Waltraud Paul and Victor Junnan Pan

What you see is what you get: Chinese sentence-final particles as head-final complementizers

The present article presents an in-depth analysis of the head-final three-layered split CP realized by sentence-final particles (SFPs) in the SVO language Mandarin Chinese. These SFPs are shown to be fully-fledged functional heads with a complex feature make-up, on a par with C elements in e.g. Indo-European languages. Chinese SFPs select and project, as evidenced by the strict hierarchy for co-occurring SFPs in the split CP. This structure must be merged as such and cannot be derived by postulating movement from a head-initial CP. It straightforwardly invalidates empirically superficial statements that attempt to turn Chinese SFPs into a grammatical quantité négligeable in order to uphold problematic word order generalizations such as the Final-over-Final Constraint.

1 Introduction

In Chinese, zhùcí ‘particle’ has been used as a cover term for (mostly, but not exclusively monosyllabic) items whose categorial status is unclear. However, already in the 1980s, Zhu Dexi (1982) identified sentence-final particles (SFP) (yǔqì zhùcí ‘mood particles’) as a closed set of items, which he characterized as combining with the sentence as a whole and constituting three distributional classes. He obtained these classes by determining the paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations among SFPs: mutually exclusive SFPs were assigned to the same class, while co-occurring SFPs were assigned to different classes in terms of their strict ordering restrictions. Zhu Dexi’s (1982) three-partite division can

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Waltraud Paul: Centre de recherches linguistiques sur l’Asie orientale CNRS-EHESS-INALCO, Paris, e-mail: waltraud.paul@ehess.fr
Victor Junnan Pan: Laboratoire de Linguistique Formelle, CNRS & Université Paris Diderot, Paris, e-mail: victor.pan@univ-paris-diderot.fr

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be easily recast into a split CP à la Rizzi (1997, 2004), modulo the addition of an additional speaker/hearer-related projection (Attitude Phrase) above Rizzi’s ForceP. As in the languages examined by Rizzi (1997, 2004), the strict relative order observed in the Chinese split CP results from the fixed hierarchy among its subprojections.

The present article presents an in-depth analysis of the three-layered split CP realized by SFPs in Mandarin Chinese. It provides extensive evidence for their status as projecting and selecting C-heads, on a par with the C-heads in e.g. Romance and Germanic languages. This straightforwardly invalidates the various recurring statements by Biberauer, Holmberg, and Roberts (2007, 2008, 2010, 2014) – based on a superficial discussion of the two Chinese SFPs ma and ne – that SFPs are basically “acategorial” and therefore a quantité négligeable that does not “count” for grammar.

The organization of the article is as follows. Section 2 introduces the basic structure of the split CP in Chinese. Section 3 corrects some of the major misconceptions commonly encountered in the literature, among them the alleged optionality of SFPs. Section 4 begins with an examination of the “innermost” SFPs nearest to TP, labelled Low C here. Even though the SFPs realizing Low C are often described as tense/aspect-related, they are clearly located above TP. Section 5 turns to the second-highest level, i.e. ForceP. Section 6 discusses the topmost level, viz. the speaker/hearer-related AttitudeP. As in other languages, the exact semantic contribution of these SFPs is the most difficult to describe. Section 7 illustrates the strict order for co-occurring SFPs and shows it to reflect the hierarchy of the respective layers. Importantly, the resulting split CP is observed in root-contexts only. Section 8 examines the issue of SFPs from a typological perspective and invalidates current proposals claiming the non-existence of head-final CPs in VO languages. Section 9 concludes the article.

2 The three-layered split CP in Mandarin Chinese

Extending Lee Hun-tak’s (1986) analysis of the yes/no question SFP ma as C to all SFPs, Paul (2008, 2014, 2015) established a three-layered CP for Chinese: Low C < Force < Attitude. This split CP replicates Zhu Dexi’s (1982: 207–213) division of the SFPs into three distributional classes, based on their rigid relative ordering. As to be argued for in this article, this split CP needs to be refined insofar as Low CP and AttitudeP can be further divided into two subprojections.
The three layers in the split root CP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>C1 (Low C)</th>
<th>C2 (Force)</th>
<th>C3 (Attitude)</th>
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<tr>
<td>le currently relevant state</td>
<td>éryǐ ‘only’</td>
<td>a softening</td>
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<tr>
<td>láizhe recent past</td>
<td>ba_{Imp} (advisative ba)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ma yes/no question</td>
<td>ma</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>zhene intensifier</td>
<td>ne</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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(N.B. The semantic values indicated for each SFP can give a rough approximation only.)

The first class of SFPs (corresponding to our Low C) occurs nearest to the sentence (TP) and is claimed to express “tense” by Zhu Dexi (1982: 9); it comprises SFPs such as le and láizhe, cf. (2)–(3) below. The SFP éryǐ (not discussed by Zhu Dexi [1982]) also belongs to Low CP, but in a subprojection higher than the one hosting láizhe and le (cf. Section 3 below). The SFPs of the second class (Force) convey notions such as yes/no question (ma), confirmation-seeking question (ba_{Confirmation}) and imperative (ba_{Imp}), cf. (4) below. The third, “outermost” class of SFPs (Attitude), finally, is explicitly stated to be different from the two other classes, because it involves the speaker’s attitude or feelings; SFPs belonging to this class are e.g. a, ei etc., cf. (5) below. Zhu Dexi (1982: 208) emphasizes that co-occurring SFPs belong to hierarchically different levels. SFPs of the same class are mutually exclusive, such as e.g. le and láizhe, which both belong to the innermost class, cf. (3) below.

(2) Tā gāngcái hái zài bàngōngshì láizhe.¹
3sg just.now still at office LowC 'He was in his office just now.'

(3) Zuótiān xià yǔ le / láizhe
yesterday fall rain LowC / LowC / \{* le láizhe / *láižhe le \}.
LowC LowC/ LowC LowC 'It rained yesterday.'

¹ The following abbreviations are used in glossing examples: CLF = classifier; EXP = experiential aspect; NEG = negation; PL = plural; PRF = perfective aspect; PROG = progressive aspect; SG = singular; SUB = subordinator; 1/2/3 = 1st/2nd/3rd person.
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(4) a.  Nǐ míngnián qù Běijīng ma?
   2SG next.year go Beijing FORCE
   ‘Will you go to Beijing next year?’

b.  Nǐ jīntiān xiàwǔ zài lái ba.
   2SG today afternoon again come FORCE
   ‘Please come again this afternoon.’

