

Take on this commitment: the particle *bəɾə* in Marathi (Indo-Aryan)¹

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Abstract. The particle *bəɾə* in Marathi optionally occurs in final position in declaratives, imperatives, and wh-interrogatives giving rise to different discourse effects. This paper presents the first description of utterance-final *bəɾə* in declaratives and imperatives, offering a unified analysis for its distributional profile and interpretive effects. I will claim that in these uses, *bəɾə* has an advisory effect: a *bəɾə*-using speaker conventionally expresses their preference that the addressee undertake a *dependent* doxastic or preferential commitment to the content introduced by the speaker. A second conventional component is a felicity condition that undertaking this commitment is a pre-condition for fulfilling a contextually salient addressee-benefiting goal. The existence of this conventionalized cross-clausal discourse strategy reinforces a view on which models of discourse update must not only track (i) evolving interlocutor beliefs *and* preferences; but also (ii) speaker attitudes regarding how commitments should be optimally taken on by their interlocutors; and (iii) how acts of taking on commitments relate to the broader action choices and goals of interlocutors.

Keywords: discourse dynamics, dependent commitments, discourse particles, Indo-Aryan, Marathi

1. Introduction

Discourse particles with cross-clausal use present a dual analytical challenge. As with any expression that comments on aspects of the discourse context or interlocutor attitudes, it is not always straightforward to determine which specific comment is being expressed by the use of the particle. The effects associated with a particle's use can be both nuanced and disparate, making it hard to isolate a single meaning contribution. Additionally, the fact that the expression can co-occur with multiple clause-type signals (declaratives, imperatives, interrogatives) means that determining its semantic contribution requires consideration of its interaction with the distinct conventional discourse effects associated with each of these clause-type signals.

This paper investigates the discourse effects associated with an utterance-final particle *bəɾə* in Marathi (Indo-Aryan; population: > 80,000,000). *bəɾə* occurs optionally in utterance-final position in declaratives, imperatives and wh-interrogatives but never in polar interrogatives. In these combinations, *bəɾə*'s effects can be quite heterogeneous. For example, it can be used with declaratives to warn the addressee to take the prejacent content into consideration in order to avoid adverse consequences (as in (1)), to intensify directive force with imperatives as in (2), or to urge the addressee to resolve the issue expressed by a constituent interrogative as in (3).

(1) CONTEXT: Anu is going to Mumbai and says to Bilal: I think it will be faster to drive.

Bilal: Are you sure? There have been heavy rains...

rəst-e k^hup nisərɖ-e ɖ^ha-le ahe-t
road.M-PL.NOM very slippery-M.PL.NOM become-PERF.M.PL be.PRES-3.PL

¹I thank Ilaria Frana and Paula Menendez Benito for giving me the opportunity to present this work at the *Evidentials in non-canonical speech acts* workshop at SuB 29. Thanks are also due to the SuB 29 audience and the audience at the DGfS 47 workshop on Expressivity: Variation and Change. For helpful questions and comments, I thank David Beaver, Daniel Gutzmann, Manfred Krifka, and Kyle Rawlins.

bəɾə

BARA

The roads have become very slippery, (keep this in mind).

- (2) CONTEXT: Same as (1).

Bilal: I absolutely don't want you to be driving in this weather...

tu mumbəi=la uɖya ɖə *bəɾə*

you.NOM Bombay=DAT tomorrow go.IMP BARA

Go to Mumbai tomorrow, (just do as I say).

- (3) CONTEXT: Anu is annoyed because Bilal has hidden her bike key and she needs to get to work urgently.

Anu: This is ridiculous...

tu maɕ^h-i tsavi ku^he ʈ^hev-li-s *bəɾə?*

you.ERG my-F.SG.NOM key.F.SG.NOM where keep-PERF.F.SG-2.SG BARA

Where did you keep my key? (you better answer right away!)

