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Revisiting the Taxonomy of Interrogatives in Cantonese

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ABSTRACT

Traditionally, Cantonese interrogatives are classified into four types: (1) yes-no questions, (2) A-not-A questions, (3) disjunctive questions, and (4) *wh*-questions (e.g., Gao 1980). However, recent studies propose a binary classification, dividing interrogatives into confirmation-seeking (CS) and information-seeking (IS) questions, a theory successfully applied to Mandarin, Xiang (Sinitic), English, and other languages (Her et al. 2022). This paper first points out that the traditional four-way classification lacks precision and overlooks universal patterns in interrogatives, advocating for a binary division for Cantonese. Specifically, we argue that yes-no questions stand alone as CS questions, while A-not-A belongs to the disjunctive type, which is, in turn, a subcategory of IS constituent questions together with *wh*-questions. Furthermore, the paper discusses several sentence-final particles, suggesting that 呀 *aa4* and 噭 *he2* form CS polar questions, whereas 話 *waa6* and 先 *sin1* appear in IS questions. Additionally, we demonstrate that 未 *mei6*, found in the so-called VP-Neg question, should be analyzed as a kind of A-not-A question involving an implicit disjunction.

Key words: Cantonese, CS polar questions, interrogative particles, IS constituent questions, sentence-final particles

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1. Introduction

The use of 'interrogatives' as a grammatical form to code 'questions' is an important discourse function shared universally among human languages. A great variation is found in how questions are coded cross-linguistically: interrogative particles, word order changes, sentence-final tags, rising intonations, and non-intonational phonological changes on final phonological segments and others (e.g., Ultan 1978). In Cantonese, interrogatives are conventionally formed by four types of distinctive marks (Wu 1996), including interrogative particles at the end of a declarative sentence, such as 咩 *me1*; the juxtaposition of a verb and its negative counterpart, i.e., A-not-A forms; explicit disjunctive morphemes, or linking words, such as 定（係）*ding6hai6*, and 抑或 *jik1waak6*, all meaning 'or', between two declarative sentences; *wh*-elements such as 點 *dim2*, 乜 *mat1*, 幾 *gei2*, 邊 *bin1*, and others. Each distinctive mark defines one type of interrogatives widely discussed in the literature on Cantonese (e.g., Gao 1980: 198–200, 250–254; Tang 2015b: 244–261; Tsui 1999: 257–258; Cheung 2007: 195–197, 302–307; Cheng et al. 2021: 22–23, 60), namely (a) polar questions, (b) A-not-A questions, (c) disjunctive questions, and (d) *wh*-questions, as shown in Table 1.[1]

Table 1: Four-way distinction of interrogatives in Cantonese

a.	Polar questions	你 去 咩？ *nei5 heoi3 me1* you go SFP 'Are you going?'
b.	A-not-A questions	你 食 唔 食 飯？ *nei5 sik6 m4 sik6 faan6* you eat not eat meal 'Do you eat?'

[1] Terminology can vary in the field of linguistics. For example, 'polar' interrogatives are also referred to as 'yes-no' or 'question-particle' interrogatives, 'disjunctive' interrogatives can be called 'A-or-B' or 'alternative' interrogatives, and '*wh*-questions' are alternatively known as 'question-word' interrogatives, 'constituent questions', or 'variable questions'. These variations in terminology are common in linguistic discourse.

Table 1: Four-way distinction of interrogatives in Cantonese (continued)

c.	Disjunctive questions	你 要 粥 定（係） 飯？ *nei5 jiu3 zuk1 ding6hai6 faan6* you want porridge or rice 'Do you want porridge or rice?'
d.	*Wh*-questions	邊個 搵 我？ *bin1go3 wan2 ngo5* who find I 'Who is looking for me?'

A ternary distinction proposed by Matthews and Yip (1994, 2011) is also adopted by many researchers, e.g., Wong and Ingram (2003) and Li et al. (2013). This taxonomy recognizes three major types: polar, disjunctive, and *wh*-questions, where particle questions, A-not-A questions, and VP-Neg questions are the three subtypes of polar questions, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Three-way distinction of interrogatives in Cantonese

a.	Polar questions	Particle questions
		A-not-A questions
		VP-Neg questions
b.	Disjunctive questions	
c.	*Wh*-questions	

Matthews and Yip (2011: 360–363) claim that the three subtypes of polar questions differ only in the presupposition they each make regarding the answer: A-not-A questions are neutral, 咩 *me1* particle questions denote surprise and are used to check the truth of an unexpected state of affairs, and VP-Neg questions with 未 *mei6* 'not yet' are used to "ask whether something has already happened" (Matthews and Yip 2011: 363).[2]

While linguists generally concur on the necessity of distinguishing various question types and distinguishing yes-no questions from *wh*-questions semantically and

[2] In this paper, we do not specifically address tag questions, such as 係唔係 *hai6m4hai6* 'yes-no-yes' and 好唔好 *hou2m4hou2* 'good-not-good', which are typically added at the end of a declarative sentence (e.g., Wu 1996; Matthews and Yip 2011). We categorize them as a form of A-not-A questions.

syntactically, the taxonomies proposed in prior studies on Cantonese, whether presenting a four-way or three-way differentiation, suffer from a lack of precise and testable classification standards. Often, these classifications are based on heterogeneous criteria. For example, yes-no questions are characterized by the expected responses they elicit, while *wh*-questions, disjunctive questions, and A-not-A questions are classified according to their structural forms. The fundamental drawback associated with these earlier classifications is that all three or four major question types are treated as independent categories, failing to constitute natural groupings. It is true that each type can be justified based on its unique features, but such a framework neglects overarching cross-category generalizations and the fact that some of these types share significant common features, forming a larger category. For instance, VP-Neg questions are essentially a variant of A-not-A questions, and disjunctive questions exhibit similar syntactic behaviors to *wh*-questions. The intersecting nature of these different question types suggest that keeping them entirely separate and independent may not serve the fundamental purpose of taxonomy.

When considering question types, we may examine a comparable discourse within the realm of biological taxonomy. In modern biology, taxonomy recognizes eight hierarchical ranks: domain, kingdom, phylum, class, order, family, genus, and species. Domain was introduced in 1977 to replace kingdom as the apex rank. It is worth noting that it is precisely in this spirit that the current mainstream three-way distinction of questions overturned an earlier popular four-way classification. However, even within the trichotomy outlined in Table 2, particle questions and A-not-A questions persist as distinct subcategories.

In a recent study of interrogatives, an important advance is the proposal of a simple universal binary categorization, distinguishing between confirmation-seeking (CS) polar questions and information-seeking (IS) constituent questions. This dichotomy has proven successful when applied to Taiwan Mandarin (TM), Xiang (a Sinitic language), and English (Her et al. 2022), Taiwanese Southern Min (TSM, a Sinitic language) (Hsiao and Her 2021), and Paiwan (an Austronesian language) (Huang and Her 2024). It is important to note that the three Sinitic languages exhibit notable typological differences. For example, Xiang appears to lack CS polar questions altogether, either through

morphosyntactic or phonological means. In contrast, both TSM and TM incorporate genuine polar interrogative particles, although in TSM, the use of the polar particle *nih* seems to be restricted to the Tainan region. Regarding English, there is sufficient evidence to consider the possibility that apparent polar questions in the language may actually be underlyingly disjunctive questions. Paiwan, on the other hand, forms polar questions solely through prosody, which distinguishes it from Xiang.

