

Bangla Biased Questions with ‘Naki’

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The discourse particle ‘naki’ that occurs felicitously only in polar questions and declaratives in Bangla – has a threefold semantics in the language:

- It can encode Inferential Evidentiality in questions:

(1) *Context: You told your friend to leave the house key with the neighbor, NOT the caretaker. However, while returning home, you see your friend call up the caretaker. You ask:*

Cabi-ta protibeshi-r kache rekhe ashish.ni naki?
key.CL neighbor.GEN close keep come.2P.NEG NAKI
‘Haven’t you left the key with the neighbor (I infer)?’

- However, this Inferential evidentiality with ‘naki’ is infelicitous in declaratives:

(2) *Context: Ram has been complaining about his old shoes for a week. Ram’s father says to his mother:*

#Ram notun juto kinte chay naki
Ram new shoe buy.INF want.3P NAKI
‘Ram wants to buy new shoes (I infer)’

- On the other hand, Reportative Evidentiality encoded by naki is felicitous in both questions and declaratives, respectively given below:

(3) *Context: The neighbor heard something from her own son and is confirming it with Ram’s mother:*

Ram naki notun juto kinte chay?
Ram NAKI new shoe buy.INF want.3P
‘Does Ram want to buy new shoes (reportedly)?’

(4) *Context: Ram’s mother tells her neighbor, and the neighbor then tells me:*

Ram naki notun juto kinte chay.
Ram NAKI new shoe buy.INF want.3P
‘Ram wants to buy new shoes (reportedly)’

- Naki questions, as can be inferred from the data above, are always confirmation questions, and are infelicitous in wh questions. For example:

(5) *Tui kar sathe bari jacchish naki?

You who with home go.2P NAKI
‘Who are you going home with, (reportedly)?’

- The two different positions of naki in the clause in (1) and (4) correspond to the two distinct evidential interpretations – the Inferential Naki always occurs clause-finally, while the Reportative Naki always occurs clause-internally. Switching the syntactic positions of the element makes unavailable the interpretations originally associated with that positions.

- In both the questions in (1) and (3), there is a speaker presupposition that he believes one answer to be more likely than the other – and the important observation here is that the polarity of the bias is equal to the polarity of the IP in the question.

Therefore, in (1) the bias of the speaker in asking the naki question is Negative (the proposition is negative too), while in (3), the speaker bias is positive (equal to the polarity of the proposition).

- The bias of the speaker does not affect the truth conditions of the answer to the naki question, it only adds a restriction to the denotation of the question – i.e. the question carries with it the presupposition about the speaker’s grounds in making the utterance, which leads him to have certain expectations when confirming a proposition. An account of ‘naki’ that unifies distinct categories such as evidentiality and bias is needed to account for all these generalizations.

References

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