

A unified account of the yes/no particle in Hindi, Bangla, and Odia

Introduction The aim of this paper is to provide a uniform account of the yes/no particle in Hindi, Bangla and Odia (HBO, henceforth). There are two competing theories of yes/no particles in the literature: a) in one approach, this particle is assumed to be generated in CP (Julien 2001, Simpson and Wu 2002, Lee 2005), and b) in the other, it is analyzed as a disjunction marker (Aldridge 2011, Bailey 2013). We first show that none of these approaches can account for the data in HBO, and we suggest that the best way to capture the facts is to adopt the spirit of Cable’s (2007) analysis for *wh-questions*, and extend it to yes/no questions. More specifically, we suggest that the yes/no particle in HBO is a Q-particle that requires a focused constituent to its right. We further suggest that this particle can be base-generated in two positions- associated with either of the two possible FocP, one lower (right above the VP, as argued in Brody 1989, 1996, Jayaseelan1989,1995, Kidwai1995) and one higher (in the left periphery, above the IP, as argued for in Rizzi (1997) in general and Choudhury (2010) for Indo-Aryan); we show how this account can capture the right semantics of yes/no questions as well as all the different word-orders associated with the yes/no particle.

Data The yes/no particle in HBO can occur in the cross-linguistically most common ‘final’ position in neutral contexts (see (1)-(3)), but also in non-final position, in contrastive focus contexts (see (4)-(6)):

Hindi (final)

(1) raam-ne kitab kharidi **kya**?
 raam-ERG book buy Q
 ‘Did Raam buy the book?’

Bangla (final)

(2) ram boi Ta kinlo **ki**?
 ram book-CL buy Q
 ‘Did Raam buy the book?’

Odia (final)

(3) raamo bohi-Ta kinila **ki**?
 raam book-CL buy Q
 ‘Did Raam buy the book?’

Hindi (non-final)

(4) raam-ne **kya** KITAB kharidi?
 raam-ERG Q book.FOC buy
 ‘Was it a book that Raam bought?’

Bangla (non-final)

(5) ram **ki** BOI Ta kinlo?
 ram Q book.FOC-CL buy
 ‘Was it a book that Raam bought?’

Odia (non-final)

(6) raamo **kono** BOHI kinila?
 raam Q book.FOC buy
 ‘Was it a book that Raam bought?’

Note that a yes/no particle is associated with an ‘or not’ interpretation: ‘did Ram buy the book or not’. An account where the yes/no particle is analyzed as a disjunction marker has the advantage that it readily captures this ‘or not’ interpretation, while the other approach where the particle is just assumed to be in the CP finds it hard to explain. Furthermore, there is evidence from Odia (see (7)) that such particles can occur in an embedded question where there is already a complementizer filling the CP position- suggesting that this particle should not just be assumed to be in CP (note that the complementizer is homophonous with the yes/no particle):

(7) raghav pachaarila **ki** raamo bohi-Ta kinila **ki**
 raghav ask.PST.3Sg that raam book-CL buy.PST.3Sg Q
 ‘Raghav asked if Ram bought the book’

On the other hand, a disjunction analysis usually heavily relies on ellipsis (cf. Aldridge 2011, Bailey 2013) to get the correct word-order, a schematic illustration of which is given below in (8), where the particle is the head ‘Conj’. The second CP is not pronounced (i.e. it is elided) and thus the disjunction particle is derived to be in the ‘final’ position.

(8) [CONJP CP [Conj CP]

Such an analysis cannot account for the non-final order of the yes/no particle in HBO in (4)-(6); moreover, if this particle is simply a disjunction marker, one would expect it to never occur with a *wh*-element (Bailey 2013)- contra to the empirical facts (see (9) from Odia).

(9) kiye aasichi ki?
 Who come.PRSNT.3Sg Q
 ‘Who has come?’

Analysis We analyze the yes/no particle as a Q particle- which is a focus sensitive operator and needs to be in a local configuration with a focused constituent which it takes as an argument to its right to

give focused alternatives (see Cable 2007 for how it's done in wh-questions). This alternative semantics is what makes the 'or not' interpretations readily available with the yes/no particles. In the neutral 'final' yes/no questions in (1)-(3), the Q-particle is generated higher and the focused constituent is the entire clause (the IP) whereas in the contrastive 'non-final' yes/no questions in (4)-(6), the Q-particle is generated lower, above the VP, and the focused constituent is the DP which is being contrastively focused. That is, as a representative illustration of our proposal, the base (underlying) order for (2) is (10) and that of (5) is (11):

(10) ki [FOC ram boi Ta kinlo] ? Underlying structure for (2)

Q [FOCUSED CONSTITUENT IP]

(11) ram [ki [FOC BOI Ta] kinlo] ? Underlying structure for (5)

ram Q [FOCUSED CONSTITUENT DP] bought

We follow Dasgupta (2007) in that the Bangla 'ki' has enclitic like properties, and suggest the same with Odia. This enclitic-like property of the Q-particle requires some phonological material to be present to the left of it. In the contrastive case in (11), there is some phonological material 'ram' already present to the left of the Q-particle, and this requirement is satisfied; in the neutral case in (10), there is no phonological material to the left of the particle, and hence the focused constituent (the whole IP in this case) moves to the left of the particle, deriving the word order in the 'final' position (i.e the surface order in example (2)). This is schematized in (12) below.

(12) [FOC ram boi Ta kinlo] ki {FOC ram boi Ta kinlo}

We note that the Hindi Q-particle does not have this enclitic-like property, and thus can retain the order Q [FOC IP] in neutral contexts, unlike Bangla and Odia (see the acceptability of (13) contrasted with the unacceptability of (14) and (15)).

Hindi

(13) kya raam-ne kitab kharidi?
Q raam-ERG book buy
'Did raam buy the book?'

Bangla

(14) *ki am boi Ta kinlo?
Q ram book-CL buy
'Did Raam buy the book?'

Odia

(15) *ki raamo bohi-Ta kinila?
Q raam book-CL buy
'Did Raam buy the book?'

To sum up, our account thus straightforwardly captures: a) the final and the non-final order of the yes/no particle in HBO, (b) the availability of the 'or not' interpretation associated with the yes/no particle, and (c) the difference in the distribution of clause-initial yes/no particle in Hindi in contrast with Bangla and Odia.

Future Research We note that our account currently cannot explain why Hindi allows both the orders in (1) and (13). We have suggested that the base order in Hindi is *kya* [FOCUSED CONSTITUENT IP] and that *kya* does not have enclitic-like properties, and thus the attested order in (1) is explained. However, if it does not have enclitic-like properties, the motivation for the movement of the focused constituent to get the order in (13) remains a puzzle. We speculate that Hindi has stronger scrambling properties that play a role in this case, but a better answer is left for future research.

Selected References

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