Urdu/Hindi Questions at the Syntax-Pragmatics-Prosody Interface

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This talk reports on progress made on researching Urdu questions from a perspective in which information structural concerns take center stage. The research is conducted within Lexical-Functional Grammar (LFG), which provides for a modular architecture of grammar. Components of grammar are assumed to be independent in terms of representation and wellformedness conditions, yet also interface with one another in a mutually constraining fashion. Recent years have seen an increased discussion of the syntax-pragmatics-prosody interface in this framework.

We situate our work within this context and present a combination of experimental, corpuslinguistic and prosodic evidence in seeking to understand the pragmatic functionality of the various word order possibilities with respect to wh-elements in Urdu/Hindi. We show that a complete understanding of the pragmatics and syntactic distribution of kya 'what' must necessarily include a simultaneous integration of prosodic information. Our research to date has particularly focused on the diverse roles that the wh-element kya 'what' plays. The evidence obtained so far points towards: a) postverbal positioning of kya for reasons of secondary focus; b) an interaction between the wh-constituent analyis of kya and a polar reading that can only be resolved via prosodic information.; c) an analysis of polar kya as a marker of biased polar questions.