

A syntactic amalgam in Hindi-Urdu?*

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1 Syntactic amalgams in English

In recent work, Kyle Johnson (Johnson 2014) has explored the syntax of an unusual construction, which looks as if it has been created by overlapping two independent sentences. Such structures were named ‘syntactic amalgams’ in Lakoff (1974). Following work by Kluck (2011) and Guimarães (2004), Johnson focuses on the following kind of amalgam that Lakoff calls ‘Andrews Amalgams’.

(1) John invited [you’ll never guess how many people] to his party.

In these cases, the bracketed constituent, which contains a sluice, seems to function as an argument of the main clause. The intuition is that the meaning of (1) arises from combining the following two sentences.

- (2) a. John invited *some number of people* to his party.
b. You’ll never guess how many.

Executing this intuition has been very difficult because there is of course no *some number of people* in the first clause and even if there was, it would require ‘some miracle’ (to quote Lakoff 1974) to remove it and substitute it by the second clause that contains sluicing. Johnson cracks this hard nut by exploiting the additional geometries made available by his version of Multidominance and its associated linearization system. Setting aside almost all details, his analysis shares *how many* across the two sentences. In what follows, I will present a hitherto unstudied structure in Hindi-Urdu which I believe might be a syntactic amalgam. I am not in a position to offer an analysis but my hope is that the general system laid out by Johnson can extend to these constructions.

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2 The Hindi-Urdu putative amalgam

2.1 Background on Hindi-Urdu

Hindi-Urdu is typically analyzed as a *wh*-in-situ language. The actual picture is more complicated as *wh*-phrases prefer to appear in the immediately pre-verbal position.

- (3) a. *Subject wh-question, default word order: OSV*

Sita-se kis-ne baat kii
Sita-with who-ERG talk.F do.PFV.F

‘Who talked to Sita?’

- b. *Subject wh-question with object focus: SOV*

kis-ne Sita-se baat kii
who-ERG Sita-with talk.F do.PFV.F

‘Who was it that talked to Sita?’

What is clear though is that there is no obligatory fronting of *wh*-phrases to an initial position. Certain *wh*-phrases can certainly be fronted but this fronting seems to be not associated with their *wh*-status. Moreover at least one *wh*-pronoun *kyaa* ‘what’ resists fronting.

Further, Hindi-Urdu does not have expletive elements that would correspond to *there* or *it*.

- (4) a. *Existential construction*

kamre-me cuuhaa hai
room-in mouse.M be.PRS.3SG

‘There is a mouse in that room.’

- b. *Weather reports*

baarish ho rahii hai
rain.F be PROG.F be.PRS.3SG

‘It is raining.’

This is perhaps not too surprising given that it is a *pro*-drop language.

2.2 *yeh* ‘this’ + question

However, given the absence of expletives in the language, the existence of structures like the following is puzzling. Since these structures consist of *yeh* ‘this’ followed by a question, in the subsequent discussion, I will refer to them as ‘*yeh* questions’.

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(5) *yeh* + *question*

- a. *yeh tum kis-se baat kar rahii ho?*
this you.F who-with talk do PROG.F be.2SG
'Who is this that you are talking to?'
- b. *yeh ham kahā: aa gaye hĒ?*
this we where come GO.PFV.M.PL be.PRS.1PL
'Where have we come?'

The initial question is what the *yeh* 'this' is doing in this structure. The sequence that follow *yeh* is a well-formed *wh*-question and it is not clear that anything assigns a θ -role to *yeh*. A further question is how *yeh* questions come to have the meaning that they do. We will show that they have a meaning that is quite distinct from regular *wh*-questions. An initial intuition is that *yeh* questions don't directly ask for the answer to the *wh*-question; instead they ask for the identity of the individual answer provided by the *wh*-question.

2.3 *yeh* as a clausal expletive

In addition to being the proximal demonstrative pronoun and determiner, *yeh* also functions as a clausal expletive.

