with.

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also examine conversations in which children were given toys or props to play with while interacting with adults. Moreover, the recruitment of the data of the children in controlled conversations shows that the use of the distal demonstrative is not restricted to one child only.

2. METHOD

2.1 Subjects

As mentioned above, the study utilized two types of data, i.e., naturalistic conversations and controlled conversations. The subjects in these two types of data are different. The subject in the naturalistic conversations is a Mandarin-speaking girl, who speaks Taiwanese Southern Min as a second language and who had been learning English as a foreign language for eight months by the time of recording. She has been taken care of during the day by a babysitter in the home of the baby sitter since she was seventeen months old.³ At the time of data collection, she was fifty-four months old, i.e., four years and six months old (4;6).

The subjects in the controlled data were adopted from the data contributed by Chang (1998) to the CHILDES (short for Child Language Data Exchange System) database (MacWhinney 1995).⁴ They were further divided in two groups: one of the 4-year-olds (mean age 4;2) and the other of the 5-year-olds (mean age 5;9). The two groups both consist of seven children, with three girls and four boys in both groups. They were recruited from a kindergarten in the Hsinchu area, Taiwan. They were all Mandarin speakers.

2.2 Data

The naturalistic data are dyads between a 4-year-old and an adult. Data collection was conducted in the babysitter's home after the subject had come back from kindergarten. Spontaneous conversations between

³ After attending kindergarten, the child goes to the babysitter's home only after school.

⁴ The data used in this study were contributed to the CHILDES database by Prof. Chien-ru Chang affiliated with National Taiwan Normal University in Taipei City. The data can be browsed and downloaded at the website of the Child Language Data Exchange System at the following address:
<http://childes.psy.cmu.edu/data/EastAsian/Chinese/>.

the babysitter's son, an adult, and the girl were audio-taped accompanied with observatory notes taken by the researcher. The babysitter and her husband also participated in the conversations sometimes during recordings. The recordings were conducted twice on different days within one week. The total length of the recordings is 80 minutes, with 60 and 20 minutes each time, respectively.

The controlled conversation data were adopted from the CHILDES database (MacWhinney 1995), as mentioned earlier, and all of the conversations are controlled-conversations between the experimentee children and the experimenter. The children were given some animal replicas, such as of tigers, lions, dragons, and miniature plants or ponds to play with. The children were asked to tell the experimenter a story based on these miniatures. Each of the children was both audio- and video-recorded individually together with the experimenter in a quiet room at school. Each conversation started with the introduction to the children by the experimenter of the miniatures with which they were to be asked to play. An interaction was considered complete when the children ended their story themselves. Chang's data contain stories produced by children aged from three to six. In the present study, stories produced by seven four-year-old children of Chang's data were recruited. In addition, stories produced by seven five-year-old children in Chang's data were also adopted in order to show developmental differences between two age groups. As a result, data recruited in this study include a 4-year-old's spontaneous conversations with an adult and controlled conversations produced by fourteen 4- and 5-year-olds.

2.3 Transcription

All the data were transcribed in the CHAT transcribing conventions of the CHILDES project (MacWhinney 1995). The coding CHI in the transcripts stands for the children observed, ADT stands for the babysitter's son and AD1 for the babysitter in the naturalistic data, and EXP stands for the experimenter in the controlled-conversation data. For other transcribing conventions, please see Appendix for detailed information.

3. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Data Analysis

In this study, categorization and definitions of the pragmatic functions of the distal demonstrative were based on the data with further reference to Huang (1999: 89). However, there were some minor modifications to Huang's categorization, since a couple of the functions were not observed in the children's discourse recruited in this study. Five categories of the distal demonstrative's functions were found in the data, including the deictic use, the endophoric use, the connective function, the pause-filler function, and the unidentified use. Definitions and examples of each category will be presented below.

