

An Analysis of Coherence of Chinese Courtroom Discourse

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Abstract: Coherence, the relationships which link the meanings of utterances in a discourse or of the sentences in a text, is realized on two levels: linear or sequential coherence and global semantic structure. Taking the audio recording transcripts of two trials (one criminal and one civil) as data, this paper analyzes coherence of Chinese courtroom discourse. The findings indicate that courtroom discourse is coherent semantically (there are meaning relations between different parts of the discourse), topically (different parts of the discourse accord with its general topic), contextually (different parts of the discourse mix with the context and accomplish the communication together), and historically (the discourse refers back to its history, i.e. preceding trials, etc).

Keywords: Coherence, Chinese courtroom discourse, Meaning, Civil trial, Criminal trial.

INTRODUCTION

As a typical institutional discourse, courtroom discourse is strongly purpose-driven, because it involves important rights, interests and concerns, e.g., life, property, reputation, etc. "The purpose of the courtroom discourse is very clear and definite" (Liao 2012: 86). In order to realize the purpose, courtroom discourse should be understood clearly, which requires it to be coherent. Without coherence, courtroom discourse would be just accumulation of words and expressions and thus would be confusing. How can confusing discourse convince others and realize its purpose? So it is essential for courtroom participants to produce coherent discourse. This paper analyzes the linguistic mechanisms for the coherence of courtroom discourse.

The study of coherence in discourse analysis dates back to the early 1960s. However it is the book *Cohesion in English* published by Halliday and Hasan in 1976 that really attracted researchers' attention. With the development of the research, several theories have been put forward, i.e., Halliday and Hasan's cohesion theory (1976), van Dijk's macrostructure theory (1977, 1980), Widdowson's illocutionary act theory (1978), Mann and Thompson's rhetorical structure theory (1988), Brown and Yule's cognitive frame theory (1983), Danes and Fries' thematic progression theory (1974), Sanders, Spooren and Noordman's cognitive parameterization theory (1992, 1993). Of the above, van Dijk's (1977, 1980) macrostructure theory is most suitable for the analysis of such institutional discourse as courtroom discourse (Tao 2009: 102, Wang 2009: 125).

Coherence of legal language has attracted scholars' attention and some research has been conducted. However, previous studies mainly focus on legislative text. For example, Xiong (2002), Huang (2008), Hu (2010) and Yang and Jiang (2014) all examined coherence of Chinese legislative text, taking Constitution of China and various laws as data. Liao (2003, 2012) touched upon coherence of Chinese courtroom discourse from the perspectives of question-answer interaction and frame analysis. Lv (2011) explored coherence in her discussion of power relations in Chinese courtroom discourse. Up to now, no scholars have employed van Dijk's macrostructure theory to analyze coherence of Chinese courtroom. This paper is a preliminary attempt in this regard.

COHERENCE

Coherence refers to the relationships which link the meanings of utterances in a discourse or of the sentences in a text. Van Dijk (1977 : 95) points out that coherence of text is realized on two levels: 'linear or sequential coherence' and 'global overall coherence', i.e. coherence of the 'macrostructure'. The former refers to 'the coherence relations holding between propositions expressed by composite sentences and sequences of sentences', which has three aspects: 1) the sequence of the narration of facts or content, including the sequence of knowing things according to conventions; 2) the preciseness and explicitness of the narration of facts and content; and 3) the organization and development of the information in the text, the interaction of given and new information, etc. The macrostructure of the text refers to the semantic structure represented by the general topic that governs the whole text. So a coherent text is a text whose constituent parts (episodes, sentences) are meaningfully related so that the text as a whole makes sense, even though there may be relatively few formal

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markers of those meaningful relationships—that is, relatively little explicit cohesion. So coherence has to do with the global meaning involved in what we want to express through our speech activity (Mey 2001: 154).

Zhang and Liu (2003:10) argue that the three requirements for a text to be coherent are: 1) semantic coherence, which means that there should be meaning relations between the parts of a text; 2) topical coherence, requiring that the parts of a text should accord with its general topic; and 3) contextual coherence, meaning that the parts of a text mix with the context and accomplish the communication together.

In the analysis of data, I find that courtroom participants refer back to the discourse of preceding trials frequently. For example:

Extract 1

Appellant: *Yuánshēn pànjué chá míng, “Kāifā gōngsī xiàng nánjīng shì jiàn wéi shēnqǐng quèrèn hàn fū yǎ yuán wéi gāodàng zhùzhái xiǎoqū. 2000 Nián 10 yuè 24 rì, nánjīng shì jiàn wéi zài bèigào nánjīng zhāng fǎ wù yè guǎnlǐ yǒuxiàn gōngsī de bàogào zhōng xiěle “qǐngkuàng shùshì” de zìyàng”. Shàngsù rén rèn wéi zhè shì yīgè rèndìng de cuòwù.*

The judgment of the original trial says, “The property development company applied to Nanjing Municipal

Commission of Housing and Urban-Rural Development to confirm Hanfu Yayuan to be a high-grade residential village. On Oct. 24, 2000, Nanjing Municipal Commission of Housing and

Urban-Rural Development verified the report submitted by the defendant”. The appellant thinks that this is a wrong verification.’