(5)  \[ \text{CP TP} \text{Jīntiān xīngqīsān } \text{ei! Nǐ bié wàngle xiàwǔ děi shàng kè } \text{ei!}\]
   today Wednesday ATT 2SG NEG forget afternoon must attend class ATT
   ‘Today is Wednesday (mind you)! Don’t forget you have classes in the afternoon!’
   (slightly changed example from Zhu Dexi 1982: 213)

The highest layer established for Mandarin Chinese, AttitudeP, is absent from Rizzi’s (1997, 2004) original hierarchy, but is attested in other languages as well (cf. among others Munaro and Poletto [2006] for discourse-related SFPs in the Italian dialects Pagotto and Veneto, and Haegeman’s [2014] DiscourseP postulated for West-Flemish). In Mandarin Chinese, the Attitude head ei e.g. indicates that the speaker assumes the co-speaker to be up to date concerning the matter at hand, but nevertheless issues a reminder. This is reminiscent of German ja and doch as well as the particle to in Bangla and Hindi.2 As already observed by Zhu Dexi (1982), the SFPs realizing Low C (as “innermost” SFPs) are sensitive to the properties of the TP-internal predicate (cf. Section 3 below for further discussion) and in that respect are comparable to Rizzi’s FiniteP, which entertains a close relationship with the [± finite] nature of the extended verbal projection within TP. Given the controversial nature of the [± finite] distinction in Chinese, the more neutral label “Low C” has been chosen for this layer.

3 Against the so-called optionality of SFPs

As will become clear in the remainder of this article, whenever one intends to express the meaning encoded by a given SFP, this SFP is obligatory. For example, the “optionality” of the yes/no question Force head ma only exists insofar as a sentence remains acceptable without it, modulo the associated interpretational difference between a declarative and an interrogative sentence. The same observation

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2 Sentence (5) can be roughly translated into German as follows: Heute ist doch Mittwoch! Vergiss ja nicht, dass du heute nachmittag zum Unterricht musst!
Chinese SFPs as head-final complementizers holds for all SFPs in any given language, including those realizing AttitudeP. As pointed out by Biberauer, Haegeman, and van Kemenade (2014: 9) it is misleading to characterize discourse particles as “optional”, given that the absence of such a particle inevitably leads to a different interpretation. Accordingly, it does not make much sense to talk about “optionality” as a general feature of SFPs, as Biberauer, Holmberg, and Roberts (2014: 200) do: “In a survey of about 80 VO languages with final question particles, Bailey (2010, 2012) observed that these particles are very often optional (this is true of Mandarin ne and ma, for example).” [emphasis ours, W.P., V.J.P.]. Importantly, the alleged optionality of ne and ma is precisely not true, as well-known by everybody working on Chinese.

This is not meant to gloss over yes/no questions formed by a rising intonation alone (6c) (cf. Lu Jianming 1985: 236; Pan Victor Junnan 2011: 67), which do exist in Chinese, in addition to yes/no questions formed by adding the yes/no question SFP ma to a declarative sentence, cf. (6a)–(6b).

(6) a. Tā huì shuō bāfāliyàyü.  
3sg can speak Bavarian  
‘He can speak Bavarian.’
b. Tā huì shuō bāfāliyàyü ma?  
3sg can speak Bavarian FORCE  
‘Can he can speak Bavarian?’
c. Tā huì shuō bāfāliyàyü ↑?  
3sg can speak Bavarian  
‘Can he speak Bavarian?’

However, in many syntactic contexts the option of using intonation to encode a question is excluded.

In tag questions with bù shì ma ‘isn’t it (so)?’, the SFP ma is obligatory and cannot be “replaced” by a rising intonation.

(7) Nǐ zài Sītūjiātè jiāo shū, bù shì *(ma)?  
2sg at Stuttgart teach book not be FORCE  
‘You teach in Stuttgart, don’t you?’

3 While Biberauer, Holmberg, and Roberts (2014) refer to Bailey’s doctoral dissertation as Bailey (2012), elsewhere it is cited as Bailey (2013) (2013 being the year of submission). In the following, we settle for Bailey (2012/2013) in order to indicate that we refer to the same work as Biberauer, Holmberg, and Roberts (2014). Note that Bailey’s (2012/2013) starting point is that SFPs in VO languages such as Chinese only superficially violate the Final-over-Final Constraint postulated in Biberauer, Holmberg, and Roberts (2010, 2014). Cf. Section 5 below for further discussion.
Similarly, in the presence of *wh*-indefinite construals ‘something, someone’, a *yes/no* question requires the presence of *ma*, because otherwise the sentence – due to the rising intonation – is analysed as a *wh* question (cf. Victor Junnan Pan 2011: Ch. 5):

(8) a. *Nǐ xiǎng chī diǎn shénme ↑?*  
   2SG want eat a.bit what  
   ‘What do you want to eat?’

b. *Nǐ xiǎng chī diǎn shénme ma?*  
   2SG want eat a.bit what FORCE  
   ‘Do you want to eat a little something?’

(9) a. *Tā pà shéi huì dǎ tā ↑?*  
   3sg fear who will beat 3sg  
   ‘Who does he fear will beat him?’

b. *Tā pà shéi huì dǎ tā ma?*  
   3sg fear who will beat 3sg FORCE  
   ‘Does he fear that someone will beat him?’

In this respect, Chinese is on a par with English and many other languages, where a *yes/no* question can be either formed by subject-auxiliary inversion (SAI) or by a rising intonation. Evidently, this does not imply that they are equivalent, or that the existence of rising intonation renders SAI “optional”. Negative Polarity Items, for example, are licensed in SAI only, not in *yes/no* questions formed by rising intonation:

(10) a. *You saw anyone ↑?*  
   b. *Did you see anyone?*

Furthermore, as in Chinese, in English as well tag questions cannot be formed by a rising intonation, but require SAI instead:

(11) *You teach in Stuttgart, don’t you / *you don’t ↑?*


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4 Given that *ne* is *not* a *wh*-question typing particle à la Lisa Lai-Shen Cheng (1991), it does not qualify as an interrogative Force head and can therefore not be analysed as the overt realization of the null operator present in *wh* questions, either (*contra* Aoun and Li [1993]). For a critical appraisal of Lisa Lai-Shen Cheng’s (1991) *Clause typing hypothesis* in general, cf. Bruening (2007).
cf. (12), or in an A-not-A polar question (formed by the juxtaposition of the predicate in its positive and negative form; cf. [13]), the Attitude head ne is not obligatory, for the simple reason that ne does not encode the interrogative force. However, if one wants to signal the discourse function associated with ne, which \textit{inter alia} is to solicit the co-speaker’s attention, rendered here by “listen, and you…”, \textit{ne} is evidently obligatory (cf. Wu Guo 2005; Li Boya 2006; Victor Junnan Pan 2007, 2011, among others):

(12) a. \textit{Nǐ zuì xǐhuān hē nǎ}  
\hspace{1cm} 2SG most like drink which  
\hspace{1cm} \textit{ge páizi de déguó pǐjiǔ?}  
\hspace{1cm} CLF brand SUB German beer  
‘Which brand of German beer do you like most?’

b. \textit{Nǐ zuì xǐhuān hē nǎ}  
\hspace{1cm} 2SG most like drink which  
\hspace{1cm} \textit{ge páizi de déguó pǐjiǔ ne?}  
\hspace{1cm} CLF brand SUB German beer \textit{ATT}  
‘Listen, and you, which brand of German beer do you like most?’

