
Urdu/Hindi polar *kya* at the syntax-pragmatics-prosody interface

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This talk focuses on Urdu/Hindi polar *kya* ‘what’ from the perspective of Lexical-Functional Grammar (LFG). Polar questions in Urdu/Hindi take the syntactic form of declaratives. Intonation distinguishes between a declarative and an interrogative. Polar questions can also be overtly optionally marked via *kya* ‘what’ at different positions in a sentence. Bhatt and Dayal (2014) suggest that these different possible positions result from topicalization, so that all the material to the left of *kya* is given and thus not open for questioning.

This analysis is, however, not supported by our data. We conducted an experiment via an on-line acceptability judgement questionnaire and found that regardless of the position of polar *kya* either the subject or the object were available for questioning/correction and hence not necessarily given/presupposed. We also conducted a follow up intonational study and found that if a given constituent was prosodically focused then that constituent was also available to be corrected. We were able to determine that Bhatt and Dayal’s (2014) analysis only pertains to wide focus context, i.e., neither the subject nor the object are focused.

Our data show that prosodic information *overlays* the syntactic information. Prosody interacts with syntax, but does not derive from it (see also Shattuck-Hufnagel and Turk 1996). We show how this can be modelled elegantly within the modular, mutually constraining architecture of LFG. We also propose an alternative analysis of polar *kya* that sees it as an operator which takes the questioned proposition *?p* (Biezma and Rawlins 2012) of a polar question and renders it as a modal statement of possibility. This analysis is motivated by the results of an additional corpus study of Bollywood scripts, which shows that the polar *kya* appears in contexts expressing questions about whether a certain action or situation is possible.

In conclusion, Urdu/Hindi polar *kya* presents a complex interaction across the prosody-syntax-pragmatics interfaces. Attempting to analyze its effects without integrating an understanding of the intonational properties of the language will yield only a partial understanding of the patterns.