In Extract 1, the appellant quotes what is said in the judgment of the original trial and comments on it. This builds the link between the current trial and its history, i.e. the original trial (first instance).

Extract 2 Prosecutor: Is your previous confession true?
 Defendant: Yes.

In Extract 2, the prosecutor asks the defendant to comment on his previous confession. The defendant responds accordingly. This question-answer interaction (see Liao 2003 for a detailed analysis of question-answer interactions in Chinese courtroom discourse) performs the same function as the appellant’s statement in Extract 1, i.e. builds the link between the current trial with its history (the defendant’s confession in the preceding police interrogation).

The discourse strategy in the above two extracts figures prominently in the trials. Actually, it is used frequently by almost all the trial participants. Its function is to link the current trial with its history (i.e. what

happened or was said before). It plays an important role in achieving the coherence of courtroom discourse, because it provides the ‘context of situation’ (Malinowski 1923) of the trial. It is termed ‘historical coherence’.

The above discourse strategy, i.e. historical coherence, can also be analyzed from the perspective of intertextuality¹, which is the topic addressed in another paper of mine (Shi 2014).

COHERENCE OF CHINESE COURTROOM DISCOURSE

In this section, two trials (one civil and one criminal) will be analyzed to demonstrate the coherence of Chinese courtroom discourse. Let’s first look at a civil trial.

Coherence of a Civil Trial

This is a civil trial involving property management fee dispute. The fact of this case is as follows: Xu (male) and Li (male), two property owners at Hanfu Garden (the name of a housing estate), refused to pay the property management fee from March 1, 2002 because they thought that the property management company at Hanfu Garden (Nanjing Changfa Property Management Co., Ltd, henceforth NCPM) was not qualified to charge the fee and its basis and standard for fee-charging was illegal. NCPM sued Xu and Li to Xuanwu District People’s Court of Nanjing (henceforth XDPC). XDPC ruled that Xu and Li should pay the property management fee. Xu and Li refused to accept the verdict and appealed to Nanjing Intermediate People’s Court (henceforth NIPC). The following extract is taken from the stage of court investigation, in which the presiding judge is inquiring the appellee agent on the standard for charging the property management fee at a certain period of time:

Extract 3

T1	Judge:	Niwèishéme yào àn zhège biāozhǔn shōufèi?
T2	Appellee agent:	Yīnwèi wǒmen shì qǐngshì le wùjià jú de.
T3	Judge:	Qǐngshì le wùjià jú?
T4	Appellee agent:	Dui

¹Intertextuality is basically the property texts have of being full of snatches of other texts, which may be explicitly demarcated or merged in, and which text may assimilate, contradict, ironically echo, and so forth (Fairclough 1992: 84).

