

# An Analysis of the Ambiguity-triggering *Erho* Expressions in Sichuan Dialect of Mandarin Chinese

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## Abstract

There is a vulgar expression in Sichuan Dialect of Mandarin Chinese that is of particular interests to the research of Person agreement in Chinese languages. *Erho*, literally translated as ‘son deceives’, when used without other augments it denotes a strong presupposition that the addressee is telling the truth concerning whatever he/she has claimed prior to the utterance of *Erho* in question. However, the truth-telling presupposition can be imposed on the speaker when there is an indefinite *wh*-phrase preceding *Erho*. In this paper, I argue that *Erho* expression exemplifies the assumption that there is another A-position located above TP but below CP, i.e.,  $\alpha$ P. Following the framework of Miyagawa’s (2010) Agreement languages vs. Discourse-configurational languages, it is discovered that *Erho* expression, along with the ambiguity of Person agreement observed in the various patterns of it, in Sichuan Dialect can be properly accounted for assuming there is a possibility that a language can blend the attributes of both Agreement languages and Discourse-configurational languages. Chinese languages, including Sichuan Dialect, may exploit A’-movement to execute Topicalization or Focalization as topic/focus feature on C triggers such movements, suggesting Chinese languages are Agreement languages. On the other hand, in the context of *Erho* expression in Sichuan Dialect, the Topic/Focus can be nominals taking A-position, indicating topic/focus feature is indeed inherited by lower heads, akin to Discourse-configurational languages like Japanese. As to the ambiguous Person agreement specification, I argue that it simply roots in whether or not  $\alpha$ P is projected. That when  $\alpha$ P is projected,  $\phi$ -probe, together with focus/topic feature, enters into Agree relation with the nominal taking up Spec,  $\alpha$ P. If  $\alpha$ P is not projected,  $\phi$ -probe then identifies whatever sits in Spec, TP as its Goal. Therefore, two distinct scenarios with respect to Person agreement is possible in *Erho* expression.

**Keywords:** Sichuan dialect, Ambiguous person agreement, Feature inheritance,  $\alpha$ P and TP

## 1. Introduction

Sichuan dialect (hereinafter SD) is a subset of Mandarin Chinese mainly spoken in the southwest provinces of China (e.g., Sichuan, Chongqing, Guizhou, etc.). Despite being a branch of southwestern Mandarin, it often offers less mutual intelligibility, compared to northern Mandarin dialects, to standard Mandarin (SM), which is primarily based on the features of the Beijing dialect. This paper addresses a peculiar expression that is exclusive to SD—namely, *Erho* (Lit. ‘son deceives’) expressions (EE). As shown in (1), such expressions seek commitment of the addressee that he/she was telling the truth in the previous dialog.

(1) Erho! (Note 1)

son.deceive

“Lit: If you lie to me, you are my son! /Don’t you dare lie to me!”

Due to the patriarchal traditions of Confucianism, referring to someone as one’s son or grandson can be seen as a strong insult unless people genuinely have a biological connection. Thus, by requesting the addressee to acquiesce to the presupposition of a filial relation (asserting that if the addressee fails to tell the truth, he could be reckoned as the offspring of the speaker), the commitment or proposition previously uttered by the addressee may be considered more credible.

What is intriguing is that in addition to the bare EE of (1), there are two additional patterns, and the person that *Er* (“son”) refers to varies accordingly. Observe the following EEs with additional elements. (Note 2)

(2) *Erho expression with indefinite wh-phrase (EEW)*

a. Lago Erho!

who son.deceive

Reading a: “Lit. Whoever lies to you is your son! / I won’t lie to you!”

Reading b: “Lit. Whoever lies to me is my son! / Don’t you dare lie to me!”

*Erho expression with sentence-final particle (EESFP)*

b. (Lago) Erho ma!

who son.deceive SFP

‘Lit. Whoever lies to you is your son! / I won’t lie to you (how can you not trust me)!’

On the basis of the above examples, a few generalizations can be made: (i) the truth-telling presupposition is imposed on the addressee in the bare EE; (ii) the truth-telling presupposition is imposed on either the speaker or the addressee in the EEW; and (iii) the appearance of the sentence-final particle *-ma* always eliminates person ambiguity.

In the present work, my main goal is to account for the apparent discontinuity with regard to

person references exhibited by different patterns of EE in association with the agreement languages vs. discourse-configurational languages framework proposed in Miyagawa (2010).

The organization of this article is as follows: In Section 2, I discuss the syntactic structure for EE. In Section 3, I address the three different variations of EE and the person reference ambiguity demonstrated by each of them. In Section 4, I draw conclusions based on this research.

## 2. Syntactic Structures of *Erho* Expressions

### 2.1 *EE Is Not Small Clause*

Given that the canonical word order for SD is SVO (just as in other regional dialects of Mandarin), bare EEs seem to have a full subject-predicate construction. Thus, the question of whether a bare EE is a fully projected Complementizer Phrase (CP) or a small clause projected from the head of the predicate arises. These two possibilities must thus be examined.

One may claim that bare EEs should be considered a kind of small clause akin to the *i*-drop construction in Japanese because they both demonstrate the root clause effect with a subject-predicate construction. The so-called *i*-drop construction is formulated by replacing the conjugational ending *I* of an adjective with a glottal stop to indicate the speaker's immediate reaction to something directly perceivable (Konno 2012). Consider (3) and (4):

(3) \*Hanako-wa [ keiki uma?] to omot-ta.

Hanako-TOP cake delicious C think-PAST

Intended reading: "Hanako thinks that this cake tastes so good."

(4) \*Ngo jiode [Erho].

1<sup>st</sup> think son.deceive

Intended reading: "I think if you lie to me, you are my son."

(3–4) indicate that EE and *i*-drop construction are very alike with respect to their surface structure and embeddability. In terms of embeddability, Konno (2012: 15) argues that the fact that *i*-drop construction cannot be embedded is consistent with the concept of root small clauses proposed by Progovac (2006). This idea also fits the current minimalist trend that implements the notion of phase (Chomsky 2000), suggesting that if small clauses are seen as phases (cf. Yokogoshi 2003, den Dikken 2006, cited by Konno 2012), *i*-drop constructions, such as the one seen in (3), would be transferred once the derivation reaches the phasal stage. As predicted by the phase impenetrability condition (Chomsky 2007: 16), the merger of the embedded C onto a root clause would then be implausible, as there would be no available phase edges for further mergers to apply to.

However, in contrast to the *i*-drop construction in Japanese, EEs appear to have a full-fledged clausal structure. As illustrated in (5), EEs differ sharply from the *i*-drop construction in that they allow negation, temporal reference, and even the left periphery (cf. Rizzi 1997), all of

which are not allowed in the *i*-drop construction (Konno 2012: 8–14).