The first function of the distal demonstrative *na(ge)* in child discourse is the deictic use. According to Huang (1999) the deictic use of the demonstrative serves to indicate referents available immediately in the setting of conversations. Take Excerpt (1) for example.

- (1) *CHI: ***Nage*** *dingdingdangdang de.*
That clinking DE
'That which clinks...'
%com: Talking about a decoration in the living room
*CHI: *Nage shi wo baba song gei ni mama de.*
That SHI I Dad send give you mom DE
'That was given to your mom by my dad.'

In Excerpt (1), the child used *nage* (in boldface) to refer to an ornament both she and the adult could see in the living room. Since the referent the distal demonstrative denotes is identifiable in the immediate nonlinguistic context, it is thus considered as a deictic use of *nage*. Another deictic use of the distal demonstrative is shown in Excerpt (2).

- (2) *CHI: ***Nage*** *yangleduo shi shei yao chi de a?*
That yogurt SHI who want eat DE PAR
'That drinking yogurt is for whom?'
%com: Talking about the drink on the table
*ADT: *Gei ni a.*
Give you PAR
'[It's] for you.'

In this example, the child used *nage* to refer to a bottle of yogurt that was present in the conversational setting. Therefore, this case of *nage* is also counted as a deictic use of the distal demonstrative.

A second function of *na(ge)* observed in the data is the endophoric use of the distal demonstrative. As Huang (1999) suggested, the endophoric use of *nage* functions to indicate referents established in the prior linguistic context and/or given or presupposed information established through the conversation. This endophoric use can be either anaphoric or cataphoric. As shown in Excerpt (3) below, the adult used *nage* (in the third line) to refer back to the *qiaokeli niunai* 'chocolate milk' mentioned by the child in a prior utterance. In the same vein, in the fifth and the sixth line of the excerpt, the child used the distal demonstrative to refer back to the *hongdoutang* 'sweet adzuki bean soup' and the *mian* 'noodles' mentioned by the adult in the first line. All the instances of *nage* in this excerpt are of the anaphoric use of the distal demonstrative, in terms of Huang's (1999) definition. Both the anaphoric use and cataphoric use of the distal demonstrative are considered as instances of the endophoric use. To put it in Clark's (1994) terms, the use of *nage* may demonstrate how interlocutors establish and maintain 'conversational common ground' (Clark 1994: 989).

- (3) *ADT: *Ni jintian zai xuexiao jiu zhiyou chi hongdoutang*
You today at school JIU only eat adzuki-bean soup
gen mian o?
and noodles PAR
'You only ate adzuki bean soup and noodles at school today?'
- *CHI: *En # haiyou qiaokeli niunai.*
Mm and chocolate milk
'Mm, and chocolate milk.'
- *ADT: *Nage shi wucan haishi dianxin?*
That SHI lunch or dessert
'Was that for lunch or dessert?'
- *CHI: *Qiaokeli shi wucan.*
Chocolate SHI lunch
'Chocolate was for lunch.'

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- *CHI: *Nage hongdou de tang shi nage zaocan.*
That adzuki-bean DE soup SHI that breakfast
'That adzuki bean soup was for breakfast.'
- *CHI: *Ranhou zhong [/] Nage mian shi zhongwu de can.*
Then middle that noodles SHI loon DE meal
'Then the noodles were for the meal at lunch.'

Another function of *na(ge)* observed in the data is the pause-filler function, particularly in children's utterances. According to Huang (1999), speakers may take the turn but may not be completely prepared, and then they may exploit *na* 'that' to fill pauses resulting from hesitation. Huang further comments that '*na* usually functions as a pause marker for conceptual planning, and ... *nage* functions as a pause marker for specific lexical retrieval ...' (Huang 1999: 88). It is found in the data, however, that the children observed did not explicitly distinguish conceptual planning and lexical retrieval with different linguistic devices. As a result, in this study both conceptual planning and lexical retrieval were counted as being part of the pause-filler function in this study, in the same way as denoted by Huang (1999). Consider the following excerpt.