Considering the apparent advantage of the inherent simplicity in this universalist two-way distinction of questions, we aim to reassess the traditional classification in Cantonese in light of the newly proposed CS versus IS dichotomy. Specifically, our study proposes a binary taxonomy to supersede earlier three-way and four-way classifications as the apex rank in the categorization. Our objective is to create a more informative taxonomy. To achieve this goal, this paper is organized as follows. In Section 2, we initially introduce the universalist two-way distinction and provide an overview of the set of syntactic and semantic tests that have been developed for this dichotomy in several Sinitic languages. Moving to Section 3, we employ these tests and apply the CS versus IS dichotomy to Cantonese. We illustrate the distinct grammatical characteristics of these two categories of interrogatives. In Section 4, we begin by identifying the genuine polar interrogative particle 咩 *me1*. We then address several contentious sentence-final elements, including 呀 *aa4*, 嘅 *he2*, 話 *waa6*, 先 *sin1*, and 未 *mei6*, and propose a reclassification based on our findings. Finally, Section 5 serves as the conclusion of this paper.

2. Criteria for a Two-Way Distinction of Questions

The universalist dichotomy of questions proposed by Hsiao and Her (2021) and Her et al. (2022) is first and foremost based on two semantic generalizations: first, all questions constitute a set of propositions and second, polar questions constitute a singleton set, i.e., a set with only one proposition (Bhatt and Dayal 2020), while all other questions constitute a set with two or more propositions. In (1a–c) are examples of the semantics of a polar question, a disjunctive question, and a *wh*-question.

(1) a. Polar Qs
[[did John leave]] = λ*p*.[*p* = ˆJohn left] = {John left}
(Bhatt and Dayal 2020: 1124 (22b))

b. Disjunctive Qs
[[did John or Jerry leave]] = λ*p*.[*p* = ˆJohn left ∨ *p* = ˆJerry left] = {John left, Jerry left}
(Her et al. 2022: 264 (4a))

c. *Wh*-Qs
[[between John and Jerry, who left]] = λ*p*.∃*x*[*x*∈{John, Jerry} ∧ *p* = ˆ*x* left] ={John left, Jerry left}
(Her et al. 2022: 264 (4b))

Both (1b) and (1c) involve more than one proposition and are thus classified as one major type, and (1a) forms the other major type, which involve one proposition only. Thus, contrary to the common belief, *wh*-questions and disjunctive questions are in fact alike in that they may constitute an open set or a closed set, as shown in (2) and (3).

(2) a. Is the best season to get married in Paris spring, summer, autumn, or winter?
b. What is the best season to get married in Paris?

(3) a. Is your favorite number one or two or three or four or five, so on and so forth?
b. What is your favorite number?

Hence, semantically the function of a polar question is to seek agreement on the single proposition put forth (e.g., Holmberg 2016: 156), while all other questions, i.e., disjunctive and *wh*-questions, expect the interlocutor to select one or more of propositions from the set offered. Her et al. (2022) further interpret this dichotomy in terms of pragmatics: polar questions seek (dis)confirmation on the speaker's attitude towards the proposition in the sentence, while all other questions seek information to fill the gap represented by the *wh*-constituent in the sentence. The interrogative disjunctive elements

such as *(whether)* . . . *or* in English and 還是 *hai2shi4* in Mandarin are thus also seen as a *wh*-constituent. A dichotomy of confirmation-seeking (CS) questions versus information-seeking (IS) questions is thus obtained.[3]

This dichotomy has been successfully applied to Taiwan Southern Min (TSM) by Hsiao and Her (2021), to Taiwan Mandarin (TM) and Changsha Xiang by Her et al. (2022), and to Paiwan by Huang and Her (2024). Her et al. (2022) also offer some preliminary evidence for the dissenting view that putative polar questions in English may turn out to be disjunctive questions of the *(whether)* . . . *or not* kind. Typologically, it is interesting to note that, among the three Sinitic languages, while TSM and TM have CS and IS questions, and their IS questions include disjunctive questions and *wh*-questions and their disjunctive questions include both the A-not-A type as well as the A-or-B type, Changsha Xiang does not have CS polar questions at all. Paiwan, a Formosan language in the Austronesian family, on the other hand, has only prosodically formed CS polar questions, but both Xiang and Paiwan have IS constituent questions, including disjunctive questions and *wh*-questions. Yet, Xiang disjunctive questions include the A-not-A type and the A-or-B type, but Paiwan does not have the A-not-A type. All these works demonstrate that the conventional three-way or four-way distinction advocated elsewhere for these languages misses important generalizations when examined with a set of semantic and syntactic tests developed based on the formal semantic distinction underlying the CS and IS dichotomy.

We now illustrate this set of tests with examples from Mandarin. Interrogative sentence-final particles may offer the first kind of test. The interrogative particle 嗎 *ma* in Mandarin, for example, turns a declarative sentence, or a proposition, into a CS question and is thus incompatible with IS questions. The interrogative particle 呢 *ne*, on the other, is optional with an IS question, formed with an interrogative *wh*-constituent.

Certain sentence-level adverbs may serve as the second kind of test. Given the nature of CS questions formed with a single proposition, in Mandarin they are compatible with the adverb 難道 *nan2dao4* ‘don’t tell me’, which casts doubt on the proposition

[3] An anonymous reviewer aptly notes that rhetorical questions, despite their interrogative form, often do not expect a genuine answer, thus placing them outside the scope of the current study, which focuses on prototypical questions used to elicit information or confirmation.

offered. The adverb 到底 *dao4di3* 'after all', on the other hand, presupposes two or more propositions; it is thus not compatible with CS questions. CS and IS questions thus behave exactly the opposite in terms of the use of these two adverbs.

The next kind of test may come from the observation of a certain intervention effect only in IS constituent questions, not in CS polar questions. A good example is the Mandarin sentence-level adverb 也 *ye3* 'also', which appears freely in a CS question, e.g., 他也來了嗎？ *ta1 ye3 lai2 le ma?* 'Did he also come?'. However, 也 *ye3* in a similar position in IS questions, thus including A-not-A, disjunctive, and *wh*-questions, is ill-formed. The latter is generally attributed to an invention effect, i.e., a *wh*-element must be c-commanded by either an interrogative complementizer or a Q-particle without the intervention of another c-commanding focus-sensitive operator like 也 *ye3* (e.g., Kotek 2014: 44).

The last kind of test is the availability of an indirect question counterpart. Syntactically, indirect questions appear as an argument of a predicate, thus either as a subject or an object. As such, indirect questions are semantically declarative by nature and in essence serve as the answer to the direct question. The sentence 'I know what her name is', for example, is equivalent to 'I know her name'. CS questions thus do not have indirect question counterparts due to their nature as a single proposition. The CS question 你快樂嗎？ *ni3 kuai4le4 ma?* 'You are happy?', will simply be a declarative as an indirect question, e.g., 我知道你快樂 *wo3 zhi1dao4 ni3 kuai4le4* 'I know you are happy'.

These tests demonstrate that polar questions stand alone as a major type, and all other questions form the other major type. Specifically, A-not-A questions are essentially A-or-B questions, where the B disjunct just happens to be not-A, and all disjunctive questions are in turn essentially *wh*-questions and share the same behavior under these tests. In the next section, we will apply this set of tests to justify the dichotomy of CS versus IS questions in Cantonese.