(6) a. *yeh with declarative CP associate*

Ram-ko (yeh) pataa hai [ki Sita der-se aaegii]
Ram-DAT this known is that Sita delay-with come.FUT.3F.SG

'Ram knows that Sita will come late.'

b. *yeh with a question CP associate*

Ram-ne mujh-se (yeh) puuchaa [ki Sita kis-se pyaar kartii
Ram-ERG me-INST this ask.PFV that Sita.F who-with love do.HAB.F
hai]
be.PRS.SG

'Ram asked me who Sita loves.'

Clausal expletives can also appear in subject position.

- (7) (yeh) sac hai [ki vo mujhe nahī: caah-taa]
this true is that he me.DAT NEG want.HAB.M.SG
'It's true that he doesn't want me.'

It is not, however, clear that the clausal expletives are truly expletive. It seems more plausible to analyze them as involving obligatory extraposition of the CP. One reason for thinking this is that in all the above cases of clausal expletives, the clausal expletive can be replaced by a full DP with a nominal head and with the proximal demonstrative as the determiner.

(8) a. *yeh+NP with declarative CP associate*

Ram-ko (yeh baat) pataa hai [ki Sita der-se aaegii]
 Ram-DAT this thing known is that Sita delay-with come.FUT.3F.SG

‘Ram knows the proposition that Sita will come late.’

b. *yeh+NP with a question CP associate*

Ram-ne mujh-se (yeh savaal) puuchaa [ki Sita kis-se pyaar
 Ram-ERG me-INST this question ask.PFV that Sita.F who-with love
 kartii hai]
 do.HAB.F be.PRS.SG

‘Ram asked me the question of who Sita loves.’

Clausal expletives can also appear in subject position.

(9) (yeh baat) sac hai [ki vo mujhe nahĩ: caah-taa]
 this thing true is that he me.DAT NEG want-HAB.M.SG

‘The proposition is true that he doesn’t want me.’

But independently of how one analyzes these cases, the putative expletive seems to get a θ -role from the main clause; it’s the CP one has to worry about. The situation with our *yeh* + question construction is very different. As noted at the outset, there is no source for the *yeh* to get a θ -role.

3 Syntactic properties of *yeh* questions

3.1 *yeh* is a fixed element

The proximal demonstrative, which appears at the beginning of a *yeh* question, keeps the same form *yeh* — independent of the *wh*-phrase involved in the *wh*-question that follows or the case-marking on the *wh*-phrase. This makes it unlikely the demonstrative forms a unit with the *wh*-phrase. Let us consider two cases to bring out this point. First we consider a case where the *wh*-phrase — the proximal locative demonstrative is *yahā:* but it cannot substitute *yeh*.

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(10) *The locative proximal demonstrative is yahā:*

yeh/*yahā: ham **kahā:** aa gaye hĒ?
this/here we where come GO.PFV.M.PL be.PRS.1.PL

‘Where have we come?’

Next we consider a case where the *wh*-phrase has a postposition. Phrases that combine with a postposition appear in a form called the oblique. In the following example, the *wh*-phrase is in the oblique form *kis* because it combines with the postposition *-se*; in the absence of a postposition, this *wh*-phrase would surface as *kaun*. Similarly the proximal demonstrative also has an oblique form *is*. But *is* cannot substitute for *yeh*.

(11) yeh/*is tum **kis-se** baat kar rahii ho?
this you.F who-with talk do PROG.F be.2.SG

‘Who are you talking to?/Who is this that you are talking to?’

A further demonstration of the fact that the *yeh* in *yeh* questions is a fixed element comes from the fact that it cannot be replaced by an NP where the demonstrative functions as a determiner. This seems to be possible with most instances of clausal expletives as can be seen in (8). However the addition of any kind of nominal material to *yeh* in a *yeh*-question leads to ungrammaticality.

(12) yeh + NP: *

yeh (*jagah) ham **kahā:** aa gaye hĒ?
this place we where come GO.PFV.M.PL be.PRS.1PL

‘Where have we come?’

