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A Comparative Study of Chinese and Bengali Interrogative Sentences

Aga Mostafizur Rahman Chowdhury* M M Afiquur Rahman Nahid**

Article Info	Abstract
<i>Article History</i> Date of Submission 17-02-2026 Date of Acceptance 06-05-2026 Date of Publication 15-06-2026 <i>Keywords</i> Compare, Chinese, Bengali, Interrogative Sentences	This paper conducts a comparative analysis of the interrogative sentence structure in the Chinese language and the Bengali language which are the Sino-Tibetan and the Indo-European language families respectively. The paper focuses on syntactic, morphological, and pragmatic properties of the three major types of interrogatives, namely yes-no questions, WH-questions, and alternative questions. It is found that Chinese interrogatives are predominantly constructed using sentence final particles (e.g., <i>ma</i>), A-not-A structures, and in-situ WH-words. Bengali, by contrast, often puts the elements of interrogation in the sentence-initial position and is a morphologically rich, inflexible system. Genetically, the two languages are unrelated, but both languages use systematic and rule-based methods of forming questions. Significant variation is observed in the distribution of WH-elements, the distribution of sentence-final particles in the Chinese language, and the extent of verbal inflexion in the Bengali language. There are also pragmatic differences that can be

* Aga Mostafizur Rahman Chowdhury, Lecturer, Chinese Language and Culture, Institute of Modern Languages, University of Dhaka; Corresponding Author, email: chowdhurymostafiz@du.ac.bd

** M M Afiquur Rahman Nahid, Lecturer, Chinese Language and Culture, Institute of Modern Languages, University of Dhaka.

observed, especially in politeness strategies and social relations encoding. The paper has shown that, irrespective of the structural divergence, both of the languages overlap in the communicative purpose of seeking information functionally. The results offer some useful theoretical insights and pedagogical recommendations to contrastive linguistics and second language learning.

Introduction

An interrogative sentence is a sentence that asks a question (Youn & Meng, 2015). This form of sentence is regarded as one of the most frequent and important sentence types, thereby necessitating a detailed study of its structure. The emphasis on interrogatives stems from their pervasive use and their significant role in the construction of meaning within any language. A systematic comparison of interrogatives across languages reveals both the complexities and uniformities in their grammatical organization. The Bengali language belongs to the Indo-European language family (Chatterji, 1926). So, Chinese and Bengali represent two distant geographical and linguistic areas—Sino-Tibetan and Indo-European, respectively. However, the total grammar of interrogatives of both languages is still not extensively studied and compared (Chen, 2015). The volume of available grammatical data on Chinese interrogatives is conspicuously higher than that of the Bengali language in all relevant sources. The contrastive study of interrogative sentences in Chinese and Bengali is of particular interest, since both languages widely lack morphological marking on interrogatives. Interrogatives, rather, are commonly marked by specific interrogative syntactic structures/expressions and/or interrogative words. Among the several types of interrogative sentences, cross-linguistically, yes–no interrogatives, *wh*–interrogatives, and alternative interrogatives are the most frequently attested instances, which are the focus of the present study. A preliminary comparison of the entire grammar of interrogatives of these two unrelated languages can significantly contribute to an understanding of the universal principles and possible organization of human language.

Literature Review and Identification of Research Problem

Numerous studies have explored the syntactic constraints of WH-questions in Mandarin Chinese, but relatively fewer on comparatives interrogative sentences. Studies classify Mandarin interrogatives into four or five main categories, such as particle questions with *ma*, A-not-A questions, interrogative pronoun questions and alternative questions (Elliott, 1965; Li, 2008; Nwamaka, 2016). Symonds (2007) points out that locative and motion prepositions must come before the main verb in declarative sentences, such as in 我今天在校园里吃午餐 (I today on campus eat lunch). When these declarative sentences are converted to WH-questions, the WH word usually stays in place (e.g. While both English and Chinese have a Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) word order, Chinese is less rigid and more context dependent than English. This can pose a challenge for English speakers who are learning Chinese WH-questions because English requires Subject-Auxiliary Inversion, Do-support and WH-movement, none of which are found in Chinese (Youn & Meng, 2015). Consequently, the cross-linguistic difference in syntax of WH-questions should be highlighted and teaching strategies that align with the natural syntax of Chinese should be employed (Jiang et al., 2019). For instance, Subject-Auxiliary Inversion can be introduced initially, then comparisons made between various WH-words (e.g., who, whose, etc.) to illustrate the WH-fronting transformation that occurs in English but not Chinese. WH-sentence formation can then be taught using a communicative approach that offers natural language input and practice.