3. Taxonomy of Interrogatives in Cantonese

Cantonese questions are commonly classified into four types, whether explicitly or

implicitly. Gao's (1980) four-way classification, for example, encompasses these four types: yes-no, A-not-A, disjunctive, and *wh*-questions, based on observable structural features like sentence-final particles, repetition, conjunctions, or the presence of *wh*-words, respectively. Matthews and Yip (1994, 2011), on the other hand, subsume A-not-A questions under the category of polar questions. They argue that "[t]here are several distinct forms of yes/no question, which differ in their range of application and their function" and that "[f]unctionally, the various question forms differ in their presuppositions: whether they expect a positive or negative answer, or are neutral with respect to the answer" (Matthews and Yip 2011: 359). In the following, we will provide justification for categorizing polar questions as CS questions in Section 3.1. Then, in Section 3.2, we will demonstrate that disjunctive questions (including A-not-A questions) and *wh*-questions collectively form a broader category of IS questions. Consequently, CS polar questions remain distinct. Section 3.3 will offer an interim summary.

3.1 Polar Questions as CS Questions in Cantonese

To illustrate the category of CS polar questions in Cantonese, we will apply a similar set of semantic and syntactic tests as described in Section 2. Cantonese features a diverse range of interrogative sentence-final particles, such as 咩 *me1*, 嚇 *he2*, 話 *waa6*, 呀 *aa4*, and 先 *sin1*. However, not all questions formed with these particles are CS polar questions. In this section, we will first examine the particle 咩 *me1*, as demonstrated in (4). The status of the other interrogative sentence-final particles will be discussed in Section 4.

In the existing literature, 咩 *me1* is recognized as forming yes-no questions (Cheung 2007: 193, 196; Gao 1980: 199; Li et al. 1995: 519; Matthews and Yip 2011: 400). It carries a sense of surprise, distinct from the general-purpose particle in Mandarin, 嗎 *ma*. This type of interrogative using 咩 *me1* is "used to check the truth of an unexpected state of affairs" (Matthews and Yip 2011: 360). Importantly, 咩 *me1* exclusively appears in polar questions and not in other forms of question sentences, as illustrated in (4). We will demonstrate that it functions as a genuine polar interrogative particle, similar to Mandarin's 嗎 *ma*.

(4) a. Polar questions
你 去 咩？
nei5 heoi3 me1
you go SFP
'Are you going?'

b. A-not-A questions
你 食 唔 食 飯 （*咩）？
nei5 sik6 m4 sik6 faan6 me1
you eat not eat meal SFP
'Do you eat?'

c. Disjunctive questions
你 要 粥 定（係） 飯 （*咩）？
nei5 jiu3 zuk1 ding6hai6 faan6 me1
you want porridge or rice SFP
'Do you want porridge or rice?'

d. *Wh*-questions
邊個 搵 我 （*咩）？
bin1go3 wan2 ngo5 me1
who find I SFP
'Who is looking for me?'

We shall begin by examining how a 咩 *me1* question is answered. Recall that a CS polar question presents a complete proposition and seeks confirmation from the interlocutor, whereas an IS constituent question contains an information gap, and the interlocutor is expected to provide specific information to fill the gap. Consequently, only the former can confirm or disconfirm the speaker's attitude towards the truth of a proposition by responding with a *yes* or *no*. In other words, only CS polar questions necessitate yes-no answers. If an IS constituent question can be answered with a *yes* or *no* particle, it must be polarity-based, meaning it should be based on the polarities explicitly provided in the question. This semantic characteristic of CS polar questions is described in (5).

(5) a. Q: 佢哋 你 都 唔 識 嘅[4] 咩？
keoi5dei6 nei5 dou1 m4 sik1 ge3 me1
they you all not know SFP SFP
'Don't you know any of them?'

b. A: 係 啊 ／啱 嘅，（我 都 唔 識）。
hai6 aa3 / ngaam1 ge3 ngo5 dou1 m4 sik1
yes SFP / right SFP I all not know
'No, I don't know any of them.'

c. A: 唔係 啊 ／唔 啱，（我 都 識 嘅）。
m4hai6 aa3 / m4 ngaam1 ngo5 dou1 sik1 ge3
no SFP / not right I all know SFP
'Yes, I know all of them.'

In (5a), we observe a negative polar question ending with 咩 *me1*. As evident from the responses in (5b) and (5c), the recipient either confirms the speaker's attitude towards the veracity of the statement 佢哋我都唔識 *keoi5dei6 ngo5 dou1 m4 sik1* 'I don't know any of them' with 係啊 *hai6 aa3* 'yes' or 啱嘅 *ngaam1 ge3* 'right', or they disconfirm it with 唔係啊 *m4hai6 aa3* 'no' or 唔啱 *m4 ngaam1* 'wrong'. Example (5) demonstrates that 咩 *me1* functions in the same manner as the Mandarin 嗎 *ma* particle, indicating that a question ending with 咩 *me1* is indeed a genuine CS polar question.

Next, we can employ the interrogative adverbs 唔通 *m4tung1* 'don't tell me' and 究竟 *gau3ging2* 'after all' to further examine this distinction. Similar to their Mandarin counterparts, 難道 *nan2dao4* 'don't tell me' and 到底 *dao4di3* 'after all', these adverbs help differentiate between CS polar from IS constituent questions in Mandarin (Hsieh 2001, 2014; Her et al. 2022; among others). In Mandarin, CS polar questions are associated with the adverb 難道 *nan2dao4* but not 到底 *dao4di3*, while IS constituent questions exhibit the opposite behavior.

We can arrive at a similar result with 唔通 *m4tung1* and 究竟 *gau3ging2*. In (6), a question ending with 咩 *me1* is only compatible with 唔通 *m4tung1*. When replaced by

[4] Tang (2011: 148, 2015b: 37) posits that 嘅 *ge3*, serving as a modifier marker equivalent to 的 *de* in Mandarin, functions as a structural suffix attached to either a nominal or verbal constituent.

究竟 *gau3ging2*, as seen in (6b), the question becomes ill-formed. This suggests that 咩 *me1* is indeed a polar interrogative particle.

(6) a. 唔通 你 食 飯 咩？
m4tung1 *nei5* *sik6* *faan6* *me1*
don't-tell-me you eat meal SFP
'Don't tell me you are going to eat?'

b. *究竟 你 食 飯 咩？
gau3ging2 *nei5* *sik6* *faan6* *me1*
after-all you eat meal SFP
'Do you eat after all?'

Additional evidence supporting this distinction comes from the absence of an intervention effect in CS polar questions. Due to Relativized Minimality (Rizzi 1990), a *wh*-element must be c-commanded by either an interrogative complementizer or a Q-operator without the intervention of another c-commanding operator (Kotek 2014). It is expected that intervention effects are only observed in questions containing *wh*-elements. Rizzi (1990) suggests that intervening elements belong to the same natural class as the Q-operator, such as quantifiers, adverbs of frequency, modals and focus.

As demonstrated in (7), 咩 *me1* questions do not exhibit an intervention effect, indicating the absence of a *wh*-element in the sentence. This is because 咩 *me1*, much like 嗎 *ma* in Mandarin, is base-generated in C, taking wide scope over the matrix clause, with no requirement for LF movement of the *wh*-element or binding of the Q-operator. Consequently, when focus phrases like 哩成個鐘頭 *lei1 sing4 go3 zung1tau4* 'this entire hour' are introduced, no intervention effects occur.

(7) 佢 哩 成 個 鐘頭 睇 書 咩？
keoi5 *lei1* *sing4* *go3* *zung1tau4* *tai2* *syu1* *me1*
s/he this entire CL hour read book SFP
'Does s/he only read for this entire hour?'

