Against the Cartographic view that Vietnamese thì is a topic marker, and that Vietnamese projects a Topic Phrase (Cao 1998; Duffield 2007; Tran 2009; Michaud & Brunelle 2015), the paper argues that the particle is a contrast particle in the spirit of Neeleman and Vermeulen (2012). The exchange in (1) indicates that the particle is appropriate in non-topical contexts, giving rise to the dislocation of the wh-phrase and the focus.

(1) a. Ai thì Ba giúp tì?
   who PRT Ba help
   ‘Who will Ba help?’
b. Nam thì Ba giúp tì
   Nam PRT Ba help
   ‘Ba will help Nam.’

Dislocation is also observed in contrastive topic context.

(2) a. Tôi không biết ai mua trà CT, nhưng
   I not know who buy tea, but…
   ‘I don’t know who bought the tea, but …

b. Cà phê CT thì Nam mua tì
   coffee PRT Nam buy
   ‘Nam bought the coffee.’

Semantically, the contrast particle yields a contrast component in addition to the ordinary meaning. Specifically, the contrast component of (1a) suggests that there exists a set denoted by the D-linked wh-phrase alternative to the expressed non-D-linked one such that the speaker cannot or does not want to make an enquiry about. The contrast component of the contrastive focus (1b) conveys that there is at least one alternative y to the focus Nam such that it is not the case that the speaker will help y. Likewise, that of the contrastive topic (2b) states that there is at least one alternative such that the speaker cannot make or finds it difficult to make an assertion about.