

Is the correlation between grounding and transitivity universal?

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This paper studies the correlation between grounding and transitivity in Chinese narratives and conversations based on the ten Transitivity features proposed by Hopper and Thompson (1980), to examine the universality of the correlation across different spoken discourse and different languages. According to the percentages of high-transitivity features vis-à-vis grounding, highly transitive clauses in Chinese narratives, just like English written narratives, tend to be foregrounded. However, such correlation is not borne out in conversational discourse, in that highly transitive clauses are almost equally distributed in foreground and background. As conversations are more pervasive and reflect people's habitual use of language, it is concluded that grounding is independent of the morphosyntactic and semantic manifestations of transitivity.

1. Introduction

Grounding is a fundamental property of text organization. In past research, it was mainly studied in narrative discourse that was comprised of a main story line.

It is evidently a universal of narrative discourse that in any extended text an overt distinction is made between the language of the actual story line and the language of supportive material which does not itself narrate the main events. (Hopper 1979:213)

Thus, foregrounded clauses refer to the topical development along the plot of the story, while backgrounded clauses “support, amplify, or *COMMENT ON* the narration” (Hopper 1979:215). In daily conversation, however, topics are spontaneous and naturally developed by the participants at the moment of speaking. When speakers do not narrate and when what they talk about lacks a

clear story line, does grounding still legitimately characterize the various types of information in face-to-face interaction? Consider the conversational excerpt in example (1). The subject of talk is how speaker C interacted with her boyfriend in class by continuously looking at him, as expressed by the topical and foregrounded clause in IU8 to IU10 (see Appendix C for the definition of IU). The rest of the utterance conveys background information, orienting the topic with temporal information — ‘every time I attended the math class’ (IU2), the location of the boyfriend — ‘he sat on my right side’ (IU3), and a reason for the seat arrangement which accounts for the boy’s location — ‘girls sat on one side, and boys sat on the other side’ (IU4–6).

- (1) 1 C: ..*ranhou%*,\
 then
 2 ...*(1.2)mei ci wo shang shuxue,*
 every time 1SG attend math class
 3 ...*ta jiu zuo zai wo you bian,*
 3SG then sit at 1SG right side
 4 ...*women shi%*,_
 1PL COP
 5 ...*nusheng yi bian,*
 girl one side
 6 ...*nansheng yi bian ma,*
 boy one side PRT
 7 B: (0)<P *uh= P>,/
 BC
 8 C: ...<A *ranhou wo zhe bian zheyangzi%*,_
 then 1SG this side like this
 9 ...*yanzhu dou%*,_
 eyeball all
 10 ...*yizhi A> ^kan ta zheyangzi,*
 continuously look 3SG like this
 C: ‘Then, every time I attended the math class, he sat on my right side. We had girls sitting on one side, and boys sitting on the other side.’
 B: ‘Uh.’
 C: ‘Then I kept looking at him from this side (i.e. the girls’ side).’*

Example (1) clearly illustrates the fact that utterances in conversation do receive different grounding status: some are pertinent to introducing a topic, while some support it in various ways. The pragmatic notion of grounding, which

manages different kinds of information in the two common types of spontaneous speech, is thus universal and genre-independent. As Hopper and Thompson (1980:280–281) remark,

in any speaking situation, some parts of what is said are more relevant than others. That part of a discourse which does not immediately and crucially contribute to the speaker's goal, but which merely assists, amplifies, or comments on it, is referred to as BACKGROUND. By contrast, the material which supplies the main points of the discourse is known as FOREGROUND.

Hopper and Thompson (1980:295) have further proposed a discourse patterning of transitivity in terms of grounding, since “[g]rounding itself reflects a deeper set of principles — relating to decisions which speakers make, on the basis of their assessment of their hearers’ situation, about how to present what they have to say”. The way to present what to say can be realized by the transitivity of the clause: “high Transitivity is correlated with foregrounding and low Transitivity with backgrounding” (Hopper and Thompson 1980:251). They also believe that

the grammaticization of devices to indicate grounding in narrative begins in the more pervasive conversational genre, and is extended to other genres in a natural way; i.e., the same devices used to highlight the main points of a conversation are also appropriate in foregrounded parts of a narrative. (Hopper and Thompson 1980:283)

Since their study was based on English written narratives, the question remains: Do grounding and transitivity still correlate in different spoken discourse and across different languages? This paper will examine the universality of the correlation in two common types of Chinese discourse — oral narratives and daily conversations, based on the ten Transitivity features proposed by Hopper and Thompson (1980).

