ki and *naki* - Alternative Question Particles in Bangla

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Abstract: The primary discussion of the paper is centered on two polar question particles in the Eastern Indo-Aryan language Bangla. One is 'ki' and the other one is 'naki.' These two polar question particles also appear as interrogative disjunction morphemes in alternative questions. This further leads to the argument that there exists a disjunction operator in both polar and alternative questions and the polar question particle is the lexical realization of that disjunction operator.

Keywords: Polar questions, Alternative questions, Cornering effect, *ki*, *naki*, *na.*

About the Author

Dr Ambalika Guha is a syntactician. Her primary interest lies in studying the uniformity between nominal and clausal left periphery. Remarkably, she investigates the discourse notion, which plays a direct role in a syntactic derivation. Recently, she has also been intrigued by the semantics of polar questions and alternative questions. Before joining Adamas University, she was a teaching fellow at VIT (Bhopal) and was a guest lecturer at the Department of Linguistics at Jadavpur University. She has also received a Ph.D. in Linguistics from EFLU, Hyderabad.

1. Introduction

The meaning of a question is a set of propositions that answers that question. Alternative Questions involve a strong exhaustivity presupposition for the mentioned alternatives (Beizma and Rawlins (2012), Beizma (2015), Howell (2016)). These questions are non-wh questions, where two alternatives are separated by disjunction marker, and the meaning of the question also involves a final falling tone. Polar Questions, on the other hand, indicates one alternative explicitly and are necessarily non-exhaustive. The meaning of these questions involves final rising tone. This paper gives an account of the formation of polar and alternative questions in Bangla and tries to argue that both these types of questions indicate disjunction. This argument will be supported by the empirical evidence, which shows that there is an identity relation between the polar question particle and alternative question particle in Bangla.

The paper starts with exploring the number of ways in which polar questions are formed in this language, particularly focusing on the polar question particle 'ki' (section 2). Then it proceeds to show that the syntactic position of the polar question particle 'ki' affects the semantics of the yes/no questions in Bangla (section 3). In (section 4), we notice that the polar question particle 'ki' surfaces as the interrogative disjunction marker in an alternative question. This observation leads to the proposal that polar questions, like alternative questions, indicate disjunction

in the answer space. Then in section 5, we introduce another polar question particle 'naki' in Bangla and we notice that 'naki', like 'ki', occurs as [+Q] disjunction marker in alternative questions. Section 6 of the paper explores the semantic status of another interrogative disjunction marker 'na' and draws the differences among 'ki', 'naki', and 'na.' Section 7 concludes the paper.

2. Polar Questions in Bangla

Pol(ar) Q(uestion)s in Bangla is formed in two ways. One way is when the speaker uses a rising intonation at the end of a declarative clause, cf. (1). The other way is when the speaker uses P(olar) Q(uestion) P(article) besides the prosody, cf. (2).

1. Ram   tʃa: kha-b-e ↑
   Ram   tea   eat-Fut-3rd
   'Will Ram have tea?'

2. Ram   ki   tʃa: kha-b-e ↑
   Ram   PQP   tea   eat-Fut-3rd
   'Will Ram have tea?'

The other Indo-Aryan languages like Hindi and Assamese also form polar question in the aforementioned two ways, as shown by Bhatt and Dayal (2014, 2020) in Hindi and Rajkhowa (2018) in Assamese.

The Bangla PQP 'ki' in (2) is homophonous to the thematic question word 'ki' (what), cf. (3), as shown in Bhadra (2017). This is not exceptional to Bangla, even in Hindi the PQP 'kya:' is homophonous to the thematic question word 'kya:', as shown in Bhatt and Dayal (2014, 2020).

3. Ram   ki   kha-b-e ?
   Ram   what   eat-Fut-3rd
   'What will Ram have?'

The syntactic position of thematic 'ki' in Bangla varies from the syntactic position of the PQP 'ki.' The thematic Q word occurs in pre-verbal position (3) and the PQP can occur in multiple positions inside a clause, cf. (4).

4. (*ki)   Ram   (ki)   chaa   (ki)   kha-b-e   (ki) ↑
   PQP   Ram   PQP   tea   PQP   eat-Fut-3rd   PQP
   'Will Ram have tea?'

