

Egocentric questions: The view from Bangla and Hindi-Urdu

ARKA BANERJEE, *WBUJS, Kolkata*

KOUSANI BANERJEE, *EFLU, Hyderabad*

RAJESH BHATT, *UMass Amherst*

ABSTRACT

In Bangla and Hindi-Urdu, we find a kind of question that is grammatically restricted to being about a particular event. This kind of a question consists of a demonstrative pronoun followed by a plain question. We refer to such questions as egocentric questions and to the demonstrative pronoun they contain as the egocentric pronoun. The egocentric pronoun picks out an event and the question is about this event. Since the speaker and the hearer need to pick out the event the question is about, such questions cannot be used in a state of speaker ignorance. This differentiates them from plain questions where speaker ignorance is the default. We show that various properties of egocentric questions follow from the need to be able to assign a reference to the egocentric pronoun and from the nature of access the speaker has to the event that the egocentric pronoun picks out.

1 Introduction

This paper will address a phenomenon in Bangla (Bengali) and Hindi-Urdu where demonstratives can appear together with a question, however in a non-canonical manner. Here, the term ‘non-canonical’ is used to refer to the fact that these demonstratives are not assigned any theta role. Consider the following:

(1) Bangla

- a. *e tumi ki korcho?*
this you what do.PROG.PRS.2
‘What is this that you are doing?’
- b. *e ami kothay elam?*
this I where come.PST.1
‘What is the place where I came?’

(2) Hindi-Urdu

- a. *yeh tum kya: kar rahe ho?*
this you what do PROG.MPL be.PRS.2PL
‘What is this that you are doing?’
- b. *yeh ham kahā: a: gaye hē?*
this we where come GO.MPL be.PRS.3PL
‘What is this place where we have come?’

In the above examples, it is noteworthy that no theta role is assigned to the demonstrative *e/yeh* ‘this’. The issue of this point becomes clearer when we look at the use of *e/yeh* in the following examples:

(3) Bangla

- a. *e* (lok) kothay thake?
 this person where stay.PRS.3
 ‘Where does this person stay?’
 Context: the speaker has met Riya’s friend Ravi, and the speaker is asking Riya where Ravi stays (pointing towards Ravi).
- b. *e* (meye) (ki) bhalo?
 this girl PQP good
 ‘Is this (girl) good?’
 Context: Riya is showing a picture of her school group to the speaker, and (s)he points towards a girl in that picture asking if that girl is good.

(4) Hindi-Urdu

- a. *yeh* (laṛki:) kahā: rah-ti: hε?
 this girl.F where stay-IMPV.F be.PRS.3SG
 ‘Where does this girl live?’
 Context: Riya is showing a picture of her school group to the speaker, and the speaker points towards a girl in the picture and asks the above question.
- b. (kya:) *yeh* (laṛki:) mehnati: hε?
 PQP this girl hardworking be.PRS.3SG
 ‘Is this (girl) hardworking?’
 Context: Riya is showing a picture of her school group to the speaker, and (s)he points towards a girl in that picture asking if that girl is hardworking.

For the last two pairs of examples, from (3a) to (4b), it is clear that the demonstrative *e/yeh* either gets a theta role (when it appears as a pronoun, without a nominal complement) or is part of a nominal that gets a theta role (when it appears as a determiner). The distinction between the canonical usage of the demonstrative *e/yeh* and its non-canonical usage can be brought out further by making the demonstrative take a nominal complement as in (5a-6b).

(5) Bangla

- a. **e* kaj tumi ki korcho?
 this work you what do.PROG.PRS.2
 Intended: ‘What is this work that you are doing?’
- b. **e* jaygay ami kothay elam?
 this place I where come.PST.1
 Intended: ‘What is this place where I came?’

(6) Hindi-Urdu

- a. **yeh ka:m tum kya: kar rahe ho?*
this work you.PL what do PROG.MPL be.PRS.2PL
Intended: ‘What is this work that you are doing?’
- b. **yeh jagah ham kahā: a: gaye hē?*
this place we where come GO.PFV.MPL be.PRS.3PL
Intended: ‘What is this place where we have come?’

In these cases the canonical interpretation is not available as there are too many DPs and too few theta roles. For example in (6a), the main verb assigns a theta role to its object *kya:* ‘what’, leaving the DP *yeh ka:m* ‘this work’ without a theta role. The same is the case with Bangla examples in (5a)-(5b). This is unsurprising. What is more surprising is that the non-canonical interpretation is also unavailable. We learn therefore that in the non-canonical usage, the demonstrative needs to function as a pronoun i.e. without a nominal complement.

In this paper, we will attempt to identify what role this non-argumental, demonstrative pronoun *e/yeh* plays in examples like (1a-2b), its semantic contribution(s), and the syntactic restrictions on the demonstrative in the non-canonical reading. Hereafter, throughout this paper, we will refer to these non-canonical questions as *egocentric* questions and we will refer to the non-argumental, demonstrative pronoun *e/yeh* as an *egocentric pronoun*.

