

Negative meaning without negation: case of *bara* in Marathi

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1 Introduction. Sentences with the discourse particle *bara* in medial position in Marathi (*bara p*, for short) can be paraphrased as ‘*how come p?*’, (1), what I term “adversative” reading, or ‘*as if p will happen*’, (2), the “negative” reading. In this paper I propose a unified account of *bara* and argue that *bara* conveys that the prejacent, *p*, is highly unexpected: when assuming that *p* is true, the overall interpretation, a pattern that more likely occurs after *p* is taken to be already the case in response to utterances with a perfective prejacent, we obtain the adversative reading; when *p* is not yet settled in the context, usually in response to utterances with future marking, we obtain the negative reading, (2).

CONTEXT 1 (Sp expects $\neg p$, infers *p*): Ram has been planning to surprise Anu with a trip to Goa (a beach town). I know that she hates beaches. When I meet Ram, he says to me:

Ram: Anu loved the shacks

(Implicature: *Anu went to goa*)

(1) anu bar-i govia-la ge-l-i
 anu.F BARA-F goa-DAT go-PERF-F
 ‘Anu went to Goa?!’ (what’s up with that?)

Ram: I am excited to see Anu’s reaction!

(Presupposition: *Anu will go to goa*)

(2) anu bar-i govia-la jaa-naar ahe
 anu.F BARA-F goa-DAT go-PROSP be
 ‘as if Anu will go to Goa’

In both cases there is a negative affect. *bara* allows us to see the differences between the uptake assumed to be settled facts, and predictions about the future. *bara* is also interesting in that the prejacent cannot be at issue (NAI) but is rather an inference, presupposition or conventional implicature triggered by the preceding utterance.

2 Empirical profile of *bara*. There are two important components to licensing *bara* sentences: (i) Misalignment between the prejacent and speaker’s expectation; (ii) The prejacent is the NAI meaning derived from immediately preceding context update proposal.

(i) EPISTEMIC CONFLICT: In contexts where the speaker cannot be assumed to have prior expectations regarding the prejacent, *bara* assertions are not licensed. Compare (1) with (3) for past. The same point is made for future comparing (2) and (4).

CONTEXT 2 (Sp lacks expectation that $\neg p$, infers *p*): Ram has been planning to surprise Anu with a trip to Goa. Anu had mentioned she likes beaches. When I meet Ram, he says to me:

Ram: Anu loved the shacks

(Implicature: *Anu went to goa*)

(3) #anu bar-i govia-la ge-l-i
 anu.F BARA-F goa-DAT go-PERF-F
 ‘Anu went to Goa?!’ (what’s up with that?)

Ram: I am excited to see Anu’s reaction!

(Presupposition: *Anu will go to goa*)

(4) #anu bar-i govia-la jaa-naar ahe
 anu.F BARA-F goa-DAT go-PROSP be
 ‘as if Anu will go to Goa’

(ii) NOT-AT-ISSUENESS: An interesting and puzzling fact about *bara* is that it is only licensed when the epistemic conflict is about what is inferred from preceding update but not about the at-issue update itself. For space reasons, I show this below only with negative *bara* but the same facts hold for adversative *bara* as well. Compare the infelicity of (5a) with cases of standard negation which can target the at-issue update, (5b). Here, a *bara* utterance with the prejacent ‘Anu will have a partner’ would be felicitous in (5a).

CONTEXT 3 (Sp expects $\neg p$, Ad asserts *p*): what are Anu’s plans after her graduation? I know she is focused on her studies. Ram says:

Ram: anu lagn kar-el pudhchya varshi (‘Anu will get married next year’)

(5) a. #anu bar-i lagn kar-el
 anu.F BARA-F marriage do-FUT
 pudh-chya varsh-i
 next-GEN year-PP
 ‘as if Anu will get married next year’

b. anu lagn nahi kar-naar
 anu.F marriage NEG do-PROSP
 pudh-chya varsh-i
 next-GEN year-PP
 ‘Anu will not get married next year’

Unlike canonical assertions, *bara* assertions cannot be used to resolve a raised question. Standard negation on the other hand would be licensed instead of *bara* in (6a) to negatively answer the current question.