T5	Judge:	Qǐngshì le nánjīng shì wùjià jú? Wùjià jú tóngyì le? Jìxù tóngyì nǐ àn zhège biāozhǔn shōufèi? Shì bùshì?	T9	Judge:	Which property owners?
T6	Appellee agent:	Wùjià jú ràng wǒmen jīnkuài chénglì yèzhǔ wěiyuánhui.	T10	Appellee agent:	All of them.
T7	Judge:	Duì a, nǐmen yèzhǔ wěiyuánhui bùshì méiyǒu chénglì ma? Nǐ zhè duàn shíjiān zhège kòngquē shì zěnme shōu de ne?	T11	Judge:	All of them. How can you tell?
T8	Appellee agent:	Wǒ zhège shōufèi shì yèzhǔ tóngyì de.	T12	Appellee agent:	It can be seen from the charges, the receipts.
T9	Judge:	Nǎge yèzhǔ?	T13	Judge:	Did you consult all the property owners?
T10	Appellee agent:	Suǒyǒu yèzhǔ.	T14	Appellee agent:	We charged them all like this.
T11	Judge:	Suǒyǒu yèzhǔ. Zhè shì zěnme kàn chūlái de ne?	T15	Judge:	Do you mean, you charged them like this, no matter whether they agreed or not?
T12	Appellee agent:	Cóng shōufèi de qíngkuàng kěyǐ kàn chū. Shōufèi de shōujù.	T16	Appellee agent:	All were charged like this. We planned to refund the overcharged property owners when the new price was set.
T13	Judge:	Nǐmen xiàng suǒyǒu de yèzhǔ dōu zhēngqiú yìjiàn le ma?	T17	Judge:	Do you mean you told them: "the original approval now expires, but the Property Owners' Committee has not been set up, so during this period, the charge is still ¥2.6/m ² ", is that right?
T14	Appellee agent:	Suǒyǒu de dōu shì zhèyàng shōu de.	T18	Appellee agent:	Yes.
T15	Judge:	Jiùshì shuō nǐ bùguǎn yuànyì bù yuànyì de nǐ jiù zhèyàng shōu le?	T19	Judge:	What was the standard for charge in this period? Just ¥2.6/m ² ? Would it be refunded?
T16	Appellee agent:	Suǒyǒu de dōu shì zhèyàng shōu de. Dēng dīng le xīn de jiàgé duō shōu de zài tuì.	T20	Appellee agent:	No.
T17	Judge:	Jiùshì shuō nǐ gěi dàjiā jiǎng: Pīwén xiànzài yǐjīng guòqǐ le, yèzhǔ wěiyuánhui hái méiyǒu chénglì, xiànzài zhège kòngquē, réngrán àn liǎng kuài liǔ shōu. Shì zhège yìsi ba?	T21	Judge:	What do you mean?
T18	Appellee agent:	Shì.	T22	Appellee agent:	No meaning ▲
T19	Judge:	Zhè duàn shíjiān shōufèi biāozhǔn shì àn shénme kào de? Jiùshì liǎng kuài liǔ? Hái tuì bù tuì le?	T23	Judge:	▼ I just set the price, and charge accordingly?'
T20	Appellee agent:	Bù tuì.			
T21	Judge:	Nà zhè shì shénme yìsi ne?			
T22	Appellee agent:	Méishénme yìsi ▲			
T23	Judge:	▼ Wǒ jiù dīng le, jiù àn zhège shōu.			
T1	Judge:	Why did you charge according to this standard?			
T2	Appellee agent:	Because we had consulted the Bureau of Commodity Prices.			
T3	Judge:	You had consulted the Bureau of Commodity Prices?			
T4	Appellee agent:	Yes.			
T5	Judge:	You had consulted the Bureau of Commodity Prices of Nanjing? Did the Bureau approve? It allowed you to go on with the charge according to the standard, right?			
T6	Appellee agent:	The Bureau asked us to set up the Property Owners Committee as soon as possible.			
T7	Judge:	Right, you had not set up the Committee, had you? During this period, how did you charge the fee?			
T8	Appellee agent:	The property owners agreed to our charge.			

Extract 3 meets all the three requirements for coherence. First, let's analyze semantic coherence. Some key words or phrases, which are closely related to the topic of this stage, appear recurrently. For example, *shōufèi* 'charge' is used 14 times, *biāozhǔn* 'standard' 4 times, *wùjià jú* 'Bureau of Commodity Prices' 4 times, and *yèzhǔ wěiyuánhui* 'Property Owners' Committee' 4 times. The most important word '*shōufèi* 'charge' is scattered in the extract and is almost equally used by both speakers: 8 times by the judge and 6 times by the appellee agent, which shows that the whole extract is semantically linked up by this key term. Furthermore, the recurrent appearance of such key words as *shōufèi* 'charge', *biāozhǔn* 'standard', *wùjià jú* 'Bureau of Commodity Prices', and *yèzhǔ wěiyuánhui* 'Property Owners' Committee' shows that the interaction of given and new information is systematic. In a word, the whole extract is semantically coherent.

Another feature is topical coherence. This extract can be roughly divided into three parts: T1 to T7, T8 to T16 and T17 to T23. In the first seven turns, the judge inquires on the standard for charging the property management fee at a certain period of time, but the

appellee agent doesn't give a definite answer. In T8, the appellee agent attempts to distract the judge's attention by introducing a new topic: i.e., the charge was approved by the property owners. His strategy is successful and the judge is led to this "new" topic, which is the focus of attention in the next nine turns. However, in T17, the judge realizes the trick played by the appellee agent and tactfully leads the conversation back to the original topic, i.e. the standard for the charge (pay attention to *réngrán àn liǎng kuài liù shōu* 'the charge is still ¥2.6/m²' said by the judge). This shift of topic throws the appellee agent into an unfavorable situation, and he has to acknowledge that the standard for the charge at that period was ¥2.6/m². In this way, the judge accomplishes her objective, i.e. to find out the standard for charging the property management fee at the period of time in question. In a word, although the extract can be divided into three parts, it is coherent as a whole because of its topical coherence.

The extract is also contextually coherent. It is a part of a civil trial, which is a social activity conducted at a court. So it belongs to institutional discourse. Specifically, it is a part of court investigation, in which the judge inquires the appellee agent on some facts. Both speakers have their own purposes: the judge wants to find out the truth of the fact while the appellee agent tries to say something in favour of his client. Their purposes make them cooperate and also "struggle" with each other, which renders the extract integrated and coherent.

T17 deserves our special attention because it demonstrates historical coherence. The judge says, "Do you mean you told them: 'the original approval now expires, but the Property Owners' Committee has not been set up, so during this period, the charge is still ¥2.6/m²', is that right?". The judge's discourse refers back to what the appellee said in the past, which links the utterance here with its history, i.e. relevant discourse before this trial.