(13) a. \textit{Tā huì bù huì shuō bāfāliyàyǔ?}  
\hspace{1cm} 3SG can neg can speak Bavarian  
‘Can he speak Bavarian?’

\hspace{1cm} \textit{Tā huì bù huì shuō bāfāliyàyǔ ne?}  
\hspace{1cm} 3SG can neg can speak Bavarian \textit{ATT}  
‘And he, can he speak Bavarian?’

Being a head realizing AttitudeP, \textit{ne} can also select a non-interrogative complement (cf. Section 6 below for further discussion):

(14) \textit{Déguó yǔyánxuéjiā kě duō *(ne)!}  
\hspace{1cm} German linguist really many \textit{ATT}  
‘There really are a lot of German linguists!’

As indicated, \textit{ne} is obligatory in the presence of the speaker-oriented emphatic adverb \textit{kě} ‘really’.

Finally, to round off this discussion of the alleged optionality of SFPs, the Low C \textit{le} is often required in order to syntactically “close off” a sentence (in the absence of any clearly definable meaning associated with it), the sentence in question simply being unacceptable without it. This is another well-known and broadly documented fact, as evidenced by e.g. the sixty pages in Li and Thompson (1981) devoted to the SFP \textit{le} alone (also cf. Section 4 below).
To sum up, the alleged “optionality” of SFPs invoked by Biberauer, Holmberg, and Roberts (2014) is not only incorrect for *ne* and *ma*, but for SFPs in Chinese in general, as to be amply documented in the remainder of this article. In order for the associated semantics to be encoded, the SFP must evidently be present.

## 4 Low CP

The SFPs realizing Low C can be further divided into two classes, viz. *láizhe* and *le*, on the one hand, and *éryǐ* ‘only’, on the other. As already stated above, *le* and *láizhe* as the “innermost” SFPs are sensitive to the properties of the sentence-internal extended verbal projection (e.g. aktionsart of the verb, type of negation etc.). Zhu Dexi (1982: 208) grasped this dependence of Low C on TP-internal material by characterizing them as “tense-related” and illustrated this in the minimal pair below:

(16) \[[\text{LowCP} \ [\text{TP} \ Xià \ yǔ] \ \text{le}]^{6}\]

\[\text{‘(Look), it’s raining.’} \ \text{(Zhu Dexi’s comment: It didn’t rain before.)}\]
\[(\text{Zhu Dexi 1982: 209)}\]

(17) \[[\text{LowCP} \ [\text{TP} \ Xià \ yǔ] \ \text{láizhe}]\]

\[\text{‘It was raining just now.’} \ \text{(Zhu Dexi’s comment: It just rained.)}\]
\[(\text{Zhu Dexi 1982: 209)}\]

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5 The Low C *le* in sentences such as (15) is obligatory, whereas it is unacceptable in (i). This pair with nearly identical lexical material provides additional evidence to show that the absence/presence of *le* is constrained by syntax, not by prosody. Thanks to a reviewer for asking us to be more precise on this point.

(i) \[\text{Wǒ hěn kāixīn *(le)!}\]

\[\text{1sg very happy LowC}\]

\[\text{‘I am happy!’}\]

6 Note that there is the homophonous perfective aspect verb suffix -*le* to be distinguished from the Low C *le*.

(i) \[[\text{LowCP} \ [\text{TP} \ jìntiān \ xià-\text{le} \ dà \ yǔ] \ \text{le}].\]

\[\text{today fall-PRF big rain LowC}\]

\[\text{‘(Look), it has heavily rained today!’}\]
On the basis of these examples, Zhu Dexi (1982: 209) proposed the following interpretative values: láizhe indicates that the event has occurred in the recent past, le signals that the situation at hand is (conceived of as) new. Naturally, this characterization is not meant to postulate tense as a verbal category for Chinese. It rather attempts to capture the semantic import of the SFP, which is also reflected in the constraints imposed on the complement type (TP or CP-subprojection) each SFP can select, to be examined in detail in the following sections. Since the description of le as signaling a new situation is not appropriate to cover all cases, we adopt Li and Thompson’s (1981: 240) more general characterization of the Low C le as indicating “currently relevant state”.

Though “tense-related”, Low C are clearly in the left periphery above TP, not at the vP edge within TP (contra Tang Sze-Wing [1998: 42, 51], among others, who locates Low Cs in the Tense head, with subsequent movement of T0 to C and of the TP-remnant to Spec, Low CP). As evidenced by the interpretation of sentence (18), the negation mei ‘have not’ inside TP only scopes over the vP, whence the indefinite reading for shénme ‘what’. It does not scope over láizhe; instead, it is láizhe that takes wide scope over the entire TP-complement. The same holds for le in (19), which relates the proposition (‘not going to Paris’) to the speech moment and signals that it does no longer hold.

\[(18) \quad \text{[LowCP} \text{[TP } \text{Wǒ gānggāng méi zuò shénme] [LowC láizhe ]]} \]
\[1s\text{g just.now neg do what } \quad \text{LowC} \]
\[‘\text{Just now, I didn’t do anything.’}\]
\[\text{NOT: ‘It is not the case that [I did anything just now].’} \quad \text{(RECENT.PAST>~)} \]

\[(19) \quad \text{[LowCP} \text{[TP } \text{Tā [méi [qù Bālí]] [LowC le ]]} \]
\[3s\text{g neg go Paris } \quad \text{LowC} \]
\[‘\text{He doesn’t go to Paris anymore.’}\]
\[\text{NOT: ‘He hasn’t been to Paris .’} \quad \text{(# \text{~> LE })} \]

The position of le above TP is also confirmed by (20b). Here le signals that previously, unlike the situation this year, he worked during minor holidays only and did take a few days off for Christmas. This is made explicit by the acceptability of kāishì ‘start’ in (20b), and its unacceptability in (20a):

\[(20) \quad \text{a. Tā jīnnián lián shèngdànjiē dōu (*kāishì) bù fàng jià.}\]
\[3s\text{g this.year even Christmas start NEG take holiday} \]
\[‘\text{He doesn’t even take holidays on Christmas this year.’}\]
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b. Tā jīnnián lián shèngdànjiē dōu
3sg this.year even Christmas all
(kāishǐ) bù fàng jià le.
start NEG take holiday LowC

‘He doesn’t even take holidays on Christmas (starting from) this year.’

Besides these data clearly showing the position of the Low C above TP, there are also principled objections against locating Low C in T₀ (and stipulating obligatory T-to-C movement). Given that Chinese lacks v-to-T movement (Huang C.-T. James 1994), it is rather ad hoc to postulate obligatory T-to-C movement; moreover, it must be excluded that after the verb has raised to Asp⁰, cf. (21a), it further moves on to T₀, picks up the SFP and raises as a complex head to C itself, cf. (21b):

(21) a. [TP Tā yǐjīng [AspP [Asp° qù-guò] [vp t_qu déguò]]] le.
3sg already go-EXP Germany LowC

‘He has been to Germany before.’

b. *[LowCP [TP tā yǐjīng [AspP [Asp° qù-guò] [vp t_qu déguò]] [C° qù-guò-le]].
3sg already go-EXP Germany go-EXP-LowC

In any case, as soon as one takes into account the Low C éryī, which can roughly be translated as ‘only; this is all I have to contribute’ and which is clearly not “tense-related”, the location of Low C in Tense is completely implausible.

