YES-NO QUESTIONS
AND THE VIETNAMESE CLAUSE STRUCTURE

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Abstract
Despite lively discussion in the literature on Vietnamese, the behavior of question markers is still elusive. The aim of this paper is to provide a comprehensive and systematic view of Vietnamese question particles integrating novel generalisations concerning their distributional and interpretational properties. We also show how this description leads us to a deeper understanding of Vietnamese clause structure in general.

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1 Introduction

In Vietnamese, an assertion such as (1) can be turned into a matrix yes-no question[1] by adding a variety of different particles at the end of the clause, as illustrated in (2).

(1)　　John　　thích　　học　　tiếng　　Việt
　　　　John　　like　　study　　language　Vietnamese
　　　　'John likes to study Vietnamese'

(2) a.　John　　thích　　học　　tiếng　　Việt　　**không**?
　　　　John　　like　　study　　language　Vietnamese　Q[2]
　　　　'Does John like to study Vietnamese?'

　　b.　John　　thích　　học　　tiếng　　Việt　　**chưa** ?
　　　　John　　like　　study　　language　Vietnamese　Q
　　　　'Does John like to study Vietnamese yet?'

　　c.　John　　thích　　học　　tiếng　　Việt　　**à** ?
　　　　John　　like　　study　　language　Vietnamese　Q
　　　　Roughly: 'Does John like to study Vietnamese? (I guess/ Can you confirm that)

　　d.　John　　thích　　học　　tiếng　　Việt　　**chăng** ?
　　　　John　　like　　study　　language　Vietnamese　Q
　　　　Roughly: 'Does John like to study Vietnamese? (by any chance/ Can you confirm that)'
　　e.　John　　thích　　học　　tiếng　　Việt　　**ư** ?

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[1]　A note should be made here in terms of terminology: yes-no questions are to be distinguished from constituent questions and alternative questions for only the former can be answered by Yes or No or their variants.
[2]　Abbreviations used in the glossing lines: ANT: anterior, ASR: assertion, CL/CLF: classifier, DEM: demonstrative, DUR: durative, EM: emphatic, FUT: future, IMP: imperative, LOC: locative, NEG: negative, PASS: passive, PST/PAST: past, PERF: perfect, POL: polite, PROG: progressive, PRN: pronoun, PRT: particle, Q: question, SFP: sentence-final particle, TOP: topic, 2SG: second singular.

John	like	study	language Vietnamese	Q

Roughly: 'Does John like to study Vietnamese? (I'm surprised/ Can you confirm that)

f. John **thích** học tiếng Việt **sao**?[3]

John like study language Vietnamese Q

Roughly: 'Does John like to study Vietnamese? (I'm surprised/ Can you confirm that)

Embedded yes-no questions, on the other hand, can be formed by inserting *không* to the end of the clause as in (3a), or *liệu* to the beginning of the clause as in (3b), or both as in (3c):

(3) a. Mary muốn biết **[John có thích học tiếng Việt không]**

Mary want know John yes like study language Vietnamese Q

b. Mary muốn biết **[liệu** John có thích học tiếng Việt **]**

Mary want know whether John yes like study language Vietnamese

c. Mary muốn biết **[liệu** John có thích học tiếng Việt **không]**

Mary want know whether John yes like study language Vietnamese Q

'Mary wants to know whether John likes to study Vietnamese'

Given such a large inventory of yes-no question particles in Vietnamese, a major concern to be addressed is how to distinguish them descriptively.

2 Previous accounts

Yes-no question particles have received a great deal of interest in research on Vietnamese grammar, most relevantly Cao (2004), Trinh (2005), Duffield (2013), and Le (2015). However, the list of question markers and the precise characterization of their interpretation and distribution both remain elusive.

2.1 Cao (2004)

One of the first attempts to provide an extensive description of Vietnamese yes-no questions is Cao (2004), in which he distinguishes between 'general questions' with *có ... không* or *đã ... chưa* and 'metalinguistic questions' with *à, hả, ư,* or *sao*.

(4) a. Anh Nam **có** đến đây **không**?

brother Nam yes come here Q

'Does Nam come here?' (Cao's example 2004: 396, translation ours)

b. Anh Nam **đã** đến đây **chưa**?

brother Nam ANT come here Q

'Has Nam come here yet?' (Cao's example 2004: 396, translation ours)

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[3] In addition to marking yes-no questions, Vietnamese *sao* also marks wh-questions meaning *why* or *how*. This paper is only concerned with the former use of *sao*.

c.   Ông   Nam   về   rồi   **à/ ư/ sao/hả**?[4]
     Grandpa Nam   leave   already   Q/Q/Q/ Q
     'Nam left, didn't he?'   (Cao's example 2004: 396, translation ours)

'Metalinguistic' questions like those in (4c) have a presupposition along the lines of 'I know P, but I want you to confirm whether P' (Cao 2004:398). Cao briefly notes that, *ư* and *sao* have an additional surprise effect, without going into detail.

   Thompson (1965), Nguyen (1997), and Tran (2009) on the other hand describe all of these particles - including *à, ư, sao,* and *hả* - as surprise markers. The following examples illustrate the surprise reading:

(5) a.   Chị   quên   rồi   **à**?
         2SG   forget   already A[5]
         'You forgot already? (I'm surprised)'   (Example of Thompson 1965:60)

   b.   Thằng   Huân   nó   chưa   ngủ   **à**?
        boy   Huan   he   not.yet sleep   I'm surprised
        'Isn't little Huan asleep yet?'   (Example of Nguyen 1997:125)

   c.   Lan   mua   quyển   sách   đó   **à**?
        Lan   buy   CLF   book   that   A
        'Did Lan buy that book? (I am surprised)'   (Example from Tran (2009:42)

   d.   Tân   đã   gặp   Lan   **à/ư/hả**?
        Tan   PST   meet   Lan   Q/Q/Q
        'Did Tan meet Lan? (I am surprised)'   (Example from Tran (2009:19)

The description of *à* as a 'confirmation request' as in Cao (2004) or a 'mild surprise' marker as in Thompson (1965), Nguyen (1997), and Tran (2009) is however incomplete. It turns out that *à* sometimes does not require the speaker's surprise nor prior knowledge, see sections 2.3 and 3.2 below.

