



RESEARCH PAPER

Polar *kya* in Urdu: Both Mirative and Interrogative

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to address the following question: what are the licensing conditions for the Urdu/Hindi polar question particle *kya*'s multiple concept selection behaviour? More specifically, what is the nature of contexts in which *kya* contributes both interrogative and mirative meanings, and how can such a phenomenon be characterized in terms of cognitive semantic compositional processes? To address this research question, the present study uses the Lexical Concept and Cognitive Model (Evans, 2009) as its theoretical underpinnings. This framework proposes the constructs of Lexical Concept and Cognitive Model to account for the mechanisms of semantic composition for polyfunctional phenomena. The study employs multiple data sources such as naturally occurring data, individual and dialogical introspections and Urdu Lughat. The study finds that to encode interrogative as well as mirative meanings, the polar *kya* undergoes the semantic compositional processes of lexical concept selection, integration and interpretation for final information characterization. The study concludes that *kya* can encode multiple lexical concepts in certain contexts, and its pragmatic functions result from construal imposed on the propositional content in the prior discourse. Theoretically the study shows that linguistic form-meaning relation is shaped by actual use.

KEYWORDS Mirativity, Multiple Lexical Concept Selection, Polar *Kya*, Semantic Composition

Introduction

All human languages exhibit the phenomenon of polysemy whereby one linguistic unit encodes multiple but semantically related senses (Evans, 2009, 2015; Ullmann, 1959). However, polysemy poses challenges to both translators and lexicographers whereas the native speakers of any language produce various senses in online discourse "effortlessly and unconsciously" (Ravin & Leacock, 2000, p.1) because the multiple uses of any lexical item are entrenched in their mental lexicon. Lexicographers are divided on different senses of one lexical item, as is evident in the discrepancy regarding multiple senses of a word found in different dictionaries (Hollosoy, 2008). Lexical semanticists are also challenged by the phenomenon of polysemy due to the fact that the senses of words cannot be restricted to any particular number (Kovacs, 2011; Mayor, 2009).

Traditional approaches may seem inadequate to answer the questions like why multiple senses are attached to the lexical items, how the meanings are structured and organized, why the lexical item behaves in a way to convey certain meanings, and whether other areas of language like syntax and morphology exhibit the phenomenon of polysemy. Unlike traditional approaches, cognitive linguists brought new angle to see polysemy (Croft & Cruse, 2004; Evans, 2007, 2015; Evans & Green, 2006; Evans &

Tyler, 2003; Lakoff, 1987; Langacker, 2008; Nerlich *et al.*, 2003). According to cognitive linguists, polysemy is not restricted to words only; rather the other areas of human languages such as syntax, morphology and phonology also exhibit the phenomenon of polysemy. Hence, polysemy generalizes the commonalities in other areas of language (Evans & Green, 2006). To illustrate, consider the related senses of the English preposition *over* in (1) below.

- (1) a. The picture is *over* the sofa. (above)
 b. The ball is *over* the wall. (on the other side of)
 c. The government handed *over* the power. (transfer)
 d. She has strange power *over* me. (control)
 (Evans & Green, 2006)

Polysemy in morphology is also exhibited by bound morpheme *er*:

- (2) a. Teacher: the person who teaches
 b. Villager: the person who dwells in village
 c. Toaster: the machine which performs agentive functions

Like lexicon and morphology, ditransitive construction in syntax also exhibits polysemy (Goldberg, 1995, 2006).

Against this background, the present study concerns the poly-functional nature of Urdu/Hindi *kya*. The lexical item *kya* can be used as a polar question particle (polar *kya*) as well as an open/content interrogative wh-word (thematic *kya*) (see Biezma, Butt, Jabeen, & Mumtaz, 2022; Bhatt & Dayal, 2020; Kachru, 2006). To illustrate the open interrogative word status of *kya*, the following examples are adapted from Urdu Lughat.

- (3) *kya*
- a. 'what' about action
 γəffar ke kya məni
 Ghaffar POSS what meaning
 'What does Ghaffar mean?'
- b. 'what' about things
 əbər kya hɛ
 cloud what be.PRS.SG
 'What is cloud?'
- c. 'which'
 in mē se kya pəsəḍ hɛ
 these in from what like be.PRS.SG
 'Which of these do you like?'
- d. 'what sort of'
 ye kya ʃor hɛ
 this what noise be.PRS.SG
 'What sort of noise is it?'
- e. 'how much'
 us= ne kya hat^h paḍ mare hɛ
 he=ERG what hand foot hit be.PRS.SG
 'How much efforts has he put in?'