The final piece of evidence lies in the fact that IS constituent questions can function as indirect questions, whereas CS polar questions cannot. This distinction arises from the semantic and syntactic properties of these two types of interrogatives. Therefore, a 咩 *me1* question thus cannot function as an embedded indirect question, as needed by verbs like 問 *man6* 'ask', as shown in (8b); instead, it can only be employed as a direct question, as demonstrated in (8a).

(8) a. 我 問 阿妹： 「你 諗 過 咩？」
ngo5 man6 aa3mui2 nei5 nam2 gwo3 me1
I ask Amei you think PERF SFP
'I asked Amei, "Have you thought about it?"'

b. *我 問 阿妹 佢 諗 過 咩。
ngo5 man6 aa3mui2 keoi5 nam2 gwo3 me1
I ask Amei she think PERF SFP
'I asked Amei whether she had thought about it.'

With the results from the four tests, we can confidently conclude that 咩 *me1* is indeed a genuine polar interrogative particle. Consequently, the existence of CS polar questions as a major category in Cantonese is well-founded.

3.2 Disjunctive, A-Not-A, and *Wh*-questions as IS Questions

We will now shift our focus to disjunctive questions, A-not-A questions, and *wh*-questions in Cantonese. By subjecting these question types to the same battery of tests, we will demonstrate that, despite their surface distinctions, these three question types exhibit significant common features and collectively constitute a broader category of IS constituent questions. The shared properties will be presented in the following.

To begin with, it is worth noting that disjunctive questions, A-not-A questions, and *wh*-questions all denote a set of propositions, and the only minor distinction lies in the extent of overt alternatives they present. Disjunctive questions typically offer a limited set of two or a few overt alternatives, A-not-A questions are generally limited to two alternatives, and *wh*-questions, while more open-ended, remain contextually constrained.

In each of these question types, the interlocutor is expected to choose one or more propositions from the set of implied possibilities. Consequently, none of them necessitates truth-based yes-no responses; rather, they are answered by identifying a particular proposition from the available set, as exemplified in (9), (10), and (11).

(9) Q: 你 唔 識 Peter 定（係） Rudolph？
nei5 m4 sik1 Peter ding6hai6 Rudolph
you not know Peter or Rudolph
'Don't you know Peter or Rudolph?'

A: 我 唔 識 Peter。
ngo5 m4 sik1 Peter
I not know Peter
'I don't know Peter.'

A: *係 啊 ／ *啱 嘅。
hai6 aa3 / ngaam1 ge3
yes SFP / right SFP
'Yes./ Right.'

A: *唔係 啊 ／ *唔 啱。
m4hai6 aa3 / m4 ngaam1
no SFP / not right
'No./ Wrong.'

(10) Q: 你 識 唔 識 Peter？
nei5 sik1 m4 sik1 Peter
you know not know Peter
'Do you know Peter?'

A: 我 唔 識 Peter。
ngo5 m4 sik1 Peter
I not know Peter
'I don't know Peter.'

A: *係 啊 ／*啱 嘅。
hai6 aa3 / ngaam1 ge3
yes SFP/ right SFP
'Yes./ Right.'
A: *唔係 啊 ／*唔 啱。
m4hai6 aa3 / m4 ngaam1
no SFP/ not right
'No./ Wrong.'

(11) Q: 你 唔 識 邊個？
nei5 m4 sik1 bin1go3
you not know who
'Who you don't know?'
A: 我 唔 識 Peter。
ngo5 m4 sik1 Peter
I not know Peter
'I don't know Peter.'
A: *係 啊 ／*啱 嘅。
hai6 aa3 / ngaam1 ge3
yes SFP/ right SFP
'Yes./ Right.'
A: *唔係 啊 ／*唔 啱。
m4hai6 aa3 / m4 ngaam1
no SFP/ not right
'No./ Wrong.'

Furthermore, it's important to note that disjunctive questions, A-not-A questions, and *wh*-questions do not typically involve any polar interrogative particles. The fact that introducing 咩 *me1* into these three types of interrogatives results in ungrammatical sentences, as seen in (12), further supports the classification of all three question types as part of the larger category of IS constituent questions. The ungrammaticality arises from a violation of the Doubly Filled Comp Filter, as Cantonese polar interrogative particles

(e.g., 咩 *me1*) are base-generated in Spec,CP and the landing site of *wh*-elements in Chinese in the logical form is also Spec,CP (as discussed in Huang 1998).[5]

(12) a. 你 食 唔 食 飯 （*咩）？
nei5 sik6 m4 sik6 faan6 me1
you eat not eat meal SFP
'Do you eat?'

b. 你 要 粥 定（係） 飯 （*咩）？
nei5 jiu3 zuk1 ding6hai6 faan6 me1
you want porridge or rice SFP
'Do you want porridge or rice?'

c. 邊個 搵 我 （*咩）？
bin1go3 wan2 ngo5 me1
who find I SFP
'Who is looking for me?'

Furthermore, disjunctive questions, A-not-A questions and *wh*-questions all permit the use of 究竟 *gau3ging2* 'after all', but not 唔通 *m4tung1* 'don't tell me', as illustrated in (13) and (14). An IS question, denoting a range of propositions, is indeed compatible with 究竟 *gau3ging2*, which emphasizes the speaker's intention to seek the addressee's selection of a specific proposition from the set. Conversely, it does not align with 唔通 *m4tung1*, which is typically employed in questions where the speaker seeks confirmation regarding the speaker's attitude towards the truth of a given proposition.

(13) a. 究竟 你 飲 奶茶 定（係） 咖啡？
gau3ging2 nei5 jam2 naai5caa4 ding6hai6 gaa3fe1
after-all you drink milk-tea or coffee
'Do you drink milk tea or coffee after all?'

[5] Within the Split CP hypothesis, Law (2004) and Cheng and Tang (2022) suggest that 咩 *me1* is categorized under SFP1, carries a [+Q] feature, and is base-generated in Spec,ForceP within the C space. This positioning is identical to the landing site of *wh*-elements in Chinese in the logical form, as discussed by Yang (2015).

b. 究竟 你 食 唔 食 飯？
gau3ging2 nei5 sik6 m4 sik6 faan6
after-all you eat not eat meal
'Do you eat after all?'

c. 究竟 邊個 最 靚？
gau3ging2 bin1go3 zeoi3 leng3
after-all who most pretty
'After all, who is the prettiest?'

(14) a. *唔通 你 飲 奶茶 定（係） 咖啡？
m4tung1 nei5 jam2 naai5caa4 ding6hai6 gaa3fe1
don't-tell-me you drink milk-tea or coffee
'Don't tell me you drink milk tea or coffee?'

b. *唔通 你 食 唔 食 飯 啊？
m4tung1 nei5 sik6 m4 sik6 faan6 aa3
don't-tell-me you eat not eat meal SFP
'Don't tell me you eat or not?'

c. *唔通 邊個 最 靚？
m4tung1 bin1go3 zeoi3 leng3
don't-tell-me who most pretty
'Don't tell me who is the prettiest?'

Next, disjunctive questions, A-not-A questions, and *wh*-questions all exhibit sensitivity to the intervention effect. The contrasts presented in (15) highlight a shared configuration, wherein ungrammaticality arises when an intervening focus phrase, such as 哩成個鐘頭 *lei1 sing4 go3 zung1tau4* 'this entire hour', impedes LF movement or Q-operator binding of an in-situ *wh*-phrase. In the absence of an intervening focus phrase, the interrogative sentences are grammatical.