2.2 Trinh (2005)

Trinh (2005) discusses three particles, namely *không*, *chưa,* and *à*, which according to him instantiate two kinds of questions in Vietnamese: *không* and *chưa* mark pragmatically neutral 'polarity questions', whereas *à* marks pragmatically biased 'checking questions', used to 'check what the speaker finds hard to believe' (Trinh 2005: 31). For instance, (6c) implies that the speaker suspects that John does not read books, whereas no such implicature can be inferred from (6a-b).

(6) a.   John   có   đọc   sách   **không**?
         John   CO   read   book   KHONG
         'Does John read books?'   (Trinh's example 2005:30)

   b.   Nó   đã   đọc   sách   **chưa**?
        he   DA   read   book   KHONG
        'Has he read books (yet)?'   (Trinh's example 2005:48)

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[4]   Note that *hả* is listed in Cao (2004) and Tran (2009) as a yes-no question particle, but we decided not to include *hả* in our list for reasons which will become clear in the discussion of Le (2015) below.

[5]   The gloss of the cited examples is kept intact as in the original text, here and elsewhere.

c. John   đọc   sách   **à**?
   John   read   books   Q
   'Does John read books?'   (Trinh's example 2005:30)

On the syntactic side, Trinh notes that the two types differ in that the neutral, but not the biased, particles can be embedded:

(7) a. Tôi   muốn   biết   nó   có   đọc   sách   **không**
       I   want   know   he   CO   read   book   KHONG
       'I want to know whether he reads books'

   b. *Tôi   muốn   biết   nó   đọc   sách   **à**
       I   want   know   he   read   book   Q
       Intended: 'I want to know whether he reads books'   (Trinh's examples 2005:31)

Polarity questions marked by *không*, *chưa* can thus be either root or embedded, and are pragmatically neutral, whereas checking questions marked by *à* are root-only and pragmatically biased.

2.3 Le (2015)

Le (2015) argues against the surprise interpretation (e.g, Thompson 1965, Nguyen 1997, Tran 2009) and in favor of the confirmation reading of *à* (e.g., Cao 2004, Trinh 2005), via contexts such as:

(8)   **Context**: The speaker just returned from a different area where it didn't rain and noticed that the streets at the location of speaking were wet. (S)he asks a local person:
       Hôm qua   trời   mưa   **à**?
       yesterday   it   rain   SFP
       'It rained yesterday?'   (Le's example and context 2015:29)

In this context, the question with *à* does not have any surprise meaning component since the speaker already made a guess based on what (s)he saw in the street and (s)he simply asked for confirmation.

The literature is thus focused on trying to decide either-or questions: a particle is either neutral or pragmatically loaded, and when pragmatically loaded, the pragmatics is either surprise or confirmation. Section 3.2 below suggests that these either-or approaches are not descriptively correct.

Le (2015) goes beyond the *không, chưa, à* trio, providing the most extensive list of interrogative particles in the formal literature: *không, chưa, chăng, à, ư, sao* (abbreviated as SFP ('sentence-final particle') in Le's glossing lines).

(9) a. Ngày mai   chị   có   đi   làm   **không**?
       tomorrow   2SG   CO   go   work   SFP
       'Do you go to work tomorrow?'   (Le's example 2015:23)

   b. Em   về   nhà   **chưa**?
      2SG   go   home   SFP
      'Have you gone home yet?'   (Le's example 2015:26)

   c. Chị   có   đi   Pháp   **à**?
      2SG   CO   go   France   SFP
      'You went to France?'   (Le's example 2015:30)

    d.   Chị   có   đi   học   hôm qua   **chăng**?
         2SG   CO   go   study   yesterday   SFP
         'Did you go to school yesterday?'   (Le's example 2015:28)

    e.   Anh   đang   ăn   **ư**?
         2SG   PROG   eat   SFP
         'You're eating?'   (Le's example 2015:35)

    f.   Chị   có   đi   Pháp   **sao**?
         2SG   CO   go   France   SFP
         'Have you been to France?'   (Le's example 2015:37)

One defining characteristic of this set of sentence-final particles, according to Le, is that they only license yes-no questions, not other types of questions such as wh-questions. This is shown by elements such as *gì* that are ambiguous between an indefinite reading, 'something', and a wh reading, 'what'. When they occur in a question without a yes-no marker, they typically take their wh-reading, yielding a wh-question such as (10a), (11a), (12a). But as soon as one of the yes-no markers is added to the clause, the wh-reading is impossible and hence the indefinite reading of *gì* emerges:

(10) a.   Anh   muốn   ăn   **gì**?
         2SG   want   eat   what
         'What do you want to eat?'

    b.   Anh   muốn   ăn   **gì**   **không**?
         2SG   want   eat   what   SFP
         'Do you want to eat something?'   (Le's example 2015:24)
         NOT 'What do you want to eat?'

(11) a.   Em   nhớ   **gì**?
         2SG   remember   what
         'What do you remember?'

    b.   Em   nhớ   **gì**   **chăng**?
         2SG   remember   what   SFP
         'Do you remember something?'   (Le's example 2015:27)
         NOT 'What do you remember?'

(12) a.   Anh   học   **gì**?
         2SG   study   what
         'What do you study?'

    b.   Anh   học   **gì**   **à**?
         2SG   study   what   SFP
         'Are you studying something?'   (Le's example 2015:29)
         NOT 'What do you study?'