These examples do not exhaust the interpretive effects associated with utterance-final *bəɾə* but they give a sense of the nature of its contribution. *bəɾə*'s discourse effects come about through an interaction between its conventional contribution, the conventional effect associated with clause types, the semantic content of the carrying clause, and varying contextual conditions. This paper is a first attempt to bring clarity to this interaction with the broader goal of better understanding sentential force modification in language. Given the space constraints of the paper, I will offer a treatment of *bəɾə* uses only in declarative and imperative clauses, leaving its interaction with *wh*-interrogatives for later work. The paper proceeds as follows: In §2, I describe the empirical profile of *bəɾə*, focusing on its felicity patterns and interactional effects in declaratives and imperatives. These descriptive generalizations motivate the analysis in §3: *bəɾə* is used to conventionally signal the speaker's preference that the addressee take on a *dependent* doxastic or preferential commitment to the content introduced by the speaker. It carries an additional felicity condition that takes this commitment to be a pre-condition for fulfilling a contextually salient addressee-benefiting goal that is among the speaker's effective preferences. I discuss the implications of this analysis for our understanding of force modification in §4.

2. Empirical profile

2.1. Declaratives

In a declarative clause, *bəɾə* may be used to urge the addressee to take the preadjacent content into consideration and commit to it.² For instance, in (4), Anu provides Bilal with new information that is relevant to Bilal's actions in the near future (he may not leave the house until the plumber has left) and expresses an expectation that he will take this on as a commitment and act in accordance.

²Marathi, like other Indo-Aryan languages, uses rising intonation as the primary cue for polar interrogatives, and in some cases, also signals interrogativity with an additional utterance-final particle *ka*, which carries the rising contour. Utterance-final *bəɾə*, appended to declarative clauses, also carries rising intonation (L/H-H%). While the illocutionary difference between polar interrogatives and *bəɾə*-declaratives is immediately clear to native Marathi speakers, it should be noted that (at least impressionistically), the clausal content preceding *bəɾə* has a lower pitch range (like declaratives) and is more level in comparison to polar interrogatives with or without the final particle *ka*. For purposes of this paper, I will leave aside this puzzling intonational pattern, noting that at least in some cases, *bəɾə*-declaratives function similar to declaratives with an *ok*-tag (as in (4): *I am going to the office now, ok?*)

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- (4) CONTEXT: Anu needs Bilal to stay at home because the plumber will be coming and someone needs to be in the house to meet him.

Anu:

mi ata ɔfis=la ɖa-te ahe *bəɾə*
I.NOM now office=DAT go-IMPF.F.SG be.PRES.1.SG BARA
I am going to the office now (alright?/ok?).

A digression: The English utterance-final tags *alright* and *ok* offer good translations of this use of *bəɾə*, as suggested by the translation for (4). *ok* has been studied as a response particle that signals the speaker's dependent commitment to content introduced by the prior discourse move (Gunlogson, 2008) or as expressing compliance with the interlocutor's speech act (without necessary commitment) (Krifka, 2013). There has also been work on questions with the tag form, particularly with reverse polarity tags (Ladd, 1981; Reese, 2007; Northrup, 2014; Malamud and Stephenson, 2015; Krifka, 2015; Farkas and Roelofsen, 2017; Wiltschko, 2021; Scheffler and Malamud, 2023; Roberts and Rudin, 2024). But there seems to be no study of *alright* and *ok* tagged onto declaratives or imperatives. Strings like *I am going to the office now, ok/alright?* with final rise are clearly not classifiable as questions requesting information or confirmation with respect to their prejacent. Unlike reverse polarity tag questions, their use publicly commits the speaker to the prejacent content and they do not project conversational futures in which this content fails to be added to the common ground. On the other hand, like questions, they often amount to a request for explicit confirmation – confirmation that the addressee is on board with accepting the speaker's proposal for modifying the common ground as far as factual content is concerned. Further, like both reverse and same polarity tag questions, these complex structures are realized within a single intonational phrase, suggesting that they express a single complex speech act. The analysis I offer for Marathi *bəɾə* could possibly extend to English *alright*- and *ok*-tagged clauses with important differences. See §4 for some preliminary comparison.