- (4) *CHI: *Nage # women laoshi de yingwen mingzi jiaozuo +...*
That we teacher DE English name call
'that...our teacher's English name is...'
- *CHI: *Naga xxx.*
That
'that...'
- *ADT: *jao shenmo mingzi?*
Call what name
'What [is her] name?'
- *CHI: *jao Teresa [% English] laoshi.*
Call Teresa teacher
'Teacher Teresa.'

In the excerpt above, two instances of the pause-filler use of *na(ge)* were found. The first one can be considered as representing the conceptual planning use of the pause-filler function. Although the child took the floor to speak in the current turn, she did not seem well-prepared to speak, and she indicated her hesitation with *nage*. The second instance

can illustrate the child's difficulty in retrieving a particular lexical item. The child seemed unable to retrieve the exact name of her teacher immediately, so she used *nage* as a pause-filler to allow her to fill up processing space to retrieve the lexical item she wished to produce before her unperceivable syllables in the utterance. In addition, the instance shown in Excerpt (5) below can also exemplify the case that children use the distal demonstrative to mark their conceptual planning.

- (5) *EXP: *Like na gushi zuihou ne?*
 Leek then story final PAR
 'Leek, how did the story turn out?'
 *CHI: <zuihou> [/] <zuihou> [/] <zuihou *nage*> [/] <zuihou
 Final final final that final
ta> [/] *Zuihou ta jiu hui sidiao le.*
 it Final it then will die LE
 'At the end, it will then die.'
 %act: points to elephant, then daddy lion, and then mommy
 lion
 *EXP: *Zuihou ta jiu hui sidiao le.*
 Final it then will die LE
 'At the end, it will then die.'
 *CHI: *Ranhou ta zuihou jiu hui si..*
 Then it final then will die
 'Then, it will finally die.'
 %act: points to elephant

In this excerpt, the child was trying to reply to the experimenter's question about how he would like to end the story. The child was obviously not ready for the question. As a result, he repeated and repaired a part of his response. *Nage* was found in the boy's repetition. This case can be considered a pause-filler use of the distal demonstrative revealing the boy's conceptual planning, since in the next clause of this utterance, the boy finally came up with what he wanted to say. In the data observed, it appears that the children used *nage* for both lexical retrieval and conceptual planning, unlike adults who, according to Huang (1999) sometimes use *na* for conceptual planning. *Na* was only observed in the connective use to be discussed in the following.

One more function of *na(ge)* observed in the data is the connective use. According to Huang (1999: 87-8), '[t]he *demonstrative connective*

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na 'then, and' or, much less frequently, *name* functions either to mark epistemic connections (in conditionals) or, in a clear case of semantic weakening, to mark two utterances as being loosely connected.' The children observed in this study also use the demonstrative as adults do. Take Excerpt (6) for example.

- (6) *CHI: *Bijiao haoxiao dui bu dui?*
Compare funny right not right
'[This is] more funny, right?'
- *EXP: *Bijiao haoxiao a?*
Compare funny PAR
'More funny?'
- *CHI: *Na zheyangzi hao le.*
Then this-way good LE
'Then, [let's do it] this way.'
- *CHI: *Ni kan.*
You look
'Look.'
- %act: puts tree upside down
- *EXP: *Wo [=! laughs].*
Wow
'Wow!'
- *CHI: *O [=! laughs].*
- *CHI: *Waiwai shu.*
Slanting tree
'A slanting tree.'
- *EXP: *Waiwai shu a?*
Slanting tree
'A slanting tree?'

In this excerpt, the boy was setting up the miniatures provided by the experimenter for the story. The instance *na* was observed when the boy was trying to arrange a miniature tree. Before the occurrence of *na*, it seemed that the boy would like to place the miniature tree in a particular position, but then he changed his mind as though he would want to do it in another way. He thus used *na* to mark his change of mind at the same time to connect his utterances (Huang 1999).