This is to be distinguished from other sentence-final particles which are sometimes also classified as question markers in other work, such as *hả* and its variant *hử* as in Cao (2004) and Tran (2009). According to Le, *hả* is not a genuine yes-no question marker because adding them at the end of a wh-question does not change the clause into a yes-no question, as seen above with other particles:

(13) a. Bây giờ   muốn   làm   **gì**?
      now   want   do   what
      'Now what do you want to do?'

    b. Bây giờ   muốn   làm   **gì**   **hả**?
      now   want   do   what   SFP
      'Now what do you want to do (tell me)?'
      NOT 'Now do you want to do something?' (Le's example 2015:125)

Unfortunately, no further distinctions within the six elements is provided (and the clause-initial interrogative marker *liệu* is not discussed). What is thus missing from the literature is a comprehensive but detailed study of the differences between Vietnamese yes-no question particles. In Section 3, we will show how our study fills in some of those empirical gaps.

2.4 Duffield (2013)

Duffield (2013) extends the empirical picture to include the question marker *liệu*, surfacing on the left edge of the clause, (14c), unlike the rightward *không/chưa*, (14a-b):

(14)   a.   Chị   có   mua   cái   nhà   **không**?
             PRN   ASR   buy   CL   house   NEG
             'Did you (elder sister) buy (the) house?'   (Duffield's example 2013:128)

       b.   Con   đã   uống   thuốc   **chưa**?
             PRN   ANT   drink   medicine   not.yet
             'Have you (child) taken your medicine yet?' (Duffield's example 2013:128)

       c.   Người đàn ông   tự   hỏi   [**liệu**   cô   bồ   có ở   lại
             person   man   self   ask   whether PRN   friend   ASR be.loc   stay
             với   ông   ấy   (hay   không)]
             with   PRN   DEM   or   NEG
             'The man wondered whether (or not) his girlfriend would stay with him'
                                             (Duffield's example 2013:136)

Duffield starts from the theoretical assumption that Vietnamese is a uniformly head-initial language: verbs precede their objects, nouns precede their adjectival modifiers, and hence Duffield expects a fully-qualified interrogative complementizer to precede its complement clause. Only *liệu* fulfills this expectation, and hence only *liệu* is considered a legitimate interrogative marker. To handle the clause-final *không* and *chưa*, Duffield proposes that underlyingly they are negative markers preceding their complements, but at the surface they appear at the right edge of the clause due to the movement of their complement phrase to their left.

     However, not only do we need to explain why final *không* and *chưa* are able to type the clause on their own, we also need to explain why *không/chưa* can co-occur with *liệu* inside the same clause. Clearly, *không/chưa* occupy a different position than *liệu* but they both are still able to type clauses. Furthermore, we also need to explain why sometimes *liệu* requires the presence of *không/chưa*, such as in interrogative sentential subjects:

(15) a. **Liệu** John (có) thích học tiếng Việt **không**, chẳng quan trọng
         whether John ASR like study language Vietnamese Q NEG important
         'Whether John likes to study Vietnamese isn't important'

   b. ****Liệu** John (có) thích học tiếng Việt, chẳng quan trọng
         whether John ASR like study language Vietnamese NEG important
         Intended: 'Whether John likes to study Vietnamese isn't important'

This is furthermore not a minor fact of the syntax of Vietnamese: the pattern whereby markers of the same category can surface both at the left edge and at the right edge of the clause is recurrent in other domains, suggesting that it is central to the underlying grammar of Vietnamese. For instance, this pattern also holds of perfect markers: the perfect particle *đã* is VP-initial whereas perfect *rồi* is final and the two can co-occur:

(16) a. John **đã** thích học tiếng Việt
         John PERF like study language Vietnamese
         'John liked to study Vietnamese already'

   b. John thích học tiếng Việt **rồi**
         John like study languageVietnamese PERF
         'John liked to study Vietnamese already'

   c. John **đã** thích học tiếng Việt **rồi**
         John PERF like study languageVietnamese PERF
         'John liked to study Vietnamese already'

Focus constructions exhibit the same pattern: the focus particle *chỉ* is VP-initial whereas focus *thôi* is final and the two can co-occur:

(17) a. John **chỉ** thích học tiếng Việt
         John only like study languageVietnamese
         'John only likes to study Vietnamese'

   b. John thích học tiếng Việt **thôi**
         John like study languageVietnamese only
         'John only likes to study Vietnamese'

   c. John **chỉ** thích học tiếng Việt **thôi**
         John only like study languageVietnamese only
         'John only likes to study Vietnamese'

We leave the explanation of such a pattern for separate work; what is relevant here is that the initial/final distribution involves two distinct positions, capable of both co-occurring and of handling the same function alone (rather than a single position with or without movement around it). We will come back to this point in Section 3.1.

    Duffield (2013:136-137) characterizes *à* as an 'extra-sentential (possibly extra-grammatical)' morpheme in the right periphery of the Vietnamese sentence, on a par with the politeness marker *ạ* in being extra-sentential:

(18) a. Thế **à**?
      so   A
      'Is that so?'

  b. Anh   đang   làm   gì   thế   **ạ**?
      2SG   DUR   do   what   Q   POL
      'What are you doing?   (Duffield example 2013:137)

However, the yes/no question marker *à* has a different syntactic distribution from the politeness marker *ạ*. As noted in Le (2015:152), *à* is a clause-typer while *ạ* isn't, therefore *à* cannot co-occur with another clause-typer (an imperative marker, for instance) whereas *ạ* can. In (19), while *ạ* is final, appearing after *đi*, (19a), *à* cannot appear in that position, (19b).

(19) a. Học   tiếng   Việt   **đi**   **ạ**!
      Study   language Vietnamese   IMP   POL

  b. *Học   tiếng   Việt   **đi**   **à**
      Study   language Vietnamese   IMP   POL
      'Study Vietnamese! Please!'

We will come back to this point in section 4.2, but it suffices to say that we thus need at least three descriptive positions/distributions: an initial element, *liệu,* a final non-pragmatic element *không/chưa*, and a final pragmatically loaded element *à* – where both of the final elements are distinct from the right-peripheral politeness position.