- (5) Lago er mei lai ma!  
 who son have-not come SFP

“If I didn’t come, I am your son (how can you not trust me)!”

In the case of (5), since it would be pragmatically infeasible to ask the addressee to lie to the speaker, I have changed the verb from *ho* to *lai* “come.” What matters is that the strong presupposition of filial relations remains. Crucially, (5) involves the realis negation marker *mei*, which can be roughly translated into “did not” or “have not.” N. Li (2016: 47) argues that *mei* is the head of NegativeP, which subsequently undergoes obligatory head-movement to T. Consequently, despite being a negator, *mei* can encode temporal references. Thus, it is rational to assume EEs have both NegP and Tense Phrase (TP) projections (see Laka 1990 and Haegemann 1995 for the configurational relation of NegP and TP). Furthermore, (5) also suggests that EEs have a left periphery structure since the SFP *-ma* is present. Several studies have reached the consensus that SFPs in Chinese take positions in the CP domain (see Cheung 2009, Paul 2014, Pan 2021, for example). Although SD’s inventory of SFPs does not greatly overlap with that of SM, I argue that SFPs in SD also occur in CP.

Thus, I do not assume EEs to be small clauses because they have an integral CP projection.

## 2.2 *The Locus of Er: Topic or Subject*

Chinese is often viewed as a topic-prominent language (Li and Thompson 1981: 15), suggesting that a surface subject may parallel a topic in the sense that É. Kiss (1995: 4) describes. The surface subject of SM can be overtly marked as a topic by including either an acoustic pause (Huang et al. 2009: 199) or a topic marker (Li and Thompson 1981 Cpt.4) such as *-a*, *-ne*, *-me*, or *-ba*.

Nonetheless, as I attempt to discuss whether *Er* is a subject in the A-position or a topic in the A’-position, the mechanism of topicalization discussed above cannot be directly applied to SD because (i) post-subject acoustic pauses are rarely observed in SD utterances and (ii) none of the topic markers shown above—or their equivalents—exist in SD. Therefore, the following instances of overt topicalization would be considered very peculiar if uttered in SD:

- (6) *Acoustic pause*  
 ??Ta, mai-lo Ziyusu.  
 3<sup>rd</sup> buy-ASP Japanese.book  
 “As for him, he bought the Japanese textbook.”

- (7) *Topic markers*  
 \*Ta-a/ba/ne, mai-lo Ziyusu .  
 3<sup>rd</sup> -TOP buy-ASP Japanese.book

“As for him, he bought the Japanese textbook.”

Here, thanks to an SD source, who enlightened me that an intense vulgarity may overtly mark the topic of a clause: in (8a–b), the surface subject is accompanied by *gouzi*, which is a very coarse word to say out loud yet marks a topic-comment informational structure, as shown in (8).

(8) SD

Ta gouzi xiaodei go cuitsi!

3<sup>rd</sup> EXC know CL hammer

‘As for him, how the hell would he know anything!’

Despite *gouzi* also being an available expression in SM, where it is pronounced as *gouri*, it behaves quite differently from *gouzi* in SD. I show in (9a–b) that *gouri* in SM can only be perceived as an insult to the nominal preceding it when affixed by *-de*, whereas *gouzi* in SD is often insult-free. Further, *gouzi* in SD may induce the topicalization of the object, but *gouri* in SM cannot, as illustrated in (9c–d).

(9) a. SD *gouzi* expressing sympathy

Ta gouzi malaohar li-lo hun di.

3<sup>rd</sup> EXC parents divide-ASP wedlock SFP

“What a poor guy, his parents got divorced.”

b. SM *Gouri* exclusively expressing insult

Ta gouri-\*(de) zhen bushi dongxi.

3<sup>rd</sup> EXC truly not-be thing

“He is such scum.”

c. SD *gouzi* in object topicalization

Qian gouzi haisi yao tsen.

money EXC nevertheless need earn

“Lit. As for money, one must earn some.”

d. SM *gouri* in object topicalization

\*Qian gouri haishi de zheng

money EXC nevertheless should earn

“Lit. As for money, one must earn some.”

Assuming *gouzi* in SD can function as a topic marker, I now return to the issue of EEs. Is *Er* in such expressions a grammatical subject or a topic? I argue that it is a grammatical subject

for two reasons. First, *Er* in EEs can never be followed by *gouzi*. Consider the example in (10), where inserting *gouzi* to the position after *Er* leads to ungrammaticality despite their pragmatic affinity.

- (10) \**Er gouzi ho!*  
 son EXC deceive  
 ‘Don’t you dare freaking lie to me!’

Second, *Er* arguably takes an A-position because not only can it bind an anaphor (Hornstein 2001 argues that anaphors are created by overt A-movement), but also there is one more possible A-position above it. As (11a) shows, in the case of EE, *Er* can bind an anaphor. Assuming with Chomsky (2008) that A'-movement is triggered by edge features embedded on phase heads ( $v^*$ , C), *Er* would not be able to bind an anaphor if it took a phase-edge position (phase impenetrability condition), in contrast with the fact illustrated in (11a). In addition, if *Er* was assumed to be at an A'-position, the only possible A-A' stack would be in the form of Spec, TP-Spec,  $v^*P$ , which is not applicable to the data of *Erho*. More crucially, no effect of reconstruction, which is generally assumed to be a property of A'-movement (see Chomsky 1995; Y-H. Li 2000; Huang et al. 2009), can be observed when the anaphor is moved to the edge of an EE, as shown in (11b), indicating that the position above *Er* is also an A-position.

- (11) *SD*
- a. *Er<sub>i</sub> mei zu gozen<sub>i</sub> di holu!*  
 son have-notdo self DE work  
 ‘Lit: If you didn’t finish your work, you are my son!’
- b. \**Gozen<sub>i</sub> di holu er<sub>i</sub> mei zu t!*  
 self DE work son have-not do  
 ‘Lit: If you didn’t finish your work, you are my son!’

- (12) *SM*
- a. *Ta<sub>i</sub> wancheng-le ziji<sub>i</sub> de gongzuo.*  
 3<sup>rd</sup> finish-ASP self DE work  
 ‘He finished his work.’
- b. *Ziji<sub>i</sub> de gongzuo, ta<sub>i</sub> wancheng-le t*  
 self DE work 3<sup>rd</sup> finish-ASP  
 ‘As for his work, he finished it.’

