

When Sentence-Final Particles are not Final: Right Dislocation as Evidence Against a Last Resort Analysis

Yangyu SUN
Università di Padova

Wenli TANG
University of Geneva

Research Topic and Proposal This paper adopts a Cartographic approach to investigate the syntax of Sentence-Final Particles (SFPs) in Mandarin based on evidence from the Right Dislocation (RD). We propose that SFPs in Mandarin are initial C-heads which always attract to their specifier part of their complement, instead of the whole complement via a Last Resort strategy.

In Mandarin, when SFPs appear in RD, they are always “sentence-medial”. We show that some RD cases must be analyzed as a mono-clausal structure, and the head-final word order cannot be derived by a Last Resort analysis for SFPs, which would wrongly predict that SFPs are strictly sentence-final.

Background In the recent cartographic studies of the left periphery in Mandarin Chinese (Paul 2014, Pan 2015, Paul and Pan 2017, a.o.), **SFPs** have been analyzed as a range of final heads located in the functional hierarchy of the split CP. Pan (2020) challenges the head-finalness of SFPs and suggests that they are initial C-heads which end up in the final position due to the EPP feature they bear as phasal heads, which must be satisfied by moving their complement to the specifier position as a Last Resort strategy. **RD** in Chinese languages has been analyzed as a mono-clausal structure. Cheung (1997, 2009) analyzes RD in Cantonese as a result of a focus movement of the non-RD part to FocusP which precedes the RD part. Wei and Li (2018) revise Cheung’s proposal and show that the non-RD part is preposed to a DiscourseP higher than ForceP, instead of to FocusP. Sun (2021) further extends this idea and proposes that a single focus-fronting operation is not enough to derive all the possible word orders, and a GroundP (in the sense of Poletto and Pollock 2004) immediately lower than ForceP is required to hold the RD part.

Analysis

- (1) a. *Ta zuihou mai-le HUAWEI ma?*
she/he finally buy-LE Huawei SFP
b. *Zuihou mai-le HUAWEI ma ta (*ma)?*
finally buy-LE Huawei SFP she/he SFP
c. *Mai-le HUAWEI ma ta zuihou (*ma)?*
buy-LE Huawei SFP she/he finally SFP
d. *HUAWEI ma ta zuihou mai-le (*ma)?*
Huawei SFP she/he finally buy-LE SFP
'Did she/he finally bought a HUAWEI?'

1. MONO-CLAUSAL RD: In (1), (1-a) is the canonical word order, while (1-b), (1-c) and (1-d) are three possible RD variants with the same meaning of (1-a). These three RD instances clearly show that the SFP *ma* must precede the RD part, instead of following it, which results in the apparent non-final status of the SFP. Among these RD clauses, at least (1-c) cannot be analyzed as a bi-clausal structure (as proposed, for example, by Ott and De Vries 2014, 2016 for the RD in Germanic languages), since the RD part ‘she/he finally’ cannot stand alone as a grammatical clause. Only a mono-clausal analysis can account for the remnant property of the RD part. Thus, the SFP present in (1-c) is indeed not in a clause-final position.
2. TARGET OF THE SFP: The four sentences in (1) differ in the size of the portion to the SFP’s left but are all grammatical, as long as the focus ‘HUAWEI’ is contained there. In other

words, the SFP *ma* only obligates the focus's presence to its left, while the rest of the clause can optionally appear there. If we follow Cheung (1997, 2009) who proposes that different portions bigger than the focus can be pied-piped to the specifier of FocusP, then we can attribute the various pre-SFP possibilities to the “flexibility” of FocusP. We propose that it is exactly this FocusP that is moved to the specifier of the projection headed by the SFP (labeled as ForceP for convenience), rendering all the three RD variants in (1) derivable, while a Last Resort strategy cannot account for mono-clausal RD cases like (1-b), (1-c) and (1-d).

3. DERIVATION: Based on these observations and keeping the split-C heads analysis of SFPs, one must abandon the Last Resort strategy, which does not tolerate any type of remnant to the right of SFPs in the same clause as a necessary consequence of a Comp-to-Spec movement. Instead, we propose that SFPs should target a projection smaller than its complement. Take (1-c) for example, the step-by-step derivation is as follows (irrelevant steps are omitted): 1). move the subject from vP to TP; 2). move the whole vP to SpecFocusP as a pied-piping movement triggered by the focus ‘HUAWEI’; 3). move TP to SpecGroundP as the remaining elements in TP are all non-focalized given information; 4). move FocusP to SpecForceP as the SFP *ma* only mitigates the assertive force about the focus and has nothing to do with the background information. More justifications of these steps will be provided in the paper.