3 Three core properties of yes-no question particles in Vietnamese

We propose that the seven yes-no particles can be divided along at least the following dimensions:
    (i) clausal position
    (ii) pragmatic import
    (iii) matrix clause restriction
    (iv) interaction with focus
    (v) interaction with tense/negation/aspect/voice
We discuss the first three in this section, and the interactions in section 4.

3.1 Yes-no question particles and clausal position

Among the seven particles under investigation, only *liệu* surfaces at the left edge of the interrogative clause, cf. (3b), whereas the other six appear clause-finally, as illustrated in (2). This is the only possible order: placing *liệu* at the end of the clause results in ungrammaticality, (20), and so does inserting the other six particles at the start of the clause, (21):

(20)   *Mary   muốn   biết   **[**John   có   thích học tiếng   Việt   **liệu]**
       Mary   want   know   John   yes   like   study language Vietnamese   Q
       Intended: 'Mary wants to know whether John likes to study Vietnamese'.

(21) a. ***Không** John thích học tiếng Việt?
        Q John like study language Vietnamese
        Intended: 'Does John like to study Vietnamese?'

  b. ***Chưa** John thích học tiếng Việt?
        Q John like study language Vietnamese
        Intended: 'Does John like to study Vietnamese yet?'

  c. ***À** John thích học tiếng Việt?
        Q John like study language Vietnamese
        Intended: 'Does John like to study Vietnamese? (I guess/ Can you confirm that)

  d. ***Chăng** John thích học tiếng Việt?
        Q John like study language Vietnamese
        Intended: 'Does John like to study Vietnamese? (by any chance/ Can you confirm that)'

  e. ***Ư** John thích học tiếng Việt?
        Q John like study language Vietnamese
        Intended: 'Does John like to study Vietnamese? (I'm surprised/ Can you confirm that)

  f. ***Sao** John thích học tiếng Việt?[6]
        Q John like study language Vietnamese
        Intended: 'Does John like to study Vietnamese? (I'm surprised/ Can you confirm that)

Traditionally, being head-intial versus head-final was assumed to be a language-level distinction, or per construction/functional sequence/categories. The contrast observed between (3a) vs (3b), or within (3c), however, illustrates that the initial versus final distinction goes lexical item by lexical item rather than language by language, or category by category. The first cut within the set of question particles is thus:

Table 1: Yes-no question particles: clausal position

yes-no question particles	*liệu*	*không*	*chưa*	*à*	*chăng*	*ư*	*sao*
clause-final	-	+	+	+	+	+	+

3.2 Yes-no question particles and pragmatic import

As well observed in the literature, the six clause-final question particles fall into two groups: one group of particles including does not seem to trigger any special pragmatics (*không* and *chưa*), while the other group has some pragmatic import (*chăng, à, ư,* and *sao*). For instance, in contexts incompatible with prior beliefs, it is possible to ask questions with the pragmatically neutral *không/chưa*, but not with the pragmatically loaded *à/ư/sao/chăng*.

(22) **Context**: Ann is hired to organize a party and she is working on ordering the food and drinks. Bill, her helper, tells her that "Jane and Mary do not eat meat". Since Ann has no idea about any of the guests, she asks about the next one: *(adapted from Romero & Han 2003)*

  a. John thì sao? John có ăn thịt **không**?[7]
     John TOP what John yes eat meat Q
     'What about John? Does he eat meat?'

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[6] (21f) can only be grammatical under a wh-question interpretation of *sao*, i.e, '*Why does John likes to study Vietnamese?*', which falls outside the scope of this paper.

[7] Interrogative *chưa* is also felicitous if we change the context into a perfect-induced context.

b. *John thì sao? John có ăn thịt **à/chăng/ư/sao** ?
    John TOP what John yes eat meat Q/ Q/ Q/ Q
    Intended: 'What about John? Does he eat meat?'

Note that a similar contrast holds in English between questions with and without contracted negation (Romero & Han 2004, Roberts 1993, Zwicky and Pullum 1983, Collins 2018, De Clercq 2020).

(23) a.   What about John? Does he **not** eat meat?
     b. **#** What about John? Does**n't** he not eat meat?

The added flavor of *doesn't he…* compared to *does he not* seems to be very similar to the added flavor of the Vietnamese particles with pragmatic import.

    Let us first zoom in on the pragmatics of *à,* and then on that of other particles including *chăng, ư, sao*.

    As noted above, the existing literature takes the relationship between *à* and *không/chưa* to be an either-or choice: *không/chưa* never have pragmatic import whereas *à* always does. This description is however inaccurate, as *à* can also lack pragmatic import, and this happens under illustrative circumstances. Take the following situation, where the speaker does not have any prior belief:

(24) **Context**: Ann is hired to organize a party and she is working on ordering the food and drinks. Bill, her helper, tells her that "Jane and Mary do not eat meat". Since Ann has no idea about any of the guests, she asks about the next one: *(adapted from Romero & Han 2004)*
    John thì sao? John cũng chẳng ăn thịt **à?**
    John TOP what John also NEG eat meat Q
    'What about John? Does he not eat meat either?'

There is no surprise, or confirmation expressed here, in fact no relevant pragmatics. This is a neutral use of *à*, and hence *à* is in fact sometimes felicitous in pragmatically neutral contexts.

    Why is *à* suddenly possible without pragmatic import? The solution is given by the fact that *không/chưa* are impossible in this context (we will come back to this in Section 4.3):

(25) **Same Context**: Ann is hired to organize a party and she is working on ordering the food and drinks. Bill, her helper, tells her that "Jane and Mary do not eat meat". Since Ann has no idea about any of the guest, she asks about the next one: *(adapted from Romero & Han 2004)*
    a. ***** John thì sao? John cũng **chẳng** ăn thịt **không/chưa** ?
        John TOP what John also NEG eat meat Q / Q
        Intended: 'What about John? Does he not eat meat either?'

    b . John thì sao? John cũng **chẳng** ăn thịt **à?**
       John TOP what John also NEG eat meat Q
       'What about John? Does he not eat meat either?'

