

The Syntax of Cantonese *Ho2* Revisited: Sentence-final Particle and Pro-sentence

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Abstract

This paper re-examines the syntactic properties of the sentence-final particle (henceforth, SFP) *ho2* in Hong Kong Cantonese (henceforth, Cantonese). Despite studies such as Lam 2014, Tang 2020, and Law et al. 2024, variation persists among native speakers in their judgments regarding the acceptability of SFP clusters such as *me1-ho2*. Additionally, Law et al.'s (2024) preliminary observation that *ho2* involves an addressee shift remains underexplored. To address these issues, this paper investigates whether *ho2* can co-occur with the class of Degree SFPs (Tang 2015a). The results reveal that there are two distinct *ho2*s: one operating at the propositional level and the other at the speech act level. To capture this contrast, I propose that *ho2*[A] is an SFP occupying the head of F3P, which is one of the layers of the split-FP under the cartographic approach (Tang 2015b). On the other hand, *ho2*[B] is a pro-sentence merged with the antecedent sentence by an empty conjunction, forming a general conjunctive structure. The proposed account provides better empirical coverage compared to previous literature (Lam 2014; Law et al. 2024) and enhances our understanding of the nature of the left periphery in natural languages.

Keywords

Cantonese, sentence-final particle, pro-sentence, confirmationals, left-periphery

1 Introduction

Cantonese has a rich sentence-final particle system (Tang 2015a; Sybesma & Li 2007; among others). Following the spirit of cartography (Cinque 1999; Rizzi 1997, 2004; among others), Tang (2015a) and Lau (2019) argue that SFPs in Cantonese are arranged in the order in (1). Degree SFPs are further divided into modal SFPs, interrogative SFPs, and imperative SFPs (Tang 2015a). The members in the class of Degree SFPs are listed in (2)–(4).

- (1) Time < Event < Focus < Degree (Modal/Interrogative/Imperative)
- (2) Modal: *ze1, zi1maa3, gwaa3, tim1, ga3laa1, dak1gaa2, ding2laa1, le5, be6, aa3*
- (3) Interrogative SFP: *maa3, me1, aa4, waa2, ge2, sin1, ho2, ha6waa2, aa3*
- (4) Imperative SFP: *laa1, le4, wo5, sin1, baa2laa1, hou2gwo3, hou2wo3, a1laa4, la3wei3, a3haa2, aa3*

This paper focuses on the interrogative SFP *ho2*. In descriptive grammar, *ho2* is used to “invite confirmation of a statement or suggestion” (Matthews & Yip 2011: 399), as illustrated in (5). The syntactic behaviours of *ho2* have sparked considerable controversy in the previous literature: while Lam (2014) and Law et al. (2024) report that SFP clusters such as *me1-ho2* are possible, Tang (2015a, 2020) finds them ungrammatical, leading to the controversy shown in (6). The first goal of this paper is to resolve this controversy.

- (5) Gary sik3 haa1 o3ho2?¹
 Gary eat shrimp SFP
 ‘Gary eats shrimp, eh?’
- (6) Zi3ming4 sik6 haa1 me1 ho2?
 Ziming eat shrimp SFP SFP
 ‘Does Ziming really eat shrimp? Do you also wonder?’
 (Law et al. 2024: 329)

Law et al. (2024) also argue that some interrogative SFPs and all imperative SFPs cannot be directly compatible with *ho2* unless there is an addressee shift from the original speaker (henceforth, OA) to a new addressee (henceforth, NA), as shown in (7). However, they did not systematically examine the addressee shift phenomenon. The second goal of this paper is to further investigate this phenomenon.

- (7) Sik6 di1 saang1-gwo2 laa1 *(¹) ho2?
 eat CL fruit IMP HO
 (To OA) ‘Have some fruit!’ (To NA) ‘Can you perform the invitation?’

¹ This paper follows Tang’s (2015a, 2020) analysis that the *o3* in *o3ho2* is a dummy particle that lacks concrete meaning and contributes to vowel harmony.

2 The *mel-ho2* controversy and the addressee shift phenomenon

Despite numerous analyses of *ho2*, particularly by Lam (2014), Tang (2020), and Law et al. (2024), their judgments regarding sentences involving *ho2* vary significantly. Lam (2014), following previous studies such as Zimmermann 2011, proposes a fine-grained ForceP layer that includes ForceS(peaker) and ForceA(ddressee). In this framework, *mel* occupies the head of the ForceSP position, while *ho2* occupies the head of ForceAP, forming a *mel-ho2* cluster. Lam (2014) provides example (9) as evidence for the grammaticality of the *mel-ho2* cluster within a single split-CP. However, in Section 4, this paper will derive an alternative proposal to interpret example (9).

- (9) a. Scenario: Jimmy is the first in a long taxi queue. A taxi is coming, but someone not from the queue opens the door of the taxi, saying loudly that he is in a hurry. Everyone in the queue is angry. Jimmy says this to the person who jumped the queue.

*Daai6 seng1 zau6 dak1 gaa3laa3 mel ho2?
big voice then work SFP SFP SFP

Int: ‘Can one get by just by being loud? Eh?’