Little work exists on interrogative sentences in Chinese and Bengali, despite extensive study of interrogative sentences in English and some research on interrogative words in Chinese and Bengali (Kao et al., 2010; Chen, 2015). Bengali is a typologically different language, having a basic SOV (Subject-Object-Verb) word order while Mandarin and English use SVO (Hossain, 2018; Nwamaka, 2016). Because of different typological features of these two languages, investigating this neglected area is valuable. Unlike English, Bengali does not have the auxiliary verbs, so learners may use the particle *ki*

to mark polar questions from statements (Karim, 2006). This particle *ki* is complex and functions both as a polar question marker and an interrogative disjunction morpheme that denotes alternatives in the answer space (Guha, 2022). A theoretical framework builds on interrogative-related knowledge in Chinese and the author's insights into Bengali interrogatives.

Research Objectives and Research Questions

The main purpose of the study is to conduct a systematic study of the structure of the interrogative sentences in Chinese and Bengali. To be more specific, the paper discusses the structural composition of the interrogative sentences in both languages, recognizes and discusses the parallels and differences between Chinese and Bengali as regards to the interrogative constructions and contribute to the field of comparative linguistics by offering some valuable insights. Since there is not much comparative theoretical analysis of Interrogative-question formation in the two languages, thus the study addresses this gap by posing the following research questions:

- (1) What are the distinctive characteristics of the formation of interrogative sentences in Chinese and Bengali?
- (2) What major similarities and differences exist in the formation of interrogative sentences between Chinese and Bengali?

Methodology

In this study, the methodology is aimed to make systematic-rules-based comparison of two language families, which are genetically different Sino-Tibetan (Chinese) and Indo-European (Bengali). The study uses a methodology called “Transformational Grammar” which has been used in the analysis of interrogatives in Chinese and English, and has been effective in analyzing interrogatives in these languages. In this way, the researchers can study the apparent surface structures of questions and the deep structures which underlie them and are used to create questions. To have a solid analysis, the study also compiled Sentences from academic journals (from the China National Knowledge Infrastructure, CNKI), and printed publications and books

were also used to supplement these in both Chinese and Bengali to form a comprehensive corpus for analysis. The syntactic, morphological and pragmatic characteristics of three main interrogative categories: yes/no questions, WH-questions and alternative questions. The analysis follows the same line as the previous one, by comparing structural formulas, word order (SVO for Chinese vs. SOV for Bengali) and particles.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts a theoretical approach that incorporates several linguistic models to explain the similarities and differences in information search strategies of the two languages. It adopts the Head-driven Phrase Structure Grammar Model to do research on the syntactic mechanism of the Chinese interrogatives, focusing on the formation of wh-question and the scope-taking of interrogative expressions, which can be regarded as variable operators bound by higher functional projections. Theoretically, interrogative sentences are root interrogatives, that is, sentences that are formed by using interrogative operators in the root position of a sentence. A key part of this is the typological difference between the languages, which makes Chinese and Bengali in-situ languages but English a WH-fronting language. The framework also defines direct and indirect interrogatives, and sub-categorizes the direct interrogatives into general, alternative, and special (WH) interrogatives depending on the type of information they ask for. Furthermore, the morphology of Chinese is very simple, while Bengali has very rich morphology and stems are extensively suffixated to mark tense, person, mood, and case. Finally, the study uses a three-level model of structuring politeness strategies at the lexical, syntactic and discourse level to analyse pragmatic differences and the encoding of social relations.

Interrogative Sentence Structures

According to the norms and rules and the transformation principle of sentences, this part discusses the structures of both types of interrogative sentences of Chinese and Bengali. Yes-no questions are

known as alternative questions or choice questions (Jiang et al., 2019). If a response is recoverable from one alternative by negating the other, the question functions perfectly as an interrogative sentence requiring an answer from an alternative (Youn & Meng, 2015).

Structures of Chinese yes-no questions: According to, yes-no questions in Chinese are normally formed with the experimental particle *ma* (吗). For instance: *Nǐ shì xuéshēng ma?* (你是学生吗? ‘Are you a student?’). The other frequent pattern is the A-not-A pattern, where the predicate is repeated in affirmative and negative forms, as in *Nǐ shì bú shì xuéshēng?* (你是不是学生? ‘Are you or aren’t you a student?’). One of the most commonly used interrogative patterns in Mandarin Chinese is the reduplicative or contrastive pattern that is achieved by the use of the A-not-A construction. In this pattern, the word used could be verbs or adjectives which are repeated in positive and negative form, e.g. *hao bao?* (good or not good?) and *qù bù qù?* (去不去? ‘go or not go?’). This form produces a dual option and is a strong indicator of interrogation. It is worth mentioning that the A-not-A construction is a morpho-syntactic interrogative type of construction, not a tag question. Also the Chinese yes no questions may be constructed without using the particle *ma* (吗). In these instances interrogativity can be expressed by inclusion of interrogative words such as *shenme* (什么 ‘what’) or *zenmeyang* (怎么样 how/what about) that may be incorporated in a sentence depending on the context of the sentence.