In Bangla, the non-occurrence of PQP 'ki' in the clause initial position (4) indicates that 'ki' requires elements to be cliticized to its left (noted in Bhadra (2017), and Syed and Dash (2017)).

3. The Syntactic Position of *ki* and its Effect on the Semantics of Question

The multiple syntactic positions of the PQP in Bangla affect the meaning of polar questions (Guha, 2022). The meaning of the polar questions corresponds to the position of the PQP 'ki.' Let us observe the following context in (5).

5. Context: Ram is having tea in something and A wants to know the kind of crockery in which Ram is having tea.

A: Ram (ki)   cup-e   (#ki) chaa (#ki) kha-ch-e   (#ki) ?
     Ram PQP cup-Loc PQP tea   PQP eat-prog-3 PQP
     Intended: "Is Ram having tea in a cup?"

In (5), where Ram wants to know if A is having tea in a cup or something else, the PQP 'ki' can only occur before the indirect object 'cup' and nothing else in the sentence. Similar behaviour of PQP 'kya:' has been noticed in Hindi by Biezma *et.al.,* (2018). They analyse 'kya:' as a focus sensitive operator, which further restricts the set of possible answers in a given context. They suggest that the element to the immediate right of 'kya:' is questioned. Later, Bhatt and Dayal (2020) shows that every element to the right of 'kya:' can be questioned. In Bangla also, the

elements that occur to the right of the PQP 'ki' are questioned, cf. (6). In (6a), the indirect object can be substituted and in (6b) the direct object can be substituted.

6. A. Ram   ki   cup-e   chaa   kha-ch-e   na   mug-e
        Ram   PQP   cup-LOC   tea   eat-prog-3P   disj   mug-LOC
        kha-ch-e   ?
        eat-prog-3P
        'Is Ram having tea in a cup or in a mug?'

    B. Ram   ki   cup-e   chaa   kha-ch-e   na   coffee
        Ram   PQP   cup-LOC   tea   eat-prog-3P   disj   coffee
        kha-ch-e   ?
        eat-prog-3P
        'Is Ram having tea or coffee in a cup?'

The claim that PQP 'ki' questions only the elements to its right gets more clear with the restricted (contextually) occurrence of the pre-verbal 'ki', cf. (7). The possible answer to (7a) can either be 'yes' or 'no' and nothing else (7b) as the PQP questions only the happening of the verb.

7. A.   Ram cup-e   chaa   ki   kha-ch-e ?
            Ram cup-Loc tea   PQP eat.prog.3
            Intended: "Is Ram having tea in a cup or not?"

    B. hyan / na: / # na: coffee   kha-ch-e
        Yes   no   no   coffee   eat-prog-3P
        "yes/no   /#no, he is having coffee."

In Bangla the polar questions where the PQP 'ki' occurs to the immediate left of the verb, they cannot be used in scenarios like conversation starter, invitation, marriage proposal (the scenarios stated by Bolinger (1978) to point out the difference between polar questions and alternative questions with cornering effect).

4. *Ki* in Alternative Questions in Bangla

The PQP 'ki' can also surface as an interrogative disjunction marker in an alternative question (as shown in Guha (2022)). Let us observe the data in (8) where 'ki' disjoins two polar questions.

8. Ram   chaa   kha-ch-e   ki   ~~Ram~~   coffee   kha-ch-e   ?
    Ram   tea   eat-prog-3p   KI   ~~Ram~~   coffee   eat-prog-3p
    'Is Ram having tea or coffee?'

In (8) the occurrence of 'ki' as [+Q] disjunction marker becomes evident from the data in (9) and (10). In (9), two declarative clauses are disjoined by the Boolean disjunction marker 'ba.' The [-Q] disjunction in (15) can be [+Q] disjunction when 'ba' is replaced by 'ki', cf. (16).

9. Ram   gaan   Sekh-e   ba   ~~Ram~~   naach   Sekh-e
    Ram   song   learn-3p   disj   ~~Ram~~   dance   learn-3p
    'Ram learns singing or dancing.'

10. Ram   gaan   Sekh-e   ki   ~~Ram~~   naach   Sekh-e ?
    Ram   song   learn-3p   KI   ~~Ram~~   dance   learn-3p
    'Does Ram learn singing or dancing?'