And hence instead of being mutually exclusive either-or alternatives, the semantics of the particles are in a superset/subset relationship: the semantics of *à* is a superset of that of *không/chưa*.

    This leads us to a prediction: If the readings of *à* and *không* are not in complementary distribution with each other, there should be some circumstances in which they combine within the same clause. This prediction is borne out:[8]

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[8]   We thank Tue Trinh for drawing our attention to this context.

(26)   Speaker A asks Speaker B a straight question about whether John is studying Vietnamese, using *không*. For some reason, B cannot hear the question well, and asks for confirmation

Speaker A:	John	có	học	tiếng	Việt	**không**?	
	John	yes	study	language	Vietnamese	Q	

‘Does John study Vietnamese?’

Speaker B:	John	có	học	tiếng	Việt	**không**	**à**?
	John	yes	study	language	Vietnamese	Q	Q

‘Can you confirm that your question is whether John studies Vietnamese?’

Notice also that when *không* and *à* co-occur, *à* stays more clause-peripheral than *không*, a fact that we will come back to.

The correct generalisation seems to be that *à* is pragmatically neutral when it does not compete with *không/chưa* and is pragmatically loaded when it does compete with *không/chưa*. Which in turn suggest that *không/chưa* are the preferred way to express a neutral meaning, and only when the grammar independently rules out *không/chưa* (for instance the negation in (25) excludes the final *không/chưa*), the less preferred option for a neutral context, *à*, can surface.

Let us briefly note that a similar conclusion seems to hold of the 'surprise' versus 'confirmation' readings of *à*. A confirmation-without-surprise can be brought out by simply continuing an *à* sentence with *Tôi không ngạc nhiên* ("I am not surprised"):

(27) a.   Chị   quên   rồi   **à**?   Tôi   không   ngạc nhiên
        2SG   forget   already A   1SG   NEG   surprise
        ‘You forgot already? I am not surprised’

    b.   Lan   mua   quyển   sách   đó   **à**?   Tôi   không   ngạc nhiên
        Lan   buy   CLF   book   that   A   1SG   NEG   surprise
        ‘Did Lan buy that book? I am not surprised’

Similarly, a surprise-but-not-confirmation reading can be brought out by an *à* sentence continued with "I am surprised, but I don't care":

(28) a.   Chị   quên   rồi   **à**?   Tôi   ngạc nhiên   nhưng   tôi   chẳng   quan tâm
        2SG   forget   already A   1SG   surprise   but   1SG   NEG   care
        ‘You forgot already? I am surprised but I don't care’

    b.   Lan   mua   quyển   sách   đó   **à**? Tôi   ngạc nhiên   nhưng   tôi chẳng quan tâm
        Lan   buy   CLF   book   that A   1SG   surprise   but   1SG NEG   care
        ‘Did Lan buy that book? I am surprised but I don't care’

The pragmatically loaded particle *à* thus seems to have access to *both* the surprise and confirmation readings, rather than an either-or situation. Of course, it remains to be seen if there are grammaticalised restrictions on the distribution of these two readings.

Unlike *à*, the other pragmatically loaded particles cannot lose their pragmatics: negative questions with *chăng* (if possible at all) cannot be followed by 'I am sure' as in (29a), and negative questions with *ư* and *sao* cannot be followed by 'I am not surprised', as in (29b-c):

(29) **Same context as (25):** Ann is hired to organize a party and she is working on ordering the food and drinks. Bill, her helper, tells her that "Jane and Mary do not eat meat". Since Ann has no idea about any of the guest, she asks about the next one: *(adapted from Romero & Han 2004)*:

?John	thì	sao?	John	cũng	**chẳng**	ăn	thịt	**chăng?**	* Tôi chắc chắn thế.
John	TOP	what	John	also	NEG	eat	meat	Q	1SG sure PRT

'What about John? Does he not eat meat either, by any chance?' (*I'm sure of that).

John	thì	sao?	John	cũng	**chẳng**	ăn	thịt	**ư?**	* Tôi không ngạc nhiên.
John	TOP	what	John	also	NEG	eat	meat	Q	1SG not surprised

'What about John? Does he not eat meat either? I'm surprised.' (*I'm not surprised)

John	thì	sao?	John	cũng	**chẳng**	ăn	thịt	**sao?**	* Tôi không ngạc nhiên.
John	TOP	what	John	also	NEG	eat	meat	Q	1SG not surprised

'What about John? Does he not eat meat either? I'm surprised. (*I'm not surprised)

It thus follows that *không* and *chưa* are limited to only one reading, the pragmatically neutral one, whereas *à* has two readings at its disposal, the pragmatically neutral and the pragmatically loaded ones. *Chăng, ư,* and *sao,* on the other hand, must be pragmatically loaded.

The second cut within the set of question particles is thus:[9]

Table 2: Yes-no question particles: adding pragmatic import[10]

yes-no question particles	*liệu*	*không*	*chưa*	*à*	*chăng*	*ư*	*sao*
clause-final	-	+	+	+	+	+	+
pragmatic import	-	-	-	+/-	+	+	+

3.3 Yes-no question particles and matrix clause restriction
Whether question particles can be pragmatically loaded correlates with their ability to appear in embedded clauses, as briefly noted in Trinh (2005).

So if we look at (30a-b), in embedded clauses, only the non-pragmatically loaded particles are possible, while the pragmatically loaded ones are impossible.