(22) [LowCP [TP Wǒ zhǐbúguò shuò shuo] éryī].
1sg merely say say LowC

‘I’m just talking. (Don’t take me serious.)’

More precisely, as illustrated in the table in (1) above, éryī is located in the subprojection of Low CP that is higher than the one hosting le and láizhe, as evidenced by their co-occurrence in the order ‘{le/láizhe}+ éryī’(the opposite order being excluded).

(23) [LowCP [LowCIP [TP Tāmen gāngcái zhibúguò chǎo jià] [LowC1 láizhe]] [LowC2 éryī]].
3pl just.now merely quarrel fight LowC1 LowC2

‘They were only quarrelling right now (not fighting.), that’s all.’

While Low Cs clearly occupy a TP-external position in the left periphery, there is nevertheless an interaction with TP-internal material including temporal adverbs such as gāngcái ‘just now’:

(24) Tā gāngcái hái zài bàngōngshì láizhe / *le.
3sg just.now still at office LowC / LowC

‘He was in his office just now.’
There is a conflict between \textit{gāngcái} ‘just now, a moment ago’ and \textit{le}. \textit{Gāngcái} explicitly locates the event in the past, whereas \textit{le} relates the very same event to the speech time. However, this is not the case for \textit{láizhe}, which does not establish such a relation.

5 \textbf{ForceP}

The particles typing the clause belong to ForceP: \textit{yes/no} question \textit{ma}, confirmation seeking question \textit{ba}_{\text{Qconf}} and imperative \textit{ba}_{\text{imp}}. Note that a Force head not only \textit{can}, but \textit{must} determine the nature of the resulting sentence in terms of its respective clause typing features.

The presence of \textit{ma} is obligatory for question formation, on a par with SAI in English, \textit{modulo} the constrained possibility of forming questions by rising intonation discussed in Section 3 above.\footnote{As illustrated in (13) above, polar questions can also be in the form of \textit{A-not-A} questions. For the numerous differences between the latter and the \textit{yes/no} question with \textit{ma}, cf. Hagstrom (2005).}

\begin{enumerate}[a.]
\item \text{[TP \textit{Nǐ shì déguórén}.]}
  \text{2sg be German}
  \text{‘You are German.’}

\item \text{[\text{ForceP} [TP \textit{Nǐ shì déguórén} \text{[Force} \text{* (ma)\text{]}?}]
  \text{2sg be German \text{FORCE}}
  \text{‘Are you German?’}
\end{enumerate}

As illustrated in (26), the confirmation seeking Force head \textit{ba} neatly contrasts with the \textit{yes/no} Force head \textit{ma}, as evidenced by the different answering possibilities.

\begin{enumerate}[a.]
\item \text{[\text{ForceP} [TP \textit{Nǐ shì déguórén} \text{[Force} \text{ba}_{\text{Qconf}}\text{]}?}]
  \text{2sg be German \text{FORCE}}
  \text{‘You are German, aren’t you?’}

\item \text{\textit{Nǐ shì zěnme zhīdào de?}}
  \text{2sg be how know DE}
  \text{‘How come you know that?’}
\end{enumerate}

Importantly, (26b) would be completely infelicitous as answer for the \textit{yes/no} question with \textit{ma} in (25b).

Contrary to the information seeking question Force head \textit{ma}, \textit{ba}_{\text{Qconf}} is compatible with adverbs of the type \textit{dàgài} ‘probably’. Note that without \textit{ba}, (27) would be a declarative sentence.
The data above nicely confirm the contrast between these two types of question SFPs and highlight the different constraints at work for each SFP.

The SFP ba\textsubscript{IMP}, homophonous with the confirmation seeking question SFP ba\textsubscript{Qconf}, is called “advisative” by Chao Yuen Ren (1968: 807) because of its “softening” effect. Accordingly, an imperative containing ba\textsubscript{IMP} is understood as less harsh an order than the corresponding imperative sentence without ba\textsubscript{IMP} (also cf. Hu Mingyang 1981: 416):

\begin{equation}
\text{[\text{ForceP} [\text{TP} Nǐ dàgài shì déguórén] [\text{Force}^* ba\textsubscript{Qconf}/*ma]]?}
\end{equation}

\begin{equation}
\text{‘You probably are German, aren’t you?’}
\end{equation}

Note the rigid ordering between the Low C le and the Force head ba\textsubscript{IMP}, illustrating the hierarchy ‘LowCP < ForceP’.

Let us return now to the yes/no question Force head ma. Its analysis as Force head in a head-final CP dominating a head-initial TP and a likewise head-initial extended verbal projection challenges Biberauer, Holmberg, and Roberts’ (2014, and earlier versions) Final-over-Final Constraint (FOFC), which excludes the structure where a head-final XP immediately dominates a head-initial YP. (This echoes Dryer’s [1992, 2009] “near-absolute” universal that SFPs are excluded from VO languages such as Chinese.) In their attempt to maintain the FOFC notwithstanding languages such as Chinese, Biberauer, Holmberg, and Roberts (2014: 200–201) implement Bailey’s (2012/2013) analysis which they summarize as follows:

…” at least some of the apparently FOFC-violating final question particles may actually be initial negative disjunctions of an elided disjunct clause. The structure of these yes/no questions would be [Q [TP [OR-NOT TP]]], where ellipsis of the second TP, identical
with the first TP, leaves the negative disjunction as an apparently clause-final particle. (Biberauer, Holmberg, and Roberts 2014: 200–201). 8

However, putting aside the initial motivation for Bailey’s analysis, viz. to save the FOFC, several problems arise immediately.

First, in her attempt to defend the conjunction scenario for *ma, Bailey (2012/2013) glosses over the existence of true disjunctive questions with háishi ‘or’ in Chinese, where the second TP can never be elided (whether it is identical with the first TP or not), “stranding” háishi with or without bù:

(31) a. Míngtiān tā lái wǒ jiā háishi (tā) bù lái
   tomorrow 3sg come my home or 3sg NEG come
   wǒ jiā / *háishi (bù)?
   my home / or NEG
   ‘Will he come to my place or will he not come to my place tomorrow?’

b. Míngtiān nǐ lái wǒ jiā háishi wǒ qù nǐ jiā?
   tomorrow 2sg come my home or 1sg go your home
   ‘Will you come to my place or shall I go to your place tomorrow?’

Importantly, *ma in such a disjunctive question is completely ungrammatical.