Section 2 introduces the corpus of data. The structuring of topics in both conversational and narrative discourse will be discussed in Section 3, which is crucial to determining the grounding status and the transitivity of the clause in Section 4. Section 5 presents data analysis, followed by the discussion of the correlation between grounding and transitivity across different discourse types and different languages in Section 6.

2. Database

The research reported in this study rests upon the quantitative-qualitative analysis of four oral narratives and four casual conversations. The narrative discourse in the database refers to recountings of the story line of the movie *Ghost* produced in 1990. In the movie, the leading actor is killed accidentally by a hoodlum in a conspiracy organized by the leading actor's best friend. Since the best friend needs to obtain a password from the leading actor's girlfriend to launder money, the leading actor, through the help of a medium, returns in the form of a ghost to protect the girlfriend and avenge himself on the best friend. The four narrators, two females and two males, had already seen the movie before the taping sessions, which took place in the speech laboratory of their office, where they were each requested to recount the story of the film without elicitation. Since the speakers and the interviewer were colleagues, the story was narrated in a natural way. The four narratives totaled thirty-six minutes.

The conversational data consist of four casual, unpremediated, multi-party conversations which took place from 1992 to 1995 among college students who knew each other. The first conversation had four participants; the second involved five; the third and the fourth were comprised of three speakers. The students were free to find topics of common interest. The data used in this study are twenty-minute excerpts from long recordings.

Subordinate clauses are not considered in the present study, because they function uniquely as the background in the corpus of data. Statements in the main clause, excluding copular clauses, presentative clauses, and clauses with nominal predicates, are the majority: 82.7% (464 out of 561) in storytelling, and 70.1% (1441 out of 2056) in everyday talk.

3. Structuring Topics in Discourse

To discuss the correlation between grounding and transitivity, the grounding status of a clause has to be first determined. In narrative discourse, foregrounded and backgrounded clauses can be identified within an episode — a thematic unit used to characterize the plot of the story (Tomlin 1987; van Dijk 1981). Without a main story line, how can the two types of clauses be distinguished in conversation? This section will propose that the notion 'topic chain' is useful for characterizing the advancement of conversational topics, as well as the progression of narrative episodes, so the results can be compared on the same basis.

Tsao (1979, 1987, 1988, 1990) has suggested that a ‘topic chain’ is a basic discourse unit, which can be characterized as a series of sentences sharing the same topic; the initial NP of the first sentence is the topic which, in turn, functions as the topic of the whole chain. Shi (1989), on the other hand, regards the ‘topic chain’ as a basic syntactic category, the largest unit in Chinese syntax. Li and Thompson (1979, 1981) use the notion ‘topic chain’ to interpret Chinese zero anaphors: the topic of the first clause in a topic chain is the referent for the unrealized topics in the chain of the following clauses. You’s (1998) terminology is ‘topic continuity’, within which the referents of zero anaphors in written narratives can be recovered.

The scope of T[opic] C[ontinuity] can be defined in terms of semantic propositions as follows: the previous proposition of the first proposition of a topic continuity and the following proposition of the last proposition should be subsumed by other macropropositions, i.e. should belong to other discourse topics/themes. In the surface structure, the use of noun phrases...and changes in time or place usually indicate the end of the previous topic continuity and the beginning of a new topic continuity.... In addition, TC is a hierarchical discourse structure; a topic continuity may contain several **sub-topic continuities (sub-TC)**, which may contain their own sub-topic continuities. (You 1998:40)

The term ‘topic chain’ is still employed in the present study to analyze the structuring of conversational and narrative topics. Yet, the notion is defined in a different way: topic chains as discourse units characterize text organization based on the semantic relationship between utterances. A sequence of clauses about the same subject matter introduces a topic; a topic, or more commonly, a number of semantically-connected topics then form a topic chain; the topic chains sharing the identical theme further constitute a larger topic chain. In the corpus, three levels of topic chains were identified for conversations: ‘topic chain’, ‘sub-topic chain’, and ‘sub-sub-topic chain’; two levels for narratives.

3.1 Topic chain

A topic chain (TC) is typically comprised of a set of topics sharing the same theme, whose boundary represents major changes in time, place, event, or character(s). For general discussion of subject matter, events within the topic chain have no reference time or place. Table 1 illustrates three consecutive topic chains, namely ‘Seafood’, ‘Car Accident’, and ‘Doctors’. The topic succession does not follow the actual temporal sequence, since the car accident happened years before the seafood events.

