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INSIGHT

RESPONSE PARTICLES *HAI*⁶ IN CANTONESE

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1. INTRODUCTION

As is well known, there are two types of copular verbs in Chinese languages: the Cantonese type *hai*⁶ and the Mandarin type *shì*. These two copular verbs are quite similar in that they not only appear as copular verbs, they also appear in cleft-sentences, as well as in the so-called *shì...de* constructions. Despite their similarities, they diverge in their historical source and development. It is generally agreed that *shì* has developed from a demonstrative pronoun (based on Wang's 1958 analysis), whereas *hai*⁶ started out as a verb (Tang 2009). These two different historical sources for copular verbs are both cross-linguistically attested (i.e., from demonstrative to copula or from verb to copula) (Heine and Kuteva 2002; Hengeveld 1992; Stassen 1997).

There is one similarity between *shì* and *hai*⁶ that has escaped attention in the literature: both can be used as positive response particles (while the negative counterparts are *bú-shì* and *m⁴-hai*⁶ respectively). As Zhang and Tang (2011) point out, the use of *shì* as a response particle is quite different from the copular verb *be* in English, which cannot be used as such. On the other hand, the response particle *yes* in English, for instance, is not a copular verb. The question arises why both *shì* and *hai*⁶ can be used

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as response particles, and whether this property is connected to the fact that they are both copular verbs.

This article presents a preliminary analysis of response particles *shì* and *hai*⁶, which is compatible with their copular properties. In section 2, we first discuss *hai*⁶ as a response particle, followed by *shì* as a response particle, as well as the syntax of responses. Section 3 discusses Krifka's (2013) analysis of response particles as anaphors and its application to both *shì* and *hai*⁶, as well as the historical development of copula verbs. I argue that their use as response particles is closely connected to their copular properties. Section 4 concludes the article.

2. *HAI*⁶ AS RESPONSE PARTICLE

This section focuses on *hai*⁶ as a response particle. All the data have similar Mandarin counterparts with *shì* as the response particle. I use the term “response” particle instead of “answer” particle here to emphasize the fact that such particles are not only used in question-answer sequences. Instead, they are used in broader contexts where responses to previous utterances are possible. That *hai*⁶ can be used as a response particle in Cantonese can be seen from simple question-answer cases such as (1), as well as responses to assertions as in (2), imperatives as in (3) and exclamatives as in (4). Recent literature also emphasizes the similarity between responses to assertions and answers to polarity questions (Farkas and Bruce 2010; Lipták 2013; Wiltschko 2018).

- (1) a. Billy gam¹maan⁵ lei⁴ aa⁴?
 Billy tonight come Q
 ‘Is Billy coming tonight?’
 b. Hai⁶aa³. Keoi⁵ bat⁶ dim² dou³.
 yes SFP 3SG eight o'clock arrive
 ‘Yes. He’ll arrive at 8 o’clock.’
- (2) a. Sam wan²-dou² tiu⁴ so²si⁴ laa³.
 Sam find-arrive CL key SFP
 ‘Sam found the key.’
 b. Hai⁶aa³/M⁴-hai⁶ aak³.
 yes SFP/NEG-yes SFP
 ‘Yes.’/‘No (it is not the case).’

- (3) a. Co⁵ dai¹!
 sit down
 ‘Sit down!’
 b. Hai⁶!
 yes
 ‘Yes.’
- (4) a. (Mat¹) keoi⁵ gam³ gou¹ gaa³!
 what 3SG so tall SFP
 ‘How tall he is!’
 b. Hai⁶ aa³. Keoi⁵ gou¹ gwo³ luk⁶ cek³.
 yes SFP 3SG tall past 6 foot
 ‘Yes. S/he is taller than 6 feet.’

