

Kang Xu
Graduate student
University of Calgary

On the syntax of Mandarin Sentence-Final Particles: A neo-performative analysis

Traditionally, Mandarin sentence-final particles have been treated as acategorial and therefore do not occupy a position in the syntactic structure (Biberauer, Holmberg, and Roberts 2007, 2008, 2014). However, some recent work have attempted to determine the possible syntactic status of these particles that occur at the very right edge of Mandarin clauses. For instance, Pan (2014, 2017, 2019) and Paul (2005, 2014) propose that sentence-final particles are in the very high CP-periphery. In particular, Paul and Pan (2017) argue that Mandarin CP can be casted into a split CP structure (à la Rizzi 1997) with the addition of a speaker/hearer related projection (Attitude Phrase) above Rizzi's ForceP. AttitudeP (CP) is headed by a group of attitude particles that encodes the participants' point of view and subjective judgement.

In the present paper, contra Paul and Pan (2017), I argue that attitude particles are not complementizers. Adopting Wiltschko's (2020) neo-performative theoretical framework, I propose that Mandarin attitude particles appear in an interactional layer of structure above CP (Ground_{speaker} layer and Response layer in the sense of Wiltschko 2020). Specifically, attitude particles such as *ba* appears in the Ground_{speaker} Phrase and encodes speakers' positive attitude towards a proposition. On the other hand, particles such as *ha* appears in the Response Phrase and indicates that the speaker requests a response from the addressee. I show that the present analysis is superior to the former Attitude CP analysis because it provides satisfactory account to cross-dialectal variations and some long-standing poorly understood restrictions on the rigid word order among attitude particles.

Key words: Mandarin, sentence-final particles, attitude phrase

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