2 Clause-type sensitivity of the egocentric pronoun

In this section, we explore what kinds of clauses the egocentric pronoun can appear in. As noted earlier in (1) and (2), the egocentric pronoun can appear with constituent questions. There seems to be no restriction concerning what the questioned constituent is. We have already seen examples where the questioned constituent is *ki/kya:* ‘what’ (1a, 2a), *kothay/kahā:* ‘where’ (1b, 2b). It also appears with *ke/kaun* ‘who’, *kibhabe/kaise* ‘how’, *kokhon/kab* ‘when’, *kanol/kyō* ‘why’, and *koto/kitna:* ‘how much’. Consider the following:

(7) Bangla

- | | |
|---|--|
| a. <i>e Ram kokhon elo?</i> this Ram when come.PST.3 ‘When is it that Ram came?’ | c. <i>e tui eta kano korli?</i> this you it why do.PST.2 ‘Why is it that you did it?’ |
| b. <i>e ke esheche</i> this who come.PRF.PRS.3 <i>bari-te?</i> home.LOC ‘Who is it that came home?’ | d. <i>e tui koto</i> this you how-much <i>khacchish?</i> eat.PROG.PRS.2 ‘How much food is it that you are eating?’ |

(8) Hindi

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>a. <i>yeh Ram kab a:-ya:?</i> this Ram when come-PFV.MSG ‘When is it that Ram came?’</p> | <p>c. <i>yeh kaun a: raha:</i> this who come PROG.MSG <i>hε?</i> be.PRS.3SG ‘Who is it that is coming?’</p> |
| <p>b. <i>yeh tum aisa: ka:m kyō: kar</i> this you such thing why do <i>rahe ho?</i> PROG.MPL be.PRS.2PL ‘Why is it that you are doing such a thing?’</p> | <p>d. <i>yeh tum kitna: kha:na: kha:</i> this you how-much food eat <i>rahe ho?</i> PROG.MPL be.PRS.2PL ‘How much food you are eating!’</p> |

The egocentric pronoun is also compatible with questions with reduplicated *wh*-words (9a,10a) as well as with multiple *wh* questions (9b, 10b).

(9) Bangla

- a. *e tui kake kake merechish?*
this you whom whom hit.PROG.PRS.2
‘Who are the people that you have hit?’
- b. *e tui kake ki bol-e boshli?*
this you whom what say-CNV sit.PST.2
‘Who is x and what is y s.t. you said y to x?’

(10) Hindi-Urdu

- a. *yeh tum=ne kis kis=ko pi:t diya:?*
this you=ERG whom whom=DOM beat give.PFV.DEF
‘Who are all these people that you have hit?/What a wide range of people you have hit’
- b. *yeh tum kis=se kya: kah baiṭh-e?*
this you who=INS what say SIT-PFV.MPL
‘Who is x and what is y s.t. you ended up saying y to x?’

Apart from the above constructions, the egocentric pronoun also appears in polar (11a, 12a) and alternative questions (11b, 12b).

(11) Bangla

- a. *e tui (ki) Rishi-ke boi-ta dili?*
this you PQP Rishi-DAT book-CL give.PST.2
‘Is it Rishi that you gave the book to?’
- b. *e tui mach kheli na mangsho?*
this you fish ate NA meat
‘What is it between fish and meat you ate?’

(12) Hindi-Urdu

- a. *yeh tum=ne (kya:) Ravi-ko kita:b di: thi:?*
 this you=ERG PQP Ravi-DAT book give.PFV.F be.PST.F.SG
 ‘Is it Ravi that you gave the book to?’
- b. *yeh tum papi:ta: kha: rahe ho ki aam?*
 this you papaya eat PROG.MSG be.PRS.2 THAT mango
 ‘Are you eating papaya or mango?’

The above survey of questions that the egocentric pronoun can appear in allows us to rule out analyses which directly connect the proximal demonstrative with the *wh*-word and the resulting question gives us the identity of the object that the demonstratives point to. Here is what such an analysis might look like:

- (13) **it, who** *does Joan like*
 ‘Who is it that Joan likes?’

The exact details are not important because we can rule out such analyses on two grounds. The demonstrative *e/yeh* is not used for pointing to degrees/amounts - for that *eto/itna:* would be used, see (7d/8d). Furthermore in polar questions and alternative questions, there is no *wh*-phrase that could be associated with the proximal demonstrative and yet as we have seen in (11) and (12), the egocentric pronoun is possible in such questions.

2.1 Compatibility with rhetorical questions

The egocentric questions we have seen so far have been information seeking questions. But egocentric questions need not always be information seeking. They can also be used in rhetorical contexts as well (Caponigro & Sprouse, 2007; Biezma & Rawlins, 2017). Consider the following examples where the egocentric question is used to convey a reproach.

- (14) Context: I am watching you talk to Mahesh.
- a. Bangla
e tui kibhabe kotha bolchish Mahesh-er shathe?
 this you how.manner talk.PROG.PRS.2 Mahesh-GEN with
 ‘How are you talking to Mahesh?’
- b. Hindi-Urdu
yeh tum Mahesh=se kaise ba:t kar rahe ho?
 this you Mahesh=INS how talk do PROG.MPL be.PRS.2
 ‘How are you talking to Mahesh?’

