

# Studies on Chinese Language and Linguistics in Italy

Edited by  
Serena Zuccheri

Studi Interdisciplinari su Traduzione, Lingue e Culture

**Bologna**  
University Press

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## Studi Interdisciplinari su Traduzione, Lingue e Culture

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Progetto Open Access Consorzio Alfabeta

Il volume beneficia di un contributo alla pubblicazione da parte del Dipartimento di Interpretazione e Traduzione dell'Alma Mater Studiorum - Università di Bologna

Fondazione Bologna University Press  
Via Saragozza 10 – 40123 Bologna  
tel. (+39) 051 232 882  
fax (+39) 051 221 019

[www.buonline.com](http://www.buonline.com)  
email: [info@buonline.com](mailto:info@buonline.com)

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ISSN: 2283-8910  
ISBN: 979-12-5477-177-8  
ISBN online: 979-12-5477-178-5  
DOI 10.30682/sitec45

Grafica: Alessio Bonizzato  
Impaginazione: Sara Celia

Prima edizione: aprile 2023

# Table of contents

- 7 Preface  
*Serena Zuccheri*
- 9 On Prefixation in Modern Chinese  
*Giorgio Francesco Arcodia*
- 39 Mirative *nǐ kàn* 你看: An Analysis at Syntax/Pragmatics Interface  
*Linda Badan and Yuan Huahung*
- 71 Complex Deadjectival Verbs Based on Open Scale Adjectives in Mandarin Chinese: A Comparison Between *jiā* 加+Adj. and *nòng* 弄+Adj. Verbs  
*Bianca Basciano*
- 95 Chinese Lexicography and the Critical Analysis of Lexicographical Discourse  
*Chiara Bertulesi*
- 117 Discourse Functions of *ránhòu* 然后 and Overtness Requirement for Subjects: A Corpus-Driven Formal Account  
*Marco Casentini and Sergio Conti*
- 147 Investigation on Some Italian Artistic Terms Entered in Chinese: A Diachronic and Synchronic Perspective  
*Feng Lisi*
- 167 Input-Based and Output-Based Instructions: Teaching Activities for Interrogative Constructions in Chinese as a Foreign Language Textbooks for Italian Learners  
*Gloria Gabbianelli*

- 197 Designing and Compiling the Written Sub-Corpus of  
the Bimodal Italian Learner Corpus of Chinese (BILCC):  
Methodological Issues  
*Alessia Iurato*
- 229 Pragmatic Markers and the Right Periphery in Mandarin  
Chinese: A Systematic Review of Types, Functions and  
Co-Occurrence  
*Carmen Lepadat*
- 261 Cantonese Tones and Tone Marks: How Past Studies Can  
Help Present Learners  
*Luisa M. Paternicò*
- 289 A Two-Tiered Analysis of Chinese Political Discourse:  
The Case of Xi Jinping's Commemorative Speech for the  
Centennial of the CCP  
*Carlotta Sparvoli and Chiara Romagnoli*
- 325 The Syntax of *de* (的)-Omission in Post-Numerical Positions  
*Sun Yangyu*
- 347 The Iconic Cognitive Principles of Mandarin Chinese Word  
Order: Pedagogical and Learning Perspectives  
*Tommaso Tucci*
- 373 The Identification and Communication of Expressions of  
Anger in Italian and Chinese Using Emotional Script  
*Valeria Varriano and Serena Zuccheri*
- 405 Contributors

# PRAGMATIC MARKERS AND THE RIGHT PERIPHERY IN MANDARIN CHINESE: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF TYPES, FUNCTIONS AND CO-OCCURRENCE

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## **1. Pragmatic markers: an introduction**

In the past few decades, *pragmatic markers* have become one of the most prolific research topics in linguistics. Triggered by Schourup's (1982) and Schiffrin's (1987) seminal works on linguistic expressions occurring at the periphery of certain speech units, at the turn of the century the field had already become one in which "it is almost impossible to find one's way through the jungle of publications" (Fischer 2006: 1).

A plethora of labels, definitions and classifications flourished likewise (Dér 2010). Among these, the most frequently employed and quoted in the literature is Schiffrin's (1987: 31) category of *discourse markers*, defined as "sequentially dependent elements which bracket units of talk". Fraser's (1990: 386) category of *pragmatic markers*, which he defines broadly as "signals of the speaker's communicative intentions", is generally considered as being superordinate with respect to the former



(Traugott 2015). Other terms employed with partially overlapping meanings are discourse and pragmatic particles (Brinton 2017), which nonetheless carry a stronger association with short and monosyllabic terms – thus non covering all the expressions compatible with the functional properties of the class – and with an emergent use in connection with retrospective expressions (Haselow 2012).

A number of different criteria have been adopted to limit and define pragmatic markers, most of which rely on functional rather than formal features. Crucially, the defining function of pragmatic markers also appears to shift according to the approach taken in their study. Among the most important ones, Schiffrin's (1987) initial approach is in terms of discourse coherence, with discourse markers operating on different planes of discourse – frequently at the same time – in order to contextualize the utterance they belong to by referring indexically either backward or forward. Fraser (1990, 1996) adopts a pragmatic perspective putting the accent on expressions that are devoid of propositional content, i.e., being procedural in nature<sup>1</sup>. According to Fraser, (the absence of) truth-conditionality serves as the defining factor of a very heterogeneous group of expressions which may either signal the illocutionary force of an utterance, comment on the message therein conveyed, convey an entire message parallel to the former, or specify its relation to the foregoing discourse.