Table 1. Topic chains

TC	Time	Place	Event	Character(s)
'Seafood'	one day in Boston	Boston	quality of fish	fish
'Car Accident'	another day in Oregon	Oregon	car accident	a boyfriend
'Doctors'	another day in Boston	Boston	medical diagnosis	a doctor, a patient

Table 2. Interruption within a topic chain

TC	Time	Place	Event	Character(s)
'Speaker C's Romance'	junior-high-school time	speaker C's junior high school	relationship with the first boyfriend	speaker C, the first boyfriend
'Long Hair'	high-school time	generic	wearing long hair	speakers A, B, C
'C's Romance' continued	junior-high-school time	speaker C's junior high school	relationship with the second boyfriend	speaker C, the second boyfriend

A topic chain can be interrupted by a separate theme. The talk in Table 2 centers on the speakers' past romance. While C communicates about her boyfriends in junior high school and just finished the story concerning the first boyfriend, another speaker interrupts and brings up a different topic on wearing long hair in high school. After which the original topic chain is resumed, and C continues telling about the second boyfriend.

3.2 Sub-topic chain

Within each topic chain may be found more than one subsidiary topic chain of the same theme; that is, the 'sub-topic chain' (sub-TC). The sub-TCs may not be inherently ordered. Nor do they necessarily share the same temporal and spatial information with their host TC. The speakers in Table 3 are discussing the departmental gathering to be held at the end of the semester. Since the place of the party has not yet been decided, the seven sub-TCs about the important elements to hold the gathering consistently refer to the same time but lack a specific location.

The space and time in other sub-TCs may be distinct from those of their host TC. In the narrative TC on the leading actor (i.e. the man) thwarting his friend's conspiracy (see Appendix A) in Table 4, a narrator first focused on the friend who tries to launder money by transferring it to a bank account ('Friend

Table 3. Sub-topic chains

TC: 'Departmental Gathering'			
Sub-TCs	Time	Event	Character(s)
'Food Arrangement'	end of semester	arrange for food	food, utensils
'Place'	end of semester	the place holding the gathering	place, expense
'Gas'	end of semester	gas for cooking	gas, food
'Food Containers'	end of semester	choose the right kind of food containers	food containers
'Helpers'	end of semester	check the schedules of helpers	students
'Entertainment'	end of semester	arrange for performances at the party	a teacher
'Making Tables'	end of semester	make tables for the party	tables

Launders Money'). Then, the recounting was shifted to the leading actor who transfers the money to another account before the friend does ('Man Transfers Money'). The last sub-TC goes back to the friend when he finds the money is gone ('Friend Discovers Money Being Transferred').

The sub-TCs do not necessarily proceed sequentially; a new sub-TC of a previous topic chain can be brought up after other unrelated topic chains. For instance, the last sub-TC of 'Departmental Gathering' in Table 3 is 'Making Tables', after which the speakers discuss 'Playlet Presentation', 'Art Exhibition', and then 'Departmental Directories'. After 'Departmental Directories', the participants return to 'Departmental Gathering' and resume the old topic of entertainment. Afterward, 'Playlet Presentation' is also resumed to introduce a new sub-TC about audience.

Non-sequential sub-TCs are not interruptions, since no one initiates a different topic in the middle of the talk. A real instance of interruption within an ongoing sub-TC can be found in Table 5. The speaker is sharing her own experience in seeing a cockroach in the library, but she stops and discusses with other speakers whether cockroaches can fly or make noises, after which she resumes and finishes the interrupted topic.

Table 4. Sub-topic chains of different times and places

TC: 'Man Thwarts the Conspiracy'				
Sub-TCs	Time	Place	Event	Character(s)
'Friend Launderers Money'	one day	office	the friend starts to launder money	friend, illegal money
'Man Transfers Money'	another day	bank	the man transfers the money to the medium's bank account	man, illegal money
'Friend Discovers Money Being Transferred'	another day	office	the friend discovers his money being transferred	friend, illegal money

Table 5. Interruption within a sub-topic chain

TC: 'Cockroaches'				
Sub-TCs	Time	Place	Event	Character(s)
'A Cockroach in the Library'	some time in the past	library	speaker A found a cockroach in the library	speaker A, a male student, a cockroach
'Cockroaches' Attributes'	generic	generic	speakers discuss whether cockroaches can fly and make noises	cockroaches
'A Cockroach in the Library' continued	some time in the past	library	speaker A's reaction	speaker A

3.3 Sub-sub-topic chain

The sub-topic chain can be further divided into 'sub-sub-topic chain' (sub-sub-TC) whose content is directly subsidiary to its host sub-TC, but indirectly related to the TC as a whole. Table 6 indicates two sub-sub-TCs on speaker B's first boyfriend (sub-TC1) which is part of the speaker's romance in senior high school (TC). Like the TCs in Table 1 and the sub-TCs in Table 4, the two sub-sub-TCs here — 'Meeting the Boy' and 'A Girl Confiding about the Boy' — occur at different times and places.