Coherence of a Criminal Trial

This section analyzes a criminal trial involving theft, the fact of which is as follows: Li (male, 16 years old) and Wu (male, 16 years old) dropped school and went to Jiangning District of Nanjing in August 2006. Lured by Zhao (who is at large), they began to participate in thefts with some other youngsters. Altogether Li participated in 11 thefts and Wu 8. Wu was caught on the spot in his last theft but Li, Zhao and another youngster fled the scene. After he was caught, Wu led

the policemen to the place where he and other youngsters stayed. Li was caught there but Zhao and other youngsters fled again. They were still at large when the case was tried on Jan. 15, 2007.

In a criminal trial, usually it's the prosecutor who interrogates the defendant. In this case, the interrogation of the prosecutor on the defendants takes up the major part of the trial and thus figures prominently. See the following extract in which the prosecutor interrogates Wu on the 8 thefts he participated in (The following extract is a modified version of the original transcript to save space):

Extract 4

- | | | |
|-----|-------------|--|
| T1 | Prosecutor: | Nǐshì zěnmé hé zhào mǒu mǒu, li mǒu mǒu tāmen rènshì de? |
| T2 | Defendant: | Wǒ 1 yuèfèn rènshì zhào mǒu mǒu de, dāngshí yě bù zhīdào tā gàn shénme de. |
| T3 | Prosecutor: | Nǐ shì shénme shíhòu lái nánjīng de? |
| T4 | Defendant: | Qùnián bā yuèfèn. Nèitiān shì zhào mǒu mǒu jiào wǒ guòlái shuō péi tā wán jǐ tiān, yě méiyǒu shuō guòlái gānshénme. |
| T5 | Prosecutor: | Bǎ nǐ jiē guòlái zhīhòu, nǐ dì yīcì dàoqiè zhào mǒu mǒu yǒu méiyǒu gēn nǐ jiǎng qù gānshénme? |
| T6 | Defendant: | Méiyǒu. Dào le nà biān yǐhòu tā cái gēn wǒ jiǎng qù tóu dōngxī, dāngshí wǒ jiù zài wàimiàn wàngfēng. |
| T7 | Prosecutor: | Chú liǎo wàngfēng yǐwài nǐ hái yǒu shé me xíngwéi? |
| T8 | Defendant: | Dì yīcì méiyǒu. |
| T9 | Prosecutor: | Dì yīcì dì dìdiǎn nǐ zhīdào ma? |
| T10 | Defendant: | Zhīdào, hòulái biànrèn le. |
| T11 | Prosecutor: | Tāmen tōu le shénme dōngxī nǐ zhīdào ma? |
| T12 | Defendant: | MP3, xiǎo língtōng, diànnǎo nèicún tiáo, dōngxī tóu lái zhīhòu fàng zài zhào mǒu mǒu nà. |
| T13 | Prosecutor: | Dì èr cì ne? |
| T14 | Defendant: | Tóngyī tiān xiàwǔ, háishi wǒmen sì gèrén, wǒ yě jìnqù le, zhào mǒu mǒu bāi chuānghù, ránhòu li mǒu mǒu jìnqù bāmén dǎkāi, wǒmen jiù dòu jìnqù le, zhè yīcì tōu le xiàngliàn yītiáo, jīn jièzhǐ èr gè, yínyuán sān gè, Xiànjīn bù qīngchū. Zhèxiē dōngxī dū shì wǒmen zìjǐ zhǎo, ránhòu fàng dào yīqǐ de. |
| T15 | Prosecutor: | Shǒushì hòulái zěnmé chūlǐ le? |
| T16 | Defendant: | Wǒmen yīqǐ qù mài diào le. Mài le 1350 yuán. Zhèxiē qián zhíjiē jiù gěi zhào mǒu mǒu le. Hòulái dài jīa yì qǐ chīfàn yòng diào le. |
| T17 | Prosecutor: | Dì sāncì ne? |
| T18 | Defendant: | Háishi wǒmen sì gèrén, zài yīgè xiǎoqū de yī lóu, yóu zhào mǒu mǒu bāi chuānghù, li mǒu mǒu zuān jìnqù, dǎkāi |