Structure of Bengali yes-no questions: Yes-no questions are formed with the postposition */-ki /* (কি) or according to the context of the sentences. These questions can be in the marked or unmarked form. The unmarked form only uses intonation to mark a interrogative, as in: *তুমি কি স্কুলে যাবে?* (‘Will you go to school?’). The marked form, however, expressly involves the interrogative particle *ki* (কি) i.e. the particle usually appears after the subject, or before the predicate, such as: *তুমি কি স্কুলে যাবে?* (Are you going to school?). Also, the Bengali language may convey alternative-type interrogatives with the help of such structures as *ভালো কি মন্দ?* (‘good or bad?’) and *যাবে কি যাবে না?* The opposing selections in (will you go or not) that are comparable

in purpose to Chinese A-not-A constructions. Thus, Bengali yes-no questions are constructed both syntactically (with the help of *ki*) and prosodically (intonation), so the form of interrogatives can be formed flexibly and, at the same time, the meaning of the question should be clear.

Table 1: Yes–No Interrogative Structures

Feature	Bengali	Chinese (Mandarin)
Basic Word Order	SOV	SVO
Primary Marker	Particle কি (ki) (optional)	Sentence-final particle 吗 (ma)
Structural Formula	S + (কি) + O + V	S + V + O + 吗
Intonation-only Form	Common	Rare
A-not-A Form	No equivalent structure	Yes (e.g., 喜不喜欢)
Example	তুমি কি স্কুলে যাবে? tumi ki skul-e jabe? “Will you go to school?”	你去学校吗? nǐ qù xuéxiào ma? “Are you going to school?”
Without Particle	তুমি স্কুলে যাবে? (intonation only)	Not standard
Response Pattern	Flexible	Must match polarity

Interrogative sentences related to WH-questions: WH-questions are known as content question, special question, or constituent question. In WH-questions, there are WH-words called interrogative or Wh-words. There are six interrogative words in English: 1. What (things or ideas) 2. Where (place) 3. Who (person) 4. When (time) 5. Which (specific person, place, or thing) 6. Why (reason or aim)

Structures of Chinese WH-questions: The WH-questions in Mandarin can be structurally more complex because the interrogative clause can be the embedded clause. The WH-clause in Chinese has five varieties: a) Pronoun (谁, 她, 什么国际) b) NP (中华人民共和国, 谁, 什么玩具) c) A(多少铅笔) d) QNP(多少单词) e) QPP(从什么时候).

Structure of Bengali WH-questions: A WH-question word is an interrogative pronoun or adverb. The question word is sometimes

called a “Wh-word” or an “interrogative word”. The question words in Bengali are different from those in Chinese. In Chinese, WH-words tend to only be a one-character word, mainly monosyllabic monosyllables. However, the Bengali WH-words tend to be a multiple-syllable, rather than single syllable. Such as the word “how many” is “kotoTa” (কতটা) in Bengali.

Table 2: WH-Question Structures

Feature	Bengali	Chinese (Mandarin)
WH Position	Typically sentence-initial (with scrambling)	In situ
WH Movement	Allows fronting but base SOV	No overt movement
Multiple WH	Restricted	Allowed
Structural Formula	WH + S + O + V	S + WH + V + O
Subject WH Example	কে এসেছে? ke esheche? “Who has come?”	谁来了? shéi lái le? “Who came?”
Object WH Example	কাকে তুমি দেখেছো? kake tumi dekhecho? “Whom did you see?”	你看见谁? nǐ kànjiàn shéi? “Whom did you see?”
WH + Particle Combination	No conflict	Rare (WH + 吗 unacceptable)

Chinese Interrogative Structures

Besides the common Ascription Interrogative sentence, Chinese also possesses various other sentence-type interrogatives, distinguished by their formation methods. Firstly, Interrogative sentences of alternative choice are constructed by enumerating options, usually two, connected with a conjunction such as 还是 háishì ‘or’. For example:

- 1) 她是中国人还是美国人? (tā shì Zhōngguó rén háishì Měiguó rén?)
she is Chinese or American. Secondly, Interrogative sentences with interrogative pronouns as complements use WH-words as the complements of predicates, enabling them to ask questions about the object;