It should be noted that *hai*⁶ is not used in all polarity questions in Cantonese. Consider the counterpart of (1a) in A-not-A form:

- (5) a. Billy gam¹maan⁵ lei⁴-m⁴-lei⁴?
 Billy tonight come-NEG-come
 ‘Is Billy coming tonight?’
 b. Lei⁴./*Hai⁶ aa³.
 come/yes SFP
 ‘Yes. He’s coming.’

The response in (5b) contrasts with the response in (1b), even though both are typically considered to be polar questions. Aside from *aa*⁴, there are other yes-no particles in Cantonese (e.g., *me*¹, *gaa*⁴, *laa*⁴), which all elicit *hai*⁶ (or its negative counterpart) in response, instead of a verbal echo answer as in (5b).

What we can conclude from (1) to (5) is that *hai*⁶ can be used as a response except to A-not-A questions. If A-not-A questions are indeed neutral questions (Li and Thompson 1981), the null hypothesis is that the use of *hai*⁶ in responses to questions is restricted to non-neutral questions.¹ The question is why this is the case.

I suggest that particle questions are on a par with declarative questions/rising declaratives (Gunlogson 2002). That is, they are actually declaratives. Consider first the difference between (6a) and (6b).

- (6) a. Is it raining?
 b. It is raining? (with a rising intonation)

The yes-no question in (6a) is a neutral polar question in that it can be asked when the speaker sits in a windowless room, and asks the incoming person whether or not it is raining outside. In the same context, (6b) is infelicitous, unless the person coming in shows up with a wet raincoat, a wet umbrella or simply dripping wet. As Gunlogson (2002) states, rising declaratives such as (6b) commit the addressee to the proposition expressed: in the case of (6b), the proposition is: 'it is raining'. She suggests that sentences like (6b) are in fact not questions; rather, they are declaratives (with a rising intonation). These are subsequently called *rising declaratives*.²

Consider again the particle questions above. In the particle question in (1), the proposition that the speaker gets the addressee to commit is: 'Billy is coming tonight', while its negative counterpart yields the proposition 'Billy is not coming tonight'. Both cases are thus comparable to rising declaratives. In other words, the use of *hai*⁶ as a response particle in response to particle questions in contrast with a verbal echo answer is not surprising. In the case of particle questions, we are actually dealing with a disguised declarative. Thus, response particles for declaratives are also used in particle questions because they are all declaratives. A-not-A questions, however cannot be responded to with *hai*⁶ because they are not declaratives.

2.1 Brief Note on *Shì* as Response Particle

Though Mandarin differs from Cantonese in that it does not have as many question particles, there is also a distinction between the particle *ma*-questions and A-not-A questions. Li and Thompson (1981) use *ma*-questions to contrast with neutral A-not-A questions, as the former can be used in biased contexts (just as the Cantonese *aa*⁴ questions). However, *ma*-questions can also be used as neutral polar questions.³ Consider the question-answer pairs in (7).

- (7) a. Billy yǐjīng lái-le ma?
 Billy already come-PRF Q
 ‘Has Billy come already?’
- b. Shì a. Tā gāng dào méi duō jiǔ.
 yes SFP 3SG just arrive not.have much long
 ‘Yes. He just arrived not long ago.’
- c. Lái-le.
 come-PRF
 ‘He did.’

We see in (7) that *shì* can be used as a response particle to the *ma*-question. However, it is also clear that *ma*-questions can also be interpreted as neutral polar questions because it is also possible to respond with a verbal echo answer. It should be noted that in the case of (7b), the speaker must have had some evidence that Billy has arrived (e.g., there is someone talking downstairs whose voice sounds like Billy’s). Aside from responses to *ma*-questions, as noted above, *shì* can also be used to respond to statements, imperatives and exclamatives, just like Cantonese *hai*⁶.

2.2 The Syntax of Responses

To understand the contribution of *hai*⁶ in responses to particle questions and in affirmation, it is important to first understand the basics of the syntax of responses, which has been hotly debated in the last decade. Holmberg (2016), for instance, considers *yes* in English to be a positive focus head (i.e., carrying the positive value of the polarity feature [\pm Pol]). Given a question-answer pair such as (8), the answer-particle *yes* determines [$+$ Pol] on the focus head, with which the Polarity head [Pol^0] agrees, leading to a positive answer interpretation. The TP is elided in the answer in (8b) (see also Kramer and Rawlins 2008).