To return to *bəɾə*, as noted above, there is often a flavor of 'warning' associated with *bəɾə*-containing clauses. The contexts in which *bəɾə*-clauses are construed as warnings are those in which the addressee's known action choices at utterance time are perceived by the speaker as potentially leading to an undesired/negative outcome for the addressee. Using *bəɾə*, the speaker implies that only if the addressee commits to the prejacent content and ensures that their actions are in alignment with it can this outcome be avoided. In contrast, *bəɾə* is far less felicitous if the speaker instead implies that one possible way of avoiding such an outcome is for the addressee to commit to the prejacent content and ensure that their actions are in alignment with it.³ Consider the minimally differing responses relative to the same context below.

- (5) CONTEXT: Anu is planning to go to Mumbai today by car. It is raining heavily along the route, impacting road conditions, but the weather will significantly improve tomorrow, making the drive much safer. Bilal says:

a. aɖ k^hup paus pəɖ-to ahe *bəɾə*
today much rain.M.SG.NOM fall-IMPF.M.SG be.PRES.3.SG BARA
It is raining hard today (bear in mind).
↪ Sp wants Ad to alter their plan and not travel today; no alternative plan offered.

³In addition to my own judgements, all three native Marathi speakers that I asked for felicity judgements for these context-sentence pairings, ruled (5b) out as an acceptable contribution in the context.

- b. uɖya tsɑŋɡl-ə un^h pəɖ-el (#bərə)
 tomorrow good-N.SG.NOM sunshine-N.SG.NOM fall-FUT.3.SG BARA
 Tomorrow, it will be quite sunny (#bear in mind).

↪ Sp wants Ad to alter their plan and not travel today; prejaçant points towards an alternative plan.

In (5a), Bilal wants Anu to commit to *bərə*'s prejaçant – this commitment is a precondition for Anu avoiding the undesired outcome (by exploring alternative plans for traveling safely). In (5b), Bilal also wants Anu to commit to the prejaçant – but this commitment is not such a precondition. The prejaçant merely provides information that can facilitate making one among many plans that could prevent the undesired outcome. *bərə* is infelicitous here. In other words, *bərə* is most naturally used in contexts where commitment to *bərə*'s prejaçant is a necessary precondition for ensuring some outcome.

bərə can also be used when providing new information in advice-giving contexts. What distinguishes warnings from advice is that when giving advice, the speaker considers the uptake of the suggested course of action to be beneficial to the addressee, while in warnings, non-uptake of the suggested action is taken to be detrimental to the addressee. In (6), the doctor expects Anu to commit to the prejaçant and act accordingly in order to find relief from her symptoms.

- (6) CONTEXT: Anu has been sick and goes to the doctor, who diagnoses a viral infection.

Doctor: Don't worry, the infection will run its course. Meanwhile...

he əʊfəd^h tum-ts-a tap kəmi
 this.N.SG.NOM medicine.N.SG.NOM you-GEN-M.SG.NOM fever.M.SG.NOM less
 kər-el *bərə*
 do-FUT.3.SG BARA

This medicine will lower your fever, (alright?/ok?).

Not all uses of *bərə* have to be construed as warnings or advice nor do they require the prejaçant to contain new information. *bərə* is also used regularly in 'reminder' contexts where the speaker wants the addressee to take content that they assumed to be in the common ground into consideration. As background, *bərə* is generally infelicitous if its prejaçant provides information that the speaker takes to be in the common ground already. Consider the contrast in the felicity of the *bərə*-sentence in (7) uttered in the two contexts given below. If Anu assumes (reasonably) that Bilal is aware that one of the friends is bringing their sister (CONTEXT 1), *bərə* is rather odd. But if this assumption is no longer consistent with the evidence she has, as in CONTEXT 2, *bərə* becomes perfectly felicitous.