(32) a. *Nǐ lái wǒ jiā háishi wǒ qù nǐ jiā ma
   2sg come my home or 1sg go your home FORCE

b. *Nǐ lái wǒ jiā ma háishi wǒ qù nǐ jiā ma?
   2sg come my home FORCE or 1sg go your home FORCE

This ungrammaticality holds irrespective of whether there is one *ma per clause or one *ma for the entire disjunctive structure. Both (32a) and (32b) are excluded because the yes/no question force is in conflict with the disjunctive question force inherent in háishi ‘or’ (cf. the discussion immediately below). In turn, this shows that yes/no questions with *ma and disjunctive questions must be distinguished and cannot be analysed uniformly (cf. C.T. James Huang 1982; Huang, Li, and Li 2009). As a result, the yes/no question with *ma cannot be derived from a disjunctive structure as postulated by Bailey (2012/2013).

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8 As indicated by the position of the Q-operator in the structure [Q [TP [OR-NOT TP]]], the Force head is assumed to take a disjunction of two TPs as complement. As we will show below, cf. (34), this is not the case in Chinese. By contrast, it is the disjunctive operator háishi ‘or’ itself that scopes over the respective propositions.
Furthermore, in addition to the interrogative disjunctors *haishi* ‘or’, Chinese also has the declarative disjunctors *huòzhě* ‘or’.

(33) a. Nǐ lái wǒ jiā huòzhě wǒ qù nǐ jiā.
2sg come my home or 1sg go your home ‘Either you come to my place or I go to your place.’

b. Nǐ lái wǒ jiā háishì wǒ qù nǐ jiā?
2sg come my home or 1sg go your home ‘Will you come to my place or shall I go to your place?’

As illustrated in (33b), with *haishi* ‘or’ instead of *huòzhě* ‘or’ we automatically obtain a disjunctive question. This is different from English and German where the formation of a disjunctive question not only requires ‘or’, but in addition requires SAI. In other words, *háishì* in Chinese involves both a disjunction and an interrogative operator. This is the reason for the incompatibility between a disjunctive question and the yes/no question SFP *ma* observed in (32) above.

Finally, Bailey’s (2012/2013) conjunction scenario fails completely in the case of disjunctions where each conjunct bears a sentence final particle, such as the Attitude head *ne* (discussed in detail in Section 6 below). Also note that the very presence of *háishì* ‘or’ itself is surprising in her account, given that the SFPs themselves are considered to be disjunctors.

(34) Nǐ qù Bólín ne háishì bù qù Bólín ne?
2sg go Berlin ATT or NEG go Berlin ATT ‘Listen, will you go to Berlin or not?’

Bailey (2012/2013) would have to postulate an underlying disjunction per SFP *ne* in order to account for its presence on each clause in a disjunction. She also wrongly predicts the acceptability of (35) where *háishì* ‘or’ – with or without *bù* ‘not’ – is “stranded” after deletion of the second TP conjunct:

(35) *Nǐ qù Bólín ne háishì (bù)?
2sg go Berlin ATT or NEG

In addition, the status of the “negative disjunction” OR-NOT in the structure [Q [TP [OR-NOT TP]]] is not clear. If it stands for a conjunction followed by negation after the deletion of the TP, *háishì* ‘or’ and *bù* ‘not’ will be stranded, which leads to the ungrammaticality of the sentence, cf. (35); if OR-NOT stands for a conjunction with negation incorporated, which seems to be taken to correspond to the semantics of the yes/no question Force head *ma*, the sentence is ungrammatical as well, cf. (36).
As already mentioned in the discussion of examples (12)–(14) above, the SFP *ne is not a wh-question “typing particle” à la Lisa Lai-Shen Cheng (1991). Instead, *ne is an Attitude head; it can select different types of questions, such as disjunctive questions, cf. (34) above, polar A-bù-A questions, cf. (37), rhetorical questions, cf. (39), as well as declaratives (cf. Section 6 immediately below). 9

(37) a. \[\text{ForceP}\ [\text{TP}\ Nǐ \ qù \ bù \ qù \ Fálánkèfú]?\]
   \hspace{1cm} 2SG go NEG go Frankfurt
   ‘Do you go to Frankfurt or not?’

   b. \[\text{AttP}\ [\text{TP}\ Nǐ \ qù \ bù \ qù \ Fálánkèfú}\ [\text{Att° ne }]?]\]
   \hspace{1cm} 2SG go NEG go Frankfurt ATT
   ‘Listen, do you go to Frankfurt or not?’

If *ne were a wh-question typing particle in the sense of Cheng Lisa Lai-Shen (1991), i.e. obligatory for wh-in-situ languages, its presence in polar A-bù-A questions would force us to treat the latter as a type of wh questions as well, clearly an undesired result. In addition, as is well known, the question interpretation obtains in the absence of *ne, both in polar A-bù-A questions, cf. (37a), and wh questions, cf. (38a):

(38) a. \[\text{ForceP}\ [\text{Force° Op}]\ [\text{TP}\ Nǐ \ xǐhuān \ nǎ \ zuò \ chéngshì]\]
   \hspace{1cm} 2SG like which CLF city
   ‘Which city do you like?’

   b. \[\text{AttP}\ [\text{ForceP}\ [\text{Force° Op}]\ [\text{TP}\ Nǐ \ xǐhuān \ nǎ \ zuò \ chéngshì}\ [\text{Att° ne }]?]\]
   \hspace{1cm} 2SG like which CLF city ATT
   ‘Listen, which city do you like?’

The discourse-related semantics associated with *ne can approximately be rendered by ‘listen, look’. Its alleged “clause typing” function is also invalidated by its compatibility with rhetorical questions, which are standardly

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9 Interestingly enough, Petrova (2017) observes and corrects a similar misanalysis for the Old High German particles *inu and *ia. These are in general considered to encode interrogative force, notwithstanding their occurrence in declarative sentences and their optionality in yes/no questions and wh questions. In fact, already in Old High German question formation involved verb fronting and wh fronting.
assumed to have a null negative operator as the head of ForceP (cf. Han and Siegel 1996).

\[(39)\]

(a) \[[\text{ForceP } \{\text{Force}^\sim\}] \{\text{TP} \ Tā năr huì shuō déyǔ\}]?! \]

3sg where can speak German

‘In which world can he speak German?!’ = ‘He cannot speak German at all!’

(b) \[[\text{AttP } \{\text{ForceP } \{\text{Force}^\sim\}] \{\text{TP} \ Tā năr huì shuō déyǔ\}] \{\text{Att}^\sim ne\}]?! \]

3sg where can speak German ATT

‘Oh, come on, he cannot speak German at all!’

Even though the exact semantic contribution of \textit{ne} is difficult to capture, a problem typical of Attitude heads (cf. Section 6 immediately below), it is evident that \textit{ne} is obligatory if the associated meaning is to be expressed.