'ki' can also occur as [+Q] disjunction marker in AltQvN or polar alternative constructions (11) as well as in 'or something else' construction (12).

11. Ram   chaa   khabe   ki   ~~Ram~~   ~~coffee~~   ~~khabe~~   na: ?
    Ram   tea   will have   KI   ~~Ram~~   ~~coffee~~   ~~will have~~ no
    'Will Ram have tea or not?'

12. Ram   chaa   khabe   ki   ~~Ram~~   annyo   kichukhabe ?
    Ram   tea   will have   KI   ~~Ram~~   different   something   will have
    'Will Ram have tea or something else?'

Following Bartels (1997) analysis of the properties of alternative questions and as also mentioned in Bhatt and Dayal (2020), I suggest that the alternative questions in (8), (10), (11), and (12) have the following features, a pitch accent on each disjunct, a prosodic break between the disjuncts, and a final fall.

Here, we assume that there is an identity relationship between the PQP 'ki' and the interrogative disjunction marker 'ki.' The link between the QP and disjunction morpheme has already got its first mention in Jayaseelan (2008). He shows in languages like Malayalam, Sinhala, and Japanese, that the disjunctive morpheme also appears as a question particle. Amritavalli (2003) also points out the same in Kannada. Jayaseelan states that the question particle, in these languages, is the lexical realization of the disjunction operator. The argument he puts forward for the QP to be the lexical realization of the disjunction operator is that question words indicate disjunction in the answer space. In the line of Baker's (1970) claim that "question particle = question operator", Jayaseelan (2008) proposes a "three-way identification" (13) for the languages where QP and disjunction morpheme are homophonous.

13. question particle = question operator = disjunction operator

In this paper, we will draw an account for the link of Bengali polar question particle with the interrogative disjunctive morpheme from Jayaseelan's disjunctive analysis of question words. Like alternative questions, polar questions also indicate disjunction in the answer space. The meaning of a question can be understood from its range of possible answers. In Biezma and Rawlin's (2012) discourse-based analysis of polar and alternative questions, it is shown that polar questions involve one alternative semantically and the addressee must choose between the given alternative and some salient, unstated alternatives. Whereas alternative questions present an exhaustive set of alternatives and the addressee has to choose from that closed set of alternatives. This analysis of polar and alternative questions follows from I(mmediate) Q(uestion) U(nder) D(iscussion) based theory of discourse (Roberts 1996, Buring 2003, Beaver and Clark 2008). This can be well explained under the D(iscourse) tree, as shown in Biezma and Rawlin (2012, p. 30, ex. 60) and originally proposed by Buring (2003), cf. (14), Fig1.

14.
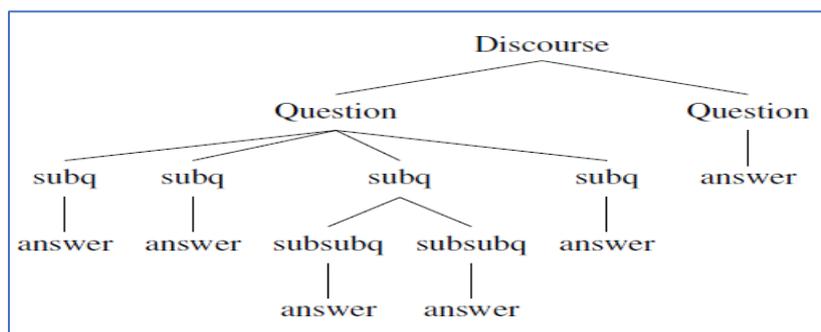

Fig1: Discourse Tree

The D-tree shows that there is a 'Big Question' (termed by Roberts (1996)) and under which there are sub-questions (which are either polar or alternative questions). The speaker utters a sub-question which could be answered by a discourse participant. The addressee must answer the IQUD which is the most current question. To answer the IQUD, the addressee develops different strategies and the different strategies correspond to different sub-questions which in turn will give answer to the 'Big Question.' Based on our understanding of D-tree, IQUD, and 'Big Question,' we can now try to explain the meaning of polar question in Bangla and find out how does polar questions indicate disjunction in answer space.