This question does not ask for information; instead, the speaker uses it to convey to the hearer that the speaker thinks the manner in which the hearer is speaking to Mahesh is inappropriate.

(15) Context: You and I can see and hear Mina talking to someone. We know who she is talking to.

a. Bangla

e Mina kar shathe kotha bolche?
this Mina who with talk.PROG.PRS.3
'Who is it that Mina is talking to?'

b. Hindi-Urdu

yeh Mina kis=se ba:t kar rahi: he?
this Mina who=INS talk do PROG.F be.PRS.3SG
'Who is it that Mina is talking to?'

Here too, the question is not asking for a canonical answer as the speaker can see who Mina is talking to. Instead, it is used to convey that there is something inappropriate about Mina talking to this person. We wish to make two additional points here. The first is that these questions are not limited to being rhetorical. If we change the context, the questions become information seeking.

(16) Context: I am watching you talk to Mahesh using strange sounds and gestures.

a. Bangla

e tui kibhabe kotha bolchish Mahesh-er shathe?
this you how.manner talk.PROG.PRS.2 Mahesh-GEN with
'How are you talking to Mahesh?'

b. Hindi-Urdu

yeh tum Mahesh=se kaise ba:t kar rahe ho?
this you Mahesh=INS how talk do PROG.MPL be.PRS.2
'How are you talking to Mahesh?'

Response: Ah! It's this new code we've been trying out!

A similar adjustment of the context allows (15) to function as an information seeking question. The switch from a rhetorical use to an information seeking one is accompanied by a corresponding shift in the prosody.

The second point is more tricky. We have shown that egocentric questions can function both as rhetorical questions and information seeking questions. But this is also true of canonical questions! So what is special about egocentric questions in this regard? We contend that there is something about the form of egocentric questions that they lend themselves very easily to being used in rhetorical questions and exclamation, in comparison to normal questions. Once we present our semantic proposal for egocentric questions, we will return to this aspect of their behavior in §4.3.

We have now shown that egocentric *e/yeh* can occur with all types of questions. Next, we turn to whether it can appear in other clause types.

2.2 Only with questions

The tendency of egocentric questions toward being used as rhetorical questions raises the query, whether the egocentric pronoun can be used in declaratives as well. It turns out that it can only be used with questions, as already seen, and with *wh*-exclamatives (17a/17b). The occurrence of the egocentric pronoun with *wh*-exclamatives does not pose a challenge for its tendency to appear with questions because *wh*-exclamatives can be given a question-based analysis (cf. Banerjee, 2022, for Bangla).

(17) Context: I am surprised to see what a beautiful picture you have drawn.

a. Bangla

(*e*) *tui ki darun ekta chobi enkechish!*

this you what marvellous one.CL painting draw.PRF.PRS.3

‘What a marvellous painting you have drawn!’

b. Hindi-Urdu

(*yeh*) *tum=ne kya: sundar tasvi:r bana:-yi: hε!*

this you=ERG what beautiful picture make-PFV.F be.PRS.3SG

‘What a beautiful picture you have made!’

However, the egocentric pronoun can occur neither in declaratives (18a/18b) nor in what Rett (2008) calls *propositional exclamations* (18c).

(18) a. Bangla declaratives:

**e tui Mina-r sathe kotha bolchish*

this you Mina-GEN with talk.PROG.PRS.2

Lit.: ‘*This you are talking to Mina’.

b. Hindi-Urdu declaratives:

**yeh tum Mina=se ba:t kar rahe ho*

this you Mina-WITH talk do PROG.MPL be.PRS.3SG

Lit.: ‘*This you are talking to Mina’.

c. Bangla propositional exclamations:

(**e*) *ajke darun ranna hoyeche!*

this today marvelous cooking happen.PRF.PRS.3

Lit.: ‘*This today marvelous cooking happened.’

The egocentric pronoun is also not compatible with imperatives.

(19) a. Bangla

(**e*) *apnara shobai pichon-er dorja diye bero-ben.*

this you all back-GEN door through exit-FUT.IMP.HON

‘*This exit through the back door!’

- b. Hindi-Urdu
 (***yeh**) *pi:che=se ba:har ja:-o.*
 this back-FROM outside go-IMP
 ‘*This go out through the back!’

The crux of the above discussion is that the egocentric pronoun is sensitive to clause types. It is possible only in question contexts or in those contexts that are derived from questions (for example, *wh*-exclamatives), and nowhere else.

3 A semantics for egocentric questions

Our initial intuition for building up the semantic contribution of these egocentric questions is that the egocentric pronoun (*e/yeh*) in an egocentric question is a pronominal element and its referent should be identified by both the speaker and the hearer successfully. The following section outlines an intuition about the semantics of the egocentric questions.

3.1 Informal intuition

We propose that in egocentric questions, the egocentric pronoun (*e/yeh*) picks out an event. Let us call it QEvent. We assume that the contribution of the egocentric question is to restrict the question to QEvent. Unlike ordinary questions, which do not directly restrict the event variables of their answers, egocentric questions are questions about a particular event. The syntax of an egocentric question consists of the the egocentric pronoun in a high position in the left periphery followed by the CP that corresponds to the question.