A slightly different approach is adopted by Blakemore (1987, 2002), who is concerned with expressions that are able to impose constraints on the “pragmatic inferences involved in the recovery of implicit content”, i.e., with expressions that are *procedural* in nature rather than *conceptual* (Blakemore 2002: 4). From the perspective of diachronic change and semantic reanalysis, Traugott (2010) focuses on the processes leading linguistic expression to acquire new meanings over time, which may be characterised by either an increase of the *subjective* component conveying speaker attitude, feelings or viewpoint, or by

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<sup>1</sup> The term adopted by Fraser is argued to follow Blakemore's (1987) initial sense of 'non-truth conditional' (Fraser 1996). However, Blakemore will argue in later works (e.g., Blakemore 2002) that procedural cannot be completely equated to non-truth conditional, since some pragmatic markers may play a role in affecting the truth value of an utterance.

a distinctive expression on the part of the speaking subject of his/her awareness and attention towards the addressee's social image, beliefs and feelings, i.e., *intersubjectivity*.

Latest accounts are provided in Traugott (2022) and Heine *et al.* (2021): the former, by referring to *discourse structuring markers* from the perspective of construction grammar (Goldberg 2006), puts the accent on “the fact that they are used not merely to reflect intended relationships but to signal and even shape such relationships” (Traugott 2022: 3); the latter, in discussing the rise mechanisms of *discourse markers*, identifies next to the process of grammaticalization that of co-optation – a “cognitive-communicative operation whereby a text segment [...] is transferred from the domain or level of sentence grammar and deployed for use on the level of discourse organization” (Heine *et al.* 2021: 26) – in order to address both their grammatical functions and the role they play in processing linguistic discourse.

In the following sections, a comprehensive discussion of the scholarly research that has been produced on pragmatic markers from the pragmatic and functionalist perspectives will be carried out, while also duly pointing to studies taking different approaches when deemed necessary.

## 2. Formal features of pragmatic markers

As the above paragraphs clearly show, there is an evident divergence of opinions concerning the functional definition of pragmatic markers. This is also true as far as the formal features put forth by different scholars are concerned. According to Aijmer (2013), relevant formal features of pragmatic markers include positional, prosodic, lexical and stylistic aspects. Nonetheless, positional and prosodic aspects have been by far the most investigated.

Regarding the pragmatic markers' position, it has been often pointed out that they tend to occur in specific structural slots in the utterance or the conversational turn. In fact, both utterance and turn peripheries have been argued to represent ideal places where information can be provided on how to process upcoming or previous stretches of talk, clarify the latter's structural relation with the context, take over the floor or yield the turn to another interlocutor, etc. (Detges and Walte-

reit 2014). Interestingly, the position that pragmatic markers occupy may have an influence on the meaning they express (Bazzanella 2001). To give an example, parenthetical expressions such as the French *moi je trouve* ‘I think’ have been argued to perform an opposite function at the two peripheries, with the left periphery favouring a booster or strengthening interpretation and the right periphery calling for a mitigating role (Detges and Waltereit 2014). Taking this observation one step further, Detges and Waltereit (2014) conclude that left-peripheral elements are mainly concerned with coherence-oriented elements – including mainly referential and turn-taking items, whereas right-peripheral elements are more likely to be modality/stance-oriented – including mostly elements re-negotiating the illocutionary force of an utterance or expressing an intersubjective stance<sup>2</sup>. Similarly, Wang and Tao (2020) address the functions of the pragmatic marker *wǒ juéde* 我觉得 ‘I think’, arguing for the recent development of a turn-expansion function when used in right-peripheral position, in addition to the already existing evaluative and epistemic functions (Wang and Tao 2020: 2). The treatise on the (a)symmetries between elements occurring at the left and right periphery is nonetheless still far from being comprehensive, since different elements appear to behave (slightly) differently when their position in the utterance is taken into account (Traugott 2014: 89).

The prosodic aspects of pragmatic markers have also been addressed to some extent, at least as far as English is concerned. Earlier works describe pragmatic markers as being characterized by “comma intonation” (Fraser 1996; Brinton 1996; Rouchota 1998; Kaltenböck *et al.* 2011), i.e. parenthetical intonation involving prosodic independence and a downstep which is normally found after a comma (Samek-Lodovici 2015: 139). However, experimental studies investigating the actual prosodic contour with which pragmatic markers are produced in naturally-occurring language are still few and show a great variability of results (Wichmann *et al.* 2010; De Cristofaro *et al.* 2022). In her

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<sup>2</sup> The argument is made in support to Beetching and Detges (2014)’s claim concerning the functional asymmetry existing between left and right periphery. For a less deterministic view on the disparities between the two positions, see Traugott (2014).

1996 volume, based on the review of scholarly works circulating in that period, Brinton argued that pragmatic markers are “short items, often phonologically reduced or unstressed” (Brinton 1996: 33). Although this statement might need to be toned down with more and more new studies appearing, there is nonetheless evidence that “pragmatic markers in present-day English are typically ‘small’ monosyllabic or disyllabic words”, and that sometimes – especially in correspondence of a particularly frequent use of the expression – they might undergo phonological reduction (Brinton 2017: 4). This is what happens with *y’know*, *kinda*, and *sorta* in American English (Brinton 2017: 4). In other cases, however, instead of presenting phonological reduction and being part of a larger tone group, pragmatic markers were shown to be phonologically stressed and to be followed by a pause marking an independent tone group (Brinton 2017: 5).

From the above, it is clear that any list of features attempting to define pragmatic markers can only be applicable if conceived of as representing the (fuzzy) core of this category, with some members representing prototypical cases and others being located in more peripheral positions.

### 3. Defining the right periphery

The remaining part of this paper will be specifically concerned with right-peripheral pragmatic markers. Nonetheless, before moving to the description of these elements, a few words are in order as far as the exact definition of the right periphery is concerned. Scholarly works tend to be in general rather vague on this point, considering the small consensus around the units with respect to which pragmatic markers should be considered peripheral. Traugott (2015) has pointed out that the terms ‘initial’ and ‘final’ are usually employed in connection with units such as the clause, utterance or sentence, and, when conversational data is taken into account, also the turn (e.g., Wang and Tao 2020). To complicate things, however, is the fact that in addition to pragmatic markers, sentence peripheries can also host elements of marked information structure, including left and right dislocations, as well as instances of focus fronting. The two types of elements can be observed in (1a-c) and (2) respectively: the first two examples illustrate

that the left periphery of the sentence may contain either a (topic) left dislocation which is coreferential with the sentence-internal pronoun *it* (1a), or a focus fronting that is not resumed by any overt coreferential form (1b), while in (1c) an instance of topic right dislocation is produced at the sentence right periphery; (2) shows the production of two pragmatic markers, *well* and *you know*, occurring in succession in utterance-initial position.