### 6 AttitudeP

The SFPs realizing AttitudeP involve the speaker/hearer’s point of view and subjective judgements; this type of SFP is very widespread across language families. As illustrated in the examples below, the exact meaning of the SFPs in AttitudeP is difficult to pin down and strongly depends on the intonation and the context. This is typical of particles relating to the discourse, as \textit{inter alia} observed for the SFPs in the dialects Pagotto and Veneto from the North-Eastern area of Italy (cf. Munaro and Poletto 2006) and in West-Flemish (cf. Haegeman 2014). In this respect, Chinese is not “exotic” at all (\textit{pace} Biberauer and Sheehan [2011: 391]), but clearly patterns with other well-studied languages.\footnote{“[...] Cantonese and Mandarin have an exotic range of sentence-final discourse-particles (SFP) that can be combined to express subtly nuanced (and notoriously difficult to translate) meanings [...]” (Biberauer and Sheehan 2011: 391).} Accordingly, the characteristics of SFPs realizing DiscourseP (the equivalent of AttitudeP) established by Haegeman and Hill (2013) also hold for Attitude SFPs in Chinese. First, AttitudeP does not concern nor affect the truth value of the proposition at hand. This contrasts with the SFPs instantiating ForceP, where as we have seen, \textit{ba} \textsubscript{\textit{Qconfirmation}} conveys the speaker’s belief that the proposition is true, and \textit{ma} is a request as to the truth value (\textit{yes/no}) of the proposition. Attitude SFPs are thus fundamentally distinct from both
Low C and Force heads, an observation already made by Zhu Dexi (1982: 208), although not elaborated upon. Second, Attitude SFPs indicate the speaker’s commitment to the sentence content; they are interactional and imply the obligatory presence of a hearer. Third, Attitude SFPs are deictic, i.e. they are directly correlated with the speech act, but do not require a preceding utterance as “trigger”. Finally, Haegeman and Hill (2013) concede that it is difficult to determine the precise interpretive properties of Attitude SFPs, even though their semantic import is clearly discernible when comparing sentences with and without them.

Starting with the Attitude head ne discussed in the preceding section, its compatibility with a declarative clause is an additional argument against its alleged role as a wh-question clause typer:

(40) [AttP [TP München jīnnián dòngtiān méi xià xuě] ne]!
Munich this.year winter neg fall snow ATT

‘Surprisingly, it didn’t snow in Munich this winter!’

The Attitude head ma (henceforth ma_{Att}) implies that the speaker presupposes the hearer not to be up to date and provides a correction of the hearer’s belief, conveying something like ‘this is self-evident’, ‘you should know’, ‘don’t you see?’ (cf. Chao Yuen Ren’s [1968: 801] term “dogmatic assertion”):

(41) Tā bù shì Lǎolǐ ma? Ràng tā jìnlái ma_{Att}!
3sg neg be Laoli FORCE let 3sg come.in ATT

‘Isn’t that Laoli? Let him come in. (Why do I have to tell you ?)’
(Lü Shuxiang 2000: 375)

(42) Wǒ shuō jīntiān shì xīngqīsān ma_{Att}! Nǐ shuō bù shì!
1sg say today be Wednesday ATT 2sg say neg be

‘I say it’s Wednesday today! You say it isn’t!’
(Zhu Dexi 1982: 213)

The Attitude head ma_{Att} is clearly distinct from the Force head ma encoding yes/no questions, as generally acknowledged in the literature (cf. Chao Yuen Ren 1968: 800–801; Zhu Dexi 1982: 211–213; Lü Shuxiang 2000: 375–376, among others) and neatly illustrated by (41), where both SFPs occur in successive sentences. Whereas in the yes/no question, the intonation rises at the end of the sentence and ma cannot be stressed, the second sentence is pronounced with a falling intonation towards the end and ma_{ATT} can, but need not be stressed. (Contra Li Boya [2006: 64–65] who postulates a
The Attitude head *a* has a rather complicated morphophonemics depending on the preceding word, which is often reflected in different transliterations: *ia, (u)a, (n)a, (ng)a* etc. (cf. Chao Yuen Ren [1968: 803], Zhu Dexi [1982: 212], Yang-Drocourt [2007: 192–195] for detailed discussion). For ease of exposition, we gloss over these phonological alternations and use the transliteration *a* throughout. The Attitude head *a* is rather ubiquitous and occurs with all kinds of sentence types (declaratives, questions, imperatives, exclamatives), which makes its semantic characterization very difficult. Scholars agree that *a* conveys the personal implication of the speaker and has a general softening effect; the different interpretations observed for *a* are then due to the different sentence types it combines with (cf. Chao Yuen Ren 1968: 803–806; Zhu Dexi 1982: 212; Li and Thompson 1981: 313–317; Beutel 1988, among others). For example, Chao Yuen Ren (1968: 804) observes that a question with the SFP *a* is less blunt than one without it, an effect which can be paraphrased as ‘by the way’ or ‘excuse me’ etc.

(43) *Nǐ míngtiān chūqù bù chūqù a?*

2sg tomorrow go.out neg go.out ATT

‘(By the way) are you going out tomorrow?’

Likewise, an imperative with the Attitude head *a* has less the flavour of a command than an imperative without it:

(44) *Shuō a, bié hàipà a!*

say ATT neg be.afraid ATT

‘Come on, say it, don’t be afraid!’

In an exclamative, *a* expresses the emotion of the speaker, which, depending on the sentence meaning, can be anger, astonishment, enthusiasm etc.:
(45) 你 看 a，變化 多 大 a!
2sg see ATT change much big ATT
‘Look, how much everything has changed!’
(Yang-Drocourt 2007: 311)

(46) 你 也 要 去 a?!
2sg also want go ATT
‘Oh, you are going, too?!’

Zhene is another Attitude head. It does not only convey an exaggeration by the speaker, but also corrects the presupposition of the co-speaker who underestimates the degree of the property in question.

(47) 他 (*非常) 美麗 zhene!
3sg extremely pretty ATT
‘She is really pretty!’

(48) 他 可 高 zhene!
2sg unmistakably tall ATT
‘He is tall indeed!’

Given that zhene already indicates a maximal degree, the presence of a degree adverb such as 非常 ‘extremely’ is excluded; by contrast, speaker-oriented adverbs such as 可 ‘unmistakably’ are acceptable. This sensitivity of the Attitude head zhene to TP-internal material such as adverbs indicates that in the absence of intervening projections, the TP is accessible to a high C-head such as AttitudeP.

In addition to the two Force heads $ba_{Qconf}$ and $ba_{Imp}$, there is a third $ba$ realizing AttitudeP:

(49) 外面 在 下 雨 ba.
outside prog fall rain ATT
‘Probably, it is raining outside.’

$Ba_{Att}$ indicates probability; thus (49) would be felicitous when uttered in a room without any windows where the speaker makes a guess based on the noise of the falling rain.

Finally, like LowCP, AttP must be further divided into two subprojections.

(50) [ATT2 P [ATT1 TP 三十 年 前 还 没 有 鼠标的 ne] ba].
thirty year before still NEG have mouse ATT1 ATT2
‘Thirty years ago, very probably there didn’t even exist anything like a computer mouse.’
This sentence contains two Attitude heads, *ne* and *ba*; it is part of a conversation about video games found on the web (and double-checked with native speakers for its acceptability). The order of *ne* and *ba* is fixed, the sequence *ba ne* being ungrammatical. Their exact semantic contribution is difficult to tease apart here; however, the import of *ba* can be rendered by “very probably”.