CONTEXT 4 (Sp expects $\neg p$, Ad assumes p): My mother hears that my friend Ram is coming over in the evening. I know Ram prefers eating food made at his home. she asks me:

Mom: ram pohe khaa-il kii upma khaa-il? ('will ram eat poha or he will eat upma?')

(presupposition: *ram will eat something*)

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| (6) | a. | #ram bar-a pohe kha-naar ahe
ram.M BARA-M poha-PL eat-PROSP be
'as if Ram will eat poha' | b. | ram bar-a kahi kha-naar ahe
ram.M BARA-M SOME eat-PROSP be
'as if Ram will eat anything' |
|-----|----|--|----|--|

These two contrasts tell us that *bara* assertions do not address the 'main point' of the utterance.

3 Proposal. Utterances are proposals to update the context. There is a primary at-issue meaning but when a proposal is accepted, the NAI meanings triggered are accepted as well. *bara* responses signal that the speaker has an epistemic conflict about the inferred content thus, resisting the preceding update to the context and shifting the issue. At its core, *bara* responses signal that the prejacent is highly unexpected. But how do the seemingly distinct effects arise? Namely, adversative *bara* is associated with a *questioning* flavour while negative *bara* appears to be performing rejection. Consider (1), In this context Ram's utterance is a report on a past state of affairs as settled facts. Which means that the (implicit) commitment expressed in Ram's context update proposal is assumed to be true by the speaker of (1). In light of this, the speaker of (1) identifies Ram as a reliable source for the (implicit) commitment that Anu went to Goa. At this stage, Ram is recognized as the implicit authority as the speaker knows that in a disagreement, Ram will prevail. Given that the speaker has an epistemic conflict with the inference that Anu went to Goa, their commitment to this proposition is contingent upon Ram's ratification of the same. The *questioning* flavor associated with adversative *bara* is expression of this dependency on addressee's ratification of the prejacent in light of speaker's epistemic conflict. On the other hand, predictions about the future are contestable. In case of (2), Ram's implicit commitment that anu will come to goa is therefore open to challenge. Given that the speaker knows that Anu hates beaches, Ram is identified as not being a reliable source for his commitment. From the speaker's perspective, Ram's prediction is highly unlikely to be true. In uttering (2), the speaker expresses this fact which amounts to a rejection. Thus, we can have a ranked ordering between Addressee report, Speaker expectations and Addressee prediction.

Ad's report \gg Sp's expectation/prediction \gg Ad's prediction

bara makes a cut between reports and predictions wherein, reports are accepted (with demand for further ratification) while predictions are challenged. We can reduce this to a more primitive notion of evidence. Addressee claims about the past come with reliable evidence thus speaker's expectation will always rank below contextual evidence. For future, *bara* signals that the addressee lacks the evidence to assume p .

4 Future direction. Given the discussion above I formalize the meaning of *bara* within a dynamic model of context update taking into account participants' considerations on the reliability of the source and its interaction with their expectations. The effect of counter-expectations seen with adversative *bara* has been well-studied in context of biased questions (Romero & Han 2004) which also requires there to be an epistemic conflict. Exclamatives also have a profile involving reactions to counter-expectations. There is also a body of work on incredulous rejections/denials across languages (See Frana & Rawlins 2019 for instance). Moreover, previous literature involves phenomena that can target at-issue content. In medial *bara*, we see these effects converging along with the fact that it only targets NAI-content. While here I have not discriminated between NAI-meanings, it is left for future research whether *bara* makes any further distinctions. The semantic contribution of *bara* in clause-final positions has been described in Deo (2024). Here I have focused only on the medial occurrences of *bara* arguing in favor of a unified lexical entry that captures its *functional heterogeny* leaving a potential unified analysis of both medial and final *bara* open for future research.

Selected References. • Deo, Ashwini (2024): Take my advice: the particle *bara* in Marathi (Indo-Aryan). talk at SuB 29. • Frana, Ilaria & Kyle Rawlins (2019): Attitudes in discourse: Italian polar questions and the particle *mica*. • Romero, Maribel & Chung-Hye Han (2004): On Negative Yes/No Questions.