(1) a. *Your book* you should give it to Kim.

(Adapted from Traugott 2015: 119)

b. *YOUR BOOK* you should give *t* to Kim.

(Adapted from Traugott 2015: 119)

c. 来了吗, 你哥哥?

*Lái-le*                      *ma*,      *nǐ*      *gēge?*

Come-PERF              SFP      2SG      older-brother

'Has (he) come, your older brother?'

(Guo 1999: 1109)

(2) *Well you know*, I was really interested in biofeedback.

(Traugott 2015: 119)

While there is no doubt that information-structuring elements as those in (1a-c) are syntactically dependent upon the main clause (Lombardi Vallauri 2009; Frascarelli 2017; Badan 2015), the status of pragmatic markers is more controversial. Under the functionalist approach, the general view is endorsed that at least some pragmatic markers are clause-external – i.e. they are syntactically independent (Haselow 2012) – while (recent) studies in syntax tend to consider pragmatic markers as occupying a position that is part of the main clause (Munaro and Poletto 2002; Spean and Tenny 2003; Giorgi 2009; Badan 2020).

With this regard, Traugott (2015) argues that the distinction between the clausal and peripheral slots should be considered as blurred rather than discrete, for it has been shown that many pragmatic markers originate from clause-internal elements which eventually acquire parenthetical meanings through intermediate stages of syntactic detachment, i.e. they undergo a grammaticalization process (Mulac and Thompson 1991; Traugott and Dasher 2002; Brinton 2017). This is for instance

the case of the English epistemic marker *I think*, which developed by means of the semantic reanalysis of a main verb taking a whole clause as its complement. Through syntactic detachment, the complex initially introducing an opinion by the speaker and followed by the complementizer *that*, has further acquired an epistemic meaning when combining with peripheral position and that-deletion (Mulac and Thompson 1991):

- (3) a. *I think that* we're definitely moving towards being more technological.  
 b. *I think*  $\emptyset$  exercise is really beneficial, to anybody.  
 c. It's just your point of view you know what you like to do in your spare time *I think*. (Brinton 2017: 17)

Traugott (2015) explicitly recognizes that defining the unit with respect to which pragmatic markers are peripheral is complex. The solution she proposes to deal with this is to consider the existence of a gradient and permeable relationship between an inner periphery (type I elements in Traugott's terminology) surrounding the verb argument structure – including adjunct phrases tending to occur either at the beginning or at the end of the clause – and an outer periphery – including pragmatic markers which can be found either in left or right position (type II elements in Traugott's terminology). According to Traugott (2015: 127), the gradient account is supported by diachronic observations, since elements of the inner periphery have been often reinterpreted and made available as elements belonging to the outer periphery, as in the case of general extenders (e.g., *and stuff*).

For reasons of convenience, this paper will adopt the term utterance-final to refer to right-peripheral pragmatic markers rather than clause- or sentence-final, for its use appears closer to a context-based, pragmatic definition of the relevant syntactic unit, which is nonetheless inclusive of both spoken and written texts, unlike the term turn.

#### 4. Utterance-final pragmatic markers

Different models have been proposed to address the discourse functions of the sentence peripheries (e.g., Onodera 2014, Beeching and Detges 2014, Degand 2014), some of which consider them as symmetric and some arguing for the existence of syntactic and functional differences between them (Traugott 2015). However, utterance-final pragmatic markers (henceforth UFPs) have been relatively neglected up until recently, with most of the scholarly work focusing on those occurring at the left periphery (Traugott 2015: 119)<sup>3</sup>. An exception to this trend is represented by studies on Asian languages, the majority of which traditionally employ a more well-defined class of words at the end of the utterance to express functions such as illocutionary force, speaker attitude, epistemic modality and other (inter)subjective meanings (Simpson 2014: 157)<sup>4</sup>. This is also captured in the typological-oriented account that Hancil and others (2015) offer of what they term *final particles* – i.e. “elements that have little or no lexical or conceptual, but predominantly procedural meaning” (Hancil *et al.* 2015: 4). In Hancil and others, particles used in Asian languages represent one of the five categories of final particles that can be found across languages worldwide<sup>5</sup>. The remaining four types are classified according to their lexical source:

- a) final particles of the conjunction type (e.g., English *but*, Finnish *mutta* ‘but’ and *ja* ‘and’, Japanese *kara* ‘because’) have interaction-oriented functions such as turn completion and/or turn-yielding and are employed to signal the kind of link that the utterance has with respect to an implicit proposition (Hancil *et al.* 2015: 10);
- b) final particles of the conjunct/adverbial connector type (e.g., French *alors* ‘thus, then’, English *then*, Spanish *pues* ‘so’) are argued to have

<sup>3</sup> Recent works on (left and) right periphery do exist within the functionalist approach (e.g., Beeching and Detges 2014, Hancil *et al.* 2015, Van Olmen and Šinkuniene 2021).

<sup>4</sup> These will be treated in detail in par. 5.1.

<sup>5</sup> However, as one anonymous reviewer of this paper suggests, it is important to highlight that in spite of the functional affinity between pragmatic markers and sentence-final particles (Degand *et al.* 2013), the two should be kept separate at least as far as their syntactic behaviour is concerned.

derived their textual or discourse-internal functions from former roles in marking structural relations within syntactic units (Hancil *et al.* 2015: 12);

c) final particles of the adverbial type (e.g., English *actually* and *anyway*, French *déjà* ‘already’, German *jetzt* ‘now’) are mainly time, place or manner adverbs used to “refer to the temporal or segmental (or, metaphorically speaking, ‘local’) structure of ongoing discourse” (Hancil *et al.* 2015: 13);

d) final particles of the focus particle type (e.g., English *even*, Dutch *alleen* ‘only’, Cantonese *ye* ‘only’, ‘merely’) are used to signal that a speech contribution in ongoing discourse is either noteworthy or unplanned, i.e. a post-factum realisation or an afterthought (Hancil *et al.* 2015: 13).