In the context of SM in (12a–b), it is clear that the dislocation of the anaphorical element at the head of the sentence does not interfere with the antecedent–anaphor binding relation,

suggesting that such movement can be reconstructed (i.e., A'-movement).

Then, the remaining and important question relates to the location of *Er*. Following the practices of É. Kiss (1995), Holmberg and Nikanne (2002), Miyagawa (2010), I assume there is a projection  $\alpha$ P sitting in the position higher than TP but lower than CP in SD, whose head, by definition, hosts syntactic features that trigger A-movement (Miyagawa 2010: 70). The ill-formedness of (11b) can then be accounted for with the assistance of  $\alpha$ P, such that the anaphorical element is moved to Spec,  $\alpha$ P, an A-position, resulting in the failure of reconstruction. If the present analysis is on the right track in that there can be an  $\alpha$ P atop EE, along with the fact that *Er* cannot be overtly marked as a topic, the most plausible structural position for *Er* would then be Spec, TP, following Miyagawa's (2010) agreement vs. discourse-configurational framework. Additionally, if his proposal, according to which the  $\phi$ -feature in both agreement languages and discourse-configurational languages is inherited by T (or  $\alpha$  if projected), *Er* would be the perfect goal for the  $\phi$ -probe because it bears specific (interpretable) person feature {+Addressee} by default (cf. Section 3.1).

The grammatical subject status of *Er* also holds in semantic components. Namely, *Er* always lacks the D(iscourse)-linking property, as Pesetsky (1987) would define the term, that the notion of "son" is not required in the previous contexts, suggesting that *Er* cannot be a topic. In fact, EEs are felicitous as long as their addressee makes a prior proclamation or commitment.

As for the motivation for *Er* to take the Spec, TP position, it can be argued that it either fulfills the pure EPP feature of T (see the V-to-T approach in Alexiadou and Anagnostopoulou 1998 and the pure expletive approach in Holmberg and Nikanne 2002) or values the  $\phi$ -feature or topic/focus feature inherited by T in the sense of Probe-goal union. I discuss the second approach in Section 3 following Miyagawa's (2010) reformulated EPP requirement.

### 3. The Ambiguous Person Interpretation of EE

In this section, I concur with Miyagawa (2010: 46) in assuming that SD, a subbranch of Mandarin Chinese, also employs person agreement. In addition, I demonstrate that the ambiguous person interpretation of EE (and its augmented forms) may provide evidence that SD blends the traits of agreement languages and discourse-configurational languages.

In the spirit of Strong Uniformity Principle (Miyagawa 2010: 10), one might expect East Asian languages to have  $\phi$ -features as well. In fact, according to Ueda (2006), modalities occurring in the CP domain in Japanese often impose limitations on the person agreement of the subject. Observe the following example, in which the sentence-final modality marker *-masyoo* can only agree with a first-person subject (see Pak, Portner and Zanuttini 2008 for Korean counterparts):

- |                 |                 |                      |           |                      |
|-----------------|-----------------|----------------------|-----------|----------------------|
| (13) Watasi/    | *Anata/         | *Kanojo-ga           | ringo-o   | kai- <b>masyoo</b> . |
| 1 <sup>st</sup> | 2 <sup>nd</sup> | 3 <sup>rd</sup> -NOM | Apple-ACC | buy-MOD              |

"Let me buy the apple."

Similarly, Miyagawa (2010: 49) argues that Mandarin Chinese is a person agreement language by presenting the so-called “blocking effect” for the reflexive *ziji* (see Y.-H. Huang 1984, Tang 1989, cited by Miyagawa 2010), according to which the long-distance binding across clause boundaries in Chinese requires the matching person feature of two T heads. On the basis of such person agreement, Miyagawa suggests that Chinese is a language equipped with person agreement on par with Romance and Hellenic *pro*-drop languages. I argue that the following discussions on EE in SD verify this statement.

### 3.1 Bare Erho Expression

Probably the most often uttered EE among all kinds of variations, bare EE has only one person interpretation, with *Er* referring to the addressee. As indicated by (1) and repeated as (14):

(14) Erho!

son.deceive

“Lit: If you lie to me, you are my son! /Don’t you dare lie to me!”

It is important to note that within EE—bare or augmented—*Er* cannot refer to a third party other than the speaker or the addressee. To substantialize this restriction, observe the following EE in which the intended referent does not take a part in the dialogue.

(15) Jialaolian: Manggo so ta xiagoyue huan ngi qian.

MG say 3<sup>rd</sup> next.CL.month return 2<sup>nd</sup> money

“Manggo says that he will pay you back next month.”

Fengtsetse: Erho!

son.deceive

Reading a: “Don’t you dare lie to me (that Manggo did say so)!”

\*Reading b: “Doesn’t he dare lie to me (that Manggo will pay me back)!”

The English translation of the utterance of *Fengtsetse* clearly suggests that bare EE in this context can only be interpreted as *Fengtsetse* urging *Jialaolian* to tell the truth, whereas whether *Manggo* will honor his commitment or not is not up for discussion.

Thus, the person feature breakdown characterized by Pak, Portner and Zanuttini (2008) seems to pertain to this discussion of EE, as the person feature is specified as {±Speaker} and {±Addressee}. The addressee-limited reading of bare EE thus helps us specify *Er* as {+Addressee}.

In phase theory (Chomsky 2007, 2008), the  $\phi$ -probe is assumed to be originally merged on C with the support of both conceptual and empirical merits. What is crucial to the present study is that the  $\phi$ -probe is inherited by T in the subsequent computations. Richards (2007)

proposes that the motivation for such inheritance is that feature valuation and transfer must take place at the same time because interfaces cannot tell inherently interpretable features from derivationally valued, uninterpretable features. Thus, if the uninterpretable  $\phi$ -feature (i.e.,  $\phi$ -probe) is not inherited by T, the conceptual-intentional interface may not be able to properly interpret it even it is valued by detecting a proper goal in its search domain. In contrast, through C-to-T inheritance, it is possible that feature valuation and transfer might apply simultaneously; the C-I interface can now distinguish or remove derivationally valued features that have no interpretation in semantic components (see Chomsky 2008: 18–19). (Note 3)

Likewise, Miyagawa (2010: 19) argues that the  $\phi$ -probe on C is always inherited by a lower head (T or  $\alpha$ ) in contrast to his earlier work (Miyagawa 2005). For EE, I tentatively assume the following structure:

$$(16) \quad [CP \ C_{\{u\phi\}} [TP \ T_{\{u\phi\}} [vP \ Er_{\{\phi: \text{Addressee}\}}]]]$$

*Inheritance*

└───┘

In the structure of (16), T is activated as a probe after inheriting the uninterpretable feature  $\{u\phi\}$  from C. Thus, a functional relation (person agreement) can then be built when T probes a proper goal and enters into an Agree relation with it. With EE, the only nominal inside T's search domain is *Er* which contains an interpretable person feature. However, although the Agree relation ensures that the uninterpretable feature embedded in the probe is properly valued, a valued person feature on a functional head T may not receive an interpretation in the C-I interface and should thus be deleted before transfer. The question is as follows: how can semantic components know that there is a functional relation built in the narrow syntax? Developed from the intuitive notion that the functional relation held between T and a nominal must be in Spec-Head configuration (Koopman and Sportiche 1991), Miyagawa (2010: 33) presents the idea that the reason for movement is to leave a record of functional relation for the semantic components. He calls this the *probe–goal union*:

$$(17) \quad \textit{Probe–goal union}$$

A goal and a probe form a local union in narrow syntax.