		mén fàng wǒmen jìnqù, zhè cì tōu le yìng zhōnghuá 6 bāo, wǔ liáng chūn 2 píng, jiǔ mài le 90 kuài qián, yān rénjiā bù shǒu, yīnwéi zhè shì chūkǒu xiāngyān, hòulái wǒmen jiù zìjǐ chōu diào le. Zhègè qián yěshì fàng zài zhào mǒu mǒu nà, wǒmen dàjiā yì qǐ huā diào le.	T3	Prosecutor:	When did you come to Nanjing?
			T4	Defendant:	Last August. That day Zhao called me to come to stay with him for several days, but didn't tell me what to do after I came.
			T5	Prosecutor:	After you came, in your first theft, did Zhao tell you what to do?
T19	Prosecutor:	Dì sīcì ne?	T6	Defendant:	No. He didn't tell me about the theft until we arrived at the site. I acted as the watchman outside the site.
T20	Defendant:	Wǒmen sì gèrén zài yīgè diàn límiàn, tōu le 500 kuài qián, fàng zài zhào mǒu mǒu nà, dàjiā yì qǐ huā le.	T7	Prosecutor:	Besides keeping watch, what else did you do?
T21	Prosecutor:	Dì wǔ cì ne?	T8	Defendant:	Nothing else.
T22	Defendant:	Sān gèrén, méiyǒu zhào mǒu mǒu, zhè cì shì lì mǒu mǒu bāi chuānghù de, ránhòu wǒmen dàjiā yì qǐ jìnqù tōu le xiànjīn rénmínbì 100 duō yīdiǎn, dàgài yǒu 120 kuài qián. Zhègè qián wǒmen ná huìqù zhīhòu gěi le zhào mǒu mǒu.	T9	Prosecutor:	Do you know the site of the first theft?
			T10	Defendant:	Yes. I identified it later.
			T11	Prosecutor:	What did they steal, do you know?
T23	Prosecutor:	Dì liù cì ne?	T12	Defendant:	MP3, PHS, computer memory bar. After the theft, the stolen things were kept by Zhao.
T24	Defendant:	Háishì wǒmen sān gèrén, méiyǒu zhào mǒu mǒu, zhè cì shì lì mǒu mǒu bāi chuānghù de, wǒmen sān gèrén yīqǐ jìnqù, zhè cì tōu le huángjīn xiàngliàn yītiáo, èr méi jièzhǐ, yùpèi yīgè, xiànjīn dēng.	T13	Prosecutor:	What about the second time?
			T14	Defendant:	The same afternoon, still the four of us, I also went in, Zhao broke the window, and then Li went in to open the door, then we all went in. This time we stole one necklace, two gold rings, and three silver ingots. The amount of cash is not clear. We found these things separately, and then put them together.
T25	Prosecutor:	Shǒushì dào nǎ qù le?			
T26	Defendant:	Mài le 2140 yuán. Shì lì mǒu mǒu qù mài de.			
T27	Prosecutor:	Nà nǐ zěnme zhīdào de?	T15	Prosecutor:	How did you deal with the jewelry?
T28	Defendant:	Lì mǒu mǒu mài liǎo zhīhòu gěi le zhào mǒu mǒu de, suǒyǐ wǒ jiù zhīdào le.	T16	Defendant:	We sold them together, getting¥1350. We directly gave the money to Zhao. Then we spent it on meals.
T29	Prosecutor:	Dì Qīcì ne?	T17	Prosecutor:	What about the third time?
T30	Defendant:	Wǒmen sì gèrén yīqǐ jìnqù de, tōu le shǒujī, zhōng héng pái MP4, xiànjīn.	T18	Defendant:	Still the four of us, on the first floor of a building in a residential village. Zhao broke the window; Li went in and opened the door to let us in. This time we stole six packs of hard Zhonghua cigarettes, two bottles of Wu Liang Chun spirits, which were sold, getting¥90. However, people did not accept the Zhonghua cigarettes, because they were export cigarettes, then we smoked them ourselves. The money was also given to Zhao and we spent it together.
T31	Prosecutor:	Zhèxiē dōngxi hòulái zěnme chǔlǐ le?			
T32	Defendant:	Shǒujī,MP4 bèi zhuā de shíhou gěi kǒu le, xiànjīn fàng zài zhào mǒu mǒu nà le.			
T33	Prosecutor:	Zuìhòu yīcì ne?			
T34	Defendant:	Wǒmen sì gèrén yīqǐ qù de. Zhào mǒu mǒu bāi kāi chuāng hù, ránhòu wǒ zuān jìnqù, tōu le 200 duō kuài qián xiànjīn, èrtiáo xiàngliàn, èr zhǐ jièzhǐ zhèxiē dōngxi bèi zhuā de shíhou dōu gěi kǒu le.			
T35	Prosecutor:	Nǐ shì rúhé pī fà xiàn de?	T19	Prosecutor:	What about the fourth time?
T36	Defendant:	Wǒ tōu le dōngxi zhǔnbèi dǎkǎi mén ràng rén fà xiàn de, nàrén zài wūzi wàimiàn de.	T20	Defendant:	The four of us went in a shop and stole ¥500. The money was kept by Zhao and then spent by us together.
T37	Prosecutor:	Nǐ dǎkǎi mén de shíhou sān gèrén zài bùzài?	T21	Prosecutor:	What about the fifth time?
T38	Defendant:	Bùzài?	T22	Defendant:	Three of us, without Zhao. This time Li broke the window, and then we all went in and stole a little more than ¥100 in cash, about ¥120. After we got back, we gave the money to Zhao.
T39	Prosecutor:	Kāimén zhīhòu nǐ yǒu shé me xíngwéi?			
T40	Defendant:	Wǒ pǎo chūlái lí tāmen jiā de dàmén bù dào shí mí de yàngzi, bèi pàichūsuǒ de rén zhuā zhù le. Fāxiàn wǒ de rén méiyǒu zhuī wǒ.	T23	Prosecutor:	What about the sixth time?
'T1	Prosecutor:	How did you get to know Zhao and Li?	T24	Defendant:	Still three of us, without Zhao, This time Li broke the window, and then we all went in. This time we stole a gold necklace, two rings, a jade pendant, cash and so on.
T2	Defendant:	I got to know Zhao in January; I did not know what his job was.			

