

Polar Question Particles in Eastern Iranian (with Special Reference to Shughni)

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Introduction. According to (Dryer 2013), particles are the primary device cross-linguistically for marking polar questions. In this talk, we present a microtypological overview of polar question particles (henceforth PQPs) in Eastern Iranian (EI) languages. We then introduce an analysis of intonational patterns of the Shughni polar questions using the Autosegmental-Metrical framework (Pierrehumbert 1980 *i.a.*).

Eastern Iranian PQPs: an overview. EI languages display various degrees of polar question grammaticalization, but, to our knowledge, no EI variety has obligatory PQPs. Whilst some languages, such as Shughni, possess special question particles, others use discourse particles, which function as negation or disjunction markers, but the question itself is signalled intonationally. In **Ossetic**, the negation marker *næ* is sometimes employed to form a question. Its usage appears to be restricted to polar questions launched from a K+ (‘knowledge plus’; Bolden et al. 2023:2) position, meaning the speaker seeks confirmation from the listener for a known proposition. Notably, *næ* in its most common function is proclitic on the verb, while here it acts as an enclitic. The prosodic behavior of Ossetic *=næ* will be discussed in more detail during the talk.

- (1) *wəd-iš* *kæd-dær* *iron-aw* *=dær matematikæ* *=næ?*
be-PST.3SG when-INDEF Ossetic-EQU =ADD mathematics =NEG
‘Once mathematics was in Ossetic too, no?’ (OC: *Dzuarikaw School*, 19)

For **Yaghnobi**, the closest relative of Ossetic, Khromov (1972: 70) cites the existence of specialized question particles. Judging from example translations given in (ibid.) and following Edelman (1990: 245–247), we assess them as emphatic particles. More interesting for the typology of PQPs in EI languages, Yaghnobi utilizes the *yo na* ‘or not’ construction for the formation of polar questions.

Wakhi (Grjunberg 1976: 651–655) and **Shughni** (Parker 2023: 458) appear to have this construction a step further, reducing *-a nāy* ‘or not’ to *-a/-o* in Wakhi and *=o nāy* ‘ibid.’ to *=o/=ū* in Shughni.

For Shughni, an advanced degree of grammaticalization for *=o* is evident from the fact that it can appear with the construction *=o nāy* ‘or not’ itself:

- (2) *tamā* *garḍā* *carāṅg*¹ *bamazā=yo* *o* *nāy*?²
2PL bread how tasty=Q or not
‘Is your bread tasty or not?’

We now turn our attention to the description of the Shughni polar question particle *=o*.

=O as a question particle in Shughni. The PQP in Shughni is optional, questions are chiefly formed by interrogative intonation.³ If the proposition as a whole forms the basis for the domain of alternatives, *=o* can also be used (3). It is also a strict enclitic.

¹ *Carāṅg* ‘how’ here is used as a discourse marker and as not an actual *wh*-word.

² As an anonymous reviewer rightfully pointed out, questions of this type are also known as **alternative questions**. However, after (Matthewson 2023) we take alternative questions to be a subtype of polar questions (more precisely, these are bipolar polar questions).

³ Examples without an indicated source were collected during fieldwork.

- (3) *tu garðā bamazā=yo?*⁴
 2SG bread tasty=Q
 ‘Is your bread tasty?’

Field data analysis shows that the intonation of Shughni polar questions is characterized by a low boundary tone (L%). The nuclear pitch accent in polar questions is bitonal with an early rise (L+H*) and is aligned with the first XP in the clause. The host for the question particle =*o* receives the final pitch accent, and the most prominent word in an Intonational Phrase receives the nuclear pitch accent, see Figure 1 for the analysis of (3). Particle =*o* itself remains unstressed and serves as the point at which the pitch begins to fall to the final low boundary tone. The difference between simple polar and exhaustive polar questions lies in final intonation. It is the most prominent acoustic cue in the interpretation of an interrogative utterance as either an exhaustive polar question or a simple polar question, as shown by Pruitt (2007). In contrast to the simple polar questions, the exhaustive polar questions formed using the *o nay* ‘or not’ construction are signalled by a rising final intonation (H-H%), see Figure 2 for the analysis of (2). Even though both constructions use rising intonation to form a question, simple polar questions are marked with a high pitch accent (L+H*), while exhaustive polar questions are identified by a high boundary tone (H%). Evidently, such prosodic characteristics are specific for this particular question type, since polar and *wh*-questions are realized with a low boundary tone akin to declaratives.

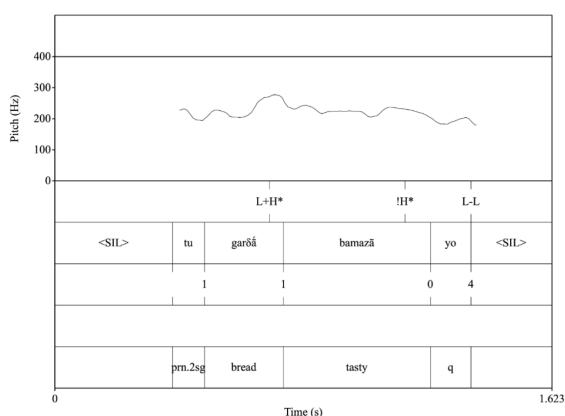


Figure 1: Pitch contour of the utterance ‘*Tu garðā bamazā=yo?*’ (‘Is your bread tasty?’); polar question.

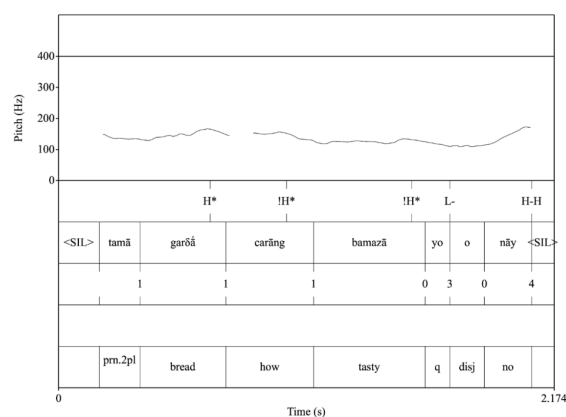


Figure 2: Pitch contour of the utterance ‘*Tamā garðā carāng bamazā=yo o nāy?*’ (‘Is your bread tasty or not?’); exhaustive polar question.

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⁴ =*yo* is the allomorph of =*o* appearing chiefly after vowel-final hosts.