A topic chain boundary may coincide with its first sub-topic chain boundary, as a sub-topic chain boundary does with its first sub-sub-topic chain

boundary. It is counted, respectively, as an instance of TC and an instance of sub-TC in the present tabulation. The frequency distribution of the various levels of topic chain in the two types of discourse is presented in Table 7.

In short, topic chains, whether narrative or conversational, display a hierarchical organization similar to the organization of ‘supertopics’, ‘topics’, and ‘subtopics’ proposed by Chafe (1994), and to the structuring of ‘topic continuity’ in You’s (1998) framework. Most of the topics proceed sequentially, especially in narrative discourse. The conversational events, however, may not be organized in a temporal sequence. Moreover, an on-going conversational topic, be it part of a topic chain or of a (sub)-sub-topic chain, can be interrupted by a new distinct theme, after which the speakers can go back to the interrupted topic; or without interruption, an old topic can be brought up again

Table 6. Sub-sub-topic chains

TC: ‘Speaker B’s Romance at Senior High’				
Sub-TC1: ‘First Boyfriend’				
Sub-Sub-TC1	Time	Place	Event	Character(s)
‘Meeting the Boy’	first year in senior high	a meeting place	discuss how speaker B met the boy	speaker B, the first boy
Sub-Sub-TC2	Time	Place	Event	Character(s)
‘A Girl Confiding about the Boy’	third year in senior high	cram school	the boy wrote about speaker B	a girl, speaker B, the first boy
Sub-TC2	Time	Place	Event	Character(s)
‘Second Boyfriend’	senior-high-school time	street	discuss how speaker B met and got along with the boy	speaker B, the second boy

Table 7. Frequency distribution of TCs, sub-TCs, and sub-sub-TCs

	narratives		conversations	
	n	%	n	%
TCs	38	77.6	37	34.2
Sub-TCs	11	22.4	57	52.8
Sub-sub-TCs	0	0.0	14	13.0
total:	49	100.0	108	100.0

- 7 ...*zhende hao piaoliang*.\
 really very be.pretty
- 8 ...(1.1)*erqie ta ziji benshen de zi=, _*
 moreover 3SG SELF per se ASSC character
- 9 ..*benshen ^jiu hen you hen%--*
 per se EMP very have very
- 10 ...(7)*you henduo ^butongde <L2 style L2>.*
 have many different style
- 11 H: ...<PP *oh= PP*>?/
 BC
- L: 'No, like Lu, his documents are all very pretty, right?'
- Z: 'Hm.'
- L: 'You look at his handwriting. His handwriting is really very pretty. Moreover, his own writing...he can write in many different styles.'
- H: 'Oh.'

Example (3) illustrates the identification of foregrounded and backgrounded clauses in a narrative topic chain about the murderer breaking into the leading actress's house ('Murderer Breaks into Woman's House', see Appendix A). The foregrounded clauses move the topical events from the woman changing clothes at home (IU8–9), to the hoodlum breaking into the woman's house (IU10–11), then to the man scaring a cat (IU24–25), and finally to the cat scaring the hoodlum away (IU26–27). The rest of the excerpt is background information. First, the preceding topic chain, 'Man Stays in the World after Death' (see Appendix A), already mentions that the man does not go to heaven after death but follows and stays beside the girlfriend. Thus, the clause in IU4 indicates the man's habitual behavior of following his girlfriend, which accounts for his presence in the topic chain. The man's recognition that the hoodlum is the murderer (IU12–15), and his nervousness and worry (IU16–19), together explain why the man has to save the woman by scaring the cat. Finally, the clause in IU21–22 is a pre-announcement for resolving the predicament.