T25	Prosecutor:	Where did the jewelry go?
T26	Defendant:	They were sold, getting ¥2140. Li sold them.
T27	Prosecutor:	How did you know?
T28	Defendant:	Li gave the money to Zhao after he sold the jewelry, so I knew.
T29	Prosecutor:	What about the seventh time?
T30	Defendant:	The four of us went in together. We stole a mobile phone, a Zhongheng MP4, and cash.
T31	Prosecutor:	How did you deal with these things?
T32	Defendant:	The mobile phone, MP4 were confiscated when we were arrested; the cash was kept by Zhao.
T33	Prosecutor:	What about the last time?
T34	Defendant:	The four of us went together. Zhao broke the window, and then I went in and stole ¥200 in cash, two necklaces and two rings. All of these were confiscated when we were arrested.
T35	Prosecutor:	How were you found?
T36	Defendant:	When I opened the door after the theft. The person was outside the house.
T37	Prosecutor:	Were the other three there when you opened the door?
T38	Defendant:	No.
T39	Prosecutor:	What did you do after you opened the door?
T40	Defendant:	I ran out and was caught by the police within ten meters from the door. The person who had found me did not chase me.

Liao (2003: 385) points out that in trials, questions and answers themselves are 'interactional entities' (or macro speech acts); the effects and results of the inner interactions of each side are their general purposes. Furthermore, the questions and answers together constitute an 'interactional entity', so the collision of the interactions--irrespective of the degree of cooperation--is to lead to an effect, which not only acts on the two sides of the interaction, but, more importantly, influences the judge, because the judge will make the decision according to this effect.

In Extract 4, the prosecutor interrogates Wu on the 8 thefts he participated in and tries to prove that he has committed the crime and therefore is guilty. In the first four turns, the prosecutor inquires into some important facts related to the 8 thefts, which serves as a preparation for the main interrogation. T5 to T40 is the interrogation on the 8 thefts, in which T5 to T12 is on the first theft, T13 to T16 on the second, T17 and T18 on the third, T19 and T20 on the fourth, T21 and T22 on the fifth, T23 to T28 on the sixth, T29 to T32 on the

seventh, and T33 to T40 on the eighth. Each question asked by the prosecutor has a specific purpose, i.e., to seek an answer. Each part (questions and answers on a specific theft) also has a purpose, i.e., to find out what crime the defendant committed in that specific theft. The interrogation as a whole has its general purpose, i.e., to prove that the defendant has committed the crime and is guilty. So the extract is hierarchical in structure and purpose. Besides, the questions are organized in a logical order, i.e., from the first theft to the last, which is in accordance with "the sequence of knowing things according to conventions" (Zhang and Liu 2003: 4).

If we put all the questions asked by the prosecutor together, we can get a 'macro-question' (Liao 2003: 388), i.e. an accusing interrogation, which aims at proving that the defendant is guilty. See Extract 5 below:

Extract 5

Prosecutor:	How did you get to know Zhao and Li?
Prosecutor:	When did you come to Nanjing?
Prosecutor:	After you came, in your first theft, did Zhao tell you what to do?
Prosecutor:	Besides keeping watch, what else did you do?
Prosecutor:	Do you know the place for the first time?
Prosecutor:	What did they steal, do you know?
Prosecutor:	What about the second time?
Prosecutor:	How did you deal with the jewelry?
Prosecutor:	What about the third time?
Prosecutor:	What about the fourth time?
Prosecutor:	What about the fifth time?
Prosecutor:	What about the sixth time?
Prosecutor:	Where did the jewelry go?
Prosecutor:	How did you know?
Prosecutor:	What about the seventh time?
Prosecutor:	How did you deal with these things?
Prosecutor:	What about the last time?
Prosecutor:	How were you found?
Prosecutor:	Were the other three there when you opened the door?
Prosecutor:	What did you do after you opened the door?