- 2) 你认识谁? (Nǐ rènshi shéi?) you know who Here, the predicate 认识 *rènshi* ‘know’ is followed by the interrogative pronoun 谁 *shéi* ‘who’. When these interrogative pronouns serve as the complement of an object-related verb, the sentence becomes an object-interrogative one. Thirdly, to inquire about the reason for an action, the interrogative 为什么 *wèishénme* ‘why’ functions as an adverbial specifying cause;
- 3) 她为什么生气? (Tā wèishénme shēngqì?) she why angry Fourthly, Interrogative sentences with reduplicated interrogative pronouns, such as 谁谁 or 什么什么, not only function as interrogative pronouns but also emphasize repetition in the question;
- 4) 他看见什么了吗? (Tā kànjiàn shénme le ma?) he see-PFV what Q ‘Did he see anything?’ / ‘What did he see?’ Finally, interrogative sentences with the sentence-final particle *ne* (呢) are frequently used to ask the same question back to the addressee or to ask about a related situation to a previous statement or common ground. Examples include;
- 5) 他也要走了, 你呢? (Tā yě yào zǒu le, nǐ ne?) he also will leave? you ? In summary, Chinese interrogative structures are diverse, employing specific strategies to convey different types of questions (Jiang et al., 2019); (Youn & Meng, 2015).

Bengali Interrogative Structures

Bengali interrogative structures are typically formed by adding an interrogative particle or question tag at the end of a declarative sentence (Beames, 1891). Five interrogative particles—which can also function as question tags—are commonly used: কেন (*kenô*, “why”), কি (*ki*, “what”/“whether”), কি-না (*ki-na*, “whether”), কি (*kii*, “how much”/“how many”), and কত (*kotô*, “how much”/“how many”). For yes/no questions, the particle কি (*ki*) is generally placed at the end, although dropping the particle is also acceptable in Bengali. The choice of interrogative particle influences the sentence’s expressiveness; for example, কি (*kii*) and কত (*kotô*) convey a stronger sense of curiosity when questioning quantity or extent (Choudhury & Kaiser, 2012).

Interrogative pronouns do not occur in the sentence-final position but appear in situ. Beyond the typical yes/no interrogative sentence, Bengali has a number of other types of sentence interrogatives, which differ in sentence formation. Firstly, yes/no interrogative sentences are typically formed by appending an interrogative marker, কি ki, to the declarative sentence (but more often in colloquial usage the particle is dropped). For example:

- 1) সে কি ছাত্র?
 (Se ki châtôr ?)
 he Q student ?
 'Is he a student?'

Secondly, interrogative sentences with interrogative pronouns have WH-words used in their natural positions (in-situ), rather than at the front of the sentence. They can refer to people, things, places or time. For example:

- 2) তুমি কাকে চেনো?
 (Tumi kâkê chenô?)
 you whom know
 'Whom do you know?'

In this sentence, the interrogative pronoun কাকে kâkê 'whom' is the object of the verb চেনো chenô 'know'.

Thirdly, to ask about the cause of an action or situation, the interrogative কেন kenô 'why' is used, usually preordered before the verb phrase. For example:

- 3) সে কেন রাগ করেছে?
 (Se kenô râg kôrechê?)
 he why angry has.done
 'Why is he angry?' / 'Why did he become angry?'

Fourthly, interrogative sentences that express quantity, amount, degree or degree of comparison are formed with words like কত kotô 'how much/how many' or কয়টি kôyti 'how many (countable)'. For example:

- 4) তোমার কত বই আছে?
 (Your how many book exist)

how many book you have

‘How many books do you have?’

Fifthly, disjunctive interrogative sentences are formed by offering two or more alternatives, usually joined by For example:

5) তুমি চা নাকি কফি খাবে?

(Tumi chā nāki kôfi khābē?)

you tea or coffee will.drink

‘Would you like tea or coffee?’

Lastly, Bengali employs sentence-final tags or echo questions to express affirmation or to respond to a previous assertion. For example:

6) আমি যাবো, তুমি যাবে তো?

(Āmi jābô, tumi jābē tō?)

I will. go you will. go TAG

I will go; you will go too, right?’

To conclude, Bengali has a wide range of interrogative structures, using particles, interrogative pronouns, quantity words, disjunctive choice and question tags to convey diverse meanings. In Bengali, unlike English, WH-elements are generally in situ, and interrogatives mostly retain the basic subject–object–verb (SOV) word order (Choudhury & Kaiser, 2012).