Other taxonomies based chiefly on the English language include among the pragmatic markers occurring primarily in utterance-final position general extenders (e.g., *and stuff, or something, or whatever*), question tags (e.g., *isn't it?*) and what Haselow (2012: 183) calls *final particles* in a sense rather close to that of Hancil and others (2015) (e.g., *then, though, anyway, actually, even*). In addition, markers that can be found both at the left and at the right periphery include epistemic adverbs (e.g., *surely, no doubt*), comment clauses (e.g., *I think, you know, see*) and vocatives (e.g., *proper names*) (Traugott 2015; Haselow 2016). According to the account offered by Haselow (2016), elements occurring at the right periphery are loosely connected to the previous utterance form a syntactic point of view and are not part of its propositional content. On the other hand, they are crucial from a pragmatic point of view, for their functions relate to “speech planning, processibility, textual coherence, speaker-listener relationship, and contextual embeddedness” (Haselow 2016: 387). Furthermore, great importance is given to the fact that they occur precisely at the end of an utterance, that is to say at “the moment at which the tasks they serve becomes relevant in the real-time emergence of a structural unit” (Haselow 2016: 387). Unlike sentence-initial elements, cognitive tasks emerging in the temporal slot characterizing the end of an utterance are more likely to be related to needs such as closing up projections and adjusting several aspects of the utterance before its final reception



on the part of the addressee, including illocutionary force, link or preciseness of equation with the preceding discourse, epistemic status and turn-yielding.

Despite the diverse pool of elements occurring at the right periphery, Haselow (2016) summarizes a number of core features that can be applied to all the six types of elements:

- (i) are used predominantly in spoken discourse;
- (ii) are not potentially turn-constitutive as they are backwards-oriented and require a 'host structure';
- (iii) make no contribution to the propositional content of an utterance (but can modify it, e.g. in terms of epistemic certainty);
- (iv) have procedural rather than conceptual meanings in the sense that they provide an interpretive cue;
- (v) have various functions on the metatextual and interpersonal level;
- (vi) are not integrated into the morphosyntactic dependency relations of the unit they follow;
- (vii) are morphologically invariant and tend to be conventionalized units;
- (viii) are functionally variant when produced at other points in time in utterance production or outside the specific construction. (Haselow 2016: 391-392)

## 5. Utterance-final pragmatic markers in Chinese

Among the linguistic devices that fit the above description in Mandarin Chinese, sentence-final particles (SFPs) have received the higher amount of attention in the literature. Traditionally described as expressing *yúqì* 语气 'modality' (Lü 1942; Zhu 1982; Wang 1985), more recently these "phonologically small elements, most frequently monosyllabic" (Simpson 2014: 157) have been investigated in connection to the wider group of pragmatic markers, with which they seem to share a number of properties, most and foremost the versatility in terms of functions performed (Lee-Wong 1998; Chu 2009; Shei 2014; Lepadat 2017). Much more recent appear to be the studies investigating the use of the remaining types

of UFPs in Mandarin, constituting Hancil and others' (2015) a) to d) groups. Following Miracle's (1991) seminal volume on discourse markers in Mandarin Chinese, in fact, an increasing number of works have been produced to investigate Mandarin's use of pragmatic markers similar to those of Indo-European languages (Fang 2000; Tao 2003; Feng 2008, 2010; Liu 2009). Those specifically or even indirectly focusing on markers occurring at the right periphery, however, are only a handful. The same can be said concerning the studies that acknowledge the existence of and tackle the relationship between SFPs and other UFPs.

### 5.1 Sentence-final particles

The body of scholarly work produced in connection to SFPs is rather extensive and diversified in terms of perspectives adopted, and its exhaustive discussion is beyond the purpose of this paper<sup>6</sup>. Instead, the current discussion will focus on the set of functions or meanings that can be conveyed through their use, for a more fruitful comparison with the other types of UFPs.

The most frequently studied and commonly accepted modal particles are *de* 的, *le* 了, *ma* 吗, *ba* 吧, *ne* 呢 and *a* 啊, but more recent studies also tackled less frequent and much more orality-oriented devices such as *ou* 哦, *ei* 欸, *la* 啦, etc. Described as "hallmarks of natural conversation" (Luke 1990: 11), the difficulty of grasping each particle's exact meaning(s) (Li and Thompson 1981) is probably connected to their taking on a whole array of nuances connected to the pragmatic environment in which they occur (Chu 2009). Overall, their functions have been argued to pertain to several distinct domains in the area of pragmatics, encompassing both discourse-structural, subjective and intersubjective uses. Studies such as Zhu (1982) and more recently Paul and Pan (2017) argue that while (some uses of the) particles *ma*, *ne* and *ba* are primarily connected to the expression of illocutivity, SFPs such as *a*, *ou*, *ei*, etc., are instead specialized in expressing the speaker's attitude. In the former case, the use of the SFP is not optional, since it serves to codify a specific sentence type, as the yes/no question realized by *ma* in (4):

<sup>6</sup> For a more extensive account of the SFP inventory and their functions in Mandarin, see e.g., Qi 2002.