- f. *'different'*
 tu kya s̄amaj̄hta h̄e h̄am kya k̄ehte h̄ẽ
 you what understand be.PRS.SG we what say be.PRS.PL
 'You are mistaking what we are saying.'
- g. *'not only'*
 vo h̄amara kya dusr̄ũ ka b̄hi m̄oxalif h̄e
 he our what others of also opponent be.PRS.SG
 'He is not only our but also others' opponent?'
- h. *'surprise'*
 ḡh̄oṛa kya h̄e bijli h̄e
 horse what be.PRS.SG electricity be.PRS.SG
 'What a horse! It is all power.'
- i. *'why'*
 ye kya p̄h̄ir uni pe k̄ar̄am
 this what again them on blessing
 'Why to bless them again?'
- j. *'very much'*
 aḡar vo muj̄h se bat̄ẽ k̄are to m̄ẽ kya xoj̄ h̄ũ
 if he me with talk do then I what happy be.PRS.1SG
 'I will be very much happy if he talks to me.'
- k. *'how great/competent, etc.'*
 tum n̄ah̄ĩ jante kya ho tum
 you not know what be.PRS.2SG. you
 'You do not know how competent you are.'
- l. *'how meagre'*
 us ki amd̄ani hi kya h̄e
 he POSS income very what be.PRS.SG
 'He has a very meagre income.'
- m. *'lot of'*
 vo kya kya n̄ah̄ĩ k̄ehe ga
 he what what not say will
 'He will tell a lot.'
- n. *'no'*
 lālaj =ko kya əlaj
 incurable=DAT what cure
 'There is no cure for the incurable.'
- o. *'unreal (ironic)'*
 un ka kya vo to h̄ẽ hi j̄aḡli
 them POSS what they be very wild
 'What of them? they are just wild.'
- p. *'have nothing to do'*

tumē is se kya
 you this with what
 'You have nothing to do with it.'

q. 'of no use'

əb^h pəç^htane se kya
 now repent from what
 'It is of no use to repent now.'

r. 'indifference'

vo mərəē muj^he kya
 they die me what
 'I do not care if they die.'

s. 'as soon as'

vo kya ai səb b^hag gəe
 she what come all run go.PRF.PL
 'All ran away as soon as she came.'

t. 'nothing'

us ke pas kya rək^ha hē
 she POSS with what keep be.PRS.SG
 'He has nothing.'

u. 'how'

jis ka səb kuch təbah ho gəya use kya təsalli dē
 she POSS all some ruin become go he what console give
 'How can we console the person who has lost everything?'

All the examples in (3) above represent the polyfunctional nature of *kya* when it is used as a content question word (thematic *kya*). However, the data collected from the Urdu speakers shows that *kya* as a polar particle can also play a significant role in clause-level polysemy in the sense that in certain contexts, it can be used for seeking confirmation, as given in (4) below, while in other contexts, it can help encode both polar question (confirmation seeking) and mirative (surprise) meanings, as given in (5) below.

(4) Context: Speaker A learns through media that the government is planning to increase the petrol price. Next day he goes to a petrol pump and asks the pump assistant (B):

A. kya gormiṭ =ne pətrōl ki qimət bəṛha di hē
 PIM government = ERG petrol of price increase give be
 'Has the government increased the price of petrol?'

B. əb^hi nəhī
 now no
 'Not yet'

(5) Context: Speaker A is worried about a rampant high inflation in the country. Speaker B comes in and says, "The petrol price has decreased to 30 rupees per litre". Speaker A, astonished on hearing this, can respond, using one of the following stock of potential utterances (situation-bound), as confirmed by dialogical introspection:

- a. kya tum sac keh rāhe ho
 PIM you truth say PROG be
 'Are you telling the truth!/?'
- b. kya tum māzaq to nāhī kār rāhe
 PIM you joke not do PROG
 'Aren't you joking!/?'
- c. kya ēse hua
 PIM this happen.PRF.SG
 'Did it happen!/?'

Against the background given above, the following questions arise: what are the licensing conditions for the Urdu/Hindi polar question particle *kya*'s multiple concept selection behaviour? More specifically, what is the nature of contexts in which *kya* contributes both interrogative and mirative meanings, and how can such a phenomenon be characterized in terms of cognitive semantic compositional processes? To address these questions, we need a framework which could incorporate situated use of expressions and characterize explicitly the conditions licensing for such a meaning behavior. The next section outlines a theoretical framework deemed to meet this requirement.