(30) a.	Mary	muốn	biết	[John	thích	học	tiếng	Việt	**không/chưa]**	
	Mary	want	know	John	like	study	language	Vietnamese	Q / Q	
b. *Mary	muốn	biết	[John	thích	học	tiếng	Việt	**à]**		
	Mary	want	know	John	like	study	language	Vietnamese	Q		

'Mary wants to know whether John likes to study Vietnamese'

And this is true across a number of embedded contexts, such as embedded questions as in (31):

(31) a.	Mary	muốn	biết	[John	thích	học	tiếng	Việt	**không/chưa] à** ?	
	Mary	want	know	[John	like	study	language	Vietnamese	Q / Q Q	
b. *	Mary	muốn	biết	[John	thích	học	tiếng	Việt	**à] không/chưa** ?	
	Mary	want	know	John	like	study	language	Vietnamese	Q Q / Q	

'Does Mary want to know whether John likes to study Vietnamese?'

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9   Due to space limitations, we do not give examples on *liệu* here, but it should be clear from (3) that *liệu* marks a neutral embedded question.

10   See Nguyen (2021) for a detailed discussion on the felicity conditions of some of the Vietnamese polar question markers.

The embedding asymmetry is also present with left-dislocated objects:

(32) a. **[** John   thích   học   tiếng   Việt   **không/chưa]**,   Mary chẳng biết
        John   like   study   language Vietnamese Q / Q   Mary NEG   know
  b. *** [** John   thích   học   tiếng   Việt   **à]**,   Mary chẳng   biết
        John   like   study   language Vietnamese Q,   Mary NEG   know
    'Whether John likes to study Vietnamese (yet), Mary doesn't know'

as well as sentential subjects:

(33) a. **[** John thích học   tiếng   Việt   **không/chưa]**,   chẳng   quan trọng
        John   like study language Vietnamese Q /Q   NEG   important
  b. *** [** John thích học   tiếng   Việt   **à]**,   chẳng   quan trọng
        John   like   study language Vietnamese Q,   NEG   important
    'Whether John likes to study Vietnamese isn't important.'

All of these contexts give us exactly the same point: there is a correlation between which particles can have pragmatic import and which particles can be embedded: if one has pragmatic import, it cannot be embedded (i.e., it is restricted to matrix clauses only), as schematized in Table 3.[11]

Table 3: *Yes-no question particles: adding matrix clause restriction*

yes-no question particles	*liệu*	*không*	*chưa*	*à*	*chăng*	*ư*	*sao*
clause-final	-	+	+	+	+	+	+
pragmatic import	-	-	-	+/-	+	+	+
matrix clause only	-	-	-	+	+/-[12]	+	+

4 Clausal co-occurrence restriction of yes-no question particles

Aside from their position, interpretation and root-restrictions, Vietnamese yes-no particles are subject to interesting and hitherto unnoticed generalisations restricting their co-occurrence with other clausal particles. To show this, we will examine the co-occurence of *không/chưa* with focus markers, and then with particles for tense, negation, aspect and voice, showing that they reduce to an elegant underlying pattern.

4.1 Yes-no question particles and focus restriction

Let us start with the interaction between the question markers and the focus markers *chỉ … thôi*. The pragmatically flavored question markers can combine with it, (34a), and so does *liệu*, (34b), whereas *không/chưa* do not, (34c).

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[11] This is a one-way correlation: [+pragmatic import] => [+matrix clause only]. The other direction, namely [-pragmatic import] => [-matrix clause only] does not hold, as *à* can be [-pragmatic] but cannot be embedded.

[12] A reviewer suggests that *chăng* differs from *à, ư,* and *sao* in co-occuring with *liệu* in an embeded context.
(i) Phương Thanh kêu gọi 'showbiz chuẩn bị tinh thần', netizen thắc mắc **liệu** có biến gì **chăng**?
PT call.upon showbiz prepare mind netizen wonder LIEU have unforeseen.event what CHANG
'PT calls upon the showbiz 'to be ready', netizens wonder if some unforeseen event has happened?'
(https://saostar.vn/giai-tri/phuong-thanh-keu-goi-showbiz-chuan-bi-tinh-than-20211018230458384.html,
accessed 2 December 2021).

(34) a. John **chỉ** thích học tiếng Việt **thôi à/ư/sao/chăng?**
       John only like study language Vietnamese only Q/ Q/ Q/ Q
       'Does John only likes to study Vietnamese?'

    b. Mary muốn biết **liệu** John **chỉ** thích học tiếng Việt **thôi**
       Mary want know whether John only like study language Vietnamese only
       'Mary wants to know whether John only likes to study Vietnamese'

    c. *John **chỉ** thích học tiếng Việt **thôi không/chưa?**
       John only like study language Vietnamese only Q/ Q
       Intended: 'Does John only likes to study Vietnamese?'

We thus have another cut among these yes-no question particles: only interrogative *không/chưa* are incompatible with focus markers, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Yes-no question particles: adding focus restriction

yes-no question particles	*liệu*	*không*	*chưa*	*à*	*chăng*	*ư*	*sao*
clause-final	-	+	+	+	+	+	+
pragmatic import	-	-	-	+/-	+	+	+
matrix clause only	-	-	-	+	+/-	+	+
freely co-occur with focus markers	+	-	-	+	+	+	+

4.2 Two positions for final yes-no question particles
An additional new pattern is worth mentioning here, though the facts are less transparent. Let's start with an additional fact about *chỉ ... thôi*: it turns out that *không* does combine with *chỉ ... thôi*, but at the cost of losing its yes-no particle reading. The combination becomes a focus expression, with no interrogative semantics, as in (35a). It turns out that *à* can also combine in a non-interrogative way with *chỉ ... thôi*, as in (35b). (Again, other pragmatically loaded particles contrast with *à*: they cannot combine with *chỉ ... thôi*.) There is, however, a sharp asymmetry between *không* and *à*: *không* precedes *thôi*, whereas *à* follows *thôi*:

(35) a. ✓ John **chỉ** thích học tiếng Việt **không thôi**
       John only like study language Vietnamese KHONG only
       'John only likes to study Vietnamese'

    b. ✓ John **chỉ** thích học tiếng Việt **thôi à**
       John only like study language Vietnamese only A
       'John only likes to study Vietnamese'

We thus have a *không > à* in the right periphery, with respect to *thôi*. Recall that this order was also found above in (26) when *không* and *à* co-occur, repeated here:

(27) John có học tiếng Việt **không à?**
      John yes study language Vietnamese Q Q
      'Can you confirm that your question is whether John studies Vietnamese?'