7 The hierarchy of co-occurring SFPs and the root vs non-root asymmetry in the Chinese CP

Having described the three layers, LowCP, ForceP and AttP, we can now proceed to examples where several SFPs co-occur in the same sentence and obey the strict order corresponding to the hierarchy of their respective subprojections. Note that for semantic reasons, it is quasi-impossible to find examples where each of the three layers (LowCP, ForceP and AttP) is realized. In fact, Zhu Dexi (1982: 208) was well aware of this problem. Accordingly, when establishing the relative order between several SFPs, he applied the notion of *transitivity*; if a given SFP A is shown to precede the SFP B and SFP B precedes the SFP C, then necessarily SFP A likewise must precede C. This same notion of transitivity also underlies Zhu Dexi’s (1982: 208) statement that the relative order always holds, i.e. also when a given SFP position remains empty, as in the combination of the Low C le with the Attitude head ou:

\[
(51) \text{Bù zǎo l’ou \[= le + ou\], kuāi zou b’ou \[= ba + ou\]}
\]

’It’s getting late! Hurry up and go!’

(Chao Yuen Ren 1968: 808)

*Given that the Attitude head ou (expressing the speaker’s impatience) consists of a single vowel, it fuses phonetically with the preceding SFP (le and ba) into a single syllable, resulting in l’ou and b’ou.*

The examples below illustrate the split LowCP followed by either an Attitude or a Force head:

\[
(52) \text{Wǒ zhǐbúguò chū chāi le ér yǐ a!}
\]

1sg merely go.out business.trip LowC1 LowC2 att

’I only went on a business trip (i.e. it is not that I wouldn’t come back)’

(53) \text{Tā jǐnjǐn dǎ-cuò zì le ér yǐ ma?}
\]

3sg only type-wrong character LowC1 LowC2 force

‘Did he only make spelling mistakes?’
Note that the combinations *éryǐ le ma, *le ma éryǐ, *ma le éryǐ, and *éryǐ ma le are all excluded and thus confirm the requirement of a rigid ordering.

As illustrated in example (48) above with only one SFP realizing Attitude, in the absence of an intervening projection, the highest C can select the TP directly as its complement. On the other hand, when projections are spelt out, it is always the leftmost SFP which s-selects the complement (TP or CP) to its left, not the next highest SFP.

(54) a. Nǐ míngtiān chī xīcān ma?
   2SG tomorrow eat western.food FORCE
   ‘Will you eat western food tomorrow?’

b. *Nǐ míngtiān chī xīcān láizhe
   2SG tomorrow eat western.food LowC

c. *Nǐ míngtiān chī xīcān láizhe ma?
   2SG tomorrow eat western.food LowC FORCE

As indicated in (54b), láizhe is incompatible with a TP containing the adverb míngtiān ‘tomorrow’, and the same incompatibility is observed in (54c); accordingly, this unacceptable LowCP cannot serve as the complement for ma. The fact that ma itself allows for a TP complement with míngtiān (54a) cannot save (54c).

So far we have limited our discussion to SFPs occurring in matrix sentences, i.e. root contexts. This is important because most C-elements in Chinese are prohibited in embedded, non-root contexts.12 More precisely, only Low Cs are acceptable in embedded contexts, cf. (55)–(57), whereas Force and Attitude heads, cf. (58)–(60), are completely excluded here and only acceptable in root contexts (cf. Paul [2014, 2015: Ch. 7] for further discussion). Accordingly, the three-layered split CP ‘LowCP < ForceP < AttitudeP’ exclusively holds for root contexts.

(55) Tā méi gào sù wǒ [ClowP TP Lìsī bù qù Bólín] le
3SG NEG tell 1SG Lisi NEG go Berlin LOWC
‘He didn’t tell me that Lisi no longer wants to go to Berlin.’

(56) [DP [ClowP TP Gāngcái dǎ diànhuà láizhe] de rén]
just strike phone LOWC SUB person
dàodǐ shì shéi?
in.fact be who
‘Who on earth was the person that called just now?’
(Pan Victor Junnan 2012: Ex. [41])

(57) [TP Wǒ shì [CP [TP]-fin] tīng cóng lái bù chōu yān] de ]
1SG be ever NEG smoke cigarette [-root]C
‘(It is the case that) I have never smoked.’

While the complement of gào sù ‘tell’ in (55) and the relative clause in (56) can either be a CP or a TP, in the propositional assertion construction (57) the copula shì ‘be’ requires a projection headed by the non-root C de as complement (cf. Paul and Whitman 2008). Accordingly, de, which in turn selects a non-finite TP (hence the obligatory subject raising to the matrix TP), can be considered a subordinating C on a par with e.g. that.

(58) a. Wǒmen yìqǐ qù baIMP!
1pl together go force
‘Let’s go there together.’

b. Tā yào wǒmen [pro yìqǐ qù (*baIMP)].
3SG ask 1pl together go force
‘He asked us to go there together.’

(59) {*[ForceP TP Ākiū lái ma] / [TP Ākiū lái bù lái]}
Akiu come force Akiu come NEG come
méi yǒu guānxì).
NEG have relation
‘Whether or not Akiu comes doesn’t matter.’

(60) Tā bù zhīdào [Ākiū lái bù lái] (*ne)].
3SG NEG know Akiu come NEG come ATT
‘She doesn’t know whether Akiu will come or not.’

(59) illustrates the impossibility for a CP headed by the yes/no question ma to occur in an embedded context; by contrast, the polar A-not-A question is acceptable here.
Note finally that Force heads were not always banned from non-root contexts in the history of Chinese. The yes/no question Force head *hū* was acceptable in matrix and embedded questions:13

(61) \[\text{ForceP} [\text{TP} \ Lǜ \ kē \ qû] \ hū]? \ Dui-yuè [\text{pro} \ bû \ kê].

‘Can the state Lu be annexed? He answered: No, it cannot.’

(Zuozhuan, Min 1; 4th c. BC)

(62) \[\text{ForceP} [\text{TP} \ tiâăn \ qì \ Lǜ] \ hū].

NEG know heaven abandon Lu FORCE

‘I do not know whether Heaven has abandoned the state of Lu.’

(Shìjì 33; 1542; 2nd c. BC)

Apparently, the ban on Force and Attitude heads in non-root contexts is a rather recent development in the history of Chinese.

This section has illustrated the well-known rigid ordering among SFPs in the three layers as well as within the subprojections of LowCP and AttitudeP.