- (3) 1 W: ...*(H)jiieguo=?/*
 as a result
- 2 ...*(1.3)youyitian=?/*
 one day
- 3 ...*(.8)youyitian=, _*
 one day

- 4 ...*ta gen zhe ta nupengyou.*\
3SG follow DUR 3SG girlfriend
- 5 ...*zai= ta nupeng,*\
be:at 3SG REPAIR
- 6 ...*zai jiali deshihou.*\
be:at home when
- 7 ...(.8)*uh=,*_
PF
- 8 ...*ta%* —
3SG
- 9 ...*nupengyou zheng zai huanyifu,*\
girlfriend just PROG change clothes
- 10 ...(.7)*ranhou you yige ^huairen,*\
then there:be one bad guy
- 11 ...*^huairen chuang jinlai.*\
bad guy break into a house come in
- 12 ...*(H)jiu ta yi ^kan,*\
then 3SG as soon as look
- 13 ...*jiushi= zai= jieshang,*\
that is on street
- 14 ...*shasi ta de nage=,*_
kill 3SG ASSC that
- 15 ...*nage= hunhun.*\
that hoodlum
- 16 ...*(H)ranhou ta jiu=,*_
then 3SG then
- 17 ...*ta jiu hen jinzhang.*_
3SG then very be:nervous
- 18 ...(.8)*hen pa ta=,*_
very be:afraid SG
- 19 ...*zai qu shanghai ta nupengyou.*\
again go hurt 3SG girlfriend
- 20 ...(.9)*(H)suoyi=,*_
so
- 21 ...*(1.2)ta jiu=,*_
3SG then
- 22 ...*xiang le yige banfa.*\
think of PF one way

- 23 ...*jiu*=, _
 then
- 24 ...(9)*jingxia le*= *nage*=, _
 scare PF that
- 25 ...*ta nupengyou*= *suo yang de mao*.\
 3SG girlfriend SUO raise ASSC cat
- 26 ...*ranhou ba nage huai ren gei gei*=, _
 then BA that bad guy GEI GEI
- 27 ...(1.)*gei ^xiazou le*.\
 GEI scare away PF

W: ‘As a result, one day, one day, he follows his girlfriend. At her...at home, uh...his girlfriend is changing clothes. Then, there is a bad guy....a bad guy breaking into the house. He takes a look (at the bad guy). The bad guy is the...the hoodlum who killed him on the street. He, then...then, he is very nervous. He is very afraid that the bad guy will hurt the girlfriend again. So, he thinks of a solution. (He) scares the cat that his girlfriend raises. Then (the cat) scares away the bad guy.’

Table 8 presents the frequency distribution of foregrounded and backgrounded clauses in the narrative and conversational texts.

5. Data analysis

Identifying foregrounded and backgrounded clauses is the first indispensable step to examine the correlation between grounding and transitivity. The discourse patterning of transitivity that “the foci of high Transitivity and low Transitivity correlate with the independent discourse notions of foregrounding and backgrounding respectively” (Hopper and Thompson 1980:294) is based on ten defining properties: ‘kinesis’, ‘affirmation’, ‘mode’, ‘punctuality’, ‘aspect’, ‘participants’, ‘agency’, ‘volitionality’, ‘affectedness of O’, and ‘individuation of O’.

Table 8. Frequency distribution of foregrounded and backgrounded clauses

	narratives		conversations	
	n	%	n	%
Foregrounded clauses	161	34.7	375	26.0
Backgrounded clauses	303	65.3	1066	74.0
total:	464	100.0	1441	100.0

These features can be categorized into two types: the first half are concerned with the ‘speech event’; the second half with the ‘participant’. Their respective frequency distribution vis-à-vis grounding in Chinese spoken discourse will be presented in this section.

5.1 Speech event

‘Kinesis’ is concerned with the action-state distinction. Action and state verbs constitute the majority in the discourse data examined here: 72.6% (337 out of 464) in narratives, and 88.8% (1279 out of 1441) in the conversations. The minor verb types, categorized as ‘others’ in Table 9, are mental act, mental state, and process verbs. ‘Affirmation’ and ‘mode’ refer to the affirmative-negative and the realis-irrealis dichotomy, respectively. Their frequency distribution in foreground and background is given in Table 9.

The feature of punctuality “refers to the suddenness of an action, or the absence of a clear transitional phase between onset and completion” (Hopper and Thompson 1980:286). ‘Aspect’, being realized as ‘perfectivity’ in this study, is concerned with “an action viewed from its endpoint” (Hopper and Thompson 1980:252). These two factors have to do with action verbs only, because states are inherently continuous, undifferentiated, and boundless. The frequency distribution of punctual and non-punctual, perfective and imperfective clauses with respect to grounding is shown in Table 10.