There are therefore two different positions in the right periphery. First come the neutral yes-no markers, and then the pragmatically loaded question markers. The same point is also made by the co-occurence

of the two types of yes-no markers with the deictic particle *thế* and the politeness marker *ạ*. Again, we find *không/chưa* towards their left, in (36-37a), while *à/ư/sao/chăng* cannot occur in that position, in (36-37b):

(36) a. John   thích   học   tiếng   Việt   **không/chưa**   **thế** ?
        John   like   study   language Vietnamese   Q /   Q   deictic
        'Does John like to study Vietnamese (yet)?'

    b. * John   thích   học   tiếng   Việt   **à/ư/sao/chăng**   **thế** ?
        John   like   study   language   Vietnamese   Q/ Q/ Q/ Q   deictic
        Intended: 'Does John like to study Vietnamese?'

(37) a. John   thích   học   tiếng   Việt   **không/chưa**   **ạ** ?
        John   like   study   language Vietnamese   Q/ Q   POL
        'Does John like to study Vietnamese (yet)?' (politely)

    b. * John   thích   học   tiếng   Việt   **à/ư/sao/chăng**   **ạ** ?
        John   like   study   language Vietnamese   Q/ Q/ Q/ Q   POL
        Intended: 'Does John like to study Vietnamese?' (politely)

Again, it seems that *à/ư/sao/chăng* are more right-peripheral than *không/chưa*. The bigger picture thus becomes that the radically right-peripheral particles have access to pragmatics and are root-only, whereas the not-so-right-peripheral particles do not have access to pragmatics but can be embedded.

4.3 Yes-no particles versus Tense, Aspect and Voice markers

Let us now turn to the interrogative *không*. A number of tense/aspect markers can co-occur with interrogative *à* but not with interrogative *không*. For example, when the future tense is explicitly marked by *sẽ*, it is only possible to ask questions with *à*, not with *không*.

(38) a. *Bữa   tối   có   cá   đấy. Bạn   **sẽ**   ăn   **không**?
         dinner evening   has   fish   PRT 2SG   FUT   eat   Q
         'Fish is served for dinner. Will you eat?'

    b. Bữa   tối   có   cá   đấy. Bạn   **sẽ**   ăn **à?**
        dinner evening   has   fish   PRT 2SG   FUT   eat Q
        'Fish is served for dinner. Will you eat?'

Similarly, the past tense *đã* is bad with interrogative *không*, but is good with interrogative *à*.

(39) a.* Bữa   tối   đã   sẵn-sàng lúc 6 giờ. Bạn   **đã**   ăn **không**?
          meal   evening PAST   ready   at 6 hour.   2SG   PAST   eat Q
          'Dinner was ready at 6pm. Did you eat?'

    b. Bữa   tối   đã   sẵn-sàng lúc 6 giờ.   Bạn   **đã**   ăn **à**?
        meal evening   PAST   ready   at 6 hour.   2SG   PAST   eat Q
        'Dinner was ready at 6pm. Did you eat?'

Furthermore, in the presence of a negative marker, we cannot form a yes-no question using *không*; we must use *à*.

(40) a. *John **chẳng** thích học tiếng Việt **không**?
     John NEG like study language Vietnamese Q
     Intended: 'Doesn't John like to study Vietnamese?'

   b. John **chẳng** thích học tiếng Việt **à**?
     John NEG like study languageVietnamese Q
     'Doesn't John like to study Vietnamese?'

On the other hand, the progressive particle *đang* and the passive particle *bị* are compatible with both *không* and *à*:

(41) Phone call context:
   a. Chào John. Bạn có **đang** ăn **không**?
     hi John. 2SG yes PROG eat Q
     'Hi Trang! Are you eating?'

   b. Chào John. Bạ **đang** ăn **à**?
     hi John! 2SG PROG eat Q
     'Hi John! Are you eating?'

(42) a. Con cá có **bị** ăn thịt **không**?
     CLF fish yes PASS eat meat Q
     'Was the fish eaten?'

   b. Con cá **bị** ăn thịt **à**?
     CLF fish PASS eat meat Q
     'Was the fish eaten?'

The empirical pattern that emerges is as follows:

(43) Future tense *sẽ*:   *không   ✓ à
    Past tense *đã*:   *không   ✓ à
    Negative markers *chẳng*: *không   ✓ à
    Progressive *đang*:   ✓ không   ✓ à
    Passive *bị*   ✓ không   ✓ à

When we put this in cross-linguistic perspective, a beautiful generalisation emerges: *không* is incompatible with higher functional elements, and compatible with lower functional elements. Future and past markers are higher in the clause than progressive and passive markers, and so is negation. A simple example of that is the relative positioning of *will*, *not* and *-ing* in English, eg. *'you will not be doing any of this'* (see Chomsky 1957, Pollock 1989, Cinque 1999, also Phan 2013 for the functional sequence of Vietnamese clause).

    Recall from section 4.1 that *không* is also incompatible with the focus marker *thôi*. This too falls into place, as Focus is even higher than past/future and negation: Focus > Past/Future > Negation > Progressive > Passive. The elements that *không* is thus incompatible with thus constitute a continuous stretch of syntactic structure, from Focus down to Negation.