- (8) a. Does John like this book?
 b. [_{FocP} Yes Foc⁰_[+Pol], [_{PolP} he_i does [$+$ Pol] [_{TP} t_i ~~like this book~~]]].
-
- assigns
agrees

However, this analysis cannot straightforwardly apply to the responses we have seen in (1)–(5). First, the counterpart of *yes* in Cantonese cannot be used in the neutral A-not-A polar questions. Second, Chinese languages are said to use the ‘agree/disagree system’ or the ‘truth-based system’ (Holmberg 2016). In other words, in the case of a negative question, we have the pattern as in (9): the positive answer (9b) agrees with the negative presupposition of the question: ‘Billy is not coming tonight’, while the negative answer (9c) disagrees with it.

- (9) a. Billy gam¹maan⁵ m⁴ lei⁴ aa⁴?
 Billy tonight not come Q
 ‘Is Billy not coming tonight?’
 b. Hai⁶aa³. Keoi⁵ gam¹maan⁵ m⁴ dak¹haan⁴.
 yes SFP He tonight not available
 ‘Yes. He is not available/free tonight.’
 c. M⁴-hai⁶ aak³. Keoi⁵ ci⁴ di¹ lei⁴.
 NEG-yes SFP he late little come
 ‘No. He is coming a little later.’

The pattern that we see in (9) suggests that *hai⁶* does not yield a positive polarity, in contrast with *yes* in English. Instead, in the positive answer (9b), it asserts the declarative in (9a), which contains a negative polarity, namely that ‘Billy is not coming tonight’.

3. RESPONSE PARTICLES AS ANAPHORS

Krifka (2013) proposes that response particles are anaphors, which pick up a salient propositional discourse referent. Consider the sentences in (10a).

- (10) a. Ede stole the cookie. Bill knows it.
 b. Statement: Ede stole the cookie.
 Response: Yes, he did.

The first clause in (10) introduces a salient propositional discourse referent that is anchored to the proposition ‘Ede stole the cookie’. The pronoun *it* picks up this discourse referent and refers to it. What *yes* does

in (10b), according to Krifka (2013), is that it picks up the salient propositional discourse referent, and asserts it.⁴ The negative counterpart, *no*, asserts the negation of the discourse referent. Krifka further suggests that *yes* is situated in a higher functional projection ActP (related to speech acts), and its meaning is equivalent to ASSERT(*d*) (where *d* is the salient propositional discourse referent), as represented in (11).

$$(11) \llbracket [\text{ActP } \textit{yes}] \rrbracket = \text{ASSERT}(d)$$

Holmberg (2016) objects to Krifka's (2013) analysis for *yes* and *no* in English. The objection concerns whether or not the analysis can apply to question-answer pairs. In particular, under Hamblin's (1973) theory of questions (Karttunen 1977; Dayal 2016), a polar question denotes two propositions. In the case of the question in (6a), the propositions are: 'it is raining and it is not raining'. In other words, as polar questions denote two propositions, there isn't just one salient propositional discourse referent for *yes* (or *no*) to pick up. Thus, for Holmberg (2016), Krifka's treatment of *yes* and *no* might apply to statement-response pairs but not to question-answer pairs.

3.1 *Shì* and *Hai*⁶

We have seen in section 2.1 that *hai*⁶ differs from *yes* in English in that it cannot be used in answers to neutral A-not-A polar questions. That is, it cannot be used to determine the positive polarity in an answer to a polar question (i.e., like *yes* under Holmberg's 2016 account). Furthermore, we have seen in section 2 that *hai*⁶ and its negative counterpart are used in responses to particle questions, which are declaratives in disguise (just like rising declaratives), simple declaratives, imperatives and exclamatives. This means that Holmberg's objection to Krifka's analysis of response particles does not apply to *hai*⁶ as it is only used in responses to non-questions, which can have a salient propositional discourse referent.