Table 9. ‘Kinesis’, ‘affirmation’, ‘mode’, and grounding

	narratives				conversations			
	foreground		background		foreground		background	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Action verbs	134	83.2	113	37.3	271	72.3	535	50.2
State verbs	11	6.8	79	26.1	86	22.9	387	36.3
Others	16	10.0	111	36.6	18	4.8	144	13.5
total:	161	100.0	303	100.0	375	100.0	1066	100.0
Affirmative	154	95.7	258	85.1	326	86.9	878	82.4
Negative	7	4.3	45	14.9	49	13.1	188	17.6
total:	161	100.0	303	100.0	375	100.0	1066	100.0
Realis	136	84.5	191	63.0	169	45.1	482	45.2
Irrealis	25	15.5	112	37.0	206	54.9	584	54.8
total:	161	100.0	303	100.0	375	100.0	1066	100.0

Table 10. ‘Punctuality, ‘aspect’, and grounding

	narratives				conversations			
	foreground		background		foreground		background	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Punctual	27	20.1	17	15.0	17	6.3	25	4.7
Non-punctual	107	79.9	96	85.0	254	93.7	510	95.3
total:	134	100.0	113	100.0	271	100.0	535	100.0
Perfective	66	49.3	42	37.2	70	25.8	130	24.3
Imperfective	68	50.7	71	62.8	201	74.2	405	75.7
total:	134	100.0	113	100.0	271	100.0	535	100.0

5.2 Participant

The first feature related to participants is ‘number of participants’ taking part in speech events. Clauses taking sentential or verbal arguments were excluded in the present tabulation; those including three participants were calculated as two-participant clauses, since only four instances were found in the corpus — three occurrences of *gei* ‘give’ and one occurrence of *jiao* ‘teach’. ‘Agency’ refers to the participants in role A (for Agent, see Dixon 1979). This study defined it in terms of ‘humanness’; thus, two kinds of participants were distinguished: ‘human’ and ‘non-human’. Finally, the property of ‘volitionality’ only refers to human participants in role A performing an action purposefully (Hopper and

Table 11. ‘Participant’, ‘agency’, ‘volitionality’, and grounding

	narratives				conversations			
	foreground		background		foreground		background	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
One participant	50	38.5	117	56.8	166	50.6	502	61.8
Two participants	80	61.5	89	43.2	162	49.4	310	38.2
total:	130	100.0	206	100.0	328	100.0	812	100.0
Human A	104	98.1	11	61.1	117	89.3	130	86.7
Non-human A	2	1.9	7	38.9	14	10.7	20	13.3
total:	106	100.0	18	100.0	131	100.0	150	100.0
Volitional A	63	60.6	5	45.5	58	49.6	59	45.4
Non-volitional A	41	39.4	6	54.5	59	50.4	71	54.6
total:	104	100.0	11	100.0	117	100.0	130	100.0

Thompson 1980:252). Non-human referents in this particular syntactic position are irrelevant to this semantic distinction. Table 11 presents the statistics for these features in foreground and background.

The last two features are pertinent to the referents in role O (for Object, see Dixon 1979). First, the 'affectedness' of O referents has to be determined by the entire clause, in that "[t]he completion of the action of a clause naturally involves the whole O. When the action is viewed not as completed, but as under way, the O is less likely to be completely affected" (Hopper and Thompson 1980:287). There are many other situations in which the events affect O referents only to a certain degree or they have no effect on them, as in hypothetical or deontic situations. In the present tabulation, referents which are completely affected by the events are classified as 'totally affected'; partial and no affectedness are grouped together as 'partially/not affected'. Finally, the 'individuation' of referents in role O is determined by the human-nonhuman, concrete-abstract, and generic-particular distinctions. Their respective frequency distribution is given in Table 12.

Table 12. 'Affectedness', 'individuation', and grounding

	narratives				conversations			
	foreground		background		foreground		background	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Totally affected O	50	70.4	36	70.6	45	36.9	67	44.1
Partially/not affected O	21	29.6	15	29.4	77	63.1	85	55.9
total:	71	100.0	51	100.0	122	100.0	152	100.0
Human O	52	73.2	6	11.8	24	19.7	33	21.7
Non-human O	19	26.8	45	88.2	98	80.3	119	78.3
total:	71	100.0	51	100.0	122	100.0	152	100.0
Concrete O	70	98.6	24	47.1	116	95.1	97	63.8
Abstract O	1	1.4	27	52.9	6	4.9	55	36.2
total:	71	100.0	51	100.0	122	100.0	152	100.0
Generic O	3	4.2	24	47.1	71	58.2	84	55.3
Particular O	68	95.8	27	52.9	51	41.8	68	44.7
total:	71	100.0	51	100.0	122	100.0	152	100.0

6. Transitivity and grounding

Based on the results in Section 5, this section will compare Hopper and Thompson's (1980) results with the findings for Chinese discourse to examine the universal correlation between transitivity and grounding across various discourse types and different languages.