(15) a. 佢（*哩 成 個 鐘頭） 睇 書 定（係） 去 買 嘢？
keoi5 lei1 sing4 go3 zung1tau4 tai2 syu1 ding6hai6 heoi3 maai5 je5
s/he this entire CL hour read book or go buy thing
'Does s/he only read or purchase (for this entire hour)?'

b. 佢（*哩 成 個 鐘頭） 睇 唔 睇 書？
keoi5 lei1 sing4 go3 zung1tau4 tai2 m4 tai2 syu1
s/he this entire CL hour read not read book
'Does s/he only read (for this entire hour)?'

c. 佢（??哩 成 個 鐘頭） 點解 睇 書？
keoi5 lei1 sing4 go3 zung1tau4 dim2gaai2 tai2 syu1
s/he this entire CL hour why read book
'Why does s/he only read (for this entire hour)?'

Finally, as demonstrated in example (16), all three question types can function as clausal complements to the matrix verb 問 *man6* 'ask', effectively functioning as an indirect question. The fact that they can be used in this manner highlights their shared status as IS questions.

(16) a. 我 問 阿妹 佢 有 冇 諗 過。
ngo5 man6 aa3mui2 keoi5 jau5 mou5 nam2 gwo3
I ask Amei she yes no think PERF
'I asked Amei whether she has thought about it.'

b. 我 問 阿妹 佢 諗 過 定（係） 睇 過。
ngo5 man6 aa3mui2 keoi5 nam2 gwo3 ding6hai6 tai2 gwo3
I ask Amei she think PERF or read PERF
'I asked Amei whether she has thought or read about it.'

c. 我 問 阿妹 佢 諗 過 乜。
ngo5 man6 aa3mui2 keoi5 nam2 gwo3 mat1
I ask Amei she think PERF what
'I asked Amei what she has thought about.'

In light of the findings from the four tests presented above, we can reasonably conclude that disjunctive questions, A-not-A questions, and *wh*-questions collectively constitute a broader category of IS constituent questions.

3.3 Interim Summary

We have provided a rationale for the two-way classification of interrogatives in Cantonese. CS polar questions remain distinct, while disjunctive questions, A-not-A questions, and *wh*-questions collectively comprise a broader category of IS constituent questions. This taxonomy and the semantic and syntactic tests employed are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3: Distinction of CS and IS questions in Cantonese

	Truth-based yes-no answers	Polar particle 咩 *me1*	No particle	Adverb 唔通 *m4tung1* 'don't tell me'	Adverb 究竟 *gau3ging2* 'after all'	Intervention effect	Indirect question
CS Polar Qs	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗
IS Constituent Qs	✗	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓

4. Questions with Other Sentence-Final Elements

In the following, we will examine the proper status of several sentence-final elements, excluding 咩 *me1*, which has already been established as a genuine polar interrogative particle. The list of monosyllabic sentence-final elements provided in (17) is adapted from Tang (2015b: 232).[6] We will not include 嗎 *maa3* in the following discussion since it is a direct borrowing from the Mandarin interrogative particle 嗎 *ma*. Readers seeking more extensive discussions on the topic can refer to Tang (2015b: 232–233).

Our aim is to demonstrate that only 呀 *aa4* and 嘅 *he2* from the list in (17) function as polar interrogative particles. In contrast, 話 *waa6* and 先 *sin1* are optional sentence-final particles employed in IS questions. As for the last element, 未 *mei6*, it is

[6] Please note that Cantonese features a substantial inventory of sentence-final particles (SFPs), as outlined by Law (2002), which includes at least 24 monosyllabic SFPs. Given the extensive range of SFPs, it is impractical to include them all in the current study. Therefore, only a selection of monosyllabic SFPs adapted from Tang (2015b: 232) is discussed herein.

actually a negation marker. It's worth noting that the last three elements are sometimes mistakenly categorized as polar interrogative particles, as can be seen in Matthews and Yip (2011: 363–365, 367–369).

(17) 嗎 *maa3*, 呀 *aa4*,[7] 嚱 *he2*, 話 *waa6*, 先 *sin1*, 未 *mei6*

In Section 4.1, we will begin by singling out 呀 *aa4* and 嚱 *he2* from the list provided in (17), as existing literature suggests that these two interrogative particles are exclusively used in polar questions. We will then subject them to the suite of tests presented earlier to demonstrate that 呀 *aa4* and 嚱 *he2* indeed function as genuine polar interrogative particles.

Subsequently, in Section 4.2 and Section 4.3, we will demonstrate that the remaining sentence-final elements listed in (17) cannot be classified as polar interrogative particles. Synchronically, it's crucial to distinguish them from polar interrogative particles as they exhibit different behavior, either semantically or syntactically.

4.1 Sentence-Final Polar Particles 呀 *aa4* and 嚱 *he2*

Cheng and Tang (2022), Law (1990), Law (2002), and Li et al. (1995) suggest that 呀 *aa4* and the interrogative particle 咩 *me1* share identical distribution patterns. Both can exclusively appear in polar questions but not in the other types of interrogatives, such as disjunctive questions, A-not-A questions, and *wh*-questions. According to Law (2002), the function of 呀 *aa4* is to indicate that the speaker already possesses relevant knowledge and seeks confirmation from the other party. In other words, 呀 *aa4* serves the same confirmation-seeking function as 咩 *me1*, as proposed in Section 3.1. Without the particle, the proposition remains declarative. The difference between the two particles lies in semantics; 咩 *me1* suggests that the speaker presupposes that the proposition is false, while 呀 *aa4* implies that the speaker presupposes the proposition is true and has a positive bias towards it (Law 2002). Tang (2015b) provides the following pair to illustrate their nuanced semantic distinction.

[7] Note that 呀 *aa4* should not be confused with another sentence-final particle, 啊 *aa3*. For a more detailed distinction between these two, readers are suggested to refer to Tang (2015b: 234).

In (18) the speaker does not feel very cold, for example, on a day with a temperature above 30 degrees Celsius. However, when the speaker sees someone else wearing thick clothes, questions like (18) are uttered. In (19), the speaker may have heard the weather forecast or made a guess and then asks the other party for confirmation.

(18) 今日 好 凍 咩？
gam1jat6 *hou2* *dung3* *me1*
today very cold SFP
'Is today very cold?'

(Tang 2015b: 235 (263))

(19) 今日 好 凍 呀？
gam1jat6 *hou2* *dung3* *aa4*
today very cold SFP
'Is today very cold?'

(Tang 2015b: 235 (264))

Similar to 呀 *aa4*, 嘅 *he2* has been observed to appear in polar questions, as noted in Tang (2015b: 241), and has consistently been associated with the function of seeking confirmation in previous studies. These descriptions include phrases such as "asking the other party to agree with one's point of view" (Tang 2015b: 241), "asking the other party to give an answer that agrees with one's opinion" (Rao et al. 2017: 93), "hoping that the other party agrees with oneself give an affirmative answer based on one's point of view" (Li et al. 1995: 520), "expressing the hope that the other party agrees with one's own statement" (Mai and Tan 2011: 345), "asking the other party to agree after expressing one's opinion" (Cheung and Ni 1999: 145), "asking the other party for their opinions on their views, or ask the other party to verify a certain fact that has already happened" (Fang 2003: 147), and "using it when asking the other party to agree with your own opinion" (Liu 2008: 163).

The first set of examples in (20), involving negative questions, demonstrates that 呀 *aa4* and 嘅 *he2* questions elicit truth-based answers. Much like the case of 咩 *me1*, the appropriate responses to these types of interrogatives are 係 *hai6* 'yes' or 唔係 *m4hai6* 'no', indicating that questions formed by 呀 *aa4* and 嘅 *he2* should be categorized as

yes-no questions. This is a characteristic shared by CS questions. The fact that 咩 *me1*, 呀 *aa4*, and 噭 *he2* all exhibit this trait suggests that they share the same semantic function. With such questions, the interlocutor is expected to either affirmatively confirm or negatively disconfirm the speaker on the proposition presented.

