Towards an analysis of the sentence final *punya* in Colloquial Malay

The use of colloquial Malay sentence final *punya* has been noted to indicate that the speaker is certain about the propositional content of the utterance (Koh 1990: 78; Yap 2007a,b; Nomoto and Soh, to appear). Its use has an interactional overtone, and gives rise to a "trust me" or "I'm telling you" or "I can assure you" type of assertion (Gil 1999 cited in Yap 2007b, Yap 2007a, b).

(1) Ali   dah   tahu (punya).
    Ali   PERF   know PUNYA
    'Ali knew it. (I can assure you.)'

In this paper, I present a new empirical generalization involving the incompatibility of *punya* and questions that supports the current treatment of *punya* as expressing the speaker's certainty about the propositional content of the utterance. I then turn to a puzzle about the incompatibility of *punya* and the focus particle *–lah* (Yap 2007b). Building on existing analyses of *punya*, I propose a new analysis of *punya* that accounts for these two restrictions.

        Sentence final *punya* cannot appear in wh-questions and yes/no questions:

(2) a. Dia datang cari   siapa (*punya)?   b. Siapa datang cari   kau (*punya)?
        3SG come look.for who PUNYA   who   come look.for 2SG PUNYA
        'Who did s/he come to look for? (*I can assure you.)' 'Who came to look for you? (*I can assure you.)'
    c. Siapa-kah yang dia datang cari   (*punya)?   d. Siapa-kah yang datang cari   dia (*punya)?
        who-Q   that 3SG come look.for PUNYA   who-Q   that come   look.for 3SG PUNYA
        'Who did s/he come to look for? (*I can assure you.)''Who came to look for him/her? (*I can assure you.)'

(3) a Dia ada-tak datang cari   kau (*punya)?   b. Dia cari-ke-tak boyfriend kau (*punya)?
       3SG have-Q come look.for 2SG   PUNYA   3SG look.for-Q boy.friend 2SG   PUNYA
       'Did s/he come to look for you?   'Did s/he look for your boy friend?
        (*I can assure you.)'   (*I can assure you.)'
    c. Dia datang cari   kau (*punya) ke (*punya)?
        3SG come look.for 2SG   PUNYA Q   PUNYA
        'Did s/he come to look for you? (*I can assure you.)'

The incompatibility of *punya* with questions is expected given that the use of *punya* expresses the speaker's certainty about the propositional content of the utterance. One cannot express confidence about the truth of a question.

        Sentence final *punya* cannot appear with the focus particle *–lah* (Yap 2007b):

(4) a. Dia-lah   yang datang cari   aku (*punya).   b. Aku-lah yang dia datang cari   (*punya).
        3SG-LAH that come look.for 1SG   PUNYA   1SG-LAH that 3SG come look.for PUNYA
        'It's s/he who came to look for me.   'It's me who s/he came to look for.
         (I can assure you.)'   (I can assure you.)'

The restriction is puzzling as it is unclear why the sentences are not acceptable with the meanings indicated. Note that sentences with *punya* can have broad or narrow focus; the latter is possible with phonological prominence on the narrow focused elements:

(5) a. Dia datang cari   aku punya, bukan aku pergi cari   dia.
        3SG come look.for 1SG PUNYA not   1SG go   look.for 3SG
        'S/he came to look for me. I can assure you. Rather than I went to look for him/her.'
    b. Dia pergi cari   Ali punya, bukan pergi cari Minah.
        3SG go   look.for Ali PUNYA not   go   look.for Minah
        'S/he went to look for Ali, I can assure you, rather than Minah.'

Assuming a split CP (Rizzi 1997, Paul 2014), I propose that *punya* heads a C$_{attitute}$ that scopes over C$_{force}$, and it subcategorizes for a non-interrogative C$_{force}$. Sentence final *punya* <u>syntactically</u> marks its complement CP (headed by C$_{force}$) as broad focus (with the possibility of a further narrow focus of a constituent within Force-CP marked by phonological prominence) (cf. Cheng (2008) on Mandarin *de*). I propose that *punya* is incompatible with the focus particle *–lah* because it is not possible to <u>syntactically</u> mark a constituent and a subconstituent simultaneously as being focused. I claim that the speaker using *punya* expresses confidence about the truth of the proposition of the utterance based on direct or indirect evidence, and believes that at least one of the conversation participants may doubt the truth of the proposition or may need a reminder about its truth.