3.2 Location of *yeh*

In all the examples we have seen so far, *yeh* appears clause-initially and this does seem to be the most neutral location for it. But material can precede *yeh*.

(13) a. yeh *S Adverb wh-IO DO V*

yeh Ram-ne aaj kis-ko [vo kitaab] de dii
this Ram.ERG today who.DAT that book.F give GIVE.PFV.F

‘Who is this who Ram has given that book to today?’

b. *S yeh Adverb wh-IO DO V*

Ram-ne yeh aaj kis-ko [vo kitaab] de dii
 Ram.ERG this today who.DAT that book.F give GIVE.PFV.F

‘Who is this who Ram has given that book to today?’

c. *S Adverb yeh wh-IO DO V*

(?)Ram-ne aaj yeh kis-ko [vo kitaab] de dii
 Ram.ERG today this who.DAT that book.F give GIVE.PFV.F

‘Who is this who Ram has given that book to today?’

However, the *yeh* cannot follow the *wh*-phrase.

(14) *S Adverb wh-IO yeh DO V: **

*Ram-ne aaj kis-ko yeh [vo kitaab] de dii
 Ram.ERG today who.DAT this that book.F give GIVE.PFV.F

Intended: ‘Who is this who Ram has given that book to today?’

If the *yeh* follows the *wh*-phrase, the sentence reads like word salad – one gets the feeling that there is one DP too many. This is in a sense what one would expect for all *yeh* questions but evidently they have a distinct parse available which does not run into the ‘too many DPs’ problem.

3.3 Restrictions on the question

This has been implicit in the preceding discussion but the clausal constituent that follows *yeh* must be a question. If what follows is a declarative or an imperative, the resulting structure is ungrammatical.¹

(15) a. *yeh + declarative: **

*yeh Ram kal aayaa thaa
 this Ram yesterday come.PFV be.PST.M.SG

b. *yeh + imperative: **

*yeh Ram-ko bulaa
 this Ram.DAT call

Intended: ‘Call Ram!’

¹ I am marking these sentences as * but I have the intuition that while these sentences are definitely bad, they feel less bad to me than the corresponding English sentence ‘*It Ram had come yesterday’ or ‘*It call Ram!’

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But not just any question suffices. *yeh* seems to require the question that follows it to be a *wh*-question. Y/N questions are impossible.

- (16) **yeh* (kyaa) Ram kal aayaa thaa?
this Q_{YN} Ram yesterday come.PFV.M.SG be.PST.M.SG

Intended: ‘Had Ram come yesterday?’

Multiple *wh*-questions are degraded with *yeh*. They are not quite impossible but to the extent they are possible they do not allow for a pair-list reading; only a single pair reading seems to be available.

- (17) a. *Multiple wh-question: pair list possible*

Sita kis-ko kyaa de rahii hai?
Sita.F who-DAT what give PROG.F be.PRS.SG

‘Who is Sita giving what?’

- b. *yeh + multiple wh-question: degraded, pair list impossible*

??*/**yeh* Sita kis-ko kyaa de rahii hai?
this Sita.F who-DAT what give PROG.F be.PRS.SG

‘Who is Sita giving what?’

Finally *yeh* is also degraded with negative questions.

- (18) *Context: there is one student who Sita is ignoring. We want to find out who this student is.*

- a. *Negative question*

Sita kis chaatra-se baat nahĩ: kar rahii hai?
Sita which student-with talk NEG do PROG.F be.PRS.3SG

‘Which student is Sita not talking to?’

- b. *yeh + negative question: degraded/**

??*/**yeh* Sita kis chaatra-se baat nahĩ: kar rahii hai?
this Sita which student-with talk NEG do PROG.F be.PRS.3SG

Intended: ‘Who is this student who Sita is not talking to?’

4 Semantic properties of *yeh* questions

We have already seen *yeh* questions where the *wh*-phrase is a *who/what*. We have also seen *yeh* questions with *where*. *yeh* questions are also possible with *how*, *how many*, *when*, and *why*.