From the above questions, we can see that in the form of questions, the prosecutor tells us a "story" (Eades 2010: 34), in which the defendant was first lured, then participated in the 8 thefts, and finally was caught by the police. The effect of this macro question is to show that the defendant did participate in the 8 thefts and played an important role, which leads to the

conclusion: the defendant is guilty. The defendant's answers (macro-answer) also prove this point. See Extract 6 below:

Extract 6

- Defendant: I got to know Zhao in January. I did not know what his job was.
- Defendant: Last August. That day Zhao called me to come to stay with him for several days, but didn't tell me what to do after I came.
- Defendant: No. He didn't tell me about the theft until we arrived at the site. I acted as the watchman outside the site.
- Defendant: Not in the first time.
- Defendant: Yes. I identified it later.
- Defendant: MP 3, PHS, computer memory bar. After the theft, the stolen things were kept by Zhao.
- Defendant: The same afternoon, still the four of us, I also went in, Zhao broke the window, and then Li went in to open the door, then we all went in. This time we stole one necklace, two gold rings, three ingots, the amount of cash is not clear. We found these things separately, and then put them together.
- Defendant: We sold them together, getting¥1350. We directly gave the money to Zhao. Then we spent it on meals.
- Defendant: Still the four of us, on the first floor of a building in a residential village, Zhao broke the window; Li went in and opened the door to let us in. This time we stole six packs of hard Zhonghua cigarettes, two bottles of Wu Liang Chun spirits, which were sold, getting¥90. However, people did not accept Zhonghua cigarettes, because they were export cigarettes, then we smoked them ourselves. The money was also given to Zhao and we spent it together.
- Defendant: The four of us went in a shop and stole ¥500. The money was kept by Zhao and then spent by us together.
- Defendant: Three of us, without Zhao. This time Li broke the window, and then we all went in and stole a little more than ¥100 in cash, about ¥120. After we got back, we gave the money to Zhao.
- Defendant: Still three of us, without Zhao, This time Li broke the window, and then we all went in. This time we stole a gold necklace, two rings, a jade pendant, cash and so on.
- Defendant: They were sold, getting¥2140. Li sold them.
- Defendant: Li gave the money to Zhao after he sold the jewelry, so I knew.
- Defendant: The four of us went in together. We stole a mobile phone, a Zhongheng MP4, and cash.
- Defendant: The mobile phone, MP4 were confiscated when we were arrested; the cash was kept by Zhao.
- Defendant: The four of us went together. Zhao broke the window, and then I went in and stole ¥200 in cash, two necklaces, two rings. All of these were confiscated when we were arrested.
- Defendant: When I opened the door after the theft. The person was outside the house.

- Defendant: No.
- Defendant: I ran out and was caught by the police within ten meters from the door. The person who had found me did not chase me.

The above answers of the defendant constitute another half of the "story" initiated by the prosecutor. In a sense, these questions fill in the blanks purposefully left by the prosecutor. Of course, in this version of "story" dominated by the prosecutor, what the defendant says is in service of the prosecutor's purpose and is thus disadvantageous for the defendant himself.

However, the defense attorney has another "story" to tell. See Extract 7 below:

Extract 7

- T1 Defense attorney: Nǐ shì shuǐ hǎn nǐ lái de?
- T2 Defendant: Zhào mǒu mǒu, tā hǎn wǒ lái wán, dāngshí tā yě zhīdào wǒ méiyǒu gōngzuò.
- T3 Defense attorney: Nǐ shì shénme shíhòu zhīdào tāmen shì qù dàoqiè de?
- T4 Defendant: Wǒ shíqián bù zhīdào, hòulái dào le dìfāng cái zhīdào.
- T5 Defense attorney: Nǐmen dàoqiè zhīqián yǒu méiyǒu fèn gōng?
- T6 Defendant: Zhào Mǒumǒu jiǎng guò, tā shuō tā fúzé bāi chuānghù, Lǐ Mǒumǒu jìnqù, ránhòu wǒmen yìqǐ jìnqù.
- T7 Defense attorney: Zuihòu yīcì nǐ shuō chū le mén bèi zhuā le, dāngshí shì gěi shuǐ fāxiàn le?
- T8 Defendant: Shì gěi zhè hù rénjiā de línjū fāxiàn le, yīnwèi tā kàn zhe wǒ jìnqù, jiù zài wàimiàn děng zhe wǒ.
- T9 Defense attorney: Cóng nǐ jìnmen dào jǐngchá lái dàgài yǒu duō cháng shíjiān?
- T10 Defendant: Shí jǐ fēnzōng.
- T11 Defense attorney: Who asked you to come?
- T2 Defendant: Zhao, he called me to come and play, at that time he knew I didn't have a job.
- T3 Defense attorney: When did you know they went to steal?
- T4 Defendant: I didn't know in advance, but only knew after I came to the site.
- T5 Defense attorney: Was there division of labor before the theft?
- T6 Defendant: Zhao said, he said he was responsible for breaking the window, Li went in, and then we went in together.
- T7 Defense attorney: The last time, you said, you were caught outside the door, who found you?

T8	Defendant:	I was found by a neighbour of this family, because he watched me go in, and just waited for me outside.
T9	Defense attorney:	How long was it between the time you entered the room and the time you were caught by the police?
T10	Defendant:	Over 10 minutes.'

The questions asked by the defense attorney and the prosecutor about the same facts are different, see Table 1.