(20) Egocentric Questions:

- a. Syntax:
 $[_{TopP} \mathbf{e/yeh} [_{CP} \text{Question}]]$
- b. Semantics:
 $\llbracket \mathbf{e/yeh}_i \text{ Who is Mina talking to?} \rrbracket =$
 $\{[Mina \text{ is talking to } x \text{ in QEvent}]: x \text{ is a person}\}, \text{ where } g(i) = \text{QEvent}$

Ordinary questions, presumably, lack the topic layer and thus correspond to just the CP portion.

(21) Plain Question:

- a. Syntax:
 a plain CP
- b. Semantics:
 $\llbracket \text{Who is Mina talking to?} \rrbracket =$
 $\{\exists e [Mina \text{ is talking to } x \text{ in } e]: x \text{ is a person}\}$

It is possible that in a language like English, ordinary questions might correspond to two structures – a plain question and an egocentric question with a silent pronoun in place of the egocentric pronoun.

One prediction of this implementation is that the event that *e/yeh* picks out has to match the question event. Suppose *e/yeh* picks out an event of Mina dancing, then this event cannot be an event in which Mina is talking to someone, assuming the events to be minimal.

3.2 The position of the egocentric pronoun in syntax

The syntax that we have proposed is inspired by Rizzi (1997). Rizzi notes that in matrix clauses in Italian, a topic must precede a *wh*-phrase.

(22) (Rizzi, 1997, page 289, ex. 13)

- a. *Wh-Top
**A chi, il premio Nobel, lo daranno?*
to whom the prize Nobel it give.Fut
Intended: ‘Who will they give the Nobel Prize to?’
- b. Top-Wh
Il premio Nobel, a chi lo daranno?
the prize Nobel to whom it give.Fut
‘Who will they give the Nobel Prize to?’

The same restriction applies to egocentric questions. A *wh*-phrase in an egocentric question may not precede the egocentric pronoun.

- (23) a. Bangla
**tumi ki e korcho?*
you what this do.PROG.PRS.2
Intended: ‘What is this that you are doing?’
- b. Hindi-Urdu
**tum kya: yeh kar rahe ho?*
you what this do PROG.MPL be.PRS.2
‘What is this that you are doing?’

There is, of course, a big difference between Italian on the one hand and Bangla and Hindi-Urdu on the other – Italian has overt and obligatory *wh*-movement to [Spec, CP], Bangla and Hindi-Urdu do not.¹ Given the absence of overt *wh*-movement to [Spec, CP] in Bangla and Hindi-Urdu, the facts in (23) could be seen as unsurprising. However, a deeper examination of the ordering restrictions that obtain in egocentric questions reveals that the kind of restrictions that Rizzi noted in Italian are relevant in Bangla and Hindi-Urdu as well.

¹This point is not uncontroversial – see Simpson & Bhattacharya (2003) who argue that Bangla has obligatory and overt *wh*-movement to [Spec, CP] followed by movement of the following argumental material to a position above [Spec, CP]. If, as we argue, the egocentric pronoun is located higher than [Spec, CP], the ordering restriction can be made to follow from their proposal with the following restriction – non-*wh* material can move past the egocentric pronoun but the *wh*-phrase, trapped in [Spec, CP], cannot.

The default position for egocentric *e/yeh* is initial and this is the order we have seen so far. But in fact, egocentric *e/yeh* can appear in a non-sentence-initial position as long as it precedes the *wh*-phrase(s) of the clause in which it appears.² Consider the following:

- (24) a. Bangla
 (✓*e*) *tumi* (✓*e*) *ki* (✗*e*) *korcho* (✗*e*)?
 this you this what this do.PROG.PRS.2 this
 ‘What is this that you are doing?’
- b. Hindi-Urdu
 (✓*yeh*) *tum* (✓*yeh*) *kya:* (✗*yeh*) *kar rahe* *ho* (✗*yeh*)?
 this you this what this do PROG.MPL be.PRS.2 this
 ‘What is this that you are doing?’

How might we derive the acceptable orders in (24), where the egocentric pronoun is not in an initial position? Both Bangla and Hindi-Urdu allow for scrambling and we can reasonably propose that material that precedes the egocentric pronoun gets there via clause-local scrambling. But then why can’t *wh*-phrases scramble past the egocentric pronoun – if they could, the unacceptable orders in (24) would not be so. We cannot appeal to scrambling not being available to *wh*-phrases. They can in fact be scrambled, just not past the egocentric pronoun. Consider the following example where the indirect object can be scrambled past the subject (25b) but not past the egocentric pronoun (25c).

- (25) a. *yeh* *Ram kaun=se larke=ko pra:iz de raha:* *he?*
 this Ram which boy=DAT prize give PROG.MSG be.3SG
 ‘Who is this boy to whom Ram is giving the prize?’