Theoretical framework

LCCM theory (Evans, 2009) assumes that two types of knowledge representation – linguistic system and conceptual system – interact for meaning construction. This theory models linguistic system and conceptual system in terms of two key constructs 'lexical concept' and 'cognitive model'. Lexical concept is the unit of linguistic content associated with a phonological vehicle and cognitive model is the unit of conceptual content. An expression's semantic value does not reside in either the lexical concept or the cognitive model individually, but rather in the relationship between the two.

Each lexical concept has a unique lexical profile which is the combination of semantic selectional tendencies and formal selectional tendencies that each lexical concept must observe in the utterance. Semantic selectional tendencies mean the way one lexical concept co-occurs with another lexical concept in utterance whereas formal selectional tendencies denote the way in which each phonological vehicle appears with another phonological vehicles in the utterance. Unlike a closed class lexical concept, an open class lexical concept, to produce contextually situated utterance, interacts with the unique access point in the conceptual structure of hearer. These access points constitute cognitive model profile which is prompted by lexical concept.

Cognitive model profile consists in the experiential knowledge regarding any lexical concept in the mind of hearer. When the auditory system of hearer receives any phonological form, the multiple types of knowledge come to the mind of hearer in service of phonological vehicle. This knowledge, however, is constrained by contextual factors. As a result, the multiple types of knowledge are narrowed to the contextually appropriate knowledge activated by lexical concept. This process in LCCM theory is referred to as lexical concept selection which provides ground to semantic composition. Meaning variation emerges because of the fact that one form is associated with more than one lexical concept across contexts. When one linguistic form is used in the context by speaker, the hearer selects one contextually relevant lexical concept rather than the other. The lexical concept selection takes place due to contextual factor which helps the hearer to activate relevant cognitive model in response to the uttered lexical concept. The lexical concept selection is of two types: broad selection and narrow selection. In

broad selection, the hearer selects one lexical concept associated with one vehicle while in narrow selection, the hearer chooses one parameter within the lexical concept. A vehicle may be associated with more than one lexical concept in the same context and this phenomenon is referred to as multiple selection.

When relevant lexical concepts are selected with the help of contextual factors such as linguistic context and extra-linguistic context, the selected lexical concepts are then subject to lexical concept integration influenced by linguistic context. The lexical concept integration involves the unpacking of linguistic content associated with the lexical concepts being integrated with each other. Lexical concept integration involves the integration of the linguistic content encoded by the full range of lexical concepts in a particular utterance. Lexical concept integration can be divided into two types: internal integration and external integration. In internal integration, concepts are integrated with the vehicles and when every vehicle is specified, it undergoes external integration where each vehicle is integrated with other vehicle. Both types of lexical concept integrations are influenced by the lexical profile of each lexical concept and result in lexical conceptual unit. A lexical conceptual unit is the larger unit consisting of different lexical concepts and get interpreted at final stage of semantic composition called interpretation.

Interpretation is the activation of conceptual content which must be in keeping with the linguistic content of lexical conceptual unit, involving the interpretation of other lexical concepts in the main lexical conceptual unit. Interpretation involves both types of contexts: linguistic context and extra linguistic context. When the hearer hears the whole utterance imbedded in all types of contexts, it activates the relevant cognitive models in response to the utterance or main lexical conceptual unit. LCCM theory assumes that every open class vehicle in the utterance activates relevant cognitive model. After the activation of each cognitive model, the match between activated cognitive models is established which results in the informational characterization of the produced utterance. This characterization is the situated meaning – an outcome of interaction between lexical concept and cognitive model in the context.

Research design

This study investigates the semantic contribution of Urdu polar particle *kya* to the construction of mirative meanings. Moreover, the study also characterizes the interaction between linguistic system and conceptual system for meaning construction. It is, therefore, necessary to use a research procedure which could tap into speaker intuition about mirativity. That is, the study requires descriptive data and the inductive analysis of the descriptive data (see Schütze, 1996). To meet this requirement, qualitative research is considered relevant (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Gonzalez-Marquez, Mittelberg, Coulson & Spivey, 2007; Yin, 1984/1989). In addition, qualitative research design being flexible, as pointed out by Dörnyei (2007), can respond in a flexible way to new linguistic details that emerge during the process of investigation.

Given the fact that the present study is delimited to the expression of surprise, and that Urdu lacks specialized mirative markers, and thus, employs various other linguistic means to encode mirative meaning (see Zheltova, 2018), the data it needs to address its question includes only those forms that carry expressive content.

