Some Notes on the Syntax of Tag Questions in Chinese

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There are three kinds of tag forms in Mandarin tag questions, such as V-not-V, V-particle, and Neg-V-particle (Hsin 2016), as illustrated in (1). Hsin (2016) proposes that the tag is the head of TagP, taking a discourse CP or event IP in the specifier position and a co-referenced null CP/IP, i.e., *pro*, in its complement position, as in (2). The tag has a "predication relation" with its complement and also with the CP/IP clause in the specifier from the co-indexation of the null CP/IP and the clause in the specifier.

While the analysis in (2) can provide explanations for certain observed phenomena in Mandarin, it is not without its challenges and encounters some issues that need careful consideration. First, it is theoretically unconventional to infer a predication relationship from the head-complement structure. Second, the co-indexation in (2) violates Binding Principle B. Third, analyzing phrases like *bu shi ma* 'isn't it' as the head of TagP poses a difficulty in syntax.

In this paper, it is argued under a cartographic approach that tags are in the internal conjunct of a coordinate structure CoP, i.e., the complement of Co, as shown in (3). The maximal projection of the tag is labeled as "XP" that can be realized as a clause with the speech act layer. If the tag is a phrase like *shi ma* 'is it' in Mandarin, it should be analyzed as a full clause with the speech act layer headed by the sentence-final particle *ma* and with some silent elements, one of which co-indexed with the clause in the specifier of CoP, as in (4). The proposed structure in (3) can be extended to the tags that are not formed by tag verbs, such as the functional element *ho2* in Cantonese, as in (5) (Lam 2014, Tang 2020). The main clause is in the specifier of CoP while the tag *ho2* is the internal conjunct of Co. The pause between the main clause and the tag could be regarded as an indication of the existence of the silent conjunction.

If the proposed coordinate structure for tag questions in (3) is on the right track, it conforms to the theory of incremental sentences, i.e., bipartite structures consisting of a host (the main clause) followed by an increment (also known as the tail) (Luke 2012). It has been hypothesized that sentence-final particles are rich if the increment is "hot" but are poor or even missing if the increment is "cool" (Tang 2019). The grammaticalization process of the elements in the increment, such as tags, provides insights into the emergence of sentence-final particles and the richness of sentence-final expressions cross-linguistically.

(1)   Zhangsan yijing zou-le,   shi-bu-shi/shi ma/ bu shi ma?
          Zhangsan already leave-Perf be-not-be be SFP not be SFP
          'Zhangsan has left, hasn't he?'

(2)   [$_{TagP}$ CP/IP$_i$ [$_{Tag'}$ Tag *pro$_i$*]

(3)   [$_{CoP}$ clause [$_{Co'}$ Co XP]

(4)   [$_{CoP}$ clause$_i$ [$_{Co'}$ Co [$_{XP}$ [*shi e$_i$*] *ma*]]

(5)   Daai6 seng1 zau6 dak1 ga3 la3 me1, ho2?
          big   voice then okay SFP SFP SFP Tag
          'What, can one get by just by being loud? I assume you'd agree it's a valid question, right?'