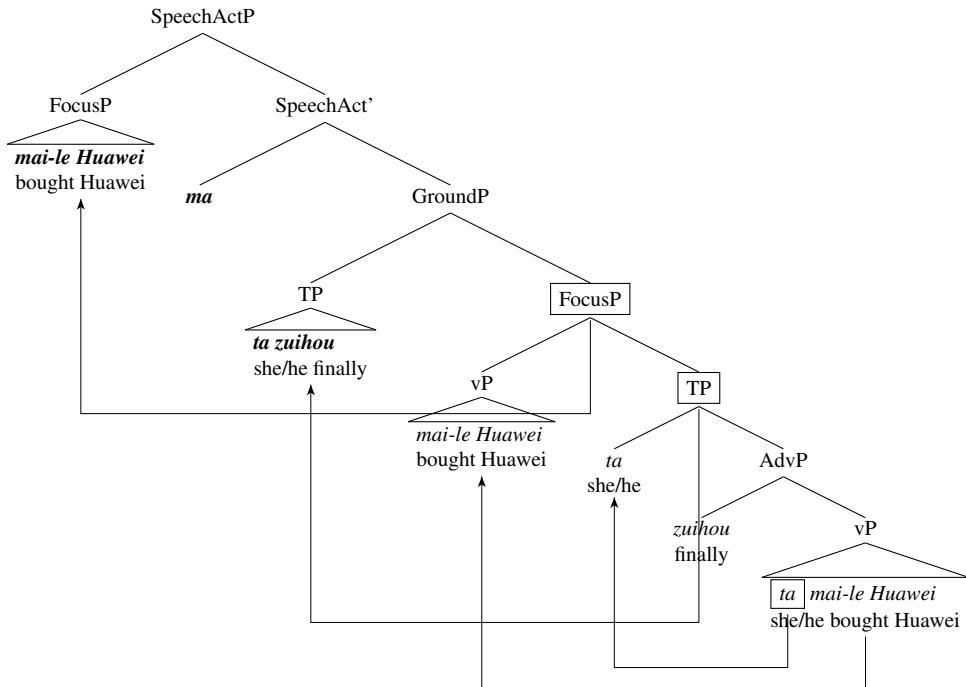


Figure 1: Derivation of (1-c)

- References** Cheung, L. Y-L., 1997. A study of right dislocation in Cantonese. PhD thesis. The University of Hong Kong; Cheung, L. Y-L., 2009. Dislocation focus construction in Chinese. *Journal of East Asian Linguistics* 18.3, pp. 197–232; Ott, D. and de Vries, M., 2014. A biclausal analysis of right-dislocation. In *Proceedings of NELS* (Vol. 43, No. 2, pp. 41-54); Ott, D. and de Vries, M., 2016. Right-dislocation as Deletion. *Natural Language & Linguistic Theory*, 34(2), pp.641-690; Pan, V. J. 2015. Mandarin peripheral construals at the syntax-discourse interface. *The Linguistic Review*, 32(4), pp. 819-868; Pan, V. J., 2020, Deriving Head-Final Order in the Peripheral Domain of Chinese. *Linguistic Inquiry*, 07, pp. 1-34; Paul, W., 2014. Why particles are not particular: Sentence-final particles in Chinese as heads of a split CP. *Studia Linguistica*, 68(1), pp.77-115; Paul, W., and Pan, V. J., 2017. What you see is what you get: Chinese sentence-final particles as head-final complementizers. Discourse particles. *Formal approaches to their syntax and semantics*, pp.49-77; Poletto, C. and Pollock J-Y., 2004. On the left periphery of some Romance wh-questions. *The Structure of CP and IP*, pp. 251–296; Sun, Y., 2021. The Syntax of Right Dislocation in Mandarin Chinese and Italian, a Comparative Study. PhD thesis. University of Padova; Wei, W. H. and Li, Y-H. A., 2018. Adverbial Clauses In Mandarin Chinese, Part 2: Ordering And Syntax-Discourse-Prosody Interface. *Linguistic Analysis* 42.1, pp. 235–297.