This study assumes that “Multi-source evidence can either validate the theory or bring contradictory results, therefore opening new perspectives” (Grisot & Moeschler, 2014, p.10; Kepser & Reis, 2008). Therefore, the data collection process is

multistage and includes four main sources to explore the maximum space of possibility of diversified mirative strategies: Naturally occurring data from TV dramas, movies and a novel, and a list of mirative strategies from native speakers. The study assumes that Urdu speakers in a day-to-day communication use various clause types to express mirative function. This is also validated by the different data sources.

Results and discussion

In terms of LCCM theory, every vehicle has its semantic structure characterized as lexical concept. In certain contexts, vehicles can encode two distinct lexical concepts in the same context, which is referred to as multiple selection, and the task of the hearer is to select two lexical concepts with the help of usage event. The Urdu initial *kya* in the examples (5a-c) above illustrates multiple selection phenomenon and gives rise to both [POLAR QUESTION] lexical concept and [MIRATIVITY] lexical concept. This phenomenon is also referred to as lexical polysemy by Evans (2015), which is not stored in semantic memory. Rather, this type of polysemy is the consequence of online discourse where speaker and hearer jointly construct the ultimate conception. The hearer is required to recognise the depth of intention on the part of speaker to reach the agreeable interpretation. Since each of the examples in (5a-c) can serve as a response to prior discourse which contains an unexpected news for the speaker. Thus, the retention of both lexical concepts is governed by some licensing conditions such as utterance level context, discourse level context, and extra-linguistics context. These contextual factors help the hearer to identify both lexical concepts at the stage of lexical concept selection, lexical concept integration, and interpretation. The following subsection accounts for the semantic composition processes in LCCM theory.

Selection

As mentioned above, under the principle of multiple selection, one lexical form can be associated with two lexical concepts in the same context. Following this principle, *kya* in the contexts such as given in (5) above encodes both [POLAR QUESTION] and [MIRATIVITY] lexical concepts. The utterance level context characterized by confirmatory and counter-expectation expressions such as *sāc*, *māzaq*, and *ese hua* helps the hearer to select two lexical concepts: [POLAR QUESTION] and [MIRATIVITY]. The initial *kya* in this particular linguistic context indicates not only the speaker's mirative attitude towards the propositional content presented in the prior discourse but also his/her intention to seek confirmation. Thus, the discourse level context governs the utterance level context. The utterances in (5) above are not isolable from the prior discourse; the speaker is asking question and expressing a surprising attitude towards the previous discourse. 30 rupees per litre decrease in petrol prices is beyond the speaker's current expectation. Both utterance level and discourse level contexts, in turn, emerge in a coherent way out of extra-linguistic context characterized by high inflation the speaker is worried about. The speaker does not expect a big decrease in petrol prices after a consistent uptrend. This extra-linguistic context causes the speaker to question the validity of the information presented.

To sum up, both utterance level context and discourse level context when integrated facilitate the hearer to select both lexical concepts with one vehicle. Encyclopaedic knowledge of both speaker and hearer is relevant here. The speaker has the knowledge of combining *kya* with those lexical concepts which show speaker doubt regarding the propositional content and the hearer possesses the same knowledge which leads him to identify both lexical concepts associated with one vehicle.

Integration

The polar particle *kya* belongs to closed class lexical concepts whose function is to specify the usage event (utterance) in terms of time, argument structure, the domain to which the event belongs, etc. Being a closed class lexical concept, it cannot activate any particular cognitive model and selects a contextually appropriate proposition as an argument. Under internal integration, *kya* becomes internally closed with two lexical concepts - [POLAR QUESTION] and [MIRATIVITY] - after lexical concept selection. The internal integration is governed by the principles of linguistic as well as schematic coherence. These two principles ensure that the form-meaning relationship is properly established. The integration of *kya* with [POLAR QUESTION] and [MIRATIVITY] lexical concepts is conventionally established since *kya* by itself can be used as question marker as well as interjection.