Types of Interrogative Sentences

Indirect or direct information is obtained using interrogative sentences. They are divided into direct and indirect interrogative sentences based on the kind of information that is sought. Direct interrogative sentences are sentences that ask questions aiming at solicitation of the answer, on the contrary, indirect interrogative sentences aim at getting the information, supplying or presupposing an answer. There are additional subcategorizations of direct interrogatives which are general, alternative and special questions. General questions ask whether the fact is true or not. Alternative questions are multiple-choice questions and require one to make a choice. Special questions are those which are aimed at finding certain information on manner, time, place, reason, method or specification. Indirect interrogatives

are answered indirectly and may include content clauses (subject, object, reason, time, location, manner, or specifications) based on the information that is being sought (Telhaj,2016).

Yes-No Questions

Yes-no questions are polar questions that would take either no or yes as responses. They tend to use auxiliaries such as do/does or conjunction such as or. Polar interrogativity in the Chinese language is syntactically expressed. A pragmatic theory of polar questions offers a system of categorization of polar questions in the parse trees and distinguishes between them as yes-no questions and alternative questions (Levinson, 2010; Youn and Meng, 2015).

Wh-Questions

The typological difference between the use of WH-questions in Bengali and Mandarin Chinese is that some languages preserve Wh-words in situ (Chinese and Bengali) whereas others, such as English, must have Wh-fronting. In English, the movement of WH-phrases takes place into the sentence-initial position (Spec-CP) with Subject-Auxiliary inversion and do-support. In Chinese, there is no need to have such movement, inversion, and do-support (Youn & Meng, 2015). The position of Standard Mandarin WH-words does not normally change, and it is only in the restricted formulaic occasions when the WH-word is used as a discourse marker that they are fronted. Although both languages possess WH-questions, their syntactic frame is different, which usually can cause problems to people with their first language permitting fronting of WH. The use of explicit grammar explanation and systematic, communicational practice to strengthen the acquisition of WH-questions should be the focus of effective teaching that places an emphasis on the cross-linguistic differences between languages.

Alternative Questions

Alternative questions appear when a choice must be made and are characterized by the presence of alternatives (Telhaj,2016). Based on alternatives, there are two kinds of alternative interrogative sentences:

those in which alternative options appear explicitly as disjunctive options connected with *apo* or *a*, and polar alternative questions that can be answered with a positive or negative reply. Polar alternative questions are also called comprehensive or general questions when the speaker seeks to verify or strengthen knowledge and may or may not have the interrogative form. They function like “yes/no questions.” Polarity expressed by negative particles should not be confused with the semantic polarity of the answer: both affirmative and negative polar questions can be answered with “yes” or “no”.

Table 3: Alternative (Choice-Based) Questions

Feature	Bengali	Chinese (Mandarin)
Connector	না (na)	还是 (háishi)
Structural Formula	Option A + না + Option B	Option A + 还是 + Option B
Final Particle Needed?	No	No
Example	তুমি চা নাকি কফি খাবে? “Will you drink tea or coffee?”	她是中国人还是美国人? “Is she Chinese or American?”
Interpretation	Forced choice	Forced choice
A-not-A Alternative	No equivalent	Yes (喜欢不喜欢)
Reduplicative/ Contrastive Form	বে কি যাবে না?	去不去?

Morphological Aspects

Some languages use overt morphology to indicate sentence mood, including interrogative mood. Chinese uses the sentence-final question particle *ma* (吗) to mark interrogative mood, as in *nǐ xǐhuān tāma?* (你喜欢他吗? ; “Do you like him?”). Morphological marking of interrogatives in Bengali is not used; rather, it is based on the word order and intonation. Interrogative marking differs cross-linguistically: Polish has it clause-initially, Chinese clause-finally and German fronts the finite verb (Kao et al., 2010). WH-words are not themselves interrogative.” “Neither WH-words nor yes-no Q-particles

can be characterized as ‘interrogative pronouns’.” “It is thus the elements in the head of the CP that mark a clause as interrogative.” Mandarin indicates polar interrogatives by a sentence-final particle; Bengali polarity remains unmarked. Bengali polar questions resemble Mandarin A-not-A constructions. The interrogative character of WH-words is not a lexical semantic property, but is determined by the type of phrase in which a WH-word occurs. WH-words always introduce entities from a particular conceptual domain: person, time, place, reason, manner, manner of death, manner of humiliation, reason of waiting, manner of voting, etc. WH-words thus contribute to the semantic representation of a clause by restricting the interpretation of the questioned element as an entity of a certain domain (Wiese, 2010).