- b. Scenario: Jimmy is the first in a long taxi queue. A taxi is coming, but someone not from the queue opens the door of the taxi, saying loudly that he is in a hurry. Everyone in the queue is angry. Jimmy whispers to the second person in the queue.

^{OK}Daai6 seng1 zau6 dak1 gaa3laa3 mel ho2?
big voice then work SFP SFP SFP

‘Can one get by just by being loud? Eh?’

(Lam 2014: 72)

Tang (2015a), on the other hand, regards *ho2* as an interrogative SFP that is unable to co-occur with other Degree SFPs due to the competition for the same syntactic position. In other words, clusters such as *mel-ho2* are predicted to be ungrammatical. This perspective is further elaborated in Tang 2020, which proposes that *ho2* moves from the head of F3P to CoAP,³ and the trace of *ho2* competes with Degree SFPs for the same syntactic position.⁴

³ As mentioned above, Tang (2019) splits FP into complex layers, which include F1P, F2P, and F3P. FP accommodates SFP clusters across the Sinitic languages. F3P is a very high position, which is usually occupied by Degree particles in Cantonese. As for CoAP, it refers to the Call on the Addressee Phrase. This paper follows Heim et al.’s (2016) proposal that the head of CoAP is occupied by the boundary tone.

⁴ Tang (2020) follows Lau (2019) in arguing that *ho2* moves from the head of F3P to that of CoAP. However, the motivation for this movement is not rigorously justified, especially when the boundary tone already occupies the head of CoAP. Therefore, this paper follows Tang (2015) and Heim et al. (2016), who argue that *ho2* occupies the head of F3P, while the boundary tone occupies the head of CoAP.

The judgments reported in Law et al. 2018, 2024 largely align with Lam 2014, but with even greater tolerance for *ho2* clusters. Law et al. (2018, 2024) introduce the concept of a force shift phenomenon in natural language. They argue that *ho2* serves as an anchoring function, transforming an unanchored sentence act into an anchored speech act. This anchoring involves both the speaker and the addressee: the speaker is anchored by performing the sentence act, while the addressee is anchored by the speaker asking whether they agree with or share the sentence act. This anchoring mechanism is the core semantic function of *ho2*. According to Law et al. (2024), SFPs other than *ho2* operate at the sentence act level, while *ho2* uniquely plays a role at the speech act level. As a result, clusters such as *me1-ho2* are considered both grammatical and felicitous under their proposal.

Another intriguing phenomenon discussed by Law et al. (2024) is the addressee shift of *ho2* following interrogative SFPs such as *aa3* and *maa3*, as well as imperative SFPs. They argue that this occurs because these SFPs already refer to the speaker, requiring *ho2* to introduce a new addressee. For example, in the case of the interrogative SFPs *aa3* and *maa3*, the addressee cannot respond to both the inner question and the *ho2*-question simultaneously. However, Law et al. (2024) do not provide a precise definition of which SFPs identify the addressee, leaving this area open for further investigation. For descriptive purposes, I preliminarily distinguish between *ho2*[A] and *ho2*[B] with two features, as shown in Table 1.⁵

Table 1 A preliminary distinction between *ho2*[A] and *ho2*[B]

	Is there a pause before the constituent?	Is there an addressee shift before the constituent?
<i>ho2</i> [A]	-	-
<i>ho2</i> [B]	+	+

3 Motivations for distinguishing the two *ho2*s

In this section, I will demonstrate that *ho2*[A] and *ho2*[B] behave differently. Firstly, *ho2*[A] cannot co-occur with speech act-level expressions, such as the evidential marker *tenglgong2* ‘hearsay’, while *ho2*[B] can, as shown in examples (10) and (11) respectively.⁶ Arguably, *ho2*[B] operates at the speech act level, while *ho2*[A] operates lower, at the propositional level.

- (10) *Tenglgong2 Peter wui5 lai4 o3 ho2[A]?
hear-say Peter will come SFP SFP
Int: ‘I heard from someone that Peter would come, eh?’

⁵ The distinction is preliminary because we will later show that neither a pause nor an addressee shift is a necessary condition for licensing *ho2*[B], as we will see when we discuss the covert addressee shift in Section 4 and a seemingly new use of *ho2* in Section 5.

⁶ I thank a reviewer for pointing this out.

- (11) Context: Mary and the speaker heard from somewhere that Peter would come to have a meal. When John asked who would come, the speaker said:

(To John) Teng1gong2 Peter wui5 lai4 (To Mary) *ho2*[B]?
 hear-say Peter will come SFP
 (To John) ‘We heard that Peter would come.’ (To Mary) ‘Eh?’