²We noted earlier that egocentric questions can also be based on polar questions and alternative questions, which lack argumental *wh*-XPs though they may contain the Polar Question Particle *kya:*. We find with these that (1) the default order has the egocentric pronoun in sentence-initial position, (2) non-focused material may precede the egocentric pronoun but focused material cannot, and (3) a PQP if present must follow the egocentric pronoun.

- i. Hindi-Urdu polar questions
- a. *yeh* (*kya:*) *tum* (*kya:*) [_F*Mina=se*] *ba:t kar rahe* *ho?*
 this PQP you PQP Mina=INS talk do PROG.MPL be.PRS.2
 ‘Are you talking to Mina?’
- b. **kya:* *yeh* *tum* [_F*Mina=se*] *ba:t kar rahe* *ho?*
 PQP this you Mina=INS talk do PROG.MPL be.PRS.2
 ‘Are you talking to Mina?’
- c. *tum yeh* (*kya:*) [_F*Mina=se*] *ba:t kar rahe* *ho?*
 you this PQP Mina=INS talk do PROG.MPL be.PRS.2
 ‘Are you talking to Mina?’
- d. **tum* [_F*Mina=se*] *yeh* *ba:t kar rahe* *ho?*
 you Mina=INS this talk do PROG.MPL be.PRS.2
 ‘Are you talking to Mina?’

- b. *yeh kaun=se larke=ko Ram pra:iz de raha: hε?*
 this which boy=DAT Ram prize give PROG.MSG be.3SG
 ‘Who is this boy to whom Ram is giving the prize?’
- c. **kaun=se larke=ko yeh Ram pra:iz de raha: hε?*
 which boy=DAT this Ram prize give PROG.MSG be.3SG
 intended: ‘Who is this boy to whom Ram is giving the prize?’

So why can non-*wh*-phrases scramble past the egocentric pronoun but not *wh*-phrases? Let’s spell out the proposal in Rizzi (1997) a little further. Rizzi (1997) argues for the following hierarchy for Italian, which has topic positions above and below the landing site of *wh*-movement.³

$$(26) \quad [_{TopP} [_{CP} \text{wh-XP} [_{C'} C[+Q] [_{TopP} \dots]]]]$$

We assume that the egocentric pronoun occupies the high topic position in Bangla and Hindi-Urdu. *wh*-phrases in these languages do not obligatorily and overtly move to [Spec, CP]; moreover, these languages being head-final, there is no visible reflex of the C[+Q] head on the left periphery.

$$(27) \quad \text{Bangla/Hindi-Urdu:} \\ [_{TopP} \text{e/yeh} [_{CP} \dots \text{wh-XP} \dots C[+Q]]]$$

A *wh*-XP must appear in the scope of a C[+Q] and the projection in which the egocentric pronoun appears needs to be higher than the question CP. This is possible when the egocentric pronoun precedes the *wh*-XP as in (27). But when the *wh*-XP precedes the egocentric pronoun, it means the question CP is higher than the egocentric pronoun’s TopP. This runs afoul of our initial proposal about the location of the the egocentric pronoun in a high topic position. The location of a non-*wh*-XP is uninformative about the scope of the question CP and hence a non-*wh*-XP that precedes the egocentric pronoun does not create a problem.

We conclude that the egocentric pronoun is generated in a high topic position which is followed by a question CP. Any such sequence is technically grammatical. Whether such a sequence is actually acceptable depends upon whether the speaker and the hearer can together use the egocentric pronoun to individuate an event that the associated question can be posed of. These two components: the individuation of the event and the fact that the questions are posed of this event are what make egocentric questions differ from normal questions meaning-wise. We turn to them in the following sections.

4 How egocentric questions differ from normal questions and why

We need to identify the limitations on the application of egocentric questions in order to pinpoint the function of the egocentric pronoun. We accomplish this by contrasting ego-

³The evidence for a lower position comes from embedded questions where the *wh*-phrase can precede or follow a topic. The *Wh-Top order in (22) follows from obligatory verb movement to C in matrix questions.

centric questions with the corresponding plain questions. We see that egocentric questions are only felicitous in a subset of the contexts where plain questions are felicitous.

- (28) Context: Riya returned home late at night. Riya's partner believes that Riya is cheating on him, and she was with Ravi all this time (though he has no proof of it). Riya's partner asks:

a. Bangla

(#e) *tui kar shathe chili?*

this you who.GEN with were

'Who is it that you were with?'

b. Hindi-Urdu

(#yeh) *tum kis=ke sa:th thi:?*

this you who=GEN with be.PST.F

'Who is it that you were with?'

- (29) Context: I am aware that you go out every evening. However, I do not possess the concrete proof that you went out anywhere yesterday. The day after, I ask you:

a. Bangla

(#e) *tui gotokal kothay giyechili?*

this you yesterday where go.PRF.PST.2

'Where have you gone to yesterday?'

b. Hindi-Urdu

(#yeh) *tum kal kahā: gaye the?*

this you yesterday where go.PFV.MPL be.PST.MPL

'Where had you gone yesterday?'