(20) a. Q: 佢哋 你 都 唔 識 呀 ／噭？
keoi5dei6 nei5 dou1 m4 sik1 aa4 / he2
they you all not know SFP / SFP
'Don't you know any of them?'

b. A: 係 啊 ／啱 嘅， （我 都 唔 識）。
hai6 aa3 / ngaam1 ge3 ngo5 dou1 m4 sik1
yes SFP / right SFP I all not know
'No, I don't know any of them.'

c. A: 唔係 啊 ／唔 啱， （我 都 識 嘅）。
m4hai6 aa3 / m4 ngaam1 ngo5 dou1 sik1 ge3
no SFP / not right I all know SFP
'Yes, I know all of them.'

Moving on to (21) and (22), in (21), only 唔通 *m4tung1* 'don't tell me' and not 究竟 *gau3ging2* 'after all' is compatible with a question formed by 呀 *aa4*. However, neither 唔通 *m4tung1* nor 究竟 *gau3ging2* is compatible with a question formed by 噭 *he2*. This distinction sets 噭 *he2* apart from 咩 *me1* and 呀 *aa4*, as the latter can co-occur with 唔通 *m4tung1* in the same sentence, as seen in (6) and (21a). However, the incompatibility with 唔通 *m4tung1* does not mean that 噭 *he2* should be excluded as a polar interrogative particle. According to Tang (2015b: 243) and Li et al. (1995: 520), 噭 *he2* is equivalent to the polar interrogative particle 吧 *ba* in Mandarin. When a speaker uses 噭 *he2* or 吧 *ba* in a question, he holds a strong presumption in mind and expects to receive a positive response. This contrasts with the semantics of 唔通 *m4tung1*, which reflects the speaker's disbelief in the truth of the proposition. In terms of their incompatibility with 究竟 *gau3ging2*, however, questions formed by these two particles can all be safely categorized as CS questions.

(21) a. 唔通 你 食 飯 呀？
m4tung1 *nei5* *sik6* *faan6* *aa4*
don't-tell-me you eat meal SFP
'Don't tell me you are going to eat?'

b. *究竟 你 食 飯 呀？
gau3ging2 *nei5* *sik6* *faan6* *aa4*
after-all you eat meal SFP
'Do you eat after all?'

(22) a. *唔通 你 食 飯 嚿？
m4tung1 *nei5* *sik6* *faan6* *he2*
don't-tell-me you eat meal SFP
'Don't tell me you are going to eat?'

b. *究竟 你 食 飯 嚿？
gau3ging2 *nei5* *sik6* *faan6* *he2*
after-all you eat meal SFP
'Do you eat after all?'

The examples in (23) provide additional evidence that questions formed by both 呀 *aa4* and 嚿 *he2* are not affected by the intervention effect, similar to 咩 *me1*. This further supports their classification as polar interrogative particles used to form CS questions.

(23) a. 佢 哩 成 個 鐘頭 睇 書 呀？
keoi5 *lei1* *sing4* *go3* *zung1tau4* *tai2* *syu1* *aa4*
s/he this entire CL hour read book SFP
'Does s/he only read for this entire hour?'

b. 佢 哩 成 個 鐘頭 睇 書 嚿？
keoi5 *lei1* *sing4* *go3* *zung1tau4* *tai2* *syu1* *he2*
s/he this entire CL hour read book SFP
'S/he only reads for this entire hour, right?'

An additional piece of evidence is presented in (24). Questions formed by these particles, as well as 咩 *me1*, are notably difficult to embed as indirect questions. They are primarily used as direct questions.

(24) a. *我 想 知道 你 諗 過 呀。
ngo5 soeng2 zi1dou6 nei5 nam2 gwo3 aa4
I want know you think PERF SFP
'I want to know whether you have thought about it.'

b. *我 想 知道 你 諗 過 嚱。
ngo5 soeng2 zi1dou6 nei5 nam2 gwo3 he2
I want know you think PERF SFP
'I want to know whether you have thought about it.'

The above observations indicate that 呀 *aa4* and 嚱 *he2* exhibit similar behavior to 咩 *me1* in the given tests, and thus, questions formed by them can confidently be classified as CS questions. However, it's worth considering whether both 呀 *aa4* and 嚱 *he2* are indeed genuine polar interrogative particles. Could they potentially be question tags, which serve a similar purpose to CS questions, i.e., to seek confirmation from the listener regarding a proposition (Wang 1965; Chao 1968; Tang 1981; Liu et al. 1996; Chu 1998; Li and Thompson 2003; Hsin 2016)? To distinguish question tags from polar interrogative particles, additional tests are required.

A tag question is structurally distinct from a polar question in that the former is argued to have a bi-clausal structure, while the latter has a mono-clausal structure (see Sailor 2012; Luo 2013). Therefore, a tag can be considered independent of the matrix clause, whereas a polar interrogative particle cannot. This structural difference implies that if an item is a question tag, it should be able to stand alone, detached from a sentence, as illustrated in (25), where 係唔係 *hai6m4hai6* 'yes-no-yes', a tag question (Matthews and Yip 2011: 366–367), can be used independently in discourse.

(25) A: 佢哋 我 都 唔 識。
keoi5dei6 ngo5 dou1 m4 sik1
they I all not know

'I don't know any of them.'

B: 係唔係？

hai6m4hai6

yes-no-yes

'Is that so?'

However, this is not demonstrated by (26), where 呀 *aa4* and 嚱 *he2* cannot be used independently in discourse.

(26) A: 佢哋 我 都 唔 識。

keoi5dei6 *ngo5* *dou1* *m4* *sik1*

they I all not know

'I don't know any of them.'

B: * 呀 ／*嚱？

aa4 / *he2*

SFP / SFP

'Is that so?'

Admittedly, another explanation for the inability to use 呀 *aa4* and 嚱 *he2* independently could be related to their morphological requirement, as they function as bound morphemes or enclitics, similar to most sentence-final particles. Nevertheless, the structural distinction between a tag question and a polar question also suggests that a sentence containing a tag should have a C head available in the host sentence while the tag occupies another C head in the dependent clause (Sailor 2012; Luo 2013). Following this insight, we argue that, in addition to attaching to declarative sentences, tags should also be attachable to questions. This prediction is supported by examples like (27), where 係唔係 *hai6m4hai6* 'yes-no-yes' can be appended to questions. However, 呀 *aa4* and 嚱 *he2* cannot be attached to questions, as demonstrated in (28).[8]

[8] It is worth noting that 嚱 *he2* is often preceded by a short pause, which is a unique feature setting this particle apart from other sentence-final particles. Typically, it is unusual to have a pause before an SPF. While the phonological manifestation might suggest that treating 嚱 *he2* as bi-clausal is not entirely implausible, it is essential to emphasize that the ungrammaticality of (28) persists even with a pause before

(27) 你　去　咩　係唔係？
nei5 heui3 me1 hai6m4hai6
you go SFP yes-no-yes
'Are you going? Is that right?'

(28) *你　去　咩　呀　／嘅？
nei5 heui3 me1 aa4 / he2
you go SFP SFP / SFP
'Are you going, right?'