Hopper and Thompson (1980:283–284) note that “in languages like English, the audience infers grounding not from a single morphosyntactic feature, but from a CLUSTER OF PROPERTIES, no single one of which is exclusively characteristic of foregrounding”. Many studies also regard the ten transitivity features as a ‘cluster concept’ (Wallace 1982; Reinhart 1984), in that even though some of the semantic distinctions do not distinguish the foreground from the background, the transitivity of a clause, be it foregrounded or backgrounded, should depend on the overall distribution. I thus follow Hopper and Thompson's calculation of the average based on the percentages of high-transitivity features in both foregrounded and backgrounded clauses. Table 13 lists the percentages of high-transitivity features vis-à-vis grounding from Tables 9, 10, 11, and 12.

In English written narratives, the average of high Transitivity in foregrounded clauses is 78%; the percentage is reduced to thirty-nine in backgrounded clauses (see Table 2 in Hopper and Thompson 1980:288). As recapitulated by DeLancey (1987:53),

[t]he canonical transitive clause has two participants, reports a kinetic event, is punctual and perfective, and a definite, referential, individuated, and wholly affected patient and a volitional agent which ranks high on the animacy hierarchy, and is affirmative and realis.

Clauses bearing these highly transitive features “also turn out to predominate in the foregrounded portions of discourse” (Hopper and Thompson 1980:292). The averages in Chinese narratives are close to those in English, though the degree of transitivity in the background is higher (49.5%). However, such correlations are not borne out in the conversational discourse, in that highly transitive clauses are almost equally distributed in foreground and background (51.4% vs. 46.5%). In other words, imperfective or irrealis events, for instance, do not often function as background in everyday talk, as they do in narration (see Tables 9 and 10). These results are contrary to Wallace's (1982:205) claim that people are more interested in what is factual or real, designating “specific, actual, definite, bounded acts”. Unbounded events in the past, the present, and the future can be interesting topics of conversation.

Table 13. Grounding and high transitivity

	narratives		conversations	
	foreground	background	foreground	background
Participants	61.5%	43.2%	49.4%	38.2%
Kinesis	83.2%	37.3%	72.3%	50.2%
Aspect	49.3%	37.2%	25.8%	24.3%
Punctuality	20.1%	15.0%	6.3%	4.7%
Volitionality	60.6%	45.5%	49.6%	45.4%
Affirmation	95.7%	85.1%	86.9%	82.4%
Mode	84.5%	63.0%	45.1%	45.2%
Agency	98.1%	61.1%	89.3%	86.7%
O-affectedness	70.4%	70.6%	36.9%	44.1%
O-individuation	89.2%	37.3%	52.2%	43.4%
average:	71.3%	49.5%	51.4%	46.5%

The claim that the more high-transitivity properties a clause includes, the more likely it is to be foregrounded seems to be universal across languages, yet only in narrative discourse. Why does high transitivity correlate with foreground information only when the speaker tells a story, be it English or Chinese, written or spoken? The answer lies in the content of the discourse. In storytelling, the foregrounded clauses are, in general, highly transitive, because the topical events along the plot of the movie are overwhelmingly factual actions performed by human participants. Speakers in everyday talk, however, are interested in a wide variety of topics about the real and the unreal; the specific and the general; the human and the non-human. Thus, the overall average of high Transitivity as determined by the cluster of properties is low. For instance, in the topic chain on a departmental gathering (see Table 3), the speakers who are in charge of this party discuss food arrangement, the location of the party, gas, food containers, helpers, entertainment, and tables. Since it is a prospective gathering at the moment of speaking and there is no inherent order among the seven topics, most of the speech events are imperfective and have not yet happened. Another topic chain centers on a car accident, so the speech events are mostly factual in the past. Such a wide variety of topics concerning the present and the future are not available in the narrative data because of the restriction on the choice of content. The narrators do not communicate a lot about the immediate environment or about the future; their narration follows the movie plot to a large extent. As a result, foregrounded narrative events are mainly realis and perfective. Moreover, since the movie story is human-centered, the topic chains are mainly comprised of concrete,

particular, human referents in the foreground, including the leading actor, the leading actress, the man's friend, a hoodlum, and a medium. In daily talk, human referents are not the overwhelming majority. Speakers can bring up any topics, so humans and non-human entities are equally the center-of-interest. In the topic chain on patents, for instance, it is the non-human 'patent' that is the major participant when speakers discuss patent writing.