## (4) 你想吃点什么吗?

*Nǐ xiǎng chī diǎn shénme ma?*

2SG want eat a.bit what SFP

‘Do you want to eat a little something?’ (Paul and Pan 2017: 5)

On the other hand, when expressing speaker attitude, SFPs are argued to be syntactically optional, but pragmatically indispensable in order to express the intended meaning. Speaker attitude or even modality are often used in a broad way to include both the degree of the speaker’s epistemic commitment towards the truth of the proposition (e.g., Chu (1998) regarding *ba*, Li (2006) for *ba* and *ma*) and other evaluative notions such as impatience (Paul and Pan (2017) concerning *ou*), or the signalling of unusual or extraordinary content (Li 2006 for *ne*). According to Liu *et al.* (2001), when used in interrogatives, *ba* expresses the speaker’s epistemic uncertainty towards the proposition, as shown in (5) below:

## (5) 这座楼可能是你们的宿舍吧?

*Zhè zuò lóu kěnéng shì nǐmen de sùshè ba?*

This CL building maybe be 2PL ATTR dormitory SFP

‘Perhaps this is your dormitory, isn’t it?’ (Liu *et al.* 2001: 424)

Quite differently, the use of *ou* 喔 in (6) is argued by Shei (2014: 264) to stress whatever the speaker’s emotions might be, including the portrayal of a situation as undesirable or unfavourable.

## (6) 安钧璨：你们好令我失望喔!

*Ān Jūncàn: nǐmen hǎo lìng wǒ shīwàng o!*

An Juncan: 2PL so make me disappoint SFP

‘Male Guest: I am so disappointed with you all!’ (Shei 2014: 264)

Other functions performed by SFPs belong to the area of intersubjectivity (Nuyts 2006; Tantucci 2013). Lee-Wong’s (1998: 388) seminal study stresses the role of SFPs such as *ba*, *a* and *ne* as “mitigators in a context where face threat is implicit”. In the same direction seem to be pointing Tantucci and Wang (2018: 64), who treat SFPs as intersubjective “operators of rapport maintenance, as they are employed

to overtly account for H[earer]’s potential reactions to S[peaker]’s utterance”. This can be observed in (7) below, where both *a* and *ba* are employed to maintain the faces of both speaker and hearer, the former signalling the casual tone of the question, and the latter further softening the forcefulness of the invitation (Lee-Wong 1998: 396):

(7) A male colleague asks a female colleague for a date.

这个星期六你有没有时间啊？我们去看电影吧。

<i>Zhè-ge</i>	<i>xīngqīliù</i>	<i>nǐ</i>	<i>yǒu</i>	<i>méi</i>	<i>yǒu</i>
This-CL	Saturday	2SG	have	not	have
<i>kòng</i>	<i>a?</i>	<i>Wǒmen</i>	<i>qù</i>	<i>kàn</i>	
free.time	SFP	1PL	go	watch	
<i>diànyǐng</i>		<i>ba.</i>			
movie		SFP			

‘Are you free this Saturday? Let’s go to the movies.’ (Adapted from Lee-Wong 1998: 396)

Among the intersubjective uses of SFPs can be included also evidentiality, i.e., the domain encoding the source of information for a given statement (Willett 1988; Aikhenwald 2004), whenever it implies such information to be shared by the speaker with a wider group of people, possibly (but not necessarily) including the hearer (Nuyts 2006: 14). Evidential uses have been identified for a number of Cantonese SFPs, including *ge5* (Li 2006; Sybesma and Li 2007) and *wo3* (Yap *et al.* 2014), and more recently for the Mandarin SFP *ma* 嘛. In Lepadat (2017), I argue – following previous analyses of the particle in terms of marker of states of affairs that are “highly evident in nature” (Chappell and Peyraube 2016: 323) – that it presents a certain evaluation as information shared among the members of a society, i.e., it represents a marker of interpersonal evidentiality (Tantucci 2013). This can be observed in (8) below.

(8) 他们的城堡一般都是依在山坡高的地方而建。[...] A: 易守难攻嘛。

<i>Tāmen</i>	<i>de</i>	<i>chéngbǎo</i>	<i>yībān</i>	<i>dōu</i>	<i>shì</i>	<i>yī</i>
3PL	POSS	castle	normally	all	be	near
<i>zài shānpō</i>		<i>gāo</i>	<i>de</i>	<i>dìfāng</i>	<i>ér</i>	<i>jiàn.</i>
at slope		high	ATTR	place	to	build

*Yi-shǒu-nán-gōng*                      *má.*

Easy-defend-difficult-attack    SFP

‘Their castles are usually built on high slopes. Easy to defend and hard to attack, of course.’

(Adapted from Lepadat 2017: 258-259)

Interestingly, it has been shown that from the perspective of diachronic development new intersubjective functions that SFPs might acquire in time follow a unidirectional path of change, i.e., new polysemies increasingly oriented towards the expression of the awareness of the addressee develop later than subjective or propositional meanings (Traugott and Dasher 2002; Tantucci and Wang 2020a). Similarly, the same unidirectional path of diachronic development has been argued to be followed in the acquisition process, for children (and arguably learners in general) tend to acquire in first instance literal meanings or functions and only successively those grounded in social cognition (Tantucci and Wang 2020b; Tantucci 2021; Lepadat 2022).

From the angle of discourse organisation, in addition to conveying specific illocutionary forces, it has been argued that SFPs may either express relationships between clauses (Chu 1998) or signal a specific information-structural distribution (Qiang 2011). As far as the latter function is concerned, Qiang (2011) argues that SFPs are used to mark a topic-comment structure and are therefore disallowed in right dislocations and other marked orders of information structure, as can be seen in (9), involving a comment-topic order<sup>7</sup>.

(9) A: 这电影你看过吗?

*Zhè-ge diànyǐng*                      *nǐ*                      *kàn-guò*                      *ma?*

This-CL    movie                      2SG                      see-ASP                      SFP

‘Have you seen this movie?’

<sup>7</sup> It is beyond the purpose of this paper to assess the feasibility of this important claim. On this occasion, the discussion will be limited to reporting the array of functions connected with the SFPs that have been identified in the literature.

B: 我看过，这电影 (\*呢/吧/么/啊)。  
*Wǒ kàn-guò, zhè diànyǐng (\*ne/ba/me/a).*  
 1SG see-ASP this movie SFP  
 ‘I’ve seen it, this movie.’ (Adapted from Qiang 2011: 192)

Lastly, Chu (1998; 2006; 2009) argues that SFPs can serve the purpose of increasing the relevance of the utterance they mark in the context, thus giving coherence to the discourse. Such is the case of *ne* in (10), wherein it is argued to signal that the speaker needs to look back for contrast (Chu 2006: 18).

