A new syntactic analysis of Mandarin sentence-final particles

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In Mandarin Chinese, the term sentence-final particle (SFP) has been used to describe a class of linguistics items whose categorial status is not clear (e.g. their functions depend on the specific context), as shown in (1a-c).

(1) a. Women ershi si ge **le**
        we   twenty four CL **particle**
   "Now there are twenty four of us."
   b. Zhangsan   mingtian   qu Jianada **ma**
      Zhangsan (name)   tomorrow   go Canada **particle**
   "Is Zhangsan going to Canada tomorrow?"
   c. Sanshi nian qian   hai   mei   you   shubiao   **ne**
      thirty years before still NEG   have mouse   **particle**
   "Thirty years ago, there didn't even exist anything like a computer mouse."

There is a debate in the literature as to whether SFPs are syntactically represented. Some researchers argue that SFPs are not represented in syntax (Biberauer, Holmberg, and Roberts 2007, 2008, 2014). However, other researchers assume that SFPs do play a role in syntax. Non-generative researchers such as Li (1924), Ding (1961), Hu (1962), Chao (1965), Lu (1980), Li and Thompson (1981), Zhu (1982), Wang (1998), Shao (2001) and Huang and Liao (2002) all point out that SFPs such as *ma* in (1b) can function as a Force marker. Recent generative analysis such as Pan (2019) proposes that SFPs are part of the CP structure. Pan (2019) suggests that Mandarin CP structure can be split into three subprojections [AttitudeCP [ForceCP [LowCP [TP...]]]]. Particles such as *le* in (1a) are analyzed as a LowC. Particles such as *ma* in (1b) are analyzed as a ForceC. Particles such as *ne* in (1c) are analyzed as a AttitudeC.

In this paper, I provide a new analysis of Mandarin SFPs. I discuss the potential shortcomings of non-generative and recent generative analysis on Mandarin SFPs. In opposition to Pan (2019), I argue that SFPs are not part of the CP structure. Instead, I adopt Wiltschko's (2021) interactional spine hypothesis which includes three distinct categories Ground$_{Speaker}$P, Ground$_{Addressee}$P and ResponseP above CP: [RespP [Ground$_{Addressee}$P [Ground$_{Speaker}$P [CP...]]]]. I suggest that Mandarin SFPs appear in this above CP interactional structure. I offer thirteen arguments to support the current proposal including 1) an extra syntactic position is needed for Pan's (2019) analysis; 2) strict word order among SFPs can be accounted for if we adopt the current proposal; 3) the interpretation of SFPs can be derived from their core interactional function; 4) co-occurring SFPs appear in a fixed word order Ground$_{Speaker}$<Ground$_{Addressee}$<Response; 5) so-called Force particles such as *a* can be analyzed as appearing in the above CP interactional structure; 6) so-called

yes/no question Force marker *ma* can be analyzed as Response particle; 7) subjectivity scale constraint supports the current proposal; among others. I aim to provide evidence to support that Mandarin SFPs appear in the interactional layer which immediately dominates the CP.

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