Secondly, *ho2*[B] can co-occur with the majority of Degree SFPs, while *ho2*[A] cannot.⁷ In the case of modal SFPs, none are compatible with *ho2*[A], but all are compatible with *ho2*[B], as shown in (12).⁸

- (12) Gary sik6 zo2 zek3 haa1 zi1maa3 {**ho2*[A]/*ho2*[B]}?
 Gary eat PERF CL shrimp ze1 SFP
ho2[A]-int: (To OA) ‘Gary has eaten one shrimp only, eh?’
ho2[B]: (To OA) ‘Gary has eaten one shrimp only.’ (To NA) ‘Eh?’⁹

All interrogative SFPs are incompatible with *ho2*[A], but some are compatible with *ho2*[B].¹⁰ Examples (13)–(18) show that interrogative SFPs such as *me1*, *ho2*[A], *sin1*, *ge2*, *haa6waa5*, and *aa3* can readily co-occur with *ho2*[B], but not with *ho2*[A].

- (13) Gary sik6 haa1 me1 {**ho2*[A]/*ho2*[B]}?
 Gary eat shrimp SFP SFP
ho2[A]-int: (To OA) ‘Does Gary eat shrimp, eh?’
ho2[B]: (To OA) ‘Does Gary eat shrimp?’ (To NA) ‘Eh?’
- (14) Gary sik6 haa1 o3 *ho2*[A] {**ho2*[A]/*ho2*[B]}?
 Gary eat shrimp SFP SFP SFP
ho2[A]-int: (To OA) ‘Gary eats shrimp, eh? Eh?’
ho2[B]: (To OA) ‘Gary eats shrimp, eh?’ (To NA) ‘Eh?’

- (15) Context: Clara and Cara are twin sisters, so are Eva and Emily. Clara and Cara’s mother says that Eva and Emily are a pair of beautiful twin sisters. Clara says:

⁷ While I will examine the co-occurrence of all Degree SFPs in Tang 2015, I will leave some of them open. The modal SFPs *le5* and *be6*, and the interrogative *he2* are not tested because they are not in my lexicon. The imperative SFPs *wo5* and *bo3* are also not tested because they are not compatible with canonical imperatives, and I question whether they are really imperative SFPs, despite Tang’s (2014, 2015a, 2015b) arguments regarding these two particles.

⁸ The same results are shared by all other modal SFPs listed in (2).

⁹ One reviewer also finds this example quite acceptable with *ho2*[A] in a context in which the speaker was annoyed by another interlocutor C, who perhaps complained that Gary ate too much seafood. The speaker can easily say this to interlocutor B as a way to object to C’s complaint. However, this is precisely the case where a covert addressee shift is involved, and the *ho2* here is actually a *ho2*[B]. I will elaborate on the covert addressee shift later.

¹⁰ Since interrogative SFPs are more sensitive to context than modal SFPs, some examples are provided with contexts to give readers a clearer picture.

(To her mother) Bin1-deoi3 maa1 mui6 zeoi3 leng3 sin1
 which-CL twin sister most pretty SFP
 {*ho2[A]/ (To Cara) ho2[B]}?
 SFP

ho2[A]-int: (To her mother) ‘Which pair of twin sisters is the prettiest, eh?’

ho2[B]: (To her mother) ‘Which pair of twin sisters is the prettiest?’ (To Cara) ‘Eh?’

- (16) Context: C tells A and B that she will come with her husband, Gary, to a gathering. However, A and B only see C coming. A says:

(To C) Dim2-gai2 Gary m4 lei4 ge2 {*ho2[A]/ (To B) ho2[B]}?
 why Gary NEG come SFP SFP

ho2[A]-int: (To C) ‘Why didn’t Gary come, eh?’

ho2[B]: (To C) ‘Why didn’t Gary come?’ (To B) ‘Eh?’

- (17) Gary sik6 haa1 haa6waa5 {*ho2[A]/ho2[B]}?

Gary eat shrimp SFP SFP

ho2[A]-int: (To OA) ‘Gary eats shrimp, eh, eh?’

ho2[B]: (To OA) ‘Gary eats shrimp, eh?’ (To NA) ‘Eh?’

- (18) Gary sik6 haa1 ding6 haai3 aa3 {ho2[A]/*ho2[B]}?

Gary eat shrimp or crab SFP SFP

ho2[A]-int: (To OA) ‘Will Gary have shrimp or crab, eh?’

ho2[B]-int: (To OA) ‘Will Gary have shrimp or crab?’ (To NA) ‘Eh?’

On the other hand, (19) shows that interrogative SFP *maa3* is incompatible with both *ho2[A]* and *ho2[B]*. This contradicts Law et al. (2024), who argue that the grammaticality of *maa3-ho2* cluster can be remedied by having an addressee shift.

- (19) *Gary sik6 haa1 maa3 {ho2[A]/ho2[B]}?

Gary eat shrimp SFP SFP

ho2[A]-int: (To OA) ‘Does Gary eat shrimp, eh?’

ho2[B]-int: (To OA) ‘Does Gary eat shrimp?’ (To NA) ‘Eh?’¹¹

The SFPs *waa2* and *aa4* present interesting cases. *Waa2* is an SFP that elicits an echo question, which can have either a confirmation reading or a clarification reading. The confirmation reading occurs when the speaker doubts what the addressee has just said and asks for confirmation. The clarification reading arises

¹¹ A reviewer points out that the issue with *maa3-ho2* seems to be that there is a lesser-known non-interrogative *maa3*, which is *almaa3*, and this is the *maa3* discussed by Law et al. (2024). The relevant example from Law et al. (2024) is (i).