(10) 他们还不看电视，还不如我呢！  
*Tāmen hái bú kàn diànshì, hái*  
 3PL still not watch television still  
*bù rú wǒ ne!*  
 not equal 1SG SFP  
 ‘They still don’t watch TV. So, they are not as [up to the times]  
 as I am!’ (Chu 2006: 18)

The different functions attributed to the SFPs in the literature are summarised in Table 1 below.

Domain	Functions	Source
Discourse structure	Illocutionary force/ sentence type	Zhu 1982; Paul and Pan 2017; Qi 2002
	Discourse organization	Chu 1998; Chu 2009; Li 2006
	Information structure	Qiang 2011; Lepadat 2017
Subjectivity	Speaker attitude	Liu <i>et al.</i> 2001; Paul and Pan 2017
	(Epistemic) modality	Chu 1998; Liu <i>et al.</i> 2001
Intersubjectivity	Politeness/Rapport management	Lee-Wong 1998; Tantucci and Wang 2018
	Evidentiality	Yap <i>et al.</i> 2014; Lepadat 2017

Table 1. Functions of SFPs in the literature.

## 5.2 Other utterance-final pragmatic markers

Studies focusing on UFPMs in Mandarin are very rare, despite the abundance of such expressions in spoken language (Lepadat 2021). Since Miracle (1991), an increasing number of works has been devoted to pragmatic markers in general, with some *passim* information that can be retrieved concerning their use in utterance-final position. In addition to *wǒ juéde* (Liu 2009; Lim 2011; Endo 2013) and (*Nǐ*) *zhīdào* (*balma*) 你知道吧/吗 ‘you know’ (Tao 2003; Liu 2006) – two among the most frequent UFPMs (Lepadat 2021) – other utterance-final uses that have been mentioned in the literature are concerned with pragmatic markers such as *jiùshì* (*shuō*) 就是说 ‘that is (to say)’ (Biq 2001), *zhēnshì* 真是 ‘really (is)’ and *shízài shì* 实在是 ‘indeed (is)’ (Wu and Biq 2011), *fǎnzhèng* 反正 ‘anyway’ (Zhou and Bao 2014), *ránhòu* 然后 ‘then’ (Wang 2018), *jiùshìle* 就是了 ‘that’s it/all’ (Shi 2019), *kǒngpà* 恐怕 ‘I’m afraid’ and *búguò* 不过 ‘though’ (Yap *et al.* 2014).

Among the very few studies specifically tackling UFPMs are those by Yap and her research group (Yap *et al.* 2010; Yap *et al.* 2014), in which common pathways of grammaticalization are identified for both SFPs and other UFPMs (*utterance tags* in their terminology). This is of particular relevance for the ongoing discussion, since it points into the direction of a strong affinity between different types of pragmatic markers found at the right periphery. As an illustration, it is possible for both SFPs and other UFPMs to have developed through a process of clausal integration or clause-combining (Givón 1985). SFPs such as *éryǐyǐ* 而已矣, *bàle* 罢了 and *hǎole* 好了, are argued to have emerged via the syntactic restructuring of a bi-clausal unit into a mono-clausal unit integrating the original evaluative terminal clause (Yap *et al.* 2014: 190). Similarly, UFPMs such as the mitigative *jiùshìle* are also argued to have originated from bi-clausal constructions, with the terminal result clause becoming syntactically and prosodically integrated into the initial clause (Shi 2019).

Additional sources of information are represented by two lines of research who address UFPMs indirectly, i.e., those on right dislocations (Bourgerie 1991, 1998; Song 2018; Lepadat 2021, *i.a.*) and increments (Luke and Zhang 2007; Lim 2014, *i.a.*). Although

both are concerned with elements that are not necessarily (and fully) grammaticalized in utterance-final position but simply respond to specific contingencies of the ongoing discourse, they offer valuable insight concerning the array of elements that are likely to have acquired or to be in the process of developing (inter)subjective meanings at the utterance right periphery.

Song (2018) addressed adverbial elements occurring at the right periphery, providing a rather extensive corpus-based list of elements. Among these are adverbs that can be classified as pertaining to Hancil and other's (2015) b), c), and d) types. Furthermore, Lepadat (2021) also provides an extensive discussion of the elements occurring at the utterance right periphery, encompassing elements belonging to Hancil and other's (2015) a) to d) types. Moreover, comment clauses occurring in utterance-final position similar to those discussed for English in Traugott (2015) and Haselow (2016) have been discussed in Lim (2014) and Lepadat (2021), *i.a.*

Based on the consulted literature, Table 2 puts together several examples of elements pertaining to all the four types of final particles identified by Hancil and other (2015) (but it disregards the fifth type corresponding to SFPs and discussed in Section 5.1 above), in addition to the comment clauses tackled by Traugott (2015) and Haselow (2016), to give a comprehensive view of the UFPs that can be used at the utterance right periphery in Mandarin Chinese<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> Question tags, general extenders and vocatives identified by Haselow (2016) as part and parcel of the right periphery have been left out from the discussion, since it is not yet completely clear to what extent they can be conflated with pragmatic markers, in spite of the many overlaps existing between their uses (Carter 2004). In particular, question tags are frequently endowed with an independent illocutionary force (Huddleston and Pullum 2002), whereas the use of vocatives and general extenders as pragmatic markers has been rarely addressed in the literature on Chinese.