- (30) Context: According to what I know, you go out every evening. I even witnessed you heading out yesterday. I thus ask you the next day:

a. Bangla

(e) *tui gotokal kothay giyechili?*

this you yesterday where go.PRF.PST.2

'Where have you gone to yesterday?'

b. Hindi-Urdu

(yeh) *tum kal kahā: gaye the?*

this you yesterday where go.PFV.MPL be.PST.MPL

'Where had you gone yesterday?'

4.1 Questions about a particular event

The set of data constructed above highlights the fact that the use of the egocentric pronoun in question situations is only acceptable if we have proof of some sort regarding the specific incident that the question is concerning. We cannot utter an egocentric question in a mere belief context as seen in (28) which describes a scenario where Riya's partner would conceivably accept the possibility that Riya and Ravi go out together. However, there is no specific event or occasion in his mind, to which he can refer while asking Riya's whereabouts using the egocentric *e/yeh*. To put it differently, these egocentric questions limit the inquiry to an event picked out by the demonstrative; if such an event is not available, they are deemed infelicitous. Now, if we modify the scenario slightly and suppose that the speaker, Riya's partner, just checked Ravi's status on WhatsApp which displays their hangout photos from that night, an egocentric question in (28) would be felicitous, as he now has a specific event to refer to while uttering the egocentric question. Due to the lack of a specific event that the inquiry can be associated with, the egocentric question is likewise infelicitous in the context of (29). In contrast, uttering an egocentric question is perfectly acceptable in a situation like (30), because the speaker has a particular event in his/her mind to which (s)he is referring while asking the question in (30). Though we have certain limitations while uttering egocentric questions, a straightforward question is acceptable in all these cases.

One might however think that egocentric questions are felicitous only in cases of direct evidence as shown in (30). Such is not the case. Look at the scenario in (31) where the speaker lacks direct proof, but the egocentric question is still admissible because there is some indirect evidence.

- (31) Context: During the meeting, Mina misbehaved with her employee Ram. After learning about Mina's actions at the meeting, the speaker asks the following questions to her:

a. Bangla

(*e*) *tui kemon byabohar korli Ram-er shathe?*

this you how behaviour do.PST.2 Ram-GEN with

'How did you behave with Ram?'

b. Hindi-Urdu

(*yeh*) *tum=ne Ram=ke sa:th kaisa: bartaav kiya:?*

this you=ERG Ram=GEN with how behaviour do.PFV.MSG

'How did you behave with Ram?'

To put it briefly, an egocentric question needs some question event, as mentioned in §3.1, to be present in the very first place, which the speaker of the egocentric question needs to be able to pick out with the egocentric pronoun. The question event needs to be an actual event. The following example shows that future events do not count as actual events. To

get to an actual event, we need more. Consider a context where you were supposed to go to Delhi next week, a plan that we are both aware of. In such a context, an egocentric question is not ok. However, if you fall terribly sick the day before your trip and I know this, an egocentric question becomes ok. But speaker knowledge is key – if I do not know about your illness, we are back to square one and an egocentric question is out. In all three situations, however, the plain question is felicitous.

(32) Case 1: no sickness: egocentric #

Case 2: sickness, Speaker knows of sickness: egocentric ok

Case 3: sickness, Speaker does not know of sickness: egocentric #

a. Bangla

(e) *tui kibhabe dilli jabi?*
this you how Delhi go.FUT.2
'How will you go to Delhi?'

b. Hindi-Urdu

(yeh) *tum dilli kaise ja:-oge?*
this you Delhi how go.FUT.M.2
'How will you go to Delhi?'

4.2 The role of the speaker and the hearer

Since a question involves both the speaker and the hearer, it is important to identify the role of the hearer in these question situations. (33) depicts a scenario where only the speaker has access to the event to which the egocentric question is referring. In such a case, the egocentric question is not felicitous.

(33) Context: At the meeting, Mina acted inappropriately towards her employee Ram. After observing Mina's actions, the speaker decides to ask Ravi about the situation. However, the speaker does not know that not only did Ravi not attend the meeting, he also didn't hear anything about its outcome. The speaker asks Ravi:

a. Bangla

(#e) *Mina kemon byabohar korlo Ram-er shathe?*
this Mina how behaviour do.PST.3 Ram-GEN with
'How did Mina behave with Ram?'

b. Hindi-Urdu

(#yeh) *Mina=ne Ram=ke sa:th kaisa: bartaav kiya:?*
this you=ERG Ram=GEN with how behaviour do.PFV.MSG
'How did Mina behave with Ram?'

Let's start with the plain question in (33), which is not infelicitous. However in the given context, Ravi is not in a position to answer this question and he would probably respond by indicating that he doesn't know. But the egocentric question is infelicitous as Ravi cannot identify the event that the egocentric pronoun is supposed to pick out.

We see that it is insufficient to have only the speaker's access to the question scenario. In order to understand the hearer's function, we must take into account circumstances in

which the hearer—that is, the individual to whom the question is addressed—does not participate in the question situation. This is what we accomplished in (33). In (30) and (31) where the hearer is a part of the question situation, (s)he always has access to the event which the egocentric question is aiming at.