A last use of the distal demonstrative observed is a peculiar function of *na(ge)* in child discourse. The unidentified use of *na(ge)*

typically appeared when the child commenced to talk about his/her own personal experiences or a particular referent which he/she assumed was common ground, but, on the other hand, it was shown at the time of the next turn in the conversation that his/her addressee had no idea what referent the child was referring to. This category is based on the identifying use of the demonstrative proposed by Huang (1999). According to Huang, '...the identifying use of the demonstrative, a demonstrative expression refers to an object which the speaker and hearer can identify on the basis of mutual knowledge based on shared background or invoked frames (Huang 1999: 89).' This use of the demonstrative is thus identified as the unidentified use, since the hearer usually cannot identify the referent to which the distal demonstrative refers in the child discourse. Consider the following excerpts.

- (7) *CHI: *Mama zuotian nage gei ta diaoxialai le.*⁵
 Mom yesterday that give it drop-down-come LE
 'Mom let that fall yesterday.'
- *AD1: *sjami meNgiaN* [% Taiwanese = what was that?]⁶
 What thing
 'What was that?'
- *CHI: *Nage a.*
 That PAR
 'That one.'
- *AD1: *Nage shi shenmo dongxi?*
 That SHI what thing
 'What was that?'
- *CHI: *Ni zai bang didi xizao de nage a.*
 You ZAI help younger brother bathe DE that PAR
 'That thing you use to bathe brother.'
- *AD1: *Nage shenmo dongxi?*
 That what thing
 'What was that?'
- *CHI: *weiqun a.*
 Apron PAR
 'Apron.'

⁵ *Mama* 'mom' in this utterance refers to the babysitter.

⁶ In this utterance, the babysitter spoke Taiwanese. The spelling N refers to nasalized vowels.

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- *CHI: *diao le hao haoxiao.*
Drop LE so laughable
'[It was] so funny [to see it dropped].'
- (8) *CHI: *Wanshang de shihou jiu chi nage a.*
Evening De time JIU eat that PAR
'[I] ate that in the evening.'
- *ADT: *Nage shenmo?*
That what
'What was that?'
- *CHI: *Chi papa mai de nage a.*
Eat dad buy DE that PAR
'[I] ate that bought by Dad.'
- *ADT: *Nage a?*
Which PAR
'What?'
- *CHI: *Guozhi.*
Juice
'Juice.'
- *ADT: *Shenmo guozhi?*
What juice
'What juice?'
- *CHI: *Mai biandang de guozhi.*
Buy lunchbox DE juice
'The juice [that] comes with the lunch box.'

In Excerpt (7) above, the conversation was between the child and the babysitter. The child initiated the topic of the conversation and introduces a new referent into the conversation with the distal demonstrative *nage*, which is usually used to mark given and/or shared information, according to previous studies (Hickmann & Liang 1990, Hickmann & Hendriks 1999, Huang 1999). Although the referent was introduced by the child with the definite demonstrative *nage*, the hearer, i.e., the babysitter, was still not clear as to the specification of the referent. As a result, the adult asked a clarification question, also functioning as an elicitation, to encourage the child to offer sufficient or more specific information about her newly introduced referent. In the child's third turn, she tried to provide more information about the referent with a relative clause, but the referent remained unspecified to

the babysitter. Finally, the child identified the new referent with a nominal and finished her proposition.

A similar case is shown in Excerpt (8). In this excerpt, the child's first utterance is a response to the adult's prior question about what she had had in her meals at the kindergarten that day. Similarly, the child seemed to introduce a new referent into the discourse with *nage* to mark a referent which was obviously unknown to the adult. The adult's question for clarification in the following turn revealed that he did not share knowledge with the child about the conversation. The adult thus kept using clarifying questions to elicit the child's intended referent and also to help her specify the information she had thought of as the 'communal common ground' or shared knowledge with the adult (Clark 1994: 989).