(i) Aa3man4 sik6 haa1 maa3 ꞑ ho2?

Aaman eat shrimp POLQ HO

‘(To Cindy) Does Aaman eat shrimp? (To Ben) Do you also wonder?’

As Law et al. (2024) explicitly transcribe, *maa3* is a polarity question marker. I think the case of *maa3* discussed by Law et al. (2024) should be an interrogative one.

when the speaker either forgets or cannot hear clearly what the addressee has said. *Ho2*[B] is compatible only with the confirmation reading, but not the clarification reading, as illustrated by the contrast between examples (20) and (21).

- (20) Context: Mary, Ken, and Sam are friends with Gary. Gary told them that he hates shrimp. However, Sam told Mary and Ken that Gary's favourite food is shrimp. Mary said:

(To Sam) Gary zeoi3 zung1ji3 sik6 me1 waa2
 Gary most like eat what SFP
 { **ho2*[A]/ (To Ken) *ho2*[B] }?
 SFP

ho2[A]-int: (To Sam) 'WHAT is the favourite food of Gary, eh?'

ho2[B]-int: (To Sam) 'WHAT is the favourite food of Gary?' (To Ken) 'Eh?'

- (21) Context: Mary, Ken, and Sam are friends with Gary. Sam told Mary and Ken that Gary likes eating something, but in a very small voice. Mary could not hear what Sam said, and believed that Ken could not too. She said:

*(To Sam) Gary zeoi3 zung1ji3 sik6 me1 waa2
 Gary most like eat what SFP
 { *ho2*[A]/ (To Ken) *ho2*[B] }?
 SFP

ho2[A]-int: (To Sam) 'WHAT is the favourite food of Gary, eh?'

ho2[B]-int: (To Sam) 'WHAT is the favourite food of Gary?' (To Ken) 'Eh?'

The interrogative SFP *aa4* is incompatible with both *ho2*[A] and *ho2*[B], as shown in (22). However, the incompatibility between *aa4* and *ho2*[B] can be remedied by adding constituents such as *mat1*, as demonstrated in (23).¹²

- (22) *Gary sik6 haa1 aa4 { *ho2*[A]/*ho2*[B] }?
 Gary eat shrimp SFP SFP
ho2[A]-int: (To OA) 'Does Gary eat shrimp, eh?'
ho2[B]-int: (To OA) 'Does Gary eat shrimp?' (To NA) 'Eh?'

- (23) Mat1 Gary sik6 haa1 gaa4 { **ho2*[A]/^{OK}*ho2*[B] }?
 WH-word Gary eat shrimp SFP SFP
ho2[A]-int: (To OA) 'What? Does Gary eat shrimp, eh?'
ho2[B]: (To OA) 'What? Does Gary eat shrimp?' (To NA) 'Eh?'

Regarding imperative SFPs, they are also incompatible with *ho2*[A] but are compatible with *ho2*[B], as shown in examples (24)–(27). The only exception is *le4*, which is incompatible with both *ho2*[A] and *ho2*[B], as in (28).

¹² Interestingly, when *mat1* is added, a *g*- initial consonant will also be added to the particles. Otherwise, it will be unnatural. That is, *aa4* becomes *gaa4*. Tang (2015a) argues that the *g*- initial consonant comes from the morpheme *ge2* in Cantonese. In other words, the constituent *gaa4* can be further decomposed into two morphemes: *ge2* and *aa4*.

- (24) Context: A mother has just discussed with the father that having meals on a regular basis is good for health. However, when the meal is ready, their son does not want to have it. The mother says:¹³

(To the son) Lei4 sik6 faan6 laa1 { *ho2[A]/ (To the father) ho2[B]}?
 come eat rice SFP SFP

ho2[A]-int: (To the son) ‘Come have your meal, eh?’

ho2[B]: (To the son) ‘Come have your meal!’ (To the father) ‘Eh?’

- (25) Context: An older sibling always bullies her younger sibling. Previously, the mother complained to the older sibling that the younger sibling does not have meals regularly. The older sibling orders the younger sibling to come have their meal.¹⁴

(To the younger sibling) Lei4 sik6 faan6 a3haa2
 come eat rice SFP
 { *ho2[A]/ (To mother) ho2[B]}?
 SFP

ho2[A]-int: (To the younger sibling) ‘Come have your meal, eh?’

ho2[B]: (To the younger sibling) ‘Come have your meal!’ (To the mother) ‘Eh?’

- (26) Context: In a buffet, the parents told the son not to eat too much, but the son did not listen. After the buffet, the son vomited. The mother says:

(To the son) Sik3 gam3 do1 a1laa4 { *ho2[A]/ (To the father) ho2[B]}?
 eat so many SFP SFP

ho2[A]-int: (To the son) ‘That’s what you get for eating so much, eh?’

ho2[B]: (To the son) ‘That’s what you get for eating so much.’ (To the father) ‘Eh?’