Type	Examples
Adverb-type markers (Hancil <i>et al.</i> 2015)	<i>hāoxiàng</i> 好像 ‘it seems’, <i>qíshí</i> 其实 ‘actually’, <i>jiǎnzhibí</i> 简直 ‘simply’, <i>jūrán</i> 居然 ‘unexpectedly’, <i>nándào</i> 难道 ‘is it possible that’, <i>dàgài</i> 大概 ‘probably’, <i>dàodǐ</i> 到底 ‘in the end’, <i>zhōngyú</i> 终于 ‘finally’, <i>háishì</i> 还是 ‘after all’, <i>yuánlái</i> 原来 ‘as a matter of fact’, <i>sìhū</i> 似乎 ‘seemingly’, <i>yěxǔ</i> 也许 ‘perhaps’, <i>zhǐhǎo</i> 只好 ‘have no choice but’, <i>jiūjìng</i> 究竟 ‘actually; after all’, <i>gēnběn</i> 根本 ‘at all’, <i>dāngrán</i> 当然 ‘certainly’, <i>dàyuē</i> 大约 ‘probably’, <i>kǒngpà</i> 恐怕 ‘I fear’ (Yap <i>et al.</i> 2014; Shi 2018)
Focus particle-type markers (Hancil <i>et al.</i> 2015)	<i>jiù</i> 就 ‘just’, <i>cái</i> 才 ‘only’, <i>yòu</i> 又 ‘again’, <i>hái</i> 还 ‘in addition’, <i>yě</i> 也 ‘also’, <i>zài</i> 再 ‘again’, <i>dōu</i> 都 ‘all’ (Shi 2018)
Conjunction-type and conjunct/ adverbial connector-type markers (Hancil <i>et al.</i> 2015) <sup>9</sup>	<i>fǎnzhèng</i> 反正 ‘anyway/nevertheless’, <i>búguò</i> 不过 ‘but/however/though’, <i>érqiě (shì)</i> 而且(是) ‘in addition’, <i>jiùshì(le)</i> 就是(了) ‘that’s it/all’, <i>rúguǒ(shì)</i> 如果(是) ‘if (that’s the case)’ (Lim 2014; Shi 2019; Lepadat 2021)
Comment clauses (Traugott 2015; Haselow 2016)	<i>wǒ juéde</i> 我觉得 ‘I think’, <i>wǒ xiǎng</i> 我想 ‘I think’, <i>wǒ gǎnjué</i> 我感觉 ‘I feel/think’, <i>nǐ shuō</i> 你说 ‘you tell me’, <i>nǐ rènwéi</i> 你认为 ‘you think’, <i>nǐ yào zhīdào</i> 你要知道 ‘you must know’, <i>nǐ zhīdào</i> 你知道 ‘you know’, <i>wǒ tīng shuō</i> 我听说 ‘I heard’ (Lu 1980; Liu 2006; Xi and Zhang 2008; Lim 2014; Yap <i>et al.</i> 2014; Lepadat 2021)

Table 2. Types of expressions found at the right periphery in the literature.

As can be observed from the table, elements of the adverbial type present the largest inventory, including UFPs that can fulfil several (inter)subjective functions. Starting from subjectivity, epistemic evaluations of a state of affairs can be conveyed through adverbs such as *dàgài* 大概, *sìhū* 似乎, and *kǒngpà*, as well as by means of 1<sup>st</sup> person comment clauses such as *wǒ juéde* or *wǒ xiǎng* 我想. An example is given below in (11), wherein *kǒngpà* is argued to serve an epistemic function expressing a low degree of certainty:

<sup>9</sup> The two groups are treated together here because of the fuzzy boundary between conjunctions and linking adverbs in Mandarin (Liu 2016), in addition to the low frequency of such elements appearing at the utterance right periphery.

(11) 他不喜歡我了，恐怕。

*Tā*            *bù*        *xǐhuān*                    *wǒ*    *le,*        *kǒngpà.*  
3SG            NEG    like                            1SG    SFP        fear

‘He doesn’t like me anymore, probably (< I’m afraid).’

(Yap *et al* 2014: 195)

Further subjective uses include the expression of a particular stance on behalf of the speaker, which can be conveyed through several adverbial-type UFPMs such as *jiǎnzhí* 简直 or *jūrán* 居然, but also through focus particles such as *jiù* 就, *cái* 才, *dōu* 都 or *yòu* 又. In (12) below, *yòu* is argued to convey a sense of disapproval:

(12) B: 不是后来小江也换单位了吗? ‘Didn’t Xiao Jiang also change jobs afterwards?’

A: 上哪儿了, 又?

*Shàng*    *nǎr*                                    *le,*        *yòu?*  
Go.up    where                                    SFP        again

‘Where did she go, this time?’ (Lepadat 2021: 255)

As far as interpersonality is concerned, both the evidential and the rapport management functions identified for SFPs can be also performed through other UFPMs. In (13), the reportative expression *wǒ tīng shuō* 我听说 is employed to mark the utterance as information the hearer has come to know based on what (s)he heard from someone else:

(13) 他回来了, 我听说。

*Tā*            *huílái-le,*                    *wǒ*        *tīng-shuō.*  
3SG.M        return-PERF                    1SG        hear-say

‘He came back, I heard.’

(Lu, 1980: 33)

On the other hand, the UFPM *wǒ juéde* in (14) is argued in Endo (2013) not just to perform an epistemic function – connected more with the utterance-initial uses of the expression – but also to solicit the hearer’s agreement and alignment of views.

(14) Ming: 这-太不公平了我觉得。

Zhè-      tài      bù      gōngpíng      le      wǒ      juéde.  
This      too      NEG      fair      SFP      1SG      think  
'This- is too unfair I think.'

Li: 对啊我们应该考自己的语言嘛。'Right, we should be tested on our own language.'

(Adapted from Endo 2013: 28)

UFPMs that can be employed for discourse structuring purposes include those specifying relationships between clauses (e.g., *búguò*, *fǎnzhèng*, *érqiě shì*), those imposing specific information-structural readings (e.g., *jiù*, *jiùshì(le)*), as well as those managing turn alternation. In example (15) below, *érqiě shì* 而且是 modifies the logical relation between the current and the preceding clause by instantiating a sequential relationship between the two (Lim 2014).

(15) Matt: 但是我觉得你那个是买得挺好的。

Dànshì wǒ juéde nǐ nà-gè shì mǎi de tīng hǎo de.  
But 1SG think 2SG that-CLF be buy DE quite good SFP  
'But I think the one you bought is quite a good buy.'