There may be a doubt that the cases of *nage* in Excerpts (7) and (8) could be classified as instances for conceptual planning and lexical retrieval, rather than as instances of the unidentified use.⁷ As far as the data observed are concerned, these two cases are undoubtedly examples of the unidentified use. A comparison between the pause-filler use, as illustrated in (4) and (5), and the unidentified use of *nage* shows that children tend to produce the intended lexical items or ideas in their own turns right after the distal demonstrative, which in turn shows that they eventually retrieve the intended lexical item and give form to the idea which they seek to express. In some cases, the pause-filler use may be found together with such conversational features as pauses and repetitions of a particular linguistic form. These conversation features in turn show that children are encountering a problem retrieving lexical items or planning their ideas, as in Excerpts (4) and (5). On the other hand, in the cases of the unidentified use, the children apparently do not show any difficulty in retrieving the intended lexical item or information. It seems that they tend to believe that they have conveyed their propositions in a complete way and that they then let go of the turn. Once encountering such cases, as mentioned above, adults need to either elicit or ask the children to clarify the intended information. Therefore, the children's utterances *per se* are able to provide sufficient clues to identify the unidentified use. The use of clarifying or eliciting questions by adults is to provide sufficient clues to the children to enable them to identify the unidentified use of the distal demonstrative.

⁷ I am thankful to an anonymous referee for pointing this out.

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To summarize, a total of five discourse-pragmatic functions of the distal demonstrative *na(ge)* have been observed in the data and identified above. The children may use the distal demonstrative to refer to objects or referents immediately available in the setting or non-linguistic context of a conversation. This function is considered the deictic use of *na(ge)*. The distal demonstrative may also be used by the children to indicate referents established in the prior context or those to be introduced in the following context. This use of *na(ge)* serves the endophoric function in a discourse. *Na(ge)* in the data is also found to be used by children as a pause filler, the pause-filler function, to indicate an unprepared start of a turn, difficulty in conceptual planning, or trouble in lexical retrieval. This function is usually found accompanied by a pause or repetition of linguistic forms. In the connective use of *na(ge)*, the distal demonstrative may be used by children either to connect conditionals in an epistemical way or to connect two utterances in a loose way. Lastly, a peculiar function of the distal demonstrative in child discourse is observed. Children may use *na(ge)* to mark referents to their own personal experiences and suppose a particular personal experience of their own to be shared knowledge between themselves and their interlocutors, while the referents are obscure to their interlocutors. Encountering the unidentified use of *na(ge)*, their interlocutors thus need to specify the children's referents via elicitation or clarification.

3.2 Discussion

The table below (Table 1) shows the distribution of the discourse-pragmatic functions of the distal demonstrative across different data groups.

Table 1. The distribution of the discourse-pragmatic functions of *na(ge)*

	Naturalistic	Controlled ⁸	
	4 year-old	4 year-olds	5 year-olds
1. Deictic use	9 (1) ⁹	4	8
2. Endophoric use	2 (9)	5	15
3. Connective use	0 (0)	11	13
4. Pause-filler use	15 (0)	10	24
5. Unidentified use	12 (0)	2	0
Total	38 (10)	32	61

As seen in the table, the pause-filler function of the distal demonstrative seems to be pervasive in child discourse. In both data types, children tend to use *na(ge)* as a pause filler, and, with a careful observation, most of the instances of this function pertaining to a difficulty in retrieving a lexical item. This use of the distal demonstrative in the data may reveal that children at the age of four have developed both the ability to use the distal demonstrative as a pause filler and the ability to hold a conversational floor which was just given to them or taken by them with a proper device, even though they may not be well-prepared.