- (27) Context: A mother has just discussed with the father that having meals on a regular basis is good for health. However, the child was so engaged in reading a book that they did not want to have dinner, and the child actually did not understand the book. In order to call the child to have dinner, the mother says:¹⁵

(To the child) Sik6 faan6 baa2laa1 { *ho2[A]/ (To the father) ho2[B]}?
 eat rice SFP SFP

ho2[A]-int: (To the child) ‘Come have your meal, eh?’

ho2[B]: (To the child) ‘Come have your meal.’ (To the father) ‘Eh?’

- (28) Context: Two teachers, A and B, are teaching a group of students. The teachers agreed with the students that they would play a game before the class started. Teacher A says:

(To students) Waan2-go3 jau4hei3 le4 { *ho2[A]/ ?? (To teacher B) ho2[B]}?
 play-CL game SFP SFP

ho2[A]-int: (To students) ‘Let’s play a game, eh?’

ho2[B]-int: (To students) ‘Let’s play a game.’ (To teacher B) ‘Eh?’

¹³ The same context and results apply to the imperative SFPs *sin1* and *la3wei3*.

¹⁴ The same context and results apply to the imperative SFP *hou2wo3*.

¹⁵ The same context and results apply to the imperative SFP *hou2gwo3*.

Two general patterns can be observed. Firstly, while *ho2*[A] cannot co-occur with Degree SFPs, *ho2*[B] can co-occur with the majority of Degree SFPs. Secondly, there are four Degree SFPs that are incompatible with *ho2*[B]: the interrogative SFPs *waa2*, *maa3*, and *aa4*, and the imperative SFP *le4*. Note that *waa2* is incompatible only when the echo question has a clarification reading, and the incompatibility of *aa4-ho2*[B] can be remedied by adding constituents such as *mat1*. I will attempt to explain these two general patterns in Section 4.

4 Proposal

I argue that both *ho2*[A] and *ho2*[B] share the core meaning of confirmationalals (cf. Wiltschko 2021). Following Büring and Gunlogson (2000), Sudo (2013), and Gyuris (2017), Yip (2022) distinguishes between contextual bias and epistemic bias: while an epistemic bias stems from an individual's set of commitments, a contextual bias arises from immediate evidence available that is not part of the individual's set of commitments. When a speaker asks a *ho2*-question, they believe that both they and the addressee should possess an epistemic bias toward the positive answer to the question. However, the two *ho2*s are syntactically distinct. *Ho2*[A] is an SFP that occupies the head of F3P, while *ho2*[B] is a pro-sentence conjoined with the antecedent sentence by a pause. Consequently, the semantic objects confirmed by these particles, denoted by their complements, differ. Speakers use *ho2*[A] to ask whether addressees agree with the speakers' propositions, while *ho2*[B] is used to ask whether addressees agree with the speakers' speech acts, based on propositional evidence in their common ground.¹⁶ The positions of the two *ho2*s are shown in Figure 1, repeated here as Figure 2.¹⁷

¹⁶ A reviewer points out that if confirming a proposition means raising a question using some propositional content, then it is predicted that *S-ho2*[A] should pattern like a canonical question. However, Tang (2020) finds that *ho2*[A] cannot produce canonical questions, but only rhetorical ones, as shown in (i).

(i) Saam1 gaal saam1 dang2jyu4 gei2do1 nel ho2[A]?
 three plus three equal how-many SFP SFP
 'How many does 3 plus 3 equal to? It's equal to 6.'
 *'How many does 3 plus 3 equal to? I am curious.'

The reviewer also points out that if *ho2*[A] derives a canonical question, it should have the ability to co-occur with negative polarity items. However, Lam (2014) finds that this is not the case, further proving that *ho2*[A] does not elicit a canonical inquisitive question. I leave this problem for further investigation.

¹⁷ This proposal is inspired by the generalized schema of Chinese particles proposed by Tang (2015b, 2016), who aims to resolve the head-parameter problem in Chinese. At first glance, the core part of Chinese appears to be head-initial, but the peripheral parts, such as SFPs, are head-final. This analysis not only violates the principle of economy but also contradicts the Final-over-Final Condition (FOFC) principle (Biberauer et al. 2014; Sheehan et al. 2017). In this regard, Tang (2015b, 2016) proposes a generalized conjunctive structure: SFPs do not occupy the heads of FPs but are instead merged with the antecedent by an empty conjunction, forming a conjunctive structure.