Under external integration, *kya*'s lexical profile (combinatory potential) takes only those propositions that would be compatible with two lexical concepts selected, both semantically as well as formally. Semantically, *kya* with confirmation and surprise sense-units can be integrated with the confirmatory and counter-expectation expression used in response to any proposition in the prior discourse. Formally, the clause-initial polar *kya* can combine with declarative constructions such as *tom sac keh rāhe ho* 'you are telling the truth' and *ese hua* 'It happened'. As to *tom mazaq to nahī kār rāhe* 'Aren't you joking?', this utterance even without *kya* can encode both confirmation seeking and surprise mainly in the presence of the lexical item *to*. However, this lexical profile of *kya* can take neither a proposition that carries no new information nor any clause formally marked by thematic *kya* (see Bhatt & Dayal, 2020). With this lexical profile, polar *kya* keeps the utterance in the domain of question and surprise. Thus, this structural scaffolding helps the hearer to avoid any selection revision or syntactic ambiguity which may lead the hearer to the declarative lexical concept in the absence of *kya*.

The hearer possessing the knowledge of lexical profile of polar question knows that the clause initial *kya* must be a polar question. The co-occurrence of [TRUTH] lexical concept (5a), [NONSERIOUSNESS] lexical concept (5b), [POSSIBILITY] lexical concept (5c) with *kya* appears to communicate the disbelief of speaker towards the information he has just received. The addressee, upon hearing such lexical concepts combined with *kya*, understands that the speaker requires the confirmation about the information. The lexical profiles of the above three lexical concepts can also include the answers such as *ji* 'yes', *nahī* 'no' and *tomē yaqīn nahī a rāha* 'you don't believe it'. If addressee produces such responses, this means that he recognizes both the lexical concepts. This also guides the hearer about mirativity interpretation of [POLAR QUESTION] lexical concept. It is, therefore, argued that lexical profile of [POLAR QUESTION] lexical concept also involves the features of [MIRATIVITY] lexical concepts. Thus, the addressee takes the responsibility to answer the question and shows his evaluative stance on the question.

Interpretation

Interpretation stage involves the interaction between linguistic and conceptual system resulting in the relevant cognitive model activated by lexical conceptual unit. The relevant cognitive models undergo the process of matching which constrain the principle of conceptual coherence and schematic coherence. When the principles of conceptual coherence and schematic coherence are satisfied, the ultimate conception characterized as the meaning of utterance is constructed by the hearer while some conceptions are yielded by mismatch of cognitive models due to conceptual and schematic incoherence.

As stated above, the particle *kya* does not have rich conceptual content. Its potential is to prepare the hearer for the type of conceptual content in the utterance. The linguistic content of *kya* guides the process of matching which saves the hearer from producing any other conception. *kya* imposes a conceptual framework on the whole utterance that constrains the matching process. In (5a-c), *sac*, *mazaq* and *ese hua* evoke the content of the previous utterance. Thus, the [CONFIRMATION SEEKING] lexical concept activates the cognitive model that contains the prices of petrol and the impossibility of a drastic decrease in the prices. The generic cognitive model about the prices of petrol includes the assumption that the prices cannot go down to 30 rupees per litre in a time of high inflation. Thus, the generic cognitive model is updated as the consequence of mismatch between the prior utterance and polar examples. This mismatch is indicated by *sac*, *mazaq* and *ese hua* and the hearer also understands the mismatch between cognitive models. Both unit-senses of confirmation seeking and surprise are motivated by conceptual and schematic incoherence. So, the addressee relies on contextual factors such as utterance level context, discourse level context carrying the news about the decrease in petrol prices and extra linguistics context involving high inflation at the time of utterance. The reason for relying on contextual factors is the non-default nature of all the three utterances. The interpretation of some polar questions can rise without contextual factors such as (a) *Does the earth revolve around the sun?*, (b) *Does the sun rise in the east?* and (c) *Does the sun set in the west?* On the contrary, the examples in (5a-c) cannot be interpreted without discourse level context.

To conclude, the principle of conceptual incoherence facilitates the hearer to construct the polysemous behaviour of polar *kya*. The other lexical concepts in three utterances update the generic cognitive model of the hearer. This is the reason that the hearer interprets the polar *kya* encoding both meaning components: mirativity component and question component.

Conclusion

The present study explores how the Urdu polar particle *kya* contributes both interrogative and mirative meaning components. The analysis of *kya* in LCCM- theoretic terms reveals that *kya* undergoes the mechanisms of semantic composition – lexical concept selection, lexical concept integration and interpretation – to retain both question and mirative meaning components. The study explicates how various licensing conditions such as discourse level context, utterance level context and extra-linguistic context contribute to the overall information characterization of *kya*. Theoretically the study shows that linguistic form-meaning relation is shaped by actual use, and that meaning construction is an interaction between linguistic and conceptual systems, the two forms of knowledge representation.

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