Therefore, to retain person agreement in bare EE, *Er* must move to the edge of its probe. One may ask, as the  $\phi$ -feature is assumed to be incompetent in determining its goal on its own (Miyagawa 2010: 22), how can SD guarantee that *Er*, instead of the internal argument, is selected by the probe? Unlike English, T in Chinese does not assign case (in accordance with Lin 2010, who claims there is no case-driven A-movement in Chinese); assigning case can assist T in English to search for the corresponding goal. A possible answer is: it is  $\{-\text{focus}\}$  feature, alongside  $\phi$ , inherited by T that enables T to identify *Er* as its goal. This is not a stipulative assumption, as the focus nature of *Er* can be evidenced by the distribution of prosodic stress.

In both SM and SD, the unmarked stress resides on the object in transitive clauses, implying

that Chinese languages also fall under the prediction of the Nuclear Stress Rule by Cinque (1993), as in (18), which shows prosodic stress highlighted by capitalization.

(18) *SD*

Manggo ci-lo            TSUZOU.

MG    eat-ASP    pork

“Manggo ate pork.”

Interestingly, in all the varieties of EE, *Er* carries the stress regardless of the presence or absence of an object:

(19) Lago    ER tou-di            qian!

who    son steal-PAST    money

Reading a: “Lit. If I stole the money, I am your son!”

Reading b: “Lit. If you stole the money, you are my son!”

In addition to the prosodic stress, I propose that there is another way to identify the focus with the assistance of phonological traits that is applicable to both SM and SD. It is noteworthy that in Mandarin Chinese, there is no distinction between long stem-vowels and short stem-vowels, a distinction on which the lexical specification hinges. In other words, contrasts such as *sheep* vs. *ship* in English or *syooko* (“proof”) vs. *syoko* (“archive”) in Japanese are absent in Chinese. However, this does not mean a vowel can be arbitrarily prolonged without proper motivation. Crucially, it seems only the stem-vowel of a focus can be prolonged without provoking infelicity. I now examine some of the typical focus structures in Mandarin Chinese, including contrastive focus (Rochemont 1986), identificational focus (É. Kiss 1998), and verum focus (Tilman 1992; prolonged vowels are italicized):

(20) *Contrastive focus (extracted from Tsai 2008: 108)*

Shifou ni *ZHUROU* chi, *NIUROU* bu chi.

whether 2<sup>nd</sup> pork            eat beef    not eat

“Is it the case that you eat pork, but not beef?”

(21) *Identificational focus (extracted from C-H. Cheung 2014: 394)*

(Shi)    *SHEI*, Mali    zui    xihuan    ne?

COP    who    Mary    most    like    SFP

“Who does Mary like the most?”

(22) *Verum focus (extracted from Cheng and Vincente 2013: 5)*

*CHI*,    wo shi            chi-guo...

eat 1<sup>st</sup> COP eat-ASP

“As for eating, I have indeed eaten...”

The sentences in (20–22) show a very uniform picture—that only the stem-vowel of the focused elements can be unproblematically prolonged. In contrast to prosodic stress, such vowel prolonging is optional; however, if a non-focused element undergoes stem-vowel prolonging, the sentence will sound quite odd. For instance, if the stem-vowel of the subject *wǒ* is intended to be prolonged in (22), not only would it sound unnatural and artificial, but also a speaker would sense difficulty in articulating such a sentence even though the prosodic stress remains on *chi*. This diagnosis for focus can be further verified by the fact that if the stem-vowel of the defocused elements is prolonged, it would sound *extremely* odd. Although Mandarin Chinese does not seem to prevail in terms of the attested variations of defocus structure, in contrast to Cantonese (see L-Y. Cheung 2009, Lee 2017), what is important is that the dislocated, defocused elements are prohibited from undergoing stem-vowel prolonging. As (23) demonstrates, SD is consistent with this restriction:

(23) Yao tsuazsi o, ngi(\*NGI).  
want do-what SFP2<sup>nd</sup>

“What are you gonna do?”

If the prolonging of the stem-vowel, along with the distribution of prosodic stress, can function as a benchmark to detect the element of focus, *Er* should be the only lexical item that can bear the stress and a prolonged stem-vowel in EEs. As (24) indicates, this is indeed the case:

(24) *ER* bu (\**U*) qi (\**i*) xio(\**IO*)xiao!  
son not go school

“If you don’t go to the school, you are my son!”

In a bare EE such as (24), other than the stem-vowel *e* of *Er*, no other vowels can be prolonged without causing phonological awkwardness. Therefore, I propose that *Er* in EE should be analyzed as a focused phrase that values the {-focus} of T, which is inherited from C, via Agree. Additionally, it is the {-focus} feature that makes T, containing the  $\varphi$ -feature as well, capable of identifying its goal. This derivation can be sketched as follows:

(25) [CP C<sub>{u $\varphi$ }/{-focus}</sub> [TP T<sub>{ $\varphi$ :Addressee}/{+focus}</sub> [<sub>v</sub>P *Er*<sub>{ $\varphi$ :Addressee}/{+focus}</sub>]]]  
Inheritance Agree

Before ending this section, I would like to speculate as to why *Er* in bare EEs can only be specified as {+Addressee}, given that it is an R-expression rather than a pronoun (e.g., *ngi* ‘you’). As I have briefly discussed in the introduction, EE was originally liable to the patriarchal traditions of Chinese social culture in that one can fiercely offend a peer by

calling him (normally not applicable to females) as one's male offspring. On the other hand, in modern colloquial Mandarin Chinese (including SD), it is very unlikely for one to refer to himself as *Er* even if he is speaking to his biological parents, whereas parents can address their son(s) as *Er* (often in its disyllabic form *Erzi*). In a nutshell, there might be two reasons for the {+Addressee} person specification of *Er* in EE: (i) it is possible to insult the addressee by calling him *Er* ("son") or (ii) the speaker does not call himself *Er* ("son").