- (7) CONTEXT 1: Anu and Bilal are hosting three friends for dinner and they both have been told that one of them will also bring her sister along. Bilal is setting the table.

Bilal: Let's see, how many place settings do we need?

CONTEXT 2: Anu and Bilal are hosting three friends for dinner and they both have been told that one of them will also bring her sister along. Its almost time for the guests and *Bilal has laid the table with settings for only five people.*

Anu: We need six place settings...

Niśa titf-ya bəhiŋi=la aŋ-te ahe *bərə*
 Niśa.NOM her.GEN-OBL sister.OBL=ACC bring-IMPF.F.SG PRES.3.SG BARA

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Niśa is bringing her sister with her.

× in CONTEXT 1; ✓ in CONTEXT 2

A use that could be said have the flavor of both warning and reminding occurs in (8), where content that must be part of the addressee's commitments (and the common ground) is uttered by the speaker to warn the addressee of adverse consequences if they fail to take this (shared) content into consideration in making their decision.

- (8) CONTEXT: Anu has been offered a new job assignment, which requires her to move to a hilly, high-altitude location with steep roads for a year. She is excited about it and is considering it seriously. Bilal prefers that she not make the move for health reasons.

Bilal: This could be really difficult for you health-wise...

tu=la dəmya-tsa tras ahe
you.OBL=DAT asthma.OBL-GEN.M.SG.NOM suffering.M.SG.NOM be.PRES.3.SG

bəɾə

BARA

You suffer from asthma, (don't forget).

To summarize the uses so far, *bəɾə* can be used by the speaker in conveying both private (new to addressee) and shared information and the discourse effects of this use can vary in flavor, construable as warnings, advice, reminders, or a blend of these, depending on the content of the carrying clause and the context. Finally, note that *bəɾə* is infelicitous in declaratives used commissively by the speaker, i.e. to take on a new commitment.

- (9) CONTEXT: Anu and Bilal take turns picking up their daughter Deepa from after-school. It is Bilal's turn today. Bilal tells Anu that he is really busy that day and asks if Anu can pick Deepa up instead.

Anu: I understand...

ho, mi ti=la g^he-un ye-te (#*bəɾə*)
yes I.NOM her.OBL=ACC bring-GER come-IMPF.F.SG BARA

Sure, I'll pick her up!

2.2. Imperatives

Imperative clauses are used in a wide range of ways; in addition to the familiar directive uses like commands, requests, warnings and advice, they may also be used in illocutions functioning as invitations, offers, permissions, or concessions (Schmerling, 1982; Portner, 2007; Condoravdi and Lauer, 2012; Kaufmann, 2012). This functional heterogeneity of imperatives is taken to arise from an invariant conventional meaning associated with imperative clauses that interacts with varying contextual conditions pertaining to speaker authority, control over realization of content, as well as speaker and addressee preferences (e.g. the implementation in Condoravdi and Lauer 2012). This context-modulated variability in the force of imperatives makes the interaction of Marathi *bəɾə* with imperative clauses particularly instructive.

The first observation here is that *bəɾə* is incompatible with imperatives that are interpreted as requests and pleas as the examples in (10) show, or as invitations/offers, permissions, concessions, or curses as the data in (11) show.⁴

⁴There is the possibility of using *bəɾə* in imperatives used for illocutions such as offers or invitations. But the