The polar question in (15) spells out one alternative, .i.e., 'chaa' (tea). To this question, the addressee can either choose to say 'yes' (15A) and thus chooses the given alternative, or he can say 'no' and choose some other alternative which is salient in the discourse (15B).

15. Ram   ki   chaa   kha-b-e ↑
    Ram   PQP   tea   eat-Fut-3rd
    'Will Ram have tea?'

   A.   hyan

Yes

B. na:,   coffee   khabe
   No   coffee   will have
   'No, he will have coffee.'

The response of the addressee in (15A) or (15B) is the response to the Big Question in (16). The question in (16) indicates disjunction in the answer space, as can be seen from its possible answers in (17).

16. Ram   ki   khabe ?
    Ram   what   will have
    'What will Ram have?'

17. {Ram   chaa   khabe   ba   coffee khabe   ba   annyo kichu   khabe}
    Ram   tea   will eat   or   coffee will eat   or   something else   will eat

The data in (15)-(17) show that polar questions signify disjunction in the answer space. Thus, we can suggest that there is a disjunction operator in both polar and alternative questions in Bangla and the operator gets lexically realized as the polar question particle 'ki.' This also supports our understanding of the identity relation between the PQP and the interrogative disjunction marker in Bangla. In the background of the languages like Malayalam, Sinhala, Japanese, and Kannada, we can argue that in Bangla also there is three way identification of question particle = question operator = disjunction operator.

5. *Naki* in Alternative Questions in Bangla

Bengali speakers use another interrogative disjunction morpheme to form alternative questions, cf. (18). Also, the same morpheme can be used as a polar question particle, cf. (19).

18. Ram   chaa   kha-b-e naki   coffee kha-b-e
    Ram   tea   eat-fut-3p   NAKI   coffee eat-fut-3p
    'Will Ram have tea or coffee?

19. amra   chaa   kha-ch-i,   Ram   chaa   kha-b-e   naki
    we   tea   eat-prog-3p   Ram   tea   eat-fut-3p   NAKI
    'We are having tea, will Ram have tea?'

Bhadra (2017) shows that the particle 'naki' in Bangla is used as an evidential morpheme. She argues that *naki* gives a reportative evidential reading when it occurs clause internally (20) and inferential evidential polar question reading when it occurs clause finally (21).

20. Ram   naki   Delhi   ja-ch-e
    Ram   NAKI   Delhi   go-prog-3p
    'Ram is going to Delhi (reportedly).'

21. Ram   Delhi   ja-ch-e   naki
    Ram   Delhi   go-prog-3p   NAKI
    'Is ram going to Delhi (as I infer).'

Here, I suggest that the 'naki' used as the interrogative disjunction morpheme in (18) and used as a polar question particle in (19) is not the evidential 'naki.' It is just homophonous to the evidential one. The 'naki' used in (19) indicates a confirmation question without any strong evidence.

The alternative questions formed by the disjunctive marker 'naki' and the one formed by the marker 'ki' cannot be used interchangeably. Let us consider the following discourse in (22) to understand the difference between 'ki' and 'naki' as [+Q] disjunction morphemes. In (22), speaker A wants to know whether the addressee will have tea or coffee and in order to know that the speaker adopts the strategy of asking and alternative question using 'naki' as the interrogative disjunction morpheme, cf. (22A). To this question, the addressee B doesn't give any direct response, as can in seen in (22B). In this situation, if the speaker A asks the same question using 'naki' as the disjunction morpheme then it will be infelicitous, as can be seen in (22A'). So, in order to force the addressee to

choose one of the given alternatives and give a clear answer, the speaker has to pose the alternative question using the disjunction morpheme 'ki', as can be seen in (22A''). This shows that 'ki' has a *cornering effect* (the term given by Biezma (2009)), which 'naki' does not.

22. A: tumi   chaa   kha-b-e   naki   ~~tumi~~   coffee   kha-b-e
        you   tea   eat-fut-3p   NAKI   ~~you~~   coffee   eat-fut-3p
        'Will you have tea or coffee?'

    B: coffee-r   Sadh   khub   kora,   abar   chini   chara   chaa   o   kora   hoy
        Coffee-Gen taste   very   strong   also   sugar   without tea   also   strong be
        'Coffee tastes strong. However, tea without sugar also tastes strong.'