With regard to the connective use of the distal demonstrative, more instances were observed in the children's (both ages) controlled conversations. However, the null instance of the connective use in the naturalistic data does not mean that the child has yet to have developed this use of the distal demonstrative. Instead, this null instance may be accidental; in other words, the child may have developed the connective use of the distal demonstrative, but she happened to not use it when the data were collected. Indeed, the frequent appearance of this use of the distal demonstrative in the controlled conversations suggests that children may have developed the concept of coherence, or of the relevancy between utterances in particular. As observed in the data, the children, in some cases, tended to use *na* as a connective when they were saying something in reply to what the experimenter had said. In other cases, they used the connective use of the distal demonstrative to relate

⁸ The numbers in the controlled group are the total instances of the distal demonstrative produced by the seven children in the data.

⁹ The numbers in parentheses refers to the numbers of uses by adults of the distal demonstrative observed in the naturalistic data.

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what they were saying to what they had thought of in their mind. For example, as mentioned in the previous section, the child in Excerpt (6) originally planned to set the miniature tree in a particular way, but then he changed his mind and wanted to arrange it in a different way. Although the child did not produce a phrase containing specific content words to indicate his change of mind, his use of *na* as a connective (to relate his current state of mind to his previous state of mind) may reveal his awareness of the need for coherence and relevancy in the connection between his current utterance and a previous one. Therefore, the children's connective use of the distal demonstrative probably reflects that they have become aware of the requirement for coherence and relevance between utterances, even though the utterances may simply be connected loosely. The awareness of coherence in turn may prompt the children to use a connective device in their conversations, and the distal demonstrative is one of the connective devices they can employ.

The comparison between the distributions of the deictic use and the endophoric use of the distal demonstrative shows an age difference. In the naturalistic data, the number of the instances of the deictic use is over four times of that of the endophoric use. On the other hand, both uses of *na(ge)* occur almost equally frequently in the 4-year-old controlled-conversation group. As to the 5-year-old controlled-conversation group, more instances of the endophoric use were found than those of the deictic use. This discrepancy seems to be somehow counterintuitive. Since the children in the controlled-conversation groups were asked to produce a narrative based on the miniatures shown to them, it was supposed to be more likely for them to show more instances of the deictic use than the naturalistic group. On the contrary, the deictic use of the distal demonstrative in the controlled-conversation groups did not outnumber the endophoric use. A plausible explanation for this discrepancy may be that without the aid of experimental instructions and props children may rely on non-linguistic contexts to help them initiate and continue a conversation. As a result, children tend to restrict their conversations to some extent to the 'here-and-now' (Brown 1973, Sachs 1983, Eisenberg 1985, Weist 1989, Huang 2000). When their conversations are all about the referents present in the nonlinguistic context, children may thus use another linguistic device to mark the referents they are referring to, e.g., *zhege* 'this one' or nominals denoting a particular referent—names or labels of

the replicas or miniatures.¹⁰ Hence, there may be fewer cases of the deictic use observed in the controlled-conversation group. The disparity between these two uses may nonetheless show that even though children are four years old, they may probably talk about referents or events that are present in the immediate context.

Moreover, the greater number of occurrences of the endophoric use in the 5-year-old controlled-conversation group may further support the speculation that children have developed the concept of coherence at the age of five, since the number of their endophoric use is nearly two times more than that of their deictic use. Children can use the distal demonstrative endophorically, either anaphorically or cataphorically, only with the awareness of coherence in discourse. Therefore, the endophoric use of the distal demonstrative may be an index to evaluate children's maturity in composing a discourse.