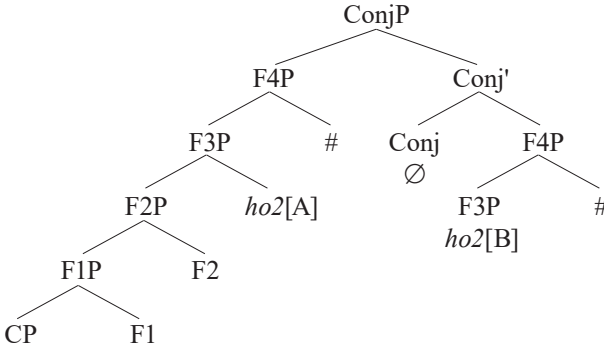


Figure 2 The syntactic position of *ho2*s

The first pattern observed in Section 3 is that Degree SFPs cannot co-occur with *ho2*[A]. I attribute this incompatibility to their competition for the same syntactic position, the head of F3P. This claim aligns with the *mel-ho2* controversy discussed in Section 2.1. While Lam (2014) and Law et al. (2024) adopt the cartographic framework, considering *ho2* as one of the heads in the split-CP layer, I argue that there are, in fact, two distinct *ho2*s. Lam (2014) provides example (9) as evidence for the grammaticality of the *mel-ho2* cluster within a single split-CP. However, upon closer inspection of the context, I found that (9) actually supports my current proposal. When the *ho2* in (9) is removed, as in (29), the felicity condition reverts. In (29a), the *mel*-question is directed at the person who jumped the queue, while in (29b), the *mel*-question is directed at the second person in the queue. This shift indicates that when the speaker utters (29b), there is a covert addressee change from the person who jumped the queue to the second person. The seemingly *ho2*[A] in (29b) is, therefore, actually *ho2*[B] with a covert pause.¹⁸

- (29) a. Context: Jimmy is the first in a long taxi queue. A taxi is coming, but someone not from the queue opens the door of the taxi, saying loudly that he is in a hurry. Everyone in the queue is angry. Jimmy says this to the person who jumped the queue.

OK Daai6 seng1 zau6 dak1 gaa3laa3 mel?
 big voice then work SFP SFP
 Int: 'Can one get by just by being loud?'

¹⁸ One reviewer suggests that covert addressee shift is possible in the case of *mel-ho2*. However, if covert addressee shift were so readily available, we should not observe any difference between *ho2*[A] and *ho2*[B]. It is true that for people who accept covert addressee shift, the boundaries between the *ho2*s are blurred, but two differences remain. Firstly, only *ho2*[B] can co-occur with Degree SFPs, while *ho2*[A] cannot, as shown in Section 3. Secondly, covert addressee shift is possible only if the sentence involves a third person, as in (30b), where the speaker expects some perlocutionary effect on the person who jumped the queue, although that person is not directly addressed. Another reviewer also points out that more examples of covert addressee change should be provided. For those who accept covert addressee change, all pauses in grammatical S-*ho2*[B] structures can be omitted.

- b. Context: Jimmy is the first in a long taxi queue. A taxi is coming, but someone not from the queue opens the door of the taxi, saying loudly that he is in a hurry. Everyone in the queue is angry. Jimmy whispers to the second person in the queue.

#Daai6 seng1 zau6 dak1 gaa3laa3 me1?
 big voice then work SFP SFP
 ‘Can one get by just by being loud?’

The second pattern observed in Section 3 is that not all Degree SFPs can co-occur with *ho2*[B]. Since Degree SFPs and *ho2*[B] occupy different syntactic positions in my proposal, I attribute their incompatibility to semantic-pragmatic reasons rather than syntactic ones. Firstly, the interrogative SFP *maa3* is incompatible with *ho2*[B], as shown in (19). This incompatibility arises because *maa3* has low compatibility with epistemic biases (Yip 2022), as evidenced by the contrast between (30) and (31). Since *ho2*[B] always requires an epistemic bias, the two SFPs conflict semantically.

- (30) Gary sik3 haa1 maa3?
 Gary eat shrimp SFP
 ‘Does Gary eat shrimp?’
 (31) ??Gary m5 sik3 haa1 maa3?
 Gary NEG eat shrimp SFP
 Int: ‘Gary doesn’t eat shrimp, right?’

Secondly, the confirmation reading of *waa2* is compatible with *ho2*[B], while the clarification reading is not. This is because confirmation echo questions inherently involve an epistemic bias. Namely, the speaker does not believe what the addressee has said. The epistemic bias requirement is, therefore, satisfied. In contrast, clarification echo questions lack any epistemic biases and are thus incompatible with *ho2*[B].

Thirdly, the interrogative SFP *aa4* is incompatible with *ho2*[B], as shown in (22). I argue that this is because *aa4* introduces a contextual bias, rather than an epistemic bias. While *aa4* is felicitous only when there is positive contextual evidence, it does not specify an epistemic bias (Yip 2022). Conversely, *ho2*[B] always requires an epistemic bias. When the epistemic states of *aa4* are underspecified, as in (22), the *aa4-ho2*[B] cluster is infelicitous. However, in (23), the addition of the rhetorical construction *mat1* forces an epistemic bias, requiring the speaker to believe that the negative answer is part of the common ground (Stalnaker 1978). This satisfies the epistemic condition of *ho2*[B], making the *aa4-ho2*[B] cluster felicitous.

Finally, the imperative SFP *le4* is not compatible with *ho2*[B], as shown in (28). I attribute this incompatibility to semantic conflicts. A speaker uses a *le4*-imperative to suggest something to the listener in an extremely friendly tone, with the speaker being confident that the listener will happily accept the suggestion (Leung 2005: 74; Tang 2015a: 252). When the speaker is highly confident in their suggestion, they do

not need to seek confirmation from a third party. Furthermore, seeking confirmation from a third party may come across as unfriendly or coercive, contradicting the friendly tone of *le4*. As a result, the *le4-ho2*[B] cluster sounds unnatural.