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- (10) a. *krupəya tum^hi mə=la hədʒar rupye dy-a (#bərə)*
 please you.PL.HON I.OBL=DAT thousand rupees give.IMP-PL BARA
 Please (sir), give me a thousand rupees. (REQUEST)
- b. *koŋi=tari mə=la vihir=it=un baher kaq^h-a (#bərə)*
 someone=PRT I.OBL=ACC well.OBL=IN=FROM out bring.IMP-PL BARA
 Someone (please) help me come out from this well! (PLEA)
- (11) a. CONTEXT: Anu has made a dessert and is offering it to Bilal to taste. She says:
tu hi rəbədʒi k^ha (#bərə)
 you.NOM this.F.SG.NOM rabadi.F.SG.NOM eat.IMP.SG BARA
 Intended: Try (lit. eat) this rabadi (milk-based dessert)! (OFFER)
- b. CONTEXT: Deepa and her friends are planning to go to the park and Deepa comes and asks her mother: Mom, can I go play in the park with my friends?
ho, dʒa aŋi mədʒa kər-a (#bərə)
 Sure, go.IMP.PL and fun do.IMP-PL BARA
 Intended: Sure, go and have fun! (PERMISSION+WELL-WISH)
- c. CONTEXT: Anu has asked Deepa to finish her homework before going out to play. Deepa is badgering Anu because she wants to go play without finishing her homework. Anu gets exasperated and says:
t^hik ahe, dʒa k^he[ay]-la (#bərə)
 alright, go.IMP play-INF BARA
 Intended: Alright! Go and play (if you aren't going to listen!) (CONCESSION)
- d. *dʒa k^hədqɔya=t/məsəŋa=t (#bərə)*
 go.IMP ditch.OBL=LOC/burial.ground.OBL=LOC BARA
 Intended: Go to hell (lit. into a ditch/burial-ground)! (CURSE)

Any analysis of *bərə* must account for its infelicity in this class of illocutionary acts that can be performed using the imperative. Requests and pleas, illustrated in (10), come about in contexts where realization of the imperative content is understood to benefit the speaker. Additionally, an imperative is construed as a request when it is presumed that realizing the imperative content does not interfere with the addressee's existing preferences, while it is construed as a plea if it is presumed that realizing the imperative content would be inconsistent with the addressee's existing preferences (Condoravdi and Lauer, 2012). Construals of imperatives as offers, invitations, permissions, and concessions all presume that realizing the imperative content is beneficial to the addressee, and in some cases already a pre-existing preference for the addressee. Moreover, with permissions, the speaker conveys that realizing the imperative content is not incompatible

effect in this case is one where the speaker is either understood to be issuing a mock-command or a veiled threat. Not always, but in some cases, it is comparable to the unexpected effect of *better* in locutions like *(You) better have that cookie, (or else...)* or *(You) better come over for dinner tomorrow!* But it is virtually impossible to use *bərə* in imperatives intended to be understood as permissions, concessions, curses, requests, or pleas.

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with their own existing preferences, while with concessions, the speaker conveys that realizing this content is (or at least was) incompatible with their original (pre-utterance) preferences.

Consider now that *bəɾə* is only felicitous in imperatives used to issue a strong directive – a command, a warning, or strong recommendation/advice. In these cases, use of *bəɾə* signals that the speaker presumes to have authority over the addressee, i.e. the addressee is expected to comply by realizing the imperative content. (12), 13, and (14) illustrate these directive uses. In (12), Anu’s utterance of the *bəɾə*-augmented imperative implies that she does not see Deepa to have choice in the matter of her bedtime (anymore).⁵ In (13), Anu expects Deepa to comply with the imperative (i.e. refrain from pouring oil) in order to ensure her own safety. Note that while *bəɾə* intensifies the force of a command, warning, or an actional recommendation by making it sound more urgent, its use in such contexts is also felt to be more considerate/polite and less impersonal. In other words, it has an exhortative value that the bare imperative lacks.⁶

- (12) CONTEXT: Deepa has stayed up way past her bedtime playing a video game. Anu gets annoyed because Deepa has school tomorrow and needs to be up early. She has already told Deepa several times to go to bed.

Anu: You are stretching my patience now...

tu ata ləgets dʒopay-la dʒa **bəɾə**
you.NOM now immediately sleep-INF go.IMP BARA
Get into bed immediately now! (just do as I say)

- (13) CONTEXT: Deepa is making dal for the first time with Anu’s help and has let the pan get too hot on the stove. She is about to put in some oil to start sautéing the onions.

