

Chinese SFP *ma*: An I-element not a C-element

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Chinese sentence final particle (SFP) *ma* is a question marker for yes-no questions, following either a positive statement (1) or a negative one (2).

(1) ni qu tushuguan ma?
you go library SFP
'Will you go to the library?'

(2) ni bu qu tushuguan ma?
you not go library SFP
'Will you not go to the library?'

The generative literature generally assumes that the sentence-final particle *ma* is at the C-domain (Cheng 1991; Simpson & Wu 2002; Hsieh & Sybesma 2008; Paul 2014; Wang & Xu 2014; Pan & Paul 2016). An alternative is to take *ma* as a disjunctive question marker (Biberauer, et al. 2014; Holmberg, 2016).

Following Holmberg's (2016) Polarity phrase hypothesis, the present article provides evidence that the SFP *ma* is base-generated at the polarity head [\pm Pol], a head at the highest position in the I-domain. Evidence comes from the grammaticalization of the SFP *ma* from the negative marker *wu* (Wu 1997). However, different from Holmberg's disjunctive analysis, the present analysis assumes that it is the VP-to-Spec movement that leads to the sentence finality of *ma*. Thus the primary structure of (1) is:

(3) [Q-force [_{CP} [\pm Pol]_i C [_{IP} Spec I [_{PolP} [\pm Pol]_i VP]]]]
→[Q-force [_{CP} [\pm Pol] C [_{IP} ni I [_{PolP} *ma* [_{VP} qu tushuguan]]]]]
→[Q-force [_{CP} [\pm Pol] C [_{IP} ni I [_{PolP} [_{VP} qu tushuguan]_i *ma* t_i]]]]

The complement-to-Spec movement is allowed in Chinese (Lin 2005), for example:

(4) ta mai shu qu le. (adapted from Lin 2005: 7)
he buy book go PERF
'He went out for buying books.'
→[_{AspP} ta [_{Asp'} le [_{quP} qu [_{VP} mai shu]]]]]
→[_{AspP} ta [_{Asp'} le [_{quP} [_{VP} mai shu]_i qu t_i]]]
→[_{AspP} ta [_{Asp'} [_{quP} [_{VP} mai shu]_i qu t_i]_j le [_{quP} [_{VP} mai shu]_i qu t_i]_j]]]

Comparatively, the present I-element analysis supports Kayne's (1994) Linear Correspondence Axiom, Holmberg's (2000) Final-over-Final Constraint, and the general assumption that a question has a question variable within its IP (cf. Holmberg 2016). More importantly, it provides a unified base for cross-linguistic variations of sentence initial/middle/final particles of yes-no questions.

Such variations can be attributed to head movement or phrasal movement. For example:

(a) Sentence initial particle (SIP)

- (5) Lu tuu a sii? (Xoo language) (Xu & Zhang 2011: 63)
SIP person TNS come
 ‘Is that person here?’
 → [Q-force [CP Lu_i C [IP tuu I [P_{oIP} t_i [TP a sii]]]]] (by overt head movement)

(b) Sentence middle particle (SMP)

- (6) ni ge shang jie? (KE-VP questions in Chinese dialects)
 you KE go street
 ‘Do you go shopping?’
 → [Q-force [CP [±Pol] C [IP ni I [P_{oIP} ge [VP shang jie]]]]] (via base-generation)

(c) Sentence final particle

- (7) ni qu tushuguan ma? (= ex.1)
 → [Q-force [CP [±Pol] C [IP ni I [P_{oIP} [VP qu tushuguan]_i ma t_i]]]] (via Complement-to-Spec movement)

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