Chinese has simple morphology, i.e., the principles that govern the internal structure of words (Youn & Meng, 2015). The morphology of a language consists of morphology-phonology (sounds of the units), morphology-syntax (the relation between the morpheme and syntax), and morphology-semantics [the meaning of the units] (Wiese, 2010). The principle that governs the internal structure of words is called morphology. The internal structure of words can be characterized as the presence of morphemes and the relation between the morphemes inside the word itself with morphology followed by phonology, syntax, and semantics.

In contrast, Bengali is a highly inflectional language with a fusional type of morphology. It is an agglutinating language predominantly characterized by suffixation, where stems undergo extensive inflection to indicate number, tense, person, mood, and case. The majority of nouns end in vowels and take suffixes to form the plural, oblique case, and the definite form. Personal pronouns are inflected for number and case but not for gender. In addition to suffixes, some nouns use stem changes to mark the plural and evoke a more formal style. The verbal system is more complicated; verbal endings include markers for tense, aspect, mood, person, and number. Bangla verbs undergo inflections based on person and number, following these four simple rules: (1) In the verbal complex, the tense/aspect/mood system always follows the personal ending; (2) There can only be one personal ending per verbal

complex; (3) A verbal complex must end in either a verb root or one of the valid personal endings; and (4) Informed by contextual and/or pragmatic information, only a subset of the personal endings can co-occur within the same verbal complex (Choudhury & Kaiser, 2012).

Table 4: Morphological Marking of Interrogatives

Feature	Bengali	Chinese (Mandarin)
Inflectional Morphology	Rich inflection	Minimal
Question Marking	Particle + inflection	Particle-based
Verb Agreement	Person/tense marking	No person marking
Word Ending Change	Yes (tense/person suffixes)	No
Example Verb	যাবে (jabe – future suffix)	去 (qù)
Interrogative Mood	Mostly syntactic + intonation	Marked by particle

Syntactic Structures

The syntactic investigation of Chinese interrogative constructions reveals a framework consistent with the Head-driven Phrase Structure Grammar Model (Youn & Meng, 2015). This framework accounts for both the diverse interrogative types present in Mandarin and the intricate wh-question formation and scope-taking mechanisms. Interrogative expressions serve as variable operators that bind constituents and are subject to quantification by higher functional projections. The Unlike English, Chinese interrogatives are constructed without auxiliary verbs, subject-auxiliary inversion, or do-support. English interrogative sentences must always include the inversion of an auxiliary verb and the subject, as “you are going to School.” becomes “Are you going to School? ”. If there is no auxiliary verb, “do” is added to make the sentence grammatically correct, for example, “you go to School.” becomes “Do you go to School? ”, Unlike English, there are no such requirements in Chinese interrogative constructions Chinese interrogative sentences can be formed by utilizing question particles, inversion, or A-not-A constructions:

Inversion: Chinese does not typically employ Subject-verb inversion to form interrogative sentences or questions. For example, “你去学校” (You go to school) becomes “你去学校吗” (Do you go to school?) by adding the sentence-final particle *ma* (吗) rather than by changing the word order.

Question particles: Add *shenme*, *ma*, *ne*, etc., to the statement, as “你要去学校。” (You want to go to school) becomes “你要去学校吗?” (Do you want to go to school?)

A-not-A: use A-not-A construction, as “你喜欢他。” (you like him) becomes “你不喜欢他吗?” (you not like him)

wh-Word questions have a similar syntax, as they are extracted out of the sentence to the front with no indication of wh-movement, for example, “你去哪里?” (you go where?) and “你什么时候去?” (you what-time go?). If “你什么时候去?” is translated as a Wh-phrase question, the sentence cannot be grammatical in English. If it is a Wh-adverbial question, it is an interrogative adverbial phrase referring to time, so the sentence is grammatical (Wiese, 2010). Both languages use interrogative pronouns for wh-questions, such as “谁” (*shuí*, “who”) and “什么” (*shénme*, “what”). The syntactic structures do not map directly, however, and each language utilizes a different syntactic pattern in forming interrogative sentences. Not all interrogative pronouns are identical in syntactic structure, as some do not allow movement to the beginning of a sentence. In Chinese, many wh-elements cannot be linked to any phrase solely because they function as adverbs, rather than pronouns. The same considerations apply to Bengali as some wh-particles function adverbially rather than as interrogative pronouns. Moreover, a finite verb of Bangla selects three arguments: one subject, one indirect object, and one direct object. Subjects are not necessarily assigned the nominative Case. Case assignment in Bangla is both lexical and structural. Diathesis alternation is fairly limited in Bangla, and the causative alternation is not very productive (Choudhury & Kaiser, 2012).