I suggest that *hai*⁶ as well as the Mandarin counterpart *shì* as response particles should be analyzed as anaphoric response particles à la Krifka (2013). In particular, both *hai*⁶ and *shì* pick up the salient propositional discourse referent from the previous utterance, and assert it. The question we face is whether there is independent evidence for

analyzing *hai*⁶ and *shì* as anaphors. It should be noted that the Mandarin or Cantonese counterpart of (10a) yields a null propositional pronoun, as shown in (12), as Chinese languages often have pro-drop.

- (12) Keoi⁵ tau¹-zo² di¹-beng². A-can² zi¹dou³. (Cantonese)
 he steal-PERF CL-cake A-Can know
 'He stole some cake. A-Can knows [it].'

As mentioned in the Introduction section, both *shì* and *hai*⁶ are copular verbs. They are also both used in cleft sentences. It is well-known in the literature since Wang (1940) that Mandarin *shì* as a copular verb has developed from a demonstrative pronoun. More recently, Cheng (2021) argues that *shì* in current Mandarin is a pronominal copula, on a par with the pronominal copula *hu* in Hebrew. In other words, for Mandarin *shì*, there are historical as well as synchronic reasons to analyze it as an anaphoric element, making it likely that *shì* as a response particle is an anaphor. However, the same cannot be said about *hai*⁶ in Cantonese.

As discussed in Jin (2017), there are two main types of copular verbs in Sinitic languages: the *shì*-type and the *xi*-type.⁵ Tang (2009) shows that the Cantonese copula *hai*⁶ has developed from the verb *hai*⁶ 'to bind, to connect', and was later used in cleft-sentences and copular sentences. The fact that copular verbs can develop from full verbs is attested in other languages as well (e.g., Chantyal, Erzya; Lohndal 2009). In other words, what we see in Chinese languages represent two different grammaticalization paths concerning copular verbs: one from demonstrative pronouns, one from full verbs.

Lohndal (2009) proposes a general copula cycle for the grammatical development of copulas based on Feature Economy within the Minimalist program (based on van Gelderen 2008). The cycle that he proposes is provided in (13).

- | | | | | |
|----------------------------|---|--------|---|--------------------|
| (13) demonstrative/pronoun | > | copula | > | grammatical marker |
| specifier | > | head | > | affix |
| iF | > | uF | > | -- |

The historical development as sketched out in (13) essentially captures the claim that specifiers become heads, lexical heads become functional heads, and a functional head becomes a higher functional head (Roberts and Roussou 2003). In the case of Mandarin *shì*, the historical path is as sketched out in (13): *shì* started out as a demonstrative pronoun (specifier) and it became a copula (a head). (13) also captures the historical path of Cantonese *hai⁶* in that *hai⁶* started out as a lexical verb (V^0) and it became a copular verb, i.e., the head of Predication Phrase (PrP), which is a higher functional head. In other words, the copula cycle in Lohndal (2009) captures both paths of historical developments of copulas in Cantonese and Mandarin. In fact, Lohndal (2009), following Li and Thompson (1977), discusses Mandarin *shì* as a core example illustrating the copula cycle.

3.2 *Hai⁶* and *Shì* as Anaphoric Response Particles

Consider now the fact that the use of these copular verbs, *hai⁶* and *shì*, as response particles. Recall that under Krifka's analysis, *yes*, being an anaphoric response particle, is situated in ActP, which is located in the left-periphery, above TP. Applying Krifka's analysis to both *shì* and *hai⁶* would place these two items also in ActP, and more particularly as the head of ActP. ActP is a higher functional projection than the copula head. Under Lohndal (2009), heads moving higher in the functional hierarchy form part of the copula cycle (and in fact, this fits the Linguistic Cycle as well, see among others, van Gelderen 2013). In other words, the copular verbs, going from the head of PrP to a higher functional head, namely, the head of ActP, fit the copula cycle.