[...]

Matt: 你比我早一年买, 而且是。

Nǐ bǐ wǒ zǎo yī nián mǎi, érqiě shì.  
2SG COMP1SG early one year buy, furthermore be  
'You bought it one year earlier than me, as well.'

(Adapted from Lim 2014: 228-229)

Moreover, a foregrounding function has been called upon for several UFPMs, including *nǐ zhīdào ma* 你知道吗 (Hu 2015) and *jiùshì(le)* (Shi 2019), in addition to markers of the focus-particle type. According to Shi (2019), *jiùshì* in (16) below is unstressed and represents background information, despite its utterance-final position, while the preceding clause represents foregrounded – i.e. focal – information.

(16) 你只想如何把工作搞好就是了。

<i>Nǐ</i>	<i>zhǐ</i>	<i>xiǎng</i>	<i>rúhé</i>	<i>bǎ</i>	<i>gōngzuò</i>	<i>gǎo</i>
2SG	only	think	how	DISP	job	do
<i>hǎo</i>	<i>jiùshì</i>		<i>le.</i>			
well	just.be		SFP			

‘You just (need to) think about how to get the job done, that’s all.’  
(Adapted from Shi 2019: 43)

Lastly, UFPMs that can perform turn-yielding or response-inviting functions are several and include *wǒ juéde*, *nǐ zhīdào ma* and *nǐ shuō* 你说. In example (17) below, *nǐ rènwéi* 你认为 is used in turn-final position to invite the addressee to give his/her opinion on the matter under discussion.

(17) 达到预期效果了吗? 你认为。

<i>Dá dào</i>	<i>yù qí</i>	<i>xiào guǒ</i>	<i>le</i>	<i>ma?</i>	<i>Nǐ</i>	<i>rèn wéi.</i>
Reach	expected	effect	PERF	SFP	2SG	think

‘Have we reached the expected result, you think?’

(Xi and Zhang 2008: 12)

Overall, what can be concluded from the above discussion is that Mandarin Chinese possesses a wide inventory of expressions that can be used at the utterance right periphery to express several (inter)subjective functions in addition to SFPs. Although different expressions might be positioned at different points along the grammaticalization path, it is undoubtedly true that Chinese too can make use of different types of UFPMs that are available in other languages of the world (Hancil *et al.* 2015).

### 5.3 Co-occurrence

The co-occurrence of elements pursuing similar functions in the utterance has been taken into account with respect to a limited number of linguistic phenomena. One case is represented by Tantucci and Wang (2018), who identify different dimensions of what they call ‘illocutional concurrences’. These encompass modal expressions, usage-based instantiations of face and SFPs used in evaluative speech acts (Tantucci and Wang 2018: 65).

Despite SFPs and the other UFPMs discussed above showing clear areas of overlap, their co-occurrence has hardly ever been taken into account. One exception is Lepadat (2021), who dedicates one specific section to tackle the intersection between SFPs and what she terms sentence-final expressions to include different elements occurring at the utterance right periphery, including UFPMs. From the discussion therein contained it can be observed that UFPMs can co-occur with SFPs to further strengthen or mitigate the illocutionary force of the utterance, thus the two types of markers appear to act as (possibly redundant) strategies aiming to fulfil similar roles. The example in (18) shows the UFPM *wǒ jiù juéde* 我就觉得 ‘I really think’ being used to further reinforce the function of the SFP *a*, which conveys a strong personal involvement on the part of the speaker.

(18) Context: Speaker A is talking with B about her sister’s love affairs and explains that her mother also asked her to talk to her.

A: 反正得慎重啊, 我就觉得, 对吧。

*Fǎnzhèng děi shènzhòng a, wǒ jiù*

Anyway must be.discreet SFP, 1SG just

*juéde, duì ba.*

think right SFP

‘Anyway [she] needs to be discreet, I really think, isn’t it so?’

(Adapted from Lepadat 2021: 251)

An opposite function appears to be performed by the UFPM *dàgài* expressing approximation. In (18), it occurs together with the SFP *ba*, which has been argued to convey a roughly similar sense of speculation on behalf of the speaker.

(19) 走了吧, 大概。

*Zōu-le ba, dàgài.*

Leave-PERF SFP probably

‘(He) has probably left.’

(Bourgerie 1998:141)

## 6. Conclusions

This paper has addressed pragmatic markers occurring at the utterance right periphery in Mandarin Chinese, a topic that has been showed to deserve special attention, on a par with what is occurring for other Indo-European languages (Traugott 2015). After introducing the major studies concerning the right periphery from a typological perspective or in relation to other languages – mostly English –, it emerged that different types of pragmatic markers are employed for turn management, illocutionary force and epistemic status negotiation, expression of politeness, etc. (Hancil *et al.* 2015; Haselow 2016). As far as Asian languages – and in particular Chinese – are concerned, it is generally acknowledged that they dispose of a well-defined world class of sentence-final particles to express several discourse-structural, subjective and intersubjective meanings, which have been the focus of most of the scholarly work on right-peripheral markers.

After careful examination of the relevant literature, however, it has been pointed out that in addition to sentence-final particles, Mandarin Chinese also makes use of a number of other pragmatic markers at the end of the utterance in order to perform roughly equivalent meanings. What is more, studies such as Lepadat (2021) have additionally tackled the co-occurrence of the different types of expressions at the right periphery, showing how (inter)subjectivity can be expressed – sometimes redundantly – by means of several comparable devices. This is an important fact to be acknowledged both from a language-specific and from a typological perspective.

In the final analysis, despite the prominent use of utterance-final pragmatic markers in spoken Mandarin (Lepadat 2021), their features and functions have been rarely investigated outside the area of sentence-final particles. Nonetheless, it has been shown that more extensive and in-depth analyses of the elements (co-)occurring at the utterance right periphery are necessary in order to reach a better understanding of their functions, including from the perspective of the (a)symmetries with left-peripheral elements.

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