Now, let's examine the differences between the questions asked by the defense attorney and the prosecutor in detail. In T1, the defense attorney asks *Nǐ shì shuí hǎn nǐ lái de?* 'Who asked you to come?', while the question asked by the prosecutor about the same fact is *Nǐ shì shénme shíhou lái nánjīng de?* 'When did you come to Nanjing?' The difference between the two questions is that the former shows that the reason for the defendant to come to Nanjing is 'he was asked by someone'; while the latter means that the defendant came to Nanjing on his own initiative, without being asked by anyone. So, the former implies that the defendant was lured or even controlled by someone to participate in the thefts while the latter has no such implications.

In T3, the defense attorney asks *Nǐ shì shénme shíhou zhīdào tāmen shì qù dàoqiè de?* 'When did you know they were going to steal?'; while the prosecutor's question about the same fact is *Nǐ dì yīcì dàoqiè zhào mǒu mǒu yǒu méiyǒu gēn nǐ jiǎng qù gànshénme?* (In your first theft, did Zhao tell you what to do?) The difference is quite obvious: 1). the nature of the defendant's behavior is different according to the questions: in the former, the defendant seems to have nothing to do with the theft because it was 'they' who 'were going to steal', so the defendant is depicted as a

bystander in the first theft. However, in the prosecutor's question, the defendant is presupposed to be a participant in the theft. Notice the part *nǐ dì yīcì dàoqiè* 'your first theft'; 2). Different types of questions are asked. The former is a so-called 'wh' question, beginning with *Shénme shíhou* 'When', while the latter is a 'yes/no' question, which requires a 'yes' or 'no' answer. The difference is that the former gives the defendant an opportunity to make some statement which is favorable to him while the latter sets tight limits on the content of the defendant's answer (Fairclough 1992: 141), which leaves little room for the defendant to speak for himself.

In the third pair, the question asked by the defense attorney is *Nimen dàoqiè zhīqián yǒu méiyǒu fèn gōng?* 'Was there division of labor before the theft?' while the prosecutor's question is *Chú liǎo wàngfēng yì wài nǐ hái yǒu shé me xíngwéi?* 'Besides keeping watch, what else did you do?'. It should be pointed out that both the defense attorney and the prosecutor know that there was division of labor before the theft, and the task for the defendant was to keep watch, which was the least important role in the theft. So the purpose for the defense attorney is to show that the defendant played a minor role in his first theft. In contrast, the prosecutor's question presupposes that the defendant did something else besides keeping watch. His purpose is to induce the defendant to say more about what he did in the theft, which is of course detrimental to the defendant.

In T9, the defense attorney asks *Cóng nǐ jìnmen dào jǐngchá lái dàgài yǒu duō cháng shíjiān?* 'How long was it between the time you entered the room and the time you were caught by the police?' The prosecutor doesn't ask any question about this fact. So the

Table 1: Questions Asked by the Defense Attorney and the Prosecutor

Questions asked by the defense attorney	Questions asked by the prosecutor
1. Nǐ shì shuí hǎn nǐ lái de? 'Who asked you to come?'	1. Nǐ shì shénme shíhou lái nánjīng de? 'When did you come to Nanjing?'
Nǐ shì shénme shíhou zhīdào tāmen shì qù dàoqiè de? 'When did you know they went to steal?'	2. Nǐ dì yīcì dàoqiè zhào mǒu mǒu yǒu méiyǒu gēn nǐ jiǎng qù gànshénme? 'In your first theft, did Zhao tell you what to do? '
Nimen dàoqiè zhīqián yǒu méiyǒu fèn gōng? 'Was there division of labor before the theft?'	Chú liǎo wàngfēng yìwài nǐ hái yǒu shé me xíngwéi? 'Besides keeping watch, what else did you do?'
4. Cóng nǐ jìnmen dào jǐngchá lái dàgài yǒu duō cháng shíjiān? 'How long was it between the time you entered the room and the time you were caught by the police?'	No.

purpose for the defense attorney to ask this question deserves notice. By asking this question, he maybe wants to show that it was a short period between the time the defendant entered the room and the time he was caught by the police. In such a short time, the defendant couldn't steal a lot of things and thus couldn't cause serious harm to the owner of the house.

In a word, in this extract the defense attorney tries to prove that: 1) the defendant was lured by someone to participate in the thefts; 2) the defendant played a minor role in the thefts; and 3) his behavior didn't cause serious harm to the society. The overall purpose for the defense attorney is to mitigate the punishment upon the defendant. All the questions are in service for the same general purpose, so they are topically coherent. Furthermore, the extract has contextual and semantic coherence because it is a part of court interrogation and all the questions are about the defendant's thefts and thus semantically related to each other. Last but not least, the extract is coherent historically, because it refers back to what Zhao (a key figure in the thefts) said in the thefts (see T4 and T6).

CONCLUSION

Courtroom discourse is purpose-driven and coherence is essential for the realization of purpose. This paper analyzes the audio recording transcripts of two trials in China and finds that courtroom discourse is coherent semantically, topically, contextually, and historically. The findings can shed light on the linguistic mechanisms of coherence in Chinese courtroom discourse.

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