Anu:

kəɖ^həi=məd^hye ətta=ts tel ʈaku nəko **bəɾə**
pan.OBL=in now=EMPH oil.N.SG.NOM pour-INF NEG.IMP BARA
Don’t pour the oil into the pan just yet! (or it will go up in flames)

- (14) CONTEXT: Deepa got a lovely doll in the mail from Anu’s mother and has been playing with it. Anu wants Deepa to thank her grandma before she forgets.

Anu: Alright, you have played enough now...

ata aɕi=la ek pətrə lihi **bəɾə**
now grandma.OBL=DAT one.NOM note.N.SG.NOM write.IMP BARA
(Come) now, write a letter to grandma!

The set of illocutionary acts performed by imperatives that allow *bəɾə* suggests that *bəɾə* is felicitous in contexts where two preconditions hold: (a) the addressee has no pre-existing preference to realize the imperative content; and (b) it is appropriate for the speaker to presume

⁵The speaker, if they wish to suggest the course of action expressed in the imperative content while maintaining that the addressee has ultimate choice, would use another utterance-final particle *na* (Deo, 2023). Of course, in this particular context, this would convey lack of authoritativeness, something Anu would not wish to convey.

⁶There are other utterance-final particles (*na*, *hə/hā* and *ki*) besides *bəɾə* that augment the basic conventional effect of the imperative clause-type. While these vary in terms of their precise discourse effects, they all share the property of having an exhortative value over and beyond what might be conveyed by particle-less clauses. The analysis in §3 accounts for this property associated with *bəɾə* by making direct reference to the addressee in its conventional meaning.

authority over the addressee in realization of the imperative content or to expect unquestioning addressee compliance. In the case of permissions and concessions, it is the first pre-condition that fails to be met, while in the case of requests, pleas, offers, invitations, and curses it is the second pre-condition. It is only in the case of commands, warnings, and strong recommendation/advice that both pre-conditions are met.

A particularly instructive case that reveals the dependence of *bəɾə*'s felicity on the absence of a pre-existing preference for realizing the imperative content is one where the addressee has a latent (rather than revealed) preference which they believe may conflict with the speaker's preferences and are therefore hesitant to reveal. We can identify two minimally differing contexts – no-reveal or reveal, as exemplified in (15). In CONTEXT 1, Bilal informs Anu about having missed the bus **without revealing** his preference for taking the car to work. Anu's solution to the problem sounds to Marathi speakers more like a solicitous command/recommendation than an offer – i.e. it signals that Bilal will unquestioningly comply by taking the car to work.⁷ Anu's proposal is felicitously rendered using *bəɾə* at this context. In CONTEXT 2, Bilal explicitly **reveals** his preference to drive to work and Anu's use of *bəɾə* is far less acceptable.

- (15) CONTEXT 1: Bilal needs to be at a work meeting soon and he has missed the bus that he takes to work. Anu is the one who usually takes the car to work but Bilal would love to be able to drive to work today. Bilal tells Anu he missed the bus.

Anu: Ok, so we need to figure out a solution...

CONTEXT 2: Bilal needs to be at a work meeting soon and he has missed the bus that he takes to work. Anu is the one who usually takes the car to work but Bilal would love to be able to drive to work today. Bilal tells Anu he missed the bus and adds:

Bilal: I would really like to drive to work today so I don't miss my meeting.

Anu:

məg aɖ tu gaɖi g^he-un dza bəɾə
then today you.NOM car.F.SG.NOM take-GER go.IMP BARA

Then, (go ahead and) take the car today.