    We will leave the task of proposing an explanation for this generalisation for a future work, focusing here on improving the description of facts. Let us then turn to the interrogative *chưa*: what particles can interrogative *chưa* co-occur with? As illustrated in (44), like *không,* it cannot co-occur with future tense or negation, and can co-occur with the passive marker *bị*. Unlike *không*, however, *chưa* is crucially unable to co-occur with the progressive aspect marker *đang*:

(44) a. *John **sẽ** thích học tiếng Việt **chưa**?
      John FUT like study language Vietnamese Q
      'Will John like to study Vietnamese yet?'

  b. *John **đang** thích học tiếng Việt **chưa**?
      John PROG like study language Vietnamese Q
      *'Is John liking to study Vietnamese yet?'

  c. *John **chẳng** thích học tiếng Việt **chưa**?
      John NEG like study language Vietnamese Q
      'Isn't John liking to study Vietnamese yet?'

  d. John **bị** bắt học tiếng Việt **chưa**?
      John PASS force study language Vietnamese Q
      'Is John forced to study Vietnamese yet?'

The empirical pattern that emerges from (44) is as follows:

(45)   Future tense *sẽ*:   *chưa
      Negative markers *chẳng*: * chưa
      Progressive *đang*:   * chưa
      Passive *bị*   ✓ chưa

The same generalization holds, but of an apparently longer stretch of structure: *chưa* cannot combine with functional elements from Focus down to Progressive, in the hierarchy Focus > Past/Future > Negation > Progressive > Passive.

    The source of that apparent difference is clear: interrogative *không* and interrogative *chưa* are aspectually different, in that the former is imperfect, whereas the latter is perfect. *Chưa* being perfect is incompatible with the imperfect marker *đang* (but compatible with the perfect marker *đã*), while *không* being imperfect is compatible with the imperfect marker *đang*, but incompatible with the perfect markers *đã*:

(46) a. *John **đã** thích học tiếng Việt **không**?
      John PERF like study language Vietnamese Q
      Intended: 'Does John like to study Vietnamese yet?

  b. *John thích học tiếng Việt **rồi** **không?**
      John like study language Vietnamese PERF Q
      Intended: 'Does John like to study Vietnamese yet?

  c. *John **đã** thích học tiếng Việt **rồi** **không?**
      John PERF like study language Vietnamese PERF Q
      Intended: 'Does John like to study Vietnamese yet?

The aspectual difference between *không* and *chưa* can be seen in (2a-b), repeated here as (47a-b):

(47) a. John   thích   học   tiếng   Việt   **không**?
      John   like   study   languageVietnamese   Q
      'Does John like to study Vietnamese?'

   b. John   thích   học   tiếng   Việt   **chưa** ?
      John   like   study   languageVietnamese   Q
      'Does John like to study Vietnamese yet?'

The overall picture is thus transparent: the higher layer of the "middle field", such as tense, aspect, negation markers, are compatible with pragmatically flavored question particles, [13] not with interrogative *không/chưa*. The lower layer of the middle field, composed of aspect and passive markers, is compatible with all question markers. The five different dimensions of variation are summarized in Table 5:

Table 5: Yes-no question particles: bringing everything together

yes-no question particles	*liệu*	*không*	*chưa*	*à*	*chăng*	*ư*	*sao*
clause-final	-	+	+	+	+	+	+
pragmatic import	-	-	-	+/-	+	+	+
matrix clause only	-	-	-	+	+/-	+	+
freely occur with focus markers	+	-	-	+	+	+	+
freely co-occur with tense/negation/aspect/voice markers	+	-	-	+	+	+	+

As a side note, let us briefly consider the fact that the pre-verbal negative versions of *không/chưa* are immune to these restrictions, being compatible with all the tense/aspect/voice markers:

(48) a. John   **sẽ**   không   học   tiếng   Việt
      John   FUT   NEG   study   language Vietnamese
      'John won't study Vietnamese'

   b. John   **đã**   không   học   tiếng   Việt
      John   PAST   NEG   study   language Vietnamese
      'John didn't study Vietnamese'

   c. John   **đang**   không   học   tiếng   Việt
      John   PROG   NEG   study   language Vietnamese
      'John isn't studying Vietnamese'

   d. John   **không**   bị   bắt   học   tiếng   Việt
      John   NEG   PASS   force   study   languageVietnamese
      'John isn't forced to study Vietnamese'

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[13]   Space limitations again do not allow us to give examples with *liệu*; the fact in short is all of these middle field markers can occur in questions marked by *liệu*. That is, *liệu* patterns with the pragmatic question markers.

(49) a.
John	**sẽ**	chưa	học	tiếng	Việt
John	FUT	NEG	study	language	Vietnamese

'John won't study Vietnamese yet'

b.
John	**đang**	chưa	học	tiếng	Việt
John	PROG	NEG	study	language	Vietnamese

'John isn't studying Vietnamese yet'

c.
John	**chưa**	bị	bắt	học	tiếng	Việt
John	NEG	PASS	force	study	language	Vietnamese

'John isn't forced to study Vietnamese yet'

Again, we leave for later the explanation of why these patterns hold; our aim here is to show how the theory enables us to crisply describe the patterns.

5 Conclusion

The seven yes-no particles discussed here all show clear patterns of syntactic distribution, covarying with semantic/pragmatic differences. Those patterns are clearly not random: only the root of the sentence has access to pragmatic meanings, a well-established pattern cross-linguistically, and incompatibilities between particles target continuous, cross-linguistically consistent stretches of syntactic structure. We aim to propose an explanation for these patterns in upcoming work, but we hope that this work already shows how a theory-aware and cross-linguistic approach to Vietnamese syntax can reveal underlying order in otherwise mysterious and disparate observations.

The particles *à, chăng, ư,* and *sao* belong to the highest part of the clause, and as such they have access to pragmatic import but can only appear in matrix clauses. Further, being segregated so high, they can co-occur with the focus/tense/negation/aspect/voice markers. The particles *không* and *chưa* occur lower down in the functional sequence of the clause, and thus have no pragmatic import but can appear in embedded clauses. Furthermore, they are mutually incompatible with the entire focus/tense/negation domain, co-occurring only with the low aspectual and voice markers.

6 Acknowledgments

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