Pragmatic Considerations

In Chinese, the particle *ma* is generally used in yes/no questions, whereas a sentence containing a WH-word can serve assorted communicative goals (Chen, 2015). According to the interrogative specification given in Wiese (2010), a sentence containing a WH-word is classified as interrogative only if it also contains an element that marks the clause as interrogative, such as *ma*. Pragmatically, it is odd to pose a sentence containing both a WH-word and *ma*. Thus, the difference in the combination of sentence-final particles with WH-words is grounded in the distinction between interrogative and non-interrogative sentences. In Bengali, ranged clarifications of either apparel or footwear will typically be presented on the base of a question, but such questions will not be posed either. It is only in Bengali that a bald, direct question will be put, instead of an understated and limited request for elaboration (Jiang et al., 2019). The raise of a ranged clarification in reply to an apparent non-ranged inquiry is an instance of a one-sided repair initiation. That is, the questioner, instead of requiring an answer from the addressee, takes the responsibility of clarifying the issue on her own. The explanation for the restriction of ranged clarifications to statements is equally pragmatic. Interrogative sentences play a significant role in expressing politeness strategies within communication. They influence the interpersonal relationship between the speaker and the hearer, essentially reflecting the speaker's attitude. In Chinese, for instance, interrogative sentences are common tools used to soften commands, convert compliments into polite disagreements, or incorporate softeners such as “是不是 (*shì bù shì*)” and “好吗 (*hǎo ma*)” at the end of sentences to temper the tenor of requests and questions ((Indah) Eftanastarini, 2025). This suggests that the power and status differential between interlocutors has a substantial impact on sentence formation in Chinese; speakers of equal status typically use direct yes-no questions (e.g., “去吗?” [Are you going?]) whereas those of lower status generally prefer tag questions, such as “去, 是吗?”. Although some researchers have proposed models to explain these distinctions, most have failed to accommodate data from diverse languages (Kumar & Nath Jha, 2021). Instead, a

structural model of politeness has been advanced, comprising three interconnected levels of operation: the lexical, involving specific polite words; the syntactic, concerning sentence structure; and the pragmatic/discourse, where politeness is context-dependent and the same utterance may be either polite or impolite depending on the situation. Evidence from the language pair Hindi-English illustrates how politeness strategies can be encoded at the lexical and syntactic levels.

Table 5: Pragmatic & Politeness Strategies

Feature	Bengali	Chinese (Mandarin)
Softening Strategy	Honorific verb forms	Sentence-final particles (吗, 呢)
Tag-like Softeners	না কি (na ki)	是不是 (shì bù shì), 好吗 (hǎo ma)
Social Hierarchy Influence	Moderate	Strong
Direct Yes–No	Common	Used among equals
Indirect Polite Question	আপনি কি যাবেন? (honorific form)	去吗? vs 去, 是吗?
Politeness Encoding	Morphological + lexical	Lexical + syntactic

Discussion and Comparative Analysis

In both English and Bengali, some elements are obligatorily fronted in interrogative sentences, at least from the perspective of Modern Generative Grammar. However, these two languages differ in the choice of the fronted elements and the constraints that regulate the movement. English employs a comprehensive set of specific interrogative words to stand for the unknown constituents, including varied categories like noun phrases (who, whom, what), prepositional phrases (where, when), and adverbial modifiers (why, how much, how long). Correspondingly, the syntactic rules and constraints governing the movement of these interrogative phrases are well-defined within the framework of Modern Generative Grammar (Youn & Meng, 2015). Conversely, Bengali uses only a limited set of interrogative

words, predominantly noun phrases; words representing prepositional phrases or adverbial clauses do not form corresponding interrogative expressions. This restriction poses challenges in the analysis of information-seeking interrogatives in Bengali for theories that rely heavily on the principle of *wh*-movement, such as Modern Generative Grammar (Chen, 2015). When confronted with an interrogative sentence, English speakers readily identify the moved *wh*-phrase, even without the realization of *wh*-movement as a linguistic rule. In contrast, the identification of the moved element in Bengali interrogative sentences is less straightforward. This difficulty, coupled with the limited inventory of interrogative words, suggests a need to reconsider the syntax of Bengali questioning within the generative framework (Jiang et al., 2019).