The following table lists the favorable circumstances for asking egocentric questions. These questions are referred to in this study as ‘egocentric’ questions because they are primarily speaker-oriented, meaning they are expressed from the speaker’s point of view; that is, they can only be asked if the speaker possesses some evidence, either direct or indirect, regarding the question scenario. Note though that as we have just seen, the hearer also needs to be able to identify the intended referent of the egocentric pronoun.

| Situations | Status | Sp/Addr |
|-------------------------|--------|-----------------|
| DIRECT EVIDENCE: | ✓ | Both |
| INDIRECT EVIDENCE: | ✓ | Both |
| BELIEF ONLY: | ✗ | Sp but not Addr |
| KNOWLEDGE W/O EVIDENCE: | ✗ | Sp but not Addr |

Table 1: Situations where egocentric questions are acceptable

4.3 Partial versus complete Access: information seeking versus rhetorical

Earlier in §2.1 and §2.2, we reported that this egocentric *e/yeh* is also flexible with rhetorical and *wh*-exclamative instances. We’ve already mentioned the importance of the speaker/hearer access to the question situation which distinguishes canonical questions from egocentric questions. Now understanding the type of access and information available to the speaker/addressee about a question situation helps in identifying what type of egocentric question is being uttered i.e., whether it is an information seeking egocentric question, or an exclamative/reproach scenario.

We get a rhetorical question or an exclamation if the speaker/hearer has complete access and knowledge of the scenario under consideration, as seen in (14/15/17) respectively. It becomes an information-seeking question when the available data is incomplete (16). In (14/15/17), the speaker has both complete access and full information about the question situation, whereas in (16) though the speaker has access to the question situation, the information available to the speaker is insufficient or incomplete.

This way of characterizing the distribution of information seeking versus rhetorical readings in egocentric questions also gives us a way of explaining the slippery intuition that there is something about the form of egocentric questions that lends them to being more easily rhetorical/exclamative. We believe this intuition comes from the fact that because of their form, egocentric questions can never be used in a state of total ignorance about the question event. This is in contrast to plain questions, where ignorance about the question

event (beyond an assumption that there is such an event) could even be seen as a default state of affairs, though partial information and full information is also possible.

5 Unsolved mysteries

5.1 Proximal and distal demonstratives

The egocentric pronoun, *e/yeh* ‘this’, that we have seen so far in this paper, is the proximal demonstrative pronoun. Apart from the proximal demonstrative *e*, there are two other demonstratives in Bangla, which has a tripartite demonstrative system: ⁴ distal (e.g. *o*), and anaphoric (e.g. *se*) (Guha, 2020). We note that the distal and anaphoric demonstrative are not freely compatible with egocentric questions (34) but that there are egocentric questions where the distal demonstrative *o* is ok (35).

- (34) Context: You and I are classmates. I heard that yesterday in class you solved a mathematics puzzle in a very unique way. Today, I asked you the following:

*e/*o/*se tui kal onko-ta kibhabe solve korechili?*
this/*that/*that you yesterday mathematics-CL how solve do.PRF.PST.3

‘What was the way you used solving the mathematics puzzle?’

- (35) *o tui ki korli?*
DIST.DEM you what do.PST.2
‘What was that you did?’

Demonstratives in Bangla combine with classifiers (Dayal, 2012, 2014) but *e* with classifier *-ta* does not freely appear in egocentric questions.

- (36) *e-ta kinbo.*
PROX.DEM-CL buy.FUT.1
‘I/we will buy it.’

- (37) Context: You and I are classmates. I heard that yesterday in class you solved a mathematics puzzle in a very unique way. Today, I asked you the following:

e(-ta) tui kal onko-ta kibhabe solve korechili?*
this-CL you yesterday mathematics-CL how solve do.PRF.PST.3

Intended: ‘What was the way you used solving the mathematics puzzle?’

⁴Hindi-Urdu only has a bipartite system, contrasting the proximal demonstrative *yeh* with the distal *dvo*. Replacing the proximal demonstrative *yeh* with the distal *vo* in an egocentric question leads to strong deviance. Classifiers play a minor role in Hindi-Urdu and do not combine with demonstratives.

- i. *#vo tum kya: kar rahe ho?*
that you what do PROG.MPL be.PRS.2
Intended: ‘What are you doing?’

But this is not a general restriction. *e-ta* is possible in some egocentric questions and in such egocentric questions *o-ta* is also possible.

- (38) *e-ta/o-ta* *tui ki korli?*
 PROX.DEM-CL/DIST.DEM-CL you what do.PST.2
 ‘What was that you did?’

While *e* is possible in all egocentric questions, a subset of egocentric questions also permit *o* and the classifier variants, *e-ta* and *o-ta*. More investigation is needed.

5.2 Negation in egocentric questions

Another unresolved mystery is the behavior of negation in egocentric questions. It seems from the following that sentential negation is bad in egocentric questions.

- (39) a. Bangla
e tumi ki korcho (**na?*)
 this you what do.PROG.PRS.2 NEG
 Intended: ‘What is this that you are not doing?’
 b. Hindi-Urdu
*yeh tum kya: (*nahĩ:) kar rahe ho?*
 this you what NEG do PROG.MPL be.PRS.2
 Intended: ‘What is this that you are not doing?’