4.2 Sentence-Final Non-polar Particles 話 *waa6* and 先 *sin1*

Unlike 呀 *aa4* and 嘅 *he2*, the other two sentence-final particles mentioned in (17), 話 *waa6* and 先 *sin1*, do not appear in polar questions but are found in disjunctive questions, A-not-A questions, and *wh*-questions, which are types of IS questions (Cheung 2007: 196; Tang 2015b: 237). Similar to the Mandarin non-polar particle 呢 *ne*, both 話 *waa6* and 先 *sin1* are optional sentence-final particles used in non-polar questions, each carrying its respective illocutionary force.

The sentence-final particle 話 *waa6* is used when the speaker repeats or partially repeats what another speaker has just said and reformulates it into interrogative sentences to clarify the unclear part (Tang 1998: 2; Matthews and Yip 2011: 400). Tang (1998: chap. 2, 2015b: 236) and Matthews and Yip (2011: 400) identify 話 *waa6* as a sentence-final particle used in echo questions. Using (29) as an example, the speaker has just heard someone (likely the listener) say 我搵 XX *ngo5 wan2 XX* 'I am looking for XX', but he couldn't hear the 'XX' part. So, the speaker repeats the sentence and uses the *wh*-pronoun 邊個 *bin1go3* 'who' to ask for clarification regarding the missing information and adds 話 *waa6* to indicate that he is asking the other party to provide information about the 'XX' part.

嘅 *he2*, as in *你去呀，嘅？ *nei5 heui3 aa4 (pause) he2* 'Are you going, right?'. This demonstrates the distinction between 係唔係 *hai6m4hai6* and 嘅 *he2* and their distinctive syntactic status. Otherwise, it would be difficult to explain the asymmetric ability to be appended to questions.

(29) A: 我 搵 學生。
ngo5 *wan2* *hok6saang1*
I find student
'I am looking for a student.'
B: 你 搵 邊個 話？
nei5 *wan2* *bin1go3* *wa6*
you find who SFP
'Who did you say you were looking for?'

The sentence-final particle 先 *sin1* serves to intensify the interrogative tone, as seen in (30). The speaker's voice typically becomes more emphatic when using this particle. It's employed to heighten the questioning tone, expressing dissatisfaction, impatience, and a sense of seeking a clearer explanation (Tang 2015b: 241)—similar to the meaning of 到底 *dao4di3* 'after all' in Mandarin. Therefore, the range of application for 先 *sin1* aligns with the aforementioned Cantonese modal adverb 究竟 *gau3ging2* 'after all'. Previous studies have identified that 先 *sin1* serves various functions, including requesting additional or supplementary information (Cheng 1990: 190), expressing dissatisfaction, dissuasion, questioning, suggestion, request for explanation etc. (Cheng 1997: 243), and asking the other party to provide a clear explanation before proceeding (Mai 1993: 67; Li et al. 1995: 500–502).

(30) 邊個 最 靚 先？
bin1go3 *zeoi3* *leng3* *sin1*
who most pretty SFP
'Who after all is the prettiest?'

In addition to *wh*-questions, as demonstrated in (29) and (30), 話 *waa6* and 先 *sin1* can also be used in disjunctive questions and A-not-A questions, as seen in (31) and (32).

(31) 你 要 粥 定（係） 飯 話 ／先？
nei5 jiu3 zuk1 ding6hai6 faan6 waa6 / sin1
you want porridge or rice SFP / SFP
'Did you say you would like porridge or rice?/ What on earth would you like, porridge or rice?'

(32) 你 食 唔 食 飯 話 ／先？
nei5 sik6 m4 sik6 faan6 waa6 / sin1
you eat not eat meal SFP / SFP
'Did you say you're eating or not?/ Are you eating or not?'

As 話 *waa6* and 先 *sin1* are optional sentence-final particles compatible with IS constituent questions, they exhibit characteristics typical of IS questions. These include the absence of truth-based yes-no answers, compatibility with the adverb 究竟 *gau3ging2* 'after all', sensitivity to the intervention effect, and the availability of indirect question counterparts. Example (33) illustrates that whether 話 *waa6* and 先 *sin1* are present or not, the IS question is answered by providing information rather than with a truth-based yes or no answer, as shown in (33d).

(33) a. Q: 你 搵 邊個 （話 ／先）？
nei5 wan2 bin1go3 wa6 / sin1
you find who SFP / SFP
'Who did you say you were looking for?/ Who on earth are you looking for?'

b. A: *係 啊 ／*啱 嘅。
hai6 aa3 / ngaam1 ge3
yes SFP / right SFP
'Yes.'

c. A: *唔係 啊 ／*唔 啱。
m4hai6 aa3 / m4 ngaam1
no SFP / not right
'No.'

d. A: 我 搵 學生。
ngo5 wan2 hok6saang1
I find student
'I'm looking for students.'

Continuing the analyses, as demonstrated in (34), the presence of 話 *waa6* and 先 *sin1* with IS constituent questions allows them to remain compatible with the adverb 究竟 *gau3ging2* 'after-all', but not with 唔通 *m4tung1* 'don't tell me'. Furthermore, as shown in (35), whether or not 話 *waa6* and 先 *sin1* are used, IS constituent questions are still subject to the intervention effect due to the presence of the focus phrase 哩成個鐘頭 *lei1 sing4 go3 zung1tau4* 'this entire hour', which impedes LF movement of the *wh*-in-situ to CP. Finally, as seen in (36), whether or not 話 *waa6* and 先 *sin1* are included, IS constituent questions can function as indirect questions.

(34) a. 你 究竟 搵 邊個 （話 ／先）？
nei5 gau3ging2 wan2 bin1go3 wa6 / sin1
you after-all find who SFP / SFP
'Who on earth did you say you were looking for?/ Who on earth are you looking for?'

b. *你 唔通 搵 邊個 （話 ／先）？
nei5 m4tung1 wan2 bin1go3 wa6 / sin1
you don't-tell-me find who SFP / SFP
'Don't tell me you are looking for whom?'

(35) *你 哩 成 個 鐘頭 搵 邊個 （話 ／先）？
nei5 lei1 sing4 go3 zung1tau4 wan2 bin1go3 wa6 / sin1
you this entire CL hour find who SFP / SFP
'Who (on earth) did you say you were only looking for for this entire hour?/ Who (on earth) are you only looking for for this entire hour?'

(36) 我 問 阿妹 佢 搵 邊個 （話 ／先）。
ngo5 man6 aa3mui2 keoi5 wan2 bin1go3 wa6 / sin1
I ask Amei she find who SFP / SFP
'I asked Amei who (on earth) she was looking for.'

4.3 VP-Neg Questions

In Cantonese, the negative marker 未 *mei6* can be appended to a declarative sentence to create a question that inquires if something has already occurred, as demonstrated in (37a). This construction is often referred to as the "VP-Neg question" (Tang 2022: 323) or "negative particle question" (Tang 2022: 325) in the literature. The negative marker 未 *mei6* conveys the meaning of 'not yet' (Matthews and Yip 2011: 363). In the most common scenario, the verb is accompanied by the perfective aspect marker 咗 *zo2* or the experiential marker 過 *gwo3*, as shown in (37b).

(37) a. 你 睇 書 未？
nei5 tai2 syu1 mei6
you read book not-yet
'Have you (ever) read?'

b. 你 食 咗 ／過 海南雞飯 未？
nei5 sik6 zo2 / gwo3 hoi2 naam4 gai1 faan6 mei6
you eat PERF/ PERF Hainan-chicken-rice not-yet
'Have you (ever) eaten Hainan chicken rice?'