A': # tumi   chaa   kha-b-e naki   tumi   coffee   kha-b-e
      you   tea   eat-fut-3p   NAKI   you   coffee   eat-fut-3p
       'Will you have tea or coffee?'

A'': tumi   chaa   kha-b-e ki   tumi   coffee   kha-b-e
      you   tea   eat-fut-3p   KI   you   coffee   eat-fut-3p
       'Will you have tea or coffee?'

Besides *cornering effect*, there are other differences between the interrogative disjunction morphemes 'ki' and 'naki.' Unlike 'naki', 'ki' cannot disjoin noun phrases, cf. (23) and (24).

23. * Ram   chaa   ki   coffee   kha-b-e
      Ram   tea   KI   coffee   eat-fut-3p
      Intended: 'Will Ram have tea or coffee?'

24. Ram   chaa   naki   coffee   kha-b-e
    Ram   tea   NAKI   coffee   eat-fut-3p
    'Will Ram have tea or coffee?'

The disjunctive 'ki' cannot be used to disjoin non-finite clauses, cf. (25). But the disjunctive 'naki' can, cf. (26).

25. *Maa   Ram-ke   chaa   khe-te   ki   coffee   khe-te   bol-l-o
    Mother   Ram-Acc   tea   eat-INF   KI   coffee   eat-INF   say-past-3p
    Intended: 'Did mother ask Ram to have tea or coffee?'

26. Maa   Ram-ke   chaa   khe-te   naki   coffee   khe-te   bol-l-o
    Mother   Ram-Acc   tea   eat-INF   NAKI   coffee   eat-INF   say-past-3p
    'Did mother ask Ram to have tea or coffee?'

6. *Na* in Alternative Questions in Bangla

In Bangla, 'ki' and 'naki' are not the only question particles that get realized as interrogative disjunction morphemes. Bhadra (2017) also shows that the embedded polar question particle 'kina' which is equivalent to English 'whether' (according to Bhadra (2017) and Dasgupta (1980)) seems to mark disjunction in alternative questions. Let us observe the following data in (27)-(29) to understand Bhadra's analysis of 'kina.'

27. Maa   jante   chaye   Ram   chaa   kheyeche   kina
    Mother know   want   Ram   tea   had eaten   whether
    'Mother wants to know whether Ram had tea.'

28. Maa   jante   chaye   Ram   chaa   kheyeche   ki   na
    Mother   know   want   Ram   tea   had eaten   KINA
    'Mother wants to know whether or not Ram had tea.'

29. Maa   jante   chaye   Ram   ki   chaa   kheyeche   na   coffee kheyeche
    Mother know   want   Ram   KI   tea   had eaten   NA   coffee had eaten
    'Mother wants to know whether Ram had tea or coffee.'

Bhadra states that both the questions in (27) and (28) are embedded polar questions and they give same

interpretation. According to her, 'ki' and 'na' when concatenated together as in (27), 'kina' stands for the [+Q] whether, and when they are separated with a pause, as in (28), they have the interpretation of the phrase 'whether or not.' She further claims that 'kina' when it is used in an alternative question, the particle 'ki' moves from its base position to the subject 2 position in order to mark scope for disjunction, as can be seen in (29).

Here, in this paper I will suggest that there is difference in interpretation between the embedded questions in (27) and (28). The embedded question in (28) is not a polar question but an alternative question with cornering effect. Let us consider the following data to understand the difference between 'kina' and 'ki na.' In a situation where the speaker wants to know if Ram had tea, he will first choose to ask the polar question in (30A) and then if the addressee chooses to say 'no' and opt for some other salient alternative (30B), then the speaker can use the question in (30A') where 'ki' and 'na' are separated to force the addressee to choose between the given alternative and its negation. Thus, the question in (30A') where 'ki' and 'na' are separated, they give the interpretation of an alternative question with cornering effect and not a polar question.

30. A: Maa   jante   chaye   Ram   chaa   kheyeche   kina
         Mother know   want   Ram   tea   had eaten   KINA
         'Mother wants to know whether Ram had tea.'