With regard to the unidentified use, at first sight it seems that *nage* in both Excerpts (7) and (8) above serve different functions and may denote different referents in divergent situations or linguistic contexts. Indeed, after careful observation, it should not be difficult to find that all the referents introduced by the child are based on or from her own personal experiences. These personal experiences, from the child's own perspective, are considered shared knowledge with her interlocutors, the babysitter in Excerpt (7) and the babysitter's son in Excerpt (8). Since all the events that the child mentioned in the above excerpts concern all the interlocutors, inclusive of herself, she may probably take it for granted that the other party of the conversation shares with her the same personal experiences, or 'personal common ground' in Clark's (1994) term. As mentioned by Clark (1994: 990), '[c]ommon ground is important to a discourse because it is the background, the context, for everything the participants jointly do and say in it'. Both 'communal common ground' and 'personal common ground' comprise the 'common ground', which then form the initial context for a conversation. Once the conversation begins, the interlocutors keep building new 'conversational common ground' in every following move based on the current one. In other words, some knowledge or information is in turn shared between or among the interlocutors through the progress of the conversation. Based on Clark's (1994) proposal and the excerpts shown above, these

¹⁰ The pragmatic-discourse functions of the proximal demonstrative *zhege* 'this one' in child discourse are worth further study and exploration.

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instances of the use of distal demonstrative thus reveal that even though the child has acquired the semantics of *na(ge)* and the pragmatic knowledge that the use of the distal demonstrative in Mandarin can be exploited to indicate given or shared information (Hickmann and Liang 1990, Xu 1987, Huang 1999), she has not yet fully mastered the organization of the discourse, particularly the management of information. The child observed in this study tends to presuppose too much shared knowledge. In addition, she has not developed the pragmatic knowledge of how to manage information in conversation; that is, she may yet to have learned that not all of the information in a conversation is presupposed or shared by the interlocutors, but that some information is established through the conversation itself.

A comparison between the numbers of the endophoric use and the unidentified use in the controlled-conversation groups and those in the naturalistic group shows a disparity between two data groups and two age groups. It seems that unlike the 4-year-old child, children in the 4-year-old controlled-conversation group produced few instances of the unidentified use, and no instance of this use was found in the 5-year-old controlled-conversation group. Some researchers may attribute this disparity to the different data types. Since in the controlled groups, all the conversations produced by the children were based on animal replicas or other miniatures in the conversational context, it may thus be much easier for both parties in the conversation, the child and the experimenter, to identify which referent is in question. On the other hand, without the aid of the replicas, the 4-year-old in the naturalistic group thus may encounter some difficulties in identifying referents or making referents identified to her interlocutors, since every entity existing in the physical context is a potential candidate for deictic referents in naturalistic conversations.

An alternative and probable account for this disparity, however, may be due to developmental progress and children's ability to manage information in a discourse. As seen in the table, each group shows different patterns of distributions with respect to the distal demonstrative. The numbers of the endophoric use and those of the unidentified use seem to be in a tradeoff relation. With the increase in age, there are more uses of endophoric *na(ge)* than the unidentified one, while the uses of the unidentified decrease when the children get older. As discussed above, the instances of the unidentified use of *na(ge)* reflect children's inability to establish 'conversational common ground' and to transform their

'personal ground' into 'communal ground' through turn exchanges in conversation (Clark 1994). By the same rationale, it can thus be speculated that children at the age of five may have been able to turn their own 'personal common ground' into 'conversational common ground' to form 'communal common ground'. In addition, five-year-olds may have been aware of the disparity between their own personal experiences and their interlocutors', and this awareness may be attributed to children's ability to take a different perspective or to see from others' perspective (Tomasello 1999).

It is assumed that the children in the controlled conversations would focus more on the 'here-and-now' and use the distal demonstrative more deictically, since they were given props to play with while interacting. Indeed, the 4-year-old child produced the most numerous cases of the deictic use among the three groups, but she was not especially given any toys or props to play with. The results appear contrary to the assumption, although, according to some previous studies (e.g., Brown 1973, Sachs 1983, Eisenberg 1985, Weist 1989, Huang 2000), children tend to interact relying on entities in the physical context. In addition, it seems that the contextual factor, i.e., the here-and-now, only has an effect on the unidentified use of the distal demonstrative. As mentioned above, the children in controlled conversations produced fewer cases of the unidentified use, which can be possibly attributed to the presence of the props in the controlled conversation. Nonetheless, the comparison conducted here can at best provide a possible account for the disparity observed in the data. Since the number of the subjects in the naturalistic group is not comparable with that in the controlled group, the discrepancy in the results may be confounded and so questionable (despite the fact that the number of the utterances produced by the children in both groups is comparable).¹¹ Although the present study can only form a conjecture, contextual difference is believed to be influential, and further studies are highly desirable.