### 8 The head-final CP in VO languages from a typological perspective

The root vs non-root asymmetry holding for the Chinese C system just discussed is important in two respects. First, it demonstrates that in addition to their s- and c-selectional features, SFPs qua C-heads have to be specified for the feature [±root] as well. The SFP *ma* e.g. at least has the features [polar question force] and [+root] and c-selects a declarative TP only. The comparison with the SFP *ba* 

\[\text{comp} \text{confirmation}\] cf. (27) above, shows that the feature [polar question] needs to be further refined in order to distinguish the true information seeking question encoded by *ma* from

13 Biberauer, Holmberg, and Roberts (2014: 192) deplore “the paucity of long-term attestation of most of the world’s languages”. While this observation is correct, this is no reason to neglect Chinese with its more than 3000 years of documented history, which shows that the three-layered head-final CP has been attested since the 6th c. BC, against the backdrop of constant VO order (cf. Djamouri, Meisterernst, and Paul [2009], Paul [2008, 2014] and references therein).
the confirmation seeking question with *ba*, the other features being shared by both SFPs. With respect to their featural make-up, Chinese SFPs are therefore on a par with complementizers such as English *that* and *if*, which besides the features for Force (declarative or interrogative, respectively) and [+finite] also encode [-root]. This challenges Huang, Li, and Li’s (2009: 35) view that such complex feature bundles are a characteristic of functional categories in Indo-European languages, but not in Chinese.

Second, this “syncretic” character makes it impossible to dismiss Chinese SFPs as “categorially deficient”, “syncategorematic” or “acategorial” (cf. Biberauer, Holmberg, and Roberts 2007, 2008, 2010, 2014; Biberauer, Newton, and Sheehan 2009). The dismissal is motivated by the intention to maintain the cross-categorial generalization associating the sentence-final position of C with OV languages only (cf. Dryer 1992: 102, 2009). This generalization is important for Biberauer, Holmberg, and Roberts because it states the non-existence of structures violating the *Final-over-Final Constraint*, which precisely excludes the configuration where a head-final phrase dominates a head-initial one. The different attempts by Biberauer, Holmberg and Roberts over the past to come to terms with the head-final CP in the VO-language Chinese, illustrated by their successive reformulations of the FOFC, all have in common that SFPs are likened to “extra-metrical” elements in phonology, i.e. elements not counting for rules, in this case the FOFC. Whether this type of “extra-metrical” element can indeed exist in syntax is not discussed, notwithstanding the far-reaching nature of this claim. Last but not least, the issue of how to account then for the rigid ordering among the different layers within the split CP, the intricate semantics of SFPs and their s- and c-selectional features is never addressed. Nor do Biberauer, Holmberg, and Roberts explain how overt elements that are invisible for constraints of UG, among which the FOFC, can be correctly acquired by the child.

In any case, the at first sight solid-looking empirical basis for Dryer’s (1992, 2009) claim shrinks considerably under a more careful scrutiny. When correlating the feature 92a “polar question particle” in the *World Atlas of Languages* (cf. Dryer 2013a) (the category C not being searchable) with word order, OV and

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14 In fact, C heads in Mandarin Chinese turn out to be more “syncretic” than Cs in e.g. German, where according to Struckmeier (2014), TP-internal modal particles spell out “surplus” features of C. In Chinese, by contrast, all these features are located on C alone.

15 Dryer (1992: 102) states that “[…] in fact it may be an exceptionless universal that final complementizers are found only in OV languages. […] complementizers are therefore verb patterners, while the Ss they combine with are object patterners.” In Dryer (2009), the 140 VO languages examined are all said to have a sentence-initial C.
VO languages behave in fact more or less alike, insofar as for both word orders the sentence-initial position (observed for 37 OV and 82 VO languages, respectively) is much rarer than the sentence-final position (observed for 140 OV and 154 VO languages, respectively). Since against the backdrop of Rizzi’s (1997) split CP approach it is likely that many of the question particles can be analysed as complementizers, this considerably weakens Dryer’s (1992: 102, 2009: table [24]) claim that complementizers are verb patterners and that accordingly final complementizers are found only in OV languages. As a result, Chinese is very probably just one example among many where a VO language has a head-final (interrogative) CP.

Concerning the position of SFPs in general, going beyond those encoding polar question Force, one has to fall back on the distribution given for adverbial subordinator in WALS (cf. feature 94; Dryer 2013b): 279 VO-languages with a sentence-initial adverbial subordinator vs 2 with a sentence-final subordinator. However, as discussed by Dryer (2013b) himself, the label adverbial subordinator is a cover term for different categories, among them adpositions and case suffixes. Accordingly, the results in WALS cannot be uncritically used as testing ground for the predictions made by the FOFC for the functional category C in embedded contexts (pace Biberauer, Holmberg, and Roberts [2014] and preceding publications). Also note that there are 30 VO languages with mixed order, among them Cantonese (a fact not mentioned in Biberauer, Holmberg, and Roberts’ [2014: 183] discussion of the figures in WALS). This is noteworthy insofar as the potential candidates in Mandarin Chinese falling under the label adverbial subordinator can be shown to include sentence-level adverbs and clause-selecting prepositions (cf. Paul 2014, 2015: Ch. 8), i.e. elements preceding the following clause, in addition to the sentence-final non-root C de in the propositional assertion construction (cf. Section 7 above). It is therefore not excluded that these “mixed” order languages precisely illustrate the Chinese case.

In the face of the well-established existence of the FOFC violating configuration [[V O] C], the only way out to reconcile SFPs qua Cs in Chinese with the FOFC is an analysis à la Kayne (1994) where a head-final CP is derived from a head-intial CP by movement of the complement TP into the specifier position. However, this account does not work, either, because it shows a number of serious shortcomings, discussed in detail by Bayer (1999: §3) (also cf. Abels and Neeleman 2012). The most obvious problem for a Kayne-style analysis is the impossibility of the SFP to c-command its raised complement. This is clearly an undesirable result, because as demonstrated above, the construal of wh-indefinites ‘something, someone’, crucially depends on the c-command of the TP by the yes/no question Force head ma:
Furthermore, as pointed out by Bayer (1999) it remains entirely stipulative that it is the entire TP that must move in order to check the movement triggering feature of C, for such a feature could very well be checked by moving a subconstituent of TP, e.g. the object or the subject. This requirement also runs counter the generally observed non-movability of TP to the left (including local movement). Bayer (1999) therefore concludes that head-final Cs should not be analysed as attractors of TP and that head-final CPs are indeed merged as such.

9 Conclusion

The present article has provided extensive evidence to show that SFPs in Chinese are fully-fledged functional heads with a complex feature make-up, on a par with C elements in e.g. Indo-European languages. Chinese SFPs select and project, as evidenced by the strict hierarchy for co-occurring SFPs in the split CP. Structures with a head-final CP and VO order are not only attested in Chinese, but also in other languages (Vietnamese, Niger-Congo languages, etc.). This structure must be merged as such and cannot be derived by postulating movement from a head-initial CP. As a result, the FOFC, which precisely excludes the configuration \([V \ O \ C]\), cannot be a principle of UG, but instead illustrates a statistical observation (cf. Whitman [2008], Paul [2015: Ch. 8], for further discussion).

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