(19) a. *kitne* ‘how many’:

yeh tum-ne **kitne** sweater khariid liye?
 this you-ERG how.many sweater.M.PL buy TAKE.PFV.M.PL

‘What is this, the number of sweaters that you have brought?’
 (suggests that you have brought many sweaters)

b. *kaise* ‘how’

yeh tum Mina-se **kaise** baat kar rahe ho?
 this you Mina-with how talk do PROG.M.PL be.2PL

‘What is this, the way you are talking to Sita?’
 (suggests that the way you are talking to Sita is odd/rude)

c. *kab* ‘when’

yeh tum **kab-se** yahā: baiṭhe ho?
 this you when-since here sit.PFV.M.PL be.2SG

‘What is this, the time since you have been sitting here?’
 (suggests you’ve been sitting here for a while)

d. *kyō*

yeh Ram yahā: **kyō** aayaa hai?
 this Ram here why come.PFV.M.SG be.PRS.3SG

‘Why has Ram come here?’
 (suggests that Ram has come here for a not entirely satisfactory reason.)

The translations for these *yeh* questions indicate that *yeh* questions do something other than just ask the associated *wh*-question. In this section, we will try to make precise the semantic restrictions that are part of *yeh* questions.

4.1 Existential entailment

Ordinary *wh*-questions are sometimes taken to have an existential presupposition. If a speaker asks the question *What did John eat?*, the speaker is taken to presuppose that John did eat something. However this presupposition can be cancelled as this question can be answered by the proposition that he ate nothing. This seems to also be the case in Hindi-Urdu. However *yeh* questions do not entertain negative answers of this kind.

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- (20) a. Ram-ne kyaa khaayaa?
Ram-ERG what eat.PFV.M.SG
'What did Ram eat?'
Possible answer: 'He ate nothing.'
- b. ?yeh Ram-ne kyaa khaayaa?
this Ram.ERG what eat.PFV.M.SG
'What is this that Ram ate?'
Not a Possible answer: 'He ate nothing.'

The reader will note that (20b) is marked with a question mark. One way to make it perfect is to use the 'compound verb' construction, which in questions comes with an existential entailment – a negative answer is not acceptable. This is the case even without *yeh*.

- (21) a. Ram-ne kyaa khaa liyaa?
Ram-ERG what eat take.PFV.M.SG
'What did Ram eat?'
Not a Possible answer: 'He ate nothing.'
- b. yeh Ram-ne kyaa khaa liyaa?
this Ram-ERG what eat take.PFV.M.SG
'What is this that Ram ate?'
Not a Possible answer: 'He ate nothing.'

Yeh questions bring in an existential entailment and the contrast between (20bb) and (21b) suggests that all else being the same, a *wh*-question that comes with a built-in existential entailment is preferred. Elsewhere where there is no choice between a question with a built-in existential entailment and a closely related question without such an entailment, we don't find such a contrast.

- (22) a. darwaazaa kaun khatkhaṭaa rahaa hai?
door who knock PROG.M.SG be.PRS.SG
'Who is knocking on the door?'
Speaker thinks someone is knocking on the door, but...
Possible Response: It's no one. It's just the wind.
- b. yeh darwaazaa kaun khatkhaṭaa rahaa hai?
this door who knock PROG.M.SG be.PRS.SG
'Who is this that is knocking on the door?'
Speaker has evidence that someone is knocking on the door. 'It's no one; it's just the wind' is not a possible response.
(there is an irrelevant parse here where *yeh* modifies *darwaazaa*.)

4.2 Direct involvement

yeh questions require the person asking the question to be involved in the situation that the question is about.² While it is not straightforward to characterize what it means for the speaker to be involved, there are some clear contrasts. Suppose you fall asleep on a train that you take regularly. You wake up to find the train stopped in an area where it doesn't usually stop and that you do not recognize. In such a context, you can utter the following *yeh* question:

- (23) *yeh hamaarii train kahā: pahūc gayii hai?*
 this our.F train.F where arrive GO.PFV.F be.PRS.SG
 'What is this place where our train has reached?'