In 3.2, I discuss a more intriguing issue related to the ambiguous person reference observed in EEs headed with an indefinite *wh*-phrase, in which *Er* can refer to either the speaker or the addressee.

### 3.2 Erho Expressions With Indefinite Wh-Phrases

Recall that in (2a), I demonstrated the EE headed with an indefinite *wh*-phrase (EEW) can have two distinct interpretations regarding the person specifications of *Er* (repeated in (26–27)). For each of these possible contextual settings, I give two examples.

(26) A: Ngi so ngi xiatsou huan qian ha!  
 2<sup>nd</sup> say 2<sup>nd</sup> next-week return money SFP  
 "You said you were gonna pay me back next week!"

B: Lago Erho !

who son.deceive

Reading a: "Lit. Whoever lies to you is your son! / I won't lie to you!"

(27) A: Xiatsou ngo kendin huan ngi qian!  
 next-week 1<sup>st</sup> definitely return 2<sup>nd</sup> money  
 "I swear I will pay you back next week."

B: Lago Erho !

who son.deceive

Reading b: "Lit. Whoever lies to me is my son! / Don't you dare lie to me!"

The very sharp contrast between a bare EE and an EEW is that the person reference of *Er* is unconstrained in the latter. As suggested in (26–27), *Er* can refer to either the speaker or the addressee depending on the context. However, as I have argued in 3.1, if EEW in (26) is exchanged for a bare EE (addressee-be-the-son reading), awkwardness emerges. In the remainder of this section, I show that the *wh*-phrase *lago* takes the position Spec,  $\alpha$ P, a departure from the analyses for pre-subject *wh*-phrases in SM because *lago* in EEW is syntactically different from the generic indefinite *wh*-phrases in both SD and SM.

Although SD does not use the same lexical items to represent *wh*-elements as SM does, it seems that *wh*-phrases in SD are no different than those of SM in their syntactico-semantic properties. In (28), I briefly compare how the notions of *who*, *what*, *how*, and *why* are

represented in SD and SM.

(28) a. *Wh-phrases in SD*

*lago* “who,” *satsi* “what,” *langgo/tsago* “how,” *weisatsi* “why”...

b. *Wh-phrases in SM*

*shei* “who,” *shenme* “what,” *zenyang/ruhe* “how,” *weishenme* “why”...

In effect, *wh*-phrases in Chinese have generally been analyzed to be inherent indefinites instead of quantificational operators (e.g., Cheng 1991; Tsai 1994; Aoun and Li 2003; Aldridge 2010). For *wh*-construal, I follow Tsai’s (1999) insightful proposal that the interrogative interpretation results from the unselective binding (cf. Nishigauchi 1986) by  $Op_{[Q]}$  positioned in CP domain. Tsai’s position can also be observed in SD:

(29) *Lago xianlai, lago jiou youfa xiansi næn?*

who first.come who thencan first.eat SFP

“For which *x*, *x* a person, if *x* comes first, then *x* can eat first.”

As the interpretation of (29) indicates, the two *wh*-phrases can only be conceived of as indefinites bound by a single  $Op_{[Q]}$  (probably phonetically realized as an SFP; i.e., *næn* (Note 4); see Paul 2014), rather than as independent quantificational *wh*-operators. This is because only one person is involved in the *wh*-construal. Thus, I conclude that *wh*-phrases in SD parallel those in SM even though they are realized by distinct lexical items.

In EEWs, an argument *wh*-phrase precedes the subject. It should be noted that SM also allows *wh*-fronting targeting pre-subject position that seems to superficially resemble EEWs. The motivation for such fronting is the ongoing debate about whether it is topic-driven (J-I. Li 1996; Wu 1999; Pan 2011) or focus-driven (Cheung 2012, 2014). For example, Cheung (2014: 394) proposes that the following *wh*-fronting structure is “[a] strategy for licensing Identificational Focus (É. Kiss 1998),” targeting Spec, FocusP subsumed by an articulated CP domain (Rizzi 1997, 2004):

(30) (Shi) *shei<sub>i</sub>, Zhangsan zui taoyan t<sub>i</sub>.*

COP who ZS most dislike

“Who does Zhangsan dislike the most?”

Nonetheless, the analysis for (29) and (30) cannot be applied to the EEW data for the following reasons: (i) EEWs can never feature *wh*-construal even if the interrogative SFP *næn* appears; (ii) assuming *wh*-phrases in EEWs are a focus is at odds with the *uniqueness* trait of focus (see Benincà 1988: 144; Rizzi 1997: 290), as I have demonstrated in 2.2 that *Er* inherently bears {+focus}; (Note 5) (iii) *wh*-phrases in EEWs do not undergo movement; and (iv) the ambiguous person reference remains unsolved. I now examine these reasons one by one.

First, EEWs cannot have interrogative interpretations. Note that the appearance of SFP *næn*

renders *wh*-construal available for indefinite *wh*-phrases in non-EE contexts, as illustrated in (29). Nevertheless, neither intonation shifts nor SFPs can give rise to interrogative interpretations in EEWs:

- (31) \*Lago Erho            *næn?*  
           Who    son.deceive SFP

Intended reading: “Who is the one that if he lies to me/you, he is my/your son?”

What (31) denotes is that *lago* in EEW structure cannot be unselectively bound by  $Op_{[Q]}$  and can thus only be interpreted as indefinite meaning “whoever,” aligning with the majority of studies claiming that *wh*-phrases in Chinese are inherently indefinite or polarity items.

In seeking the reason that *wh*-phrases in EEWs cannot feature *wh*-construal, I speculate that the  $Op_{[Q]}$  merges on ForceP or InterrogativeP following the terminology of the split CP approach (Rizzi 1997). Importantly, EEs entail the illocutionary force of asserting (Searle 1976) an intense presupposition that contradicts the interrogative force. In other words, it would be improbable for one clause to simultaneously be both assertive and interrogative.

Second, assuming *wh*-phrases in EEW pattern with *wh*-fronting, as discussed in Cheung (2014), would allow too many foci in one clause. Although contrastive focus structures such as (21) involve two separate foci, a biclausal structure is also required. Moreover, in contrast to EEWs, *wh*-phrases in *wh*-fronting structures must have interrogative interpretation, as (32) shows, *shenme* “what” cannot be indefinite. (Note 6)

- (32) \*Shi    shenme,    Zhangsan    mai-le.  
           COP    what            ZS            buy-ASP

Intended reading: “It is something that Zhangsan bought.”