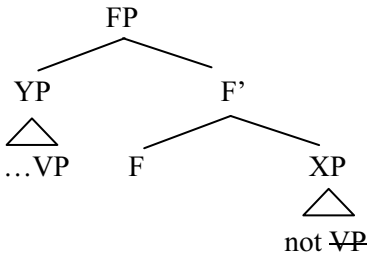
Note that 未 *mei6*, meaning 'not yet', retains its significance, signifying the existence of negative alternatives in questions. As a result, it cannot be used in combination with another negator, as illustrated in (38), in contrast to other sentence-final particles like (5a) and (20a). This distinction leads us to classify 未 *mei6* as a negative marker, rather than an interrogative or sentence-final particles.

(38) *你 冇 睇 書 未？
nei5 mou5 tai2 syu1 mei6
you not read book not-yet
'Haven't you (ever) read?'

Wang (1967), Huang (1991), Cheng et al. (1997), Hsieh (2001), Huang (2008), among others, have posited that VP-Neg questions in Mandarin involve the deletion of

the predicate in the second conjunct of a coordination structure, a process similar to the derivation of A-not-A questions explained in Section 2. Building on this idea, Tang (2015a: 11–12) argues that Cantonese VP-Neg questions are, in fact, VP-not-VP disjunctive questions that result from the deletion of the second VP, as depicted in (39).[9] In this structure, a functional category F connects two conjuncts: the main clause in the external conjunct YP and the negation, which shares the same VP, in the internal conjunct XP. Deletion occurs, causing the identical VP in the internal conjunct to be elided, while the negation remains on the surface. Consequently, such VP-Neg questions are classified as disjunctive questions, with F interpreted as a disjunctive conjunction, similar to *or* in English. These sentence-final negative markers are often incorrectly categorized as polar interrogative particles, as seen in works like Matthews and Yip (2011).

(39)



Semantically, both VP-Neg questions and A-not-A questions present two propositions and pragmatically expect the interlocutor to select one of these propositions as the answer. This further supports the idea that VP-Neg questions are akin to A-not-A questions. If this interpretation is correct, VP-Neg questions belong to the IS question type, dispelling the arguments that categorize them as polar question. These arguments include the response patterns, the presence of optional sentence-final particles, their incompatibility with the adverb 唔通 *m4tung1* 'don't tell me', and their inability to function as indirect questions.

In the case of VP-Neg questions, like IS questions, they do not elicit responses using (truth-based) yes-no particles, as demonstrated in (40c–d). Rather, the interlocutor

[9] See Tang (2022) for an alternative syntactic analysis of VP-Neg questions in Cantonese.

answers these questions by restating the main predicates, as seen in (40b). This emphasizes the presence of an information gap or a set of propositions in IS questions, as demonstrated in (40), highlighting that the interlocutor is asked to choose from the multi-membered set of propositions.

(40) a. Q: 你 睇 書 未？
nei5 tai2 syu1 mei6
you read book not-yet
'Have you (ever) read?'

b. A: 我 睇 咗。
ngo5 tai2 zo2
I read PERF
'I read.'

c. A: *係 啊 ／*啱 嘅，（我 睇 咗）。
hai6 aa3 / ngaam1 ge3 ngo5 tai2 zo2
yes SFP / right SFP I read PERF
'Yes, I read.'

d. A: *唔係 啊 ／*唔 啱， （我 冇 睇）。
m4hai6 aa / m4 ngaam1 ngo5 mou5 tai2
no SFP / not right I not read
'No, I haven't read.'

As demonstrated in Section 4.2, IS questions do not necessitate a polar interrogative particle; they are only compatible with optional non-polar sentence-final particles like 話 *waa6* and 先 *sin1*. Example (41) illustrates that VP-Neg questions also permit these optional non-polar particles.

(41) 你 睇 書 未 話 ／先？
nei5 tai2 syu1 mei6 waa6 / sin1
you read book not-yet SFP / SFP
'Did you say you have read or not?/ Have you read after all?'

Moreover, (42) shows that the VP-Neg questions are compatible with adverb 究竟 *gau3ging2* 'after all' but incompatible with 唔通 *m4tung1* 'don't tell me'.

(42) 究竟 ／*唔通 你 睇 書 未？
gau3ging2 / *m4tung1* *nei5* *tai2* *syu1* *mei6*
after-all / don't-tell-me you read book not-yet
'After all, have you read?'

The nature of VP-Neg questions as IS constituent questions becomes more apparent in (43), where these questions exhibit an intervention effect when a focus phrase like 哩成個鐘頭 *lei1 sing4 go3 zung1tau4* 'this entire hour' is introduced.

(43) 佢 （*哩 成 個 鐘頭） 睇 書 未？
keoi5 *lei1* *sing4* *go3* *zung1tau4* *tai2* *syu1* *mei6*
s/he this entire CL hour read book not-yet
'Has s/he only read for this entire hour?'

The final set of data, (44), shows that VP-Neg questions function like IS constituent questions when used as indirect questions.

(44) 我 想 知道 你 睇 書 未。
ngo5 *soeng2* *zi1dou6* *nei5* *tai2* *syu1* *mei6*
I want know you read book not-yet
'I want to know whether you have read.'

In summary, the use of 未 *mei6* 'not yet' serves as a negative marker that forms VP-Neg questions, which are essentially A-not-A questions. A-not-A questions, along with disjunctive questions featuring an overt *or*, as well as *wh*-questions, collectively constitute a larger category of IS constituent questions. Consequently, they share several significant syntactic and semantic properties.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, we have presented an argument for a two-way classification of question forms in Cantonese. In contrast to previous analyses that included yes-no questions, A-not-A questions, disjunctive questions, and *wh*-questions, we propose a dichotomy between confirmation-seeking (CS) polar questions and information-seeking (IS) constituent questions. While polar questions represent the CS category, all other question types, including A-not-A, disjunctive, and *wh*-questions, fall under the IS category.

If the universalist dichotomy of questions, as proposed in Hsiao and Her (2021) and Her et al. (2022), continues to find support in ongoing research, it would mark a significant advancement in our understanding of how interrogatives are categorized across languages. This approach offers several advantages: it provides a clear and testable framework for categorizing questions, and it revisits previous studies on sentence-final elements in Cantonese, helping resolve controversies and clarifying the status of 咩 *me1*, 嚱 *he2*, 話 *waa6*, 呀 *aa4*, 先 *sin1*, and 未 *mei6* within the new taxonomy of questions.

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重探粵語疑問句的分類

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摘　要

粵語疑問句傳統上分為四類：(1) 是非問句、(2) A-not-A 問句、(3) 選擇問句、(4) *wh-* 疑問句 (Gao 1980)。然而，近期研究提出了一種二分法，將疑問句區分為確認性提問 (CS) 和資訊性提問 (IS)，該理論已成功應用於普通話、湘語、英語等語言 (Her et al. 2022)。本文首先指出，粵語傳統的四分法在分類標準上不夠精確，忽略了疑問句中的普遍規律，因此主張粵語疑問句應以二分法劃分。具體來說，是非問句屬於 CS，A-not-A 問句應歸類為選擇問句的子類，而選擇問句和 *wh-* 疑問句同屬 IS 類別。本文進一步討論了數個句末助詞，認為「呀」(*aa4*) 和「嚱」(*he2*) 構成 CS 問句，「話」(*waa6*) 和「先」(*sin1*) 則出現在 IS 問句中。此外，我們分析了「未」(*mei6*) 在動詞短語否定問句中的功能，提出該結構涉及隱性成分的 A-not-A 問句。

關鍵詞：粵語，確認性提問，疑問句助詞，資訊性提問，句末助詞

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