Now I might know that you are on a train and so I might call your secretary and ask the following question. Let's assume your name is Kostas.

- (24) (**yeh*) *Kostas-kii train kahā: pahūc gayii hai?*
 this Kostas-GEN.F train.F where arrive GO.PFV.F be.PRS.SG
 'Where has Kostas' train reached?'

Here we find that *yeh* is not felicitous.

However, the involvement does not have to be direct. Suppose you've been reading the newspaper about various odd events that have been happening. You can ask the following *yeh* question even though you have not been directly involved in the various odd events.

- (25) *yeh kyaa ho rahaa hai?*
 this what be PROG.M.SG be.PRS.3SG
 'What is this that is happening?'

4.3 Disapproval, incomprehension, and surprise

An important aspect of *yeh* questions is that they are often used to indicate incomprehension and surprise. Consider (23). Here the speaker is not just asking where the train has reached. The speaker is conveying that this place is an unexpected and surprising place for the train to have reached. This question is, however, not a rhetorical question – the speaker does not in fact know the identity of the place where the train has reached and is asking for that.

² An intuition I have is that *yeh* questions very often involve 1st and 2nd person arguments and involve the present progressive and the present perfect. If this intuition is borne out by looking at a corpus, it would fit the involvement idea explored here.

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In other cases, *yeh* questions can be used to express disapproval. Suppose I see you talking to someone who I can identify but who I think is a lowlife that I think you shouldn't be associating with. Then the following *yeh* question feels apt.

- (26) *yeh tum kis-se baat kar rahii ho?*
this you who-with talk.F PROG.F be.PRS.2PL
'Who is this that you are talking to?'
('what kind of person are you talking to?')

5 Towards An analysis

I started this short collection of facts with an appeal to Andrews Amalgams, an example of which is repeated below.

- (27) John invited [you'll never guess how many people] to his party.

Johnson's treatment for these is, very loosely, to share *how many people* across the two sentences *John invited [...]* and *You'll never guess [...]*. Is it possible to construct a similar account for these *yeh* questions? My initial intuition was that the *yeh* questions could be seen as two questions: the *wh*-question and an identity question with the *yeh* pointing to the individual evoked by the answer and the *wh*-word in the question doing double duty. This would look something like then following:

- (28) this [*question*.....?x.....]
a. *this* refers to individual evoked by [*question*.....?x.....]
b. *this* = ?y

This is very far from the elegant treatment Johnson has for the Andrews Amalgams. I see many problems that would keep such an account from even getting off the ground; for example (28b) requires a copula but *yeh* questions don't always have copulas.

Instead I will suggest a solution based on an idea from the work of Angelika Kratzer. Let's explore the idea that *yeh*, which is the proximal demonstrative, picks out a situation that is salient to the speaker. The question that follows is now restricted to this situation. The situation being so restricted blocks ordinary interpretations of the question. Let's take a specific case.

- (29) *yeh hamaarii train kahā: aa gayii hai?*
this our.F train.F where come GO.PFV.F be.PRS.SG
'What is this place where our train has come?'

Here the *yeh* limits the question to be a question about this situation proximal to the speaker. In such a situation, the speaker cannot be asking about the location

per se because the location is already provided by the situation restriction. Instead the question becomes a question about the identity of this location and perhaps a comment on why the identity of the location cannot be identified. This is of course only the barest of an outline. I will conclude though with the claim that what *yeh* does is restrict the situation in which the subsequent question must be answered. This allows us to derive one syntactic fact about *yeh* questions, namely that the *yeh* must precede the *wh*-phrase. The explanation for this is straightforward: it is the presence of the *wh*-phrase that makes the clause where it appears into a question. If the *wh*-phrase precedes the *yeh*, then the constituent that follows *yeh* is in the relevant sense not a question. So whatever blocks *yeh* from appearing with ordinary declaratives also blocks *yeh* from following the *wh*-phrase in a question.

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