Further contrast arises when considering semantically open interrogative pronouns, where the two languages exhibit opposite preferences in the selection of indefinite pronouns for *wh*-blanks. In English, concepts like “problem” and “thing” correlate with “what,” while “place” and “time” typically relate to “where” or “when.” Bengali reverses these associations: words corresponding to “problem” or “thing” tend to connect with the interrogative pronoun equivalent to “which,” whereas “place” or “time” associates with that analogous to “what.” Both sets of pairings logically accord with their respective language-specific lexical selections and do not impact the *wh*-movement framework. Regarding question words carrying bias or presuppositions affecting answer sets, English employs rising declarative forms rather than interrogatives to express such nuanced meanings. Mandarin Chinese prefers rising interrogatives in similar contexts, unlike English or Bengali. Intriguingly, native speakers of Mandarin Chinese overwhelmingly opt for interrogative structures over rising declaratives, despite Chinese lacking obligatory subject-auxiliary inversion.

Similarities

Chinese and Bengali, although not related and being geographically separated have a number of fundamental grammatical similarities.

These similarities indicate that human languages with large number of languages structure questions in universal forms.

- i. Interrogative Words: Both languages make intensive use of certain words to inquire about various elements of a sentence people, things or places.
- ii. Indefinite Markers: The question words used in both languages (such as what or who) usually correspond to the words that are used in the meaning of indeterminate things (such as something or someone). This is an indication of a strong relationship between the unknown in a question and the unspecified in a statement.
- iii. Negation Patterns: Question words in the Mandarin Chinese are not usually marked with the negation symbol (such as words like no, not).
- iv. Subject-Operator Inversion: Regular grammatical operators are also used in both languages and there is need to invert the sentence by placing the subject and the operator in inverse form.
- v. Choice-Based Systems: The system of so-called alternative questions is very systematized in both languages. There are two fundamental forms of these alternative questions in the Chinese language which are very much reflected by the three different forms of interrogative markers used in Bengali.
- vi. Particles vs. Concepts: The two languages make use of small particles in marking questions (as in *ma* in the Chinese language or *kii* in the Bengali language), they can also have conceptual questions. These are questions that are not dependent on the particle; they are subject to conversation and dependent on the word of a question.
- vii. Lack of Word-Ending Changes: Both Chinese and Bengali do not have questions with modified word endings. Instead they have syntactic structures which concentrate on the arrangement of words in a row.

- viii. Using these similarities we can observe that the two languages deal with the root of a question in a similar manner where operators identify that we require new information.

Differences

Though the similarities demonstrate that they have common goals, the differences demonstrate that each language has some internal rules. Chinese and Bengali questions are distinct in four major ways:

- i. Placement of Words (In Situ vs. Movement): Question words remain in place in Mandarin Chinese that is, they do not get transferred to another position as in the answer. As an example, in Who are you the word who remains in the same position as the name of the person would. According to Bengali, the question word is put in front of other words and appears as the very first word in the sentence.
- ii. Number of Question Words: Chinese is more accommodating to complicated questions. It can use several question words within a single sentence (e.g. Who went where?). Bengali restricts itself to use of one question word per sentence.
- iii. Use of Particles: The Chinese language is characterized by the heavy use of sentence-final particles - small words such as *ma* or *ne* which are used to show that a question is being asked. Bengali is not a language of end particles; there is a way of showing a question; they push the question word to the first position.
- iv. Reduplicative Interrogatives: Chinese consistently uses A-not-A reduplication as a grammaticalized strategy to form interrogatives while Bengali uses the particle *কি* in coordination with the positive and negative forms to express the same meaning. This can be considered a typological distinction between reduplication in Chinese and coordination through a particle in Bengali.
- v. Morphology of an Internal Word: The Chinese language has a simple morphology, i.e. words seldom vary in the language.

Bengali is very inflectional; the words end in suffix (suffixes are endings of words) to represent number, tense, mood and other grammatical elements.

Conclusion

Interrogative sentences are considered as one of the important markers of human language which are attested in all living languages to the present-day time. Interrogative sentences can be generated if interrogative operators are set in the root position. Thus, these sentences can also be called as root interrogatives. These root interrogatives can be used to ask direct questions in a direct conversation related to a particular statement. In a sentence, question always requires new information which cannot be answered by 'yes' or 'no'. If the possible answer can be provided by 'yes' or 'no', then such types of sentences are categorized as yes-no questions. This paper demonstrates that Chinese and Bengali are in a completely different language family (the Sino-Tibetan and the Indo-European language families), but, nevertheless, they both apply complex systems to find out the information. Be it a language based on sentence final particle as in Chinese or initial word movement as in Bengali, the aim is the same to build a meaning. Comparing these two remote languages we understand better about the principles of human speech that are universal. This study is one that fills the gap between two large linguistic worlds and serves as a good contribution to linguists, teachers, and students. The way we ask questions is finally a comprehension of a basic aspect of what it means to be a human being.

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