5 Extensions: A new use of *ho2*?

Apart from the *ho2* with an addressee shift, there is another use of *ho2* in Cantonese that warrants exploration. When the speaker expects the addressee to agree with the antecedent sentence, but the addressee remains silent, the speaker can use *ho2* to urge the addressee to agree. Let us refer to this as *ho2*[X]. Syntactically, *ho2*[X] is compatible with modal SFPs, as shown in (32), but it is incompatible with interrogative and imperative SFPs, as illustrated in (33) and (34). The only exception to this is the interrogative SFP *ho2*[A], as seen in (35).

- (32) Gary sik6 zo2 saam1 zek3 haa1 zi1maa3 ho2[X]?
 Gary eat ASP three CL shrimp SFP SFP
 (To OA) ‘Gary eats three shrimps. (Silence) Eh?’

- (33) *Gary sik6 haa1 me1 ho2[X]?
 Gary eat shrimp SFP SFP
 Int: (To OA) ‘Does Gary eat shrimp? (Silence) Eh?’

- (34) *Lei4 sik6 faan6 laa1 ho2[X]?
 come eat rice SFP SFP
 Int: (To OA) ‘Come have a meal! (Silence) Eh?’

- (35) Gary sik6 haa1 o3 ho2[A] ho2[X]?
 Gary eat shrimp SFP SFP SFP
 (To OA) ‘Gary eats shrimp, eh? (Silence) Eh?’

I argue that *ho2*[X] is syntactically identical to *ho2*[B], and their behavioural differences can be attributed to pragmatics. Unlike *ho2*[B], *ho2*[X] is not compatible with interrogative and imperative SFPs due to the Gricean maxim of quantity within the Cooperative Principle, which requires speakers to contribute just the right amount of information, but neither too much nor too little (Grice 1975). A speaker should perform only one speech act at a time. Proposing two distinct speech acts simultaneously violates the maxim because it creates ambiguity for the addressee, who may not know which speech act to respond to.¹⁹ However, an exception arises when both speech acts require the same response. Tag questions can illustrate this point. In (36), for instance, two speech acts are simultaneously proposed: the assertion *Gary sik3 haa1 aa1maa3* ‘Gary eats shrimp.’ and the tag *hai3 m4 hai3 aa3* ‘isn’t that so?’.

¹⁹ This line of thought echoes Law et al. 2024, which observes the incompatibility between some SFPs and *ho2*, and explains that those SFPs already refer to the speaker, while *ho2* introduces a new addressee.

- (36) Gary sik3 haa1 aa1maa3 hai3 m4 hai6 aa3?
 Gary eat shrimp SFP be NEG be SFP
 ‘Gary eats shrimp. Right?’

Regarding the assertion, the Gricean maxim of quality requires speakers to only say what they believe to be true (Grice 1975).²⁰ Therefore, speakers must believe the asserted content and expect the addressee to believe it as well. In other words, speakers expect addressees to accept the assertion. Regarding the tag *hai3 m5 hai3 aa3*, it is positively biased, indicating the speaker’s belief that the response will likely confirm the assertion. The simultaneity of these two speech acts is permissible because the speaker expects the addressee to respond to both acts in the same way, with a yes or its equivalent.

Applying this analysis to *ho2*[X], I argue that *ho2*[X] is compatible with modal SFPs because the addressee can make a single response to two speech acts simultaneously. When the addressee answers yes or its equivalent, they respond to both the assertion and the question. This analysis can also extend to the *ho2*[A]-*ho2*[X] cluster, where two positively biased questions are posed by the speaker. By responding yes or its equivalent, the addressee addresses both the *ho2*[A] and *ho2*[X] questions simultaneously. In contrast, if other Degree SFPs were to co-occur with *ho2*[B], it would result in two speech acts requiring two different responses, thereby violating the maxim of quantity.²¹

²⁰ A reviewer points out that explaining *ho2*[X] as a variant of *ho2*[B] seems fine, but the reviewer does not think it requires resorting to Gricean Maxims. The reviewer has also provided an alternative account: *ho2*[X], as an F3P, is conjoined with the previous F3P and selected by the AddresseeP, which we follow from the literature, such as Speas and Tenny 2003, Haegeman and Hill 2013, and later Miyagawa 2022, to take it as F4P to derive a full F4P. The advantage of this derivation is that it captures why *ho2*[X] has no addressee shift. However, if we adopt this account, we would reduce an S-*ho2*[X] structure into one single speech act if we believe that one complete F4P is one speech act. Empirically, however, we can see that the pause between *ho2*[X] and its antecedent may be too long to be interpreted as a single speech act.

²¹ The case of *haa6waa5-ho2*[X] remains unclear. Tang (2015a) argues that *haa6waa5* is the fusion of the tag *hai3 m4 hai3 aa3* and possesses features of tag questions. However, the *haa6waa5-ho2*[X] cluster is impossible if there is only one addressee, as in (i).

(i) *Gary sik6 haa1 haa6waa5 ho2[X]?