Concerning the semantics of the response particle, following Krifka (2013), I assume that the anaphoric nature of the response particle is part of being the ActP. As mentioned above, there is historical evidence that Mandarin *shì* was a demonstrative pronoun. For *shì*, it is possible to claim that the anaphoric nature retains despite its head property. For Cantonese *hai⁶*, however, it is more difficult to make a similar claim, as it was never a demonstrative pronoun historically. Here, we mention two possible historical paths for Cantonese *hai⁶* which connects it to pronominal property. First, there remains a possibility that the development is part of the Linguistic Cycle as well, as the "starting" point of the cycle can be a demonstrative pronoun, which is an anaphoric item. That is, despite the

fact that *hai⁶* is not developed from a demonstrative pronoun, the fact that it is in a developmental cycle means that it will turn into a demonstrative pronoun, and the fact that it is a response particle is an indication of this. If this reasoning is correct, it entails that the renewal of the cycle may not always involve a new element, but rather can be through the same exponent. The second possibility is that the development of *hai⁶* from a lexical verb meaning ‘to connect’ to a copula involves bleaching of its lexical content, which is on a par with pro-forms. In other words, the fact that it is a copula indicates that it is similar to a pronoun (i.e., it is a pro-verb form)⁶ and thus is connected to the pronominal property.

4. CONCLUSION

In this article, I discuss the Cantonese response particle *hai⁶* and briefly its Mandarin counterpart *shì*. I argue that the development of *hai⁶*, as well as the development of *shì* as response particles, exemplify the copula cycle. Even though these two items instantiate two different routes of the copula cycle, they both become copulas, and they both become response particles. Following Krifka (2013), I suggest that as response particles, *hai⁶* and *shì* are positioned as the head of ActP, which is located higher than the copular head, PrP. Under Krifka’s account, response particles are anaphors, which pick up the salient propositional discourse referent from the previous utterance, and assert it. This can explain why both *shì* and *hai⁶* can be used as a response to particle questions, declaratives, imperatives, etc., but not to neutral A-not-A polar questions (as they do not just have one salient propositional discourse referent).

If the analysis of *shì* and *hai⁶* as response particles is on the right track, it means that even though Krifka’s (2013) may not be the correct analysis for English *yes* and *no* as response particles, it is an analysis that works for Mandarin *shì* and Cantonese *hai⁶*.

NOTES

1. It should be noted that in cases where only a special intonation is used, the pattern is the same as particle questions, and not as A-not-A questions. These questions are on par with rising declaratives discussed in

this section.

2. There is a lot of discussion concerning rising declaratives after Gunlogson (2002). See Trinh and Crnić (2011) Farkas and Roelofsen (2017), and Westera (2018) among others for further discussions.

3. I thank a reviewer for reminding me about this, and I also thank Sze-Wing Tang and Joanna Sio for discussing the differences between *ma*-questions and Cantonese particles questions with me.

4. Here, I ignore the difference that Krifka (2013) notes between English and German, as there can be other reasons why *yes* cannot appear in slots reserved for TPs.

5. *Xi* is the Mandarin pronunciation of Cantonese *hai*⁶.

6. I thank a reviewer for suggesting this.

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粤语的应答助词“係”

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摘要

普通话系词“是”和粤语系词“係”均可用于肯定应答。从跨语言的角度看，系词同时可以充当应答成分的现象并不多见。本文首先论证“是”和“係”作肯定应答助词时应被看作回指成分，支持 Krifka (2013) 对应答助词的分析。本文进一步指出“是”和“係”可以充当回指成分并用于肯定应答，这与二者的系词性质密不可分，两种功能间的联系体现了系词语法化过程中的循环演变 (Lohndal 2009)。

关键词

粤语 系词 应答助词