But sentential negation is not always impossible in egocentric questions. Consider first the fact that even the above negated questions are degraded even without the egocentric *e/yeh*.

- (40) a. Bangla
#tumi ki korcho na?
 you what do.PROG.PRS.2 NEG
 Intended: ‘What are you not doing?’
 b. Hindi-Urdu
#tum kya: nahĩ: kar rahe ho?
 you what NEG do PROG.MPL be.PRS.2
 Intended: ‘What are you not doing?’

Given the oddness of (40a/40b), the oddness of their egocentric variants, (39a/39b), is unsurprising. Let us therefore consider cases where the plain negated question is good.

- (41) Context: At a party, you praise everyone but one particular boy.
 a. Bangla
tui kon chele-ta-r ektu-o proshongsha korli na?
 you which boy-CL-GEN little-EVEN praise do.PST.2 NEG

‘Which boy did you not praise at all?’

b. Hindi-Urdu

tum=ne kis laṛke=ki bilkul=bhii ta:ri:f nahĩ: ki?
you=ERG which boy=GEN.F at.all=EVEN praise NEG do.PFV.F

‘Which boy did you not praise at all?’

(42) Context: At a party, you notice everyone but one particular boy.

a. Bangla

tui kon chele-ta-ke ektu-o patta dili na?
you which boy-CL-ACC little-EVEN interest give.PST.2 NEG

‘To which boy did you not show any signs of interest?’

b. Hindi-Urdu

tum=ne kis laṛke=ko bilkul=bhii la:in nahĩ: di?
you=ERG which boy=GEN.F at.all=EVEN line NEG give.PFV.F

‘To which boy did you not show any signs of interest?’

We find that the egocentric variants of the above are good but only in a more restricted context.

(43) Context: a situation where you are talking to a boy whom everyone praises and the conversation involves you berating this boy.

a. Bangla

e tui kon chele-ta-r ektu-o proshongsha korli na?
this you which boy-CL-GEN little-EVEN praise do.PST.2 NEG

‘Who was this boy who you did not praise at all i.e. who you berated?’

b. Hindi-Urdu

yeh tum=ne kis laṛke=ki: bilkul=bhi: ta:ri:f nahĩ: ki?
this you=ERG which boy=GEN.F at.all=EVEN praise NEG do.PFV.F

‘Who was this boy who you did not praise at all i.e. who you berated?’

(44) Context: a situation which involves you and a boy whom almost everyone has a crush on but you are totally ignoring.

a. Bangla

e tui kon chele-ta-ke ektu-o patta dili na?
this you which boy-CL-ACC little-EVEN interest give.PST.2 NEG

‘Who was this boy towards whom you did not show any signs of interest?’

b. Hindi-Urdu

yeh tum=ne kis laṛke=ko bilkul=bhi: la:in nahĩ: di:?
this you=ERG which boy=GEN.F at.all=EVEN line NEG give.PFV.F

‘Who was this boy towards whom you did not show any signs of interest?’

In contrast to sentential negation on which there seem to be restrictions in egocentric questions, narrow-scope negation is freely possible. Consider the following data:

- (45) a. Bangla
e tui amake na janiye kothay geli?
 this you me NEG inform.CP where go.PST.2
 ‘Where is it that you went without informing me?’
- b. Hindi-Urdu
yeh tum mujhe bina: bata:ye kahā: cale gaye?
 this you me.DAT without inform.CP where go.PFV.MPL go.PFV.MPL.2
 ‘Where is it that you went without informing me?’

Likewise while there are restrictions on sentential negation, the corresponding ‘negative’ situations which are not formally negated are fully unrestricted.

- (46) Bangla
- a. sentential negation: restricted
e tui kake shomman dekhali na?
 this you whom respect show.PST.2 NEG
 Intended: ‘Who was this person who you did not show respect?’
 ✓Context: uttered in a context where you surprisingly did not show respect to a delegate who everyone respects.
- b. negative predicate: unrestricted
e tui kake oshomman korli?
 this you whom disrespect do.PST.2
 ‘Who was this person who you disrespected?’
 ✓Context: uttered in a context where you surprisingly did not show respect to a delegate who everyone respects.
- (47) Hindi-Urdu
- a. sentential negation: restricted
yeh tum kis=ki: ta:ri:f nahī: kar rahe the?
 this you who=GEN.F praise.f NEG do PROG.MPL be.PST.MPL
 ‘Who was this person who you were not praising at all i.e. who you were berating?’
 ✓Context: uttered in a situation where you are talking to a boy whom everyone praises but the conversation involves you berating this boy.
- b. negative predicate: unrestricted
yeh tum kis=ki: bura:i: kar rahe the?
 this you who=GEN.F praise.f do PROG.MPL be.PST.MPL

‘Who was this person who you were dispraising?’

✓Context: uttered in a situation where you are talking to a boy whom everyone praises but the conversation involves you berating this boy.

We leave the question of why sentential negation has a limited distribution in egocentric questions for future work.

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