    B: hyan, kheyeche / na:, o coffee kheyeche
         yes   has eaten   no   he coffee has eaten
          'Yes, he had tea./ No, he had coffee.'

    A': coffee-r   byaparejante   chai-ni ,   ami   shudhu
         Coffee-Gen   about   know-INF   want-neg I   only
         jante   cheyechi   o   *chaa*   kheyeche   ki   na
         know-INF   want to know   he   tea   had eaten   KI   neg

    B': hyan, kheyeche / na:, khay-ni
         yes   has eaten   no   has not eaten
         'Yes, he had./ No, he hadn't.'

I further claim that the 'ki' in (29), repeated below in (31), has not moved from its concatenated form 'kina', but it is the PQP 'ki' which has originated in the subject 2 position. This claim is based on the data in (32) where we have more than two disjunctions and the data in (33) where 'ki' occurs in the subject 2 position and the interrogative disjunction morpheme 'naki' is used to disjoin two polar questions.

31. Maa   jante   chaye   Ram   ki   chaa   kheyeche   na   coffee kheyeche
    Mother know   want   Ram   KI   tea   had eaten   NA   coffee had eaten
    'Mother wants to know whether Ram had tea or coffee.'

32. Maa   jante   chaye   Ram   ki   chaa   kheyeche na   coffee kheyeche
    Mother know   want   Ram   KI   tea   has eaten NA   coffee has eaten
    na   juice   kheyeche
    NA   juice   has eaten
     'Mother wants to know whether Ram had tea or coffee or juice?'

33. Maa   jante   chaye   Ram   ki   chaa   kheyeche naki coffee kheyeche
    Mother know   want   Ram   KI   tea   has eaten NAKI   coffee has eaten
     'Mother wants to know whether Ram had tea or coffee.'

If we consider Bhadra's analysis of 'ki' moving from the base position to the subject 2 position to mark scope for disjunction in an alternative question, then we cannot account for the data in (32) where we have more than two disjunctions and we don't know whether the 'ki' has moved from the first disjunction or the second disjunction. I should mention here that the disjunction morpheme 'na' in (31) and (32) are homophonous to the negative element 'na' in Bangla. Also, in (33) we can notice that in alternative question where 'naki' is used as the interrogative disjunction morpheme, 'ki' still appears in the subject 2 position. Thus, we can suggest that in (29) and (31) 'ki' has originated in the subject 2 position and 'na' is the interrogative disjunction morpheme. In fact, the occurrence of 'ki'

in the subject 2 position is optional, as can be seen in (34), also mentioned by Bhadra (2017).

34.	Maa	jante	chaye	Ram	(ki)	chaa	kheyeche	na	coffee	kheyeche
	Mother	know		want	Ram	KI	tea	had eaten	NA	coffee	had eaten

'Mother wants to know whether Ram had tea or coffee.'

So, in Bangla we can have three interrogative disjunction morphemes. One is the PQP 'ki', the other is another PQP 'naki', and the last one is 'na', which does not occur as a question particle and which is not the negative element (the negative element in Bangla is homophonous to the interrogative disjunction morpheme 'na'). The difference between 'ki' and 'na' and 'naki' and 'na' are not considered in the current paper and I leave that for future research.

7. Conclusion

In this paper, we have noticed that polar questions in Bangla are formed in two ways. One is by using the prosody and the other one is by using the polar question particle, besides the prosody. We have noticed that the PQP 'ki' and the PQP 'naki' also surface as interrogative disjunctive particle in alternative questions. We have argued that there is an identity between the polar question particle and interrogative disjunction marker in Bangla. This has led to the claim that in Bangla both the polar and alternative questions involve disjunction operator and the question particle 'ki' and 'naki' are the lexical realization of that operator. We have noted also noted that the [+Q] disjunction morpheme 'ki' has a cornering effect, which 'naki' does not have. We have further discussed the embedded question operator 'kina' which gives a polar question interpretation when 'ki' and 'na' are concatenated together and we have seen that 'ki' and 'na' when they are separated, the embedded question is an alternative question with cornering effect. The final argument of the paper tries to show that in Bangla we have three interrogative disjunction morphemes, 'ki', 'naki', and 'na.'

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Yes.

Conflict of interest

The researcher has no conflict of interest to disclose.

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