¹¹ The data observed can all generally be considered as conversational interactions between two interlocutors, and there are about 480 utterances in total in both the 4-year-old groups.

4. CONCLUSION

This study examines and discusses the discourse-pragmatic functions of the distal demonstrative *na(ge)* in Mandarin in child-adult conversations. Five distinct functions of the distal demonstrative have been identified, including the deictic use, the endophoric use, the connective use, and the pause-filler use, and the unidentified use.¹² The unidentified use of the distal demonstrative may be considered as a peculiar use to children's discourse, particularly when they presuppose too much shared knowledge or before they have developed the ability to properly establish and manage 'common ground' in discourse organization (Clark 1985, Clark 1994).

In addition, this study also compares the distributions of the different functions of *na(ge)* observed in naturalistic interactions and controlled conversations. It is speculated that children's ability to appropriately use the distal demonstrative with respect to its various discourse-pragmatic in discourse takes some years to develop. Moreover, children's use of the distal demonstrative may also reflect their awareness of certain crucial elements in discourse, such as coherence, common ground or shared knowledge, and turn maintenance. It is found that children's ability to maintain a conversational turn on the basis of their use of *na(ge)* may develop early. Children's ability to manage common ground properly, to take others' perspective, and to maintain coherence may not develop until they are five.

The findings in this study provide support from Hickmann and Liang's (1990) study. In their study they also suggested that children around age four still have trouble with the correlation between sentential devices and the information status in discourse. At the same time, however, the findings in this study are to some extent contrary to those of MacWhinney and Bates' (1978). MacWhinney and Bates claim that by age three children acquire the essential relations between given/newness and particular sentential devices adopted to mark certain relationship. It is, however, found in this study that despite the fact that children after age three may know how to distinguish differences in information status with appropriate sentential devices, they may not

¹² The five uses of the distal demonstrative identified in this study can only be restricted to the data recruited in this study. It is not claimed in this study that children at this stage can only use the distal demonstrative in the five functions. There might be other functions found. Extensive investigations across different sorts of data are desirable.

handle information appropriately. In fact, children around age four still have problems with the idea of given information and the ability to establish shared knowledge or to transform their personal experiences into 'common ground' in the course of a conversation. Not until the age of five years old may they develop these abilities.

This study, nonetheless, does have limitations. As mentioned above, the numbers of subjects in the naturalistic data and those in the controlled conversations are not equivalent. This inequality between these two types of data may weaken the findings of the comparison across different contexts and leave the argument provided here a conjecture. It is thus highly suggested that future studies recruit a data set comparable in both subject numbers and utterances numbers so as to highlight in a more significant way the potential difference between the different contexts in question here. In addition, future studies can also go further and compare contexts that are far more different from each other and investigate what contextual factors are influential in the uses of the demonstratives, other deictic expressions or even discourse markers.

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APPENDIX

CHAT symbols used in the data in this study:

xxx	unintelligible speech
0	actions without speech
[?]	best guess
.	period
?	question
!	exclamation
:	lengthened syllable

#	pause between words
##	long pause between words
###	extra long pause between words
+...	trailing off
+//.	self-interruption
+/.	interruption
+^	quick uptake
+,	self-completion
++	other-completion
[=! text]	paralinguistics, prosodics
[= text]	explanation
[=? text]	alternative transcription
[% text]	comment on main line
[>]	overlap follows
[<]	overlap precedes
[/]	retracing without correction
[//]	retracing with correction
< >	scope delimiters
%act:	actions
%com:	comments by investigator
%sit:	situation