In contrast, pre-subject *wh*-phrases in EEWs can only have indefinite readings, implying that no focus-driven movement takes place. If the assumption that *wh*-movement or fronting is driven by {-focus} or {-Q} is on the right track, the non-interrogative or non-focus nature of *wh*-phrases in EEWs also constitutes a piece of evidence for the argument that no *wh*-movement is involved in EEWs; the whole picture becomes even clearer in the following example, in which *lago* heads a complete SVO sequence:

- (33) Lago    er    mei            ho            jiou!  
           who    son have-not    drink    alcohol

“Whoever doesn’t drink is my/your son!”

In (33), there is no legitimate source of *wh*-movement, as the argument positions are filled by distinct nominals, thus leaving no copy of a moved element. SM simply does not have a structure that parallels the one in (33), as the aforementioned SM *wh*-fronting indeed leaves a lower copy (Note 7). Therefore, I believe it is only plausible to treat *lago* in (33) as the output of external merge (the external merger of an XP from an independent workspace is also

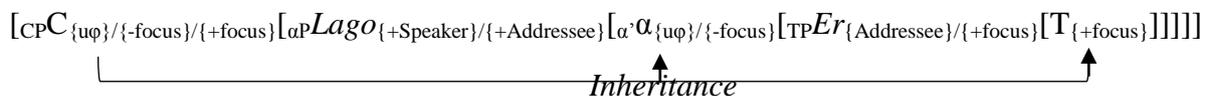
argued to be the optimal strategy to satisfy the EPP requirement by Pan 2022: 127).

Finally, current theories relating the *wh*-fronting and the licensing of *wh*-construal do not offer an analysis for the ambiguity of person agreement shown by EEW. Hereby, I propose a distinct structural analysis for EEWs in which the most essential designation is that *lago* requires the projection of  $\alpha$ P and takes its specifier position and it enters the derivation through external merge. One may wonder how can we circumvent the violation of the *Duality of Semantics* (see Chomsky 2021) which requires a theta-position to be filled only by external merge. Note that such condition does not rule out a non-theta-position that is filled by elements externally merged. In other words, it is a condition on how should (or shouldn't) a lexical item be introduced to theta-position. As to [SPEC,  $\alpha$ P], a non-theta-position, external merge of a nominal should not pose any problem.

The ambiguous person reference may result from the fact that  $\alpha$  inherits the  $\phi$ -probe and enters into an Agree relation with *lago*. Because *lago* must be indefinite, it suffers from no constraint in referring to a specific participant within the dialogue in question; the specification of the person feature of *lago* is arguably {+Speaker/+Addressee}.

Recall my argument in 2.2 that the position preceding *Er* (situated in Spec, TP) is also an A-position because movement targeting this position cannot be reconstructed. The application of  $\alpha$ P then seems very probable in dealing with EEW data. Along with the inheritance of  $\phi$ -probe, I thus tentatively propose that EEW follows this structure:

(34)



A crucial distinction between bare EE and EEW is that the  $\phi$ -probe is inherited by T in a bare EE but by  $\alpha$  in EEW. Additionally, Miyagawa (2010) assumes that  $\phi$ -probes are incapable of finding a goal, and I argue that a {-focus} (topic) feature behaves as a helper in analogy to the {-focus} (focus) feature that assists  $\phi$ -probe to find *Er* in the case of a bare EE, which only requires its specifier to be filled (Miyagawa 2010: 87). The topic nature of *lago* indicates that it is quite compatible with the Spec,  $\alpha$ P analysis. (Note 8) And the *-gouzi* test also seems to maintain my position, as illustrated in (35):

(35) *Lago-gouzi er-(\*gouzi) ho!*

who-EXC son-EXC deceive

“Whoever freaking lies is my/your son!”

If the analysis that *gouzi* marks the nominal before it as the topic is correct, the contrast shown in (35) naturally follows: the inherently focused *Er* cannot be a topic, while the indefinite *lago* can. The topic-comment informational structure is available as (35) can well have the interpretation of “*As for the two participants of the discourse, if one of them lies, he is the son of the other!*” (Note 9) It can also be quite promising to assume that instances of *lago* in EEWs have D-linking properties in contrast to *Er* because the antecedent contexts of

EEWs necessarily make reference to the speaker or addressee; they are, by nature, speech acts that give or require commitments to or from the other party.

According to the structure depicted in (34), the ambiguous person reference lies in the Agree relation built between the  $\phi$ -probe and the indefinite *lago*. Namely, the  $\phi$ -probe on C finds the most shallowly embedded goal that bears the relevant feature (i.e., the externally merged *lago*), and for the purpose of probe–goal union,  $\phi$ -probes must be inherited by the head in proximity of this goal. In doing so, not only is a functional relation constructed in favor of the richness of the expressiveness of such language, but also a record of this functional relation is preserved for interpretation in the C-I interface. (Note 10) The functional relation available with regard to person agreement is the one between the indefinite *wh*-phrase *lago* and the  $\phi$ -probe, which would accordingly result in an indefinite person reference of EE. In the same vein, it is predictable that *Er* may no longer take a part in determining the person reference of this filial presupposition since the only functional relation involving *Er* is focalization rather than person agreement. Thus, *only the addressee is the son* interpretation is expectedly unwarranted.

### 3.3 SFP *-ma*, the Ambiguity Eliminator

What makes EE a more interesting linguistic phenomenon is that despite the variation in the person reference in accordance to the presence or absence of *lago*, the appearance of the SFP *-ma* always ensures that the filial relation is imposed on the speaker. Consider (36):

- (36) (Lago) Erho ma!  
who son.deceive SFP

“If I lie to you, I am your son (how can you not trust me)!”

Whether or not *lago* is present is irrelevant; as long as *-ma* occurs in the final position, the only possible interpretation is “*If I lie to you, I am your son!*” Thus, I conclude that the SFP is responsible for the unambiguity. Therefore, *-ma* in (36) seems to be reminiscent of the SFPs in Japanese and Korean that limit the person agreement of the subject, as shown at the beginning of this section.

However, a major difference between SD and Japanese or Korean is that *-ma* in SD does not prohibit the occurrence of certain personal pronouns, only limiting the output of the functional relations of person agreement (see (13) for Japanese data) in EEs:

- (37) Ngo/Ngi/Manggo lai tsu fan ma.  
1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup>/MG come boil rice SFP

“Let me do the cooking / How about you/Manggo do the cooking.”