Hopper and Thompson's (1980:294) claim that "SEMANTIC AND GRAMMATICAL PROPERTIES WHICH ARE IRRELEVANT TO FOREGROUNDING ARE ALSO IRRELEVANT TO TRANSITIVITY" is not universal. Transitivity does not correlate with grounding in daily talk. As conversations are more pervasive and reflect people's habitual use of language, the correlation found in narrative discourse is merely a coincidence; the events in the stories happen to be mostly actions which center around and are maneuvered by human participants. To claim that speakers use highly transitive clauses to characterize foregrounded events just when they narrate the human-centered type of stories is inexplicable. The ten semantic features lend themselves only to transitivity. Organizing texts into foreground and background is independent of the morphosyntactic and semantic manifestations of transitivity.

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Appendix A: All the topic chains in *Ghost*

TC	Time	Place	Event	Character(s)
'House Moving'	one day	an apartment	the friend helps the man and the woman move into a new place	man, woman, friend

TC	Time	Place	Event	Character(s)
'Friend's Conspiracy Against Man'	one day	hoodlum's place	the friend asks a hoodlum to steal the man's bank-account password	friend, hoodlum, password
'Murder'	after a show	an alley	the hoodlum robs the man and kills him accidentally	hoodlum, man
'Man Stays in the World after Death'	after the man dies	woman's house	the man does not go to heaven but stays beside the woman	man, woman
'Murderer Breaks into Woman's House'	one day	woman's house	the hoodlum breaks into the woman's house to get the password, but he is driven away by the man through a cat	man, woman, hoodlum, cat
'Man Discovers Friend's Conspiracy'	the same day	hoodlum's place	the man follows the hoodlum and discovers the friend has organized the robbery	man, hoodlum, friend
'Friend Gets Close to Woman'	one day	woman's place	the friend tries to get close to the woman to get the password	friend, woman
'Man Meets Medium'	one day	medium's place	the man meets a medium, and tries to get her help	man, medium
'Medium Meets Woman'	one day	woman's place	on behalf of the man, the medium tells the woman about the friend's plot	medium, woman, man
'Man Learns Tricks from a Ghost'	one day	subway	a ghost at subway teaches the man to play tricks	man, ghost
'Man Plays Tricks on Friend'	one day	friend's office	the man punishes the friend by playing tricks on him	man, friend

TC	Time	Place	Event	Character(s)
'Man Thwarts the Conspiracy'	one day	bank	the friend tries to launder money, but the man transfers the money to the medium's account	man, friend, illegal money
'Fight between Man and Friend'	one day	woman's place	the friend threatens the man to retrieve the money, so they fight, and then the friend dies	man, friend
'Man Goes to Heaven'	after the fight	woman's place	the woman can see the man through the medium, then the man goes to heaven	man, woman, medium

Appendix B: Abbreviations in the interlinear glosses

1PL	first person plural
1SG	first person singular
2PL	second person plural
2SG	second person singular
3PL	third person plural
3SG	third person singular
ASSC	associative morpheme
BA	the morpheme BA
BC	backchannel
COMPL	complementizer
COP	copula verb
DUR	durative aspect
EMP	emphatic adverbial
EXP	experiential aspect
GEI	the morpheme GEI
NEG	negative morpheme
PF	pause filler
PRF	perfective aspect
PROG	progressive aspect
PRT	discourse particle
REPAIR	repair phoneme(s)
SELF	reflexive morpheme
SUO	the morpheme SUO

Appendix C: Transcription conventions

The transcription system was proposed by Du Bois et al. (1993). ‘Intonation unit’ (IU) is defined as a stretch of speech uttered under a single coherent intonation contour, which tends to be marked by a pause, a change of pitch, and a lengthening of the final syllable.

Units

{carriage return}	intonation unit
--	truncated intonation unit
{space}	word
-	truncated words
:	identity/turn start
[]	speech overlap

Transitional continuity

.	final
,	continuing
?	appeal

Terminal pitch direction

\	fall
/	rise
–	level

Accent and lengthening

^	primary accent
=	lengthening

Pause

...(N)	long
...	medium
..	short
(0)	latching

Vocal noises

(H)	inhalation
%	glottal stop

Quality

<A A>	allegro: rapid speech
<P P>	piano: soft
<PP PP>	very soft

Specialized notations

<L2 L2>	code switching from Mandarin to English
(())	transcriber’s comment

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