Gary eat shrimp SFP SFP

(To OA) ‘Gary eats shrimp, eh? (Silence) Eh?’

This is not predicted by our proposal because both the *haa6waa5*-question and the *ho2*[B]-question demand the same answer: yes, or its equivalent. In fact, *ho2*[B] shows similar incompatibility with other question tags, like *hai3 m5 hai3 aa3*, as in (ii). This contrast signals that while *ho2* and other confirmational or tags share very similar distributions and properties, they are not interchangeable. Comparisons between these constituents are needed in future research.

(ii) Gary sik6 haa1 hai3 m5 hai3 aa3 ho2[B]?

Gary eat shrimp be NEG be SFP SFP

(To OA) ‘Gary eats shrimp, isn’t he?’ (Silence) (To OA) ‘Eh?’

This analysis also explains the distributional differences between *ho2*[B] with an addressee shift and *ho2*[B] without an addressee shift (i.e., *ho2*[X]). When there is an addressee shift, each addressee is responsible for only one speech act. In such cases, the Gricean discourse constraints are not explicitly manifested, allowing *ho2*[B] with an addressee shift to be compatible with varying types of speech acts. Consequently, this paper argues that while *ho2*[B] typically has a pause and an addressee shift, the pause can be omitted, as in the case of the covert shift, and the addressee shift is also not necessary, as in the case of *ho2*[X]. The complete features of these two variants of *ho2*[B] are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2 Comparison between the *ho2*s

<i>Ho2</i>	Operation level	Allowing a pause before?	Allowing an addressee shift?
<i>ho2</i> [A]	Proposition	No	No
<i>ho2</i> [B]	Speech Act	Yes	Yes

6 Conclusion

The paper argues that Cantonese has two *ho2*s. While sharing the core semantics of confirmationals, the two *ho2*s occupy different syntactic positions. While *ho2*[A] is an SFP occupying the head of F3P, *ho2*[B] is a pro-sentence merged with the antecedent sentence by an empty conjunction, forming a general conjunctive structure. As a result, the two *ho2*s confirm different kinds of semantic objects: *ho2*[A] seeks confirmations of a proposition, while *ho2*[B] seeks confirmations of a speech act.

By arguing that clusters such as *mel-ho2* cannot co-occur within a single split-CP layer, this paper challenges Lam's (2014) complex ForceP analysis and Law et al.'s (2024) force shift analysis. The clarification of the syntax of *ho2* invites further cross-linguistic exploration of confirmationals across natural languages. Firstly, *ho2* can be compared to Cantonese question tags. While these forms share similar meanings, as evidenced in Section 5, they are not interchangeable. This distinction highlights the need for deeper investigation into the relationship between question tags and confirmationals. Secondly, *ho2* provides interesting insights into the grammaticalization pathway of SFPs. Building on Tang's (2015b, 2016) argument that SFPs are grammaticalized from interjections, it has been proposed that SFPs do not occupy the heads of FPs but instead merge with the antecedent via an empty conjunction, forming a conjunctive structure. With *ho2*[B] forming such a structure with the antecedent speech act, we hypothesize that *ho2*[A] represents a further grammaticalized version of *ho2*[B]. Their synchronic co-existence thus lends support to Tang's (2015b, 2016) proposal. Lastly, the comparison between *ho2* and other confirmationals, such as the English *eh* (Wiltschko et al. 2018), merits further investigation. *Ho2* and similar confirmationals across natural languages have been pivotal linguistic data for proposals addressing the structure of the syntactic left periphery (e.g., Wiltschko 2021; Miyagawa 2022). For instance, Wiltschko (2021)

uses the *mel-ho2*[A] cluster as critical evidence for her proposal. However, by highlighting the complexity of *ho2*, this paper calls for a more rigorous cross-linguistic comparison of confirmationals. Such an effort will contribute to a more accurate and nuanced understanding of the architecture of the left periphery.

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重探粵語句末疑問“㗎”的句法：句末助詞和代句詞

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提要

本文重新探討句尾成分“㗎”的句法特性，並主張粵語存在兩類“㗎”。儘管已有大量研究，包括 Lam (2014)、Tang (2020) 和 Law et al. (2024)，但針對如“咩㗎”等組合的語言直覺仍然莫衷一是。此外，Law et al. (2024) 引入的涉及聽話人轉換的“㗎”尚未得到充分研究。為了解決這些問題，本文觀察“㗎”是否能與程度句尾助詞共現。結果顯示，不涉及聽話人轉換的“㗎”（“㗎 1”）和涉及聽話人轉換的“㗎”（“㗎 2”）有兩套不同的句法行為。本文主張“㗎 1”是佔據 F3P 中心語的句末助詞，“㗎 2”是一個通過空連詞與前述句子合併形成廣義聯合結構的代句詞。基於這個分析，本文重新審視以往的文獻。本文的分析比起以往文獻能夠更全面地覆蓋有關“㗎”的語言事實，從而提升對自然語言左緣結構的理解。

關鍵詞

粵語，句末助詞，代句詞，確認助詞，左緣結構