Insofar as the data shown in (37), it seems that a dilemma has arisen: how can *-ma* eliminate other person interpretations in EE on one hand, while showing no restrictions on the pronominal subject on the other? I argue that *-ma* is a subject-oriented SFP that exclusively expresses the slight grievance of the speaker, thereby entering into an Agree relation with the



that *proposition structure* and *argument structure* are, respectively, centered on them (Chomsky 2007, 2008). Nonetheless, some have made efforts to adapt the articulated CP domain to the phase-based system. Among them, Hsieh (2005) claims that Force, Mood, and Fin count as phase heads; Totsuka (2013), in contrast, argues that Force and Top are phase heads that trigger transfer. Either way, the phasehood of ForceP seems to be commonly acknowledged (also note that ForceP is a core projection, while TopP is an optional projection; see Rizzi 1997, Pan 2022) (Note 13). According to this approach, it can be presumed that the  $\phi$ -probe initially merges on Force. The following sentence, in which Force scopes over the SFP *-ma* in SD, further suggests that the structure in (39) is plausible: (Note 14)

- (40) Langgo Manggojiou paodao Tsendu qi-lo ma!  
 how MG then run.to Chengdu go-ASP SFP

“How could Manggo go to Chengdu (he shouldn’t go to Chengdu)?”

(Denial > SFP > Event)

(40) entails the so-called denial *wh*-phrase; Tsai (2008: 108) argues that the locus of *zenme* (which parallels *langgo* in SD) is Force head. Crucially, with the appearance of *-ma*, the speaker’s grievance is also expressed, but it would be misleading to infer that the speaker is grumpy about the denial that *Manggo shouldn’t go to Chengdu*. Instead, the speaker is only upset that *Manggo went to Chengdu*. This scopal property supports the present analysis that *-ma* is structurally lower than the  $\phi$ -probe; consequently, person agreement becomes possible at the level of expression structure, in contrast to person agreement that spans expression structure and argument structure (i.e., the restrictions on person agreement of the subject imposed by SFP in Japanese and Korean). To be more specific, in the wake of the establishment of the probe–goal relation illustrated in (39), a functional relation of person agreement can then be attained for the purpose of the richness of expressiveness, which conforms to the purpose of agreement and building functional relations according to Miyagawa (2010: 8–9).

The reason why EEs with *-ma* can only have unambiguous interpretations thus becomes clear. That (a copy of) valued  $\phi$ -probe may still be inherited by  $\alpha$  or T, as Miyagawa (2010) argues; the  $\phi$ -probe, along with {*-focus*}, is always taken over by lower heads to give rise to focalization or topicalization, which is, in turn, responsible for the appearances of *Er* or *lago* at the surface position. Since the uninterpretable person feature has already been valued by *-ma* in CP domain, the  $\phi$ -probe cannot be valued by the person feature of the lower nominals, thus leaving no other possibility for person agreement. By adding *-ma* to an EE, the slight grievance of the speaker would be exerted on the fact that *the addressee does not trust the speaker*; this distinctive discursal function is approved by all my informants. Accordingly, this reveals that *-ma* in SD does not impose restraints on the person of the subject. In contrast to languages such as Korean, in which the  $\phi$ -probe Agrees with the pronoun situated in Spec, TP, in SD, the  $\phi$ -probe would locate the {*+Speaker*}-bearing SFP *ma* in EE.

One may also wonder if there is an addressee-oriented SFP that may value the  $\phi$ -probe as

{+Addressee}; if so, a scenario in which all EE variations only have an “*If you lie to me, you are my son!*” interpretation is to be expected. One potential candidate is the SFP *-ga*, which has the function of seeking the consent of the addressee and arguably has no counterpart in SM:

- (41) Ta/(#Ngi) ngen si go guawatsi ga.  
 3<sup>rd</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> certainly COP CL fool SFP

“He’s definitely a fool (don’t you think so?).”

If the subject of a *ga*-clause is a second-person pronoun, pragmatic infelicity emerges, as it would be inappropriate to ask the addressee to agree with the claim that he or she is a fool. Unfortunately, even though *-ga* may be a promising test for the validity of my theory regarding expression-level person agreement, not all native informants accepted that *-ga* could be used in the context of EE, thus requiring a clause such as (42) to be marked with ‘?’

- (42) ?Lago Erho ga!  
 who son.deceive SFP

Intended reading: “If you lie to me, you are my son!”

Interestingly enough, Yunnan dialect (YD), a subbranch of southwest Mandarin just like SD, and SD are basically mutually intelligible; a speaker of YD who resided in an SD-speaking region for years told me that he would use the SFP *-gai*, which is exclusively used in YD, at the end of an EE, and an addressee-exclusive interpretation is spontaneously yielded from this blended dialectal expression:

- (43) Lago Erho gai!  
 who son.deceive SFP

“If you lie to me, you are my son!”

It is possible that *-gai* in YD and *-ga* in SD might share the same etymological root. For a speaker with knowledge of both dialects, the ambiguity of EE may also be canceled out by other distinctive SFPs. In (43), the  $\phi$ -probe is valued as {+Addressee} by the Agree relation with the goal *-gai*, which inherently bears an addressee-oriented person feature.

#### 4. Conclusion

This paper addresses a colloquial expression (i.e., Erho expression) that is used by speakers of the Sichuan dialect of Mandarin Chinese to ensure that the statement made by one of the participants in the discourse is true. The idiosyncratic property of EE is that when a bare EE is used, it asserts a presupposition that if the addressee is telling the lie, he would then become the “son” of the speaker (referring to someone as one’s son could be a strong insult in Chinese unless there is a genuine biological father–son relation); on the other hand, the filial reference varies in association with the presence of elements such as indefinite *wh*-phrases and SFPs. I have proposed a generalized approach based on Miyagawa’s (2010)

agreement vs. discourse-configurational system that is capable of regularizing the seemingly muddled person agreement of various EEs. In short, SD may employ two A-positions underneath the CP domain—namely, Spec,  $\alpha$ P and Spec, TP—and the ambiguous person reference simply rests on which one of the nominals that takes these A-positions is detected by the  $\varphi$ -probe.

If the analysis for EE is on the right track, a significant consequence is that at the very least, dialects such as SD seem to blend the characteristics of both agreement languages and discourse-configurational languages. As Miyagawa (2010: 29) describes, "...[T]he difference between agreement languages and discourse-configurational languages boils down to whether or not the topic/focus feature is also inherited by a lower head such as T." Chinese languages, on one hand, display topicalization or focalization that targets the C domain (e.g., the uncanonical OSV word order, *lian...focus*) in alignment with typical agreement languages, indicating that the topic or focus feature stays on the CP layer in this case. On the other hand, in dialects such as SD, such features can be inherited by  $\alpha$  or T to allow for the raising of *Er* and external merger of *lago*, respectively. Having followed this approach, why *Er* and *lago* have focus and topic reading but take an A-position becomes evident. In contrast to a topic or focus located on the left edge of a clause, *Er* and *lago* enter into agree relations with a topic or focus feature eventually inherited by T and  $\alpha$ .

## 5. Future Research

Sichuan dialect, being a subdivision of Mandarin Chinese, has not been fully studied with respect to its unique syntactic behaviors. An intuitive understanding is that there should be no significant difference between SD and SM as far as the grammar is concerned, as the relatively low mutual-intelligibility probably results from phonological reasons. But as the present work suggests, some expressions that are limited to SD may provide new perspective about the interaction between the 'spoken' propositional layer and the 'unspoken' discourse-oriented layer. Though this work does not involve the discourse structure referred to as tree-tops by Miyakawa (2022) for the agreement relation that determines the referent of *Er* is tentatively argued to occur within the CP, I will not exclude the possibility that there could be an alternative, which is what I will explore in the near future.

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## Notes

Note 1. The romanization of Sichuan dialect in the present work is a modified version of Chinese Phonetic Alphabets (also known as *Pinyin*), which should be rather easy for those who have basic knowledge of Standard Mandarin phonology but without linguistic training to capture the rough picture of the pronunciation of this dialect. I also do not use International Phonetic Alphabets because the phonology of Sichuan dialect is just a peripheral aspect as to the issues discussed hereafter.

Note 2. The abbreviations used in this article are as follows: ACC: accusative ASP: aspect, C: complementizer, CL: classifier, COP: copula, DAT: dative, DE: de (possessive particle), EXC: execration, GEN: genitive, MOD: modal, NOM: nominative, PAST: past tense, SFP: sentence-final particle, TOP: topic.

Note 3. As Hayashi (2020: 279) indicates, within the current Problems of Projection: (Extensions) (POP(E)) framework proposed by Chomsky (2013, 2015), feature inheritance, as outlined by Richards (2007), is no longer valid. One way to revive such a distinction between the two kinds of features is proposed by Epstein, Kitahara and Seely (2017), who argue that the assumption that the <F, F> label is the assigner of the interpretation to the unvalued features renders the notion of transfer/inheritance *timing* irrelevant. In other words, an unvalued feature {uF} may remain unvalued until it reaches the C-I interface (meaning it is always distinguishable in the narrow syntax), where it receives interpretation through the <F, F> label.

Note 4. SFP *næn* is predominantly used in Chengdu (the capital of Sichuan province) area, while in eastern Sichuan dialect, the more common form is 噯 *ngan*.

Note 5. Miyagawa (2010: 90) presents a scenario in which a two-foci structure is possible in Japanese, as (i) shows:

- (i) Taroo-mo pizza-mo tabeta.  
 Taroo-also pizza-also ate  
 ‘Taroo also ate pizza, too.’

As Miyagawa denotes, this two-foci structure is imposed with order constraints in contrast to multiple topic structure, in that *Taroo-mo* and *pizza-mo* in (i) cannot be exchanged. Still, *Taroo* in this context displays sort-of-a *uniqueness* in that the nominal is attracted by the {-focus}-bearing functional head for the purpose of probe-goal union. I assume that *pizza-mo* does not cause derivational crashes for staying within *vP* since it bears interpretable {+focus}.

Note 6. This fact further suggests that Cheung (2014) correctly determines that the *wh*-fronting in question is focus-driven instead of topic-driven (Miyagawa, Wu and Koizumi 2019: 8 also suggest that *wh*-movement is triggered by focus).

Note 7. An exception is rhetorical questions, which induce negative interpretation on the proposition. However, it is rather clear that the indefinite *wh*-phrase in EEW not only cannot give rise to negation on its own but also it can only be *lago* ‘who’. On the contrary, the rhetorical *wh*-phrase repertoire of SM includes *shei* ‘who’, *nali(nar)* ‘where’, *shenme* ‘what’, *shenmeshihou* ‘when’, etc. So the general idea that such expression is not found in SM stills holds.

Note 8. In analogy with the ThemeP in Saito (2006) and FinP in Holmberg and Nikanne (2002).

Note 9. One may question whether or not is it plausible to assume an indefinite expression to be the topic. *Lago* in EEW, however, differs from canonical *wh*-indefinites, as it can only be associated with two people—namely, the speaker and the addressee. In other words, it is much more specific than a generic *wh*-indefinite. Empirically, it is not entirely impossible for indefinite expressions to be topics. For example, indefinite nominals in Japanese can be followed by the topic marker *-wa* ((i) is extracted from Niwa 2013: 3, glosses are mine):

- (i) Warudokappu-nokaisaicyu oku-no hito-tachi-wa terebi-ni  
kugizuke-datta.

World Cup-GENhold-during many-GEN person-PL-TOP TV-DAT  
rivet-COP-PAST

“Many people were glued to the TV during the World Cup.”

- (ii) Dare-ka-wa yarun-zyanai?  
who-INDF-TOP do-COP-not  
“Someone’s gonna do it.”

Note 10. Another way to ensure probe–goal union, in which *lago* moves to Spec, CP, exists. However, adopting this approach amounts to the resumption of the earlier research of Miyagawa (2005), which assumed that the  $\phi$ -probe has the option to not be inherited by a lower head.

Note 11. Note that although *-ma* is also used in SM (see Cui 2019), it differs from SD’s *-ma* in discursal function. As shown below, in certain cases, only SD uses *-ma*, while SM uses another SFP:

- (i) *SD*

- a. Yaode ma!  
alright SFP  
“(Reluctantly) Fine!”

*SM*

- b. Haode ba(#ma)!  
alright SFP  
“(Reluctantly) Fine!”

Note 12. There are two ways to construct strict probe–goal unions of *-ma* and Force by either (i) head-to-head movement in a way similar to S-Y. Lin’s (2012: 22) proposal that the uninterpretable {uForce} feature can be valued by externally merging epistemic modal verbs onto Force heads; (ii) raising the entire complement (*-ma* included) to Spec, Force if it is vacant, following Pan’s (2022) hypothesis that Force is a phase head bearing an EPP feature that must be satisfied.

Note 13. The hierarchical relation between *-ma* and other peripheral projections may be

ignored if we follow Pan's (2022) hypothesis that all the heads in CP domain are phase heads. Theoretically,  $\varphi$ -probe can be merged on  $-ma_{\{+Speaker\}}$ , a phase head proper, constructing a very local probe-goal union.

Note 14. As for the head-parameters of SFP in Chinese, I follow the proposals of Sybesma (1999), Cheung (2009), and Pan (2021) that SFP shows the property of head-initiality.

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