✓ in CONTEXT 1; × in CONTEXT 2

Further evidence that *bəɾə* cannot be used in contexts where the addressee has a manifest preference for realizing the imperative content comes from its infelicity in responses to commissive acts by the addressee. Simply put, the speaker cannot use *bəɾə* in an imperative clause that expresses agreement with or approval of an actional commitment undertaken by the addressee. In such cases, the addressee has already committed to a preference for realizing the relevant propositional content by publicly expressing it. Consider a minimally differing context from (9) above in (16) below where Anu commits to bringing Deepa from school in order to help Bilal. Bilal's response here can be an imperative clause, but not one containing *bəɾə*.

- (16) CONTEXT: Anu and Bilal take turns picking up their daughter Deepa from after-school. It is Bilal's turn today. Bilal tells Anu that he is really busy that day and doesn't know

⁷Evidence for this command-like construal comes from the fact that the *bəɾə*-containing imperative cannot be conditionalized with 'if you like' (*tu=la həvə tər.*) The use of *bəɾə* strongly signals a context in which the addressee is expected to realize the imperative content without this content being among their pre-existing preference. It follows then that any linguistic means of referencing a pre-existing preference (such as *if you want/like/prefer*) would be incompatible with *bəɾə*.

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whether he will make it to the school in time.

Anu: No worries, I am working from home today. I will pick her up!

Bilal:

tʃ^han, tu ti=la g^he-un ye (*#bəɾə*)
great you.NOM her.OBL=ACC bring-GER come.IMP BARA
Great, you pick her up and get her (home)!

To summarize, *bəɾə* constrains the range of illocutionary acts that may be performed using the imperative, restricting its use to those cases where the speaker can presume to have authority over the addressee to realize the imperative content and where the addressee has no pre-existing preference for realizing it. The acts felicitously performable using *bəɾə* then are commands, warnings, and strong recommendations. This profile is also observed with declaratives where *bəɾə*-containing clauses are used to issue warnings, strong recommendations, and reminders.

In all uses, clauses with *bəɾə* provide information (that may be new or shared) intended to guide and change the addressee's action choices towards some salient goal. In some of these contexts, the use of *bəɾə* conveys that the speaker is looking out for the addressee, trying to ensure that the addressee's actions do not lead to consequences detrimental to them (eg. (2) or (13)), while in others, it conveys that the speaker's desire to achieve their goal is what matters without consideration of the addressee's preferences (e.g. (12)). Crucially, both imperative and declarative clauses with *bəɾə* are only felicitous when there is no contextual evidence that the addressee's action choices are already aligned towards reaching the salient goal. This may be because the addressee's revealed plan of action at the context diverges from the goal (e.g. (1) or CONTEXT 2 in (7)) or because there is no such inferable or explicitly expressed plan at the context (e.g. (6)). The next section develops an analysis guided by this set of intuitions.

3. Analysis

Given that *bəɾə* can occur with both declaratives and imperatives, giving rise to a similar range of discourse effects, I will pursue an analysis that assigns an independent conventional meaning to the particle and allows it to interact with the conventional effects associated with the two clause-type signals. I adopt here a commitment-based theory of the sentential force of clause-type signals. Accounts couched within such theories broadly assume that the combinatorial system of grammar builds up semantic content (some denotation), which gets utilized in utterances that belong to the different clause-types. Each clause-type is conventionally associated with a specific change that it effects on the context – its conventional force (Gunlogson, 2008; Farkas and Bruce, 2010; Condoravdi and Lauer, 2012; Lauer, 2013; Condoravdi and Lauer, 2017, a.o.). The conventional force of declaratives, imperatives, and interrogatives resides in the specific types of public commitments that they induce for the speaker.

In standardly assumed models of context structure that build on early ideas from Hamblin (1971) and Stalnaker (1978), expanded by Ginzburg 1996; Roberts 2012; Gunlogson 2001; Asher and Lascarides 2003 among others, evolution of discourse involves the requesting, negotiating, and undertaking of commitments by discourse participants. At least starting from Gunlogson (2001), the common ground is taken to be a derived notion – the intersection of the publicized discourse commitments of all discourse participants. On such a view of the context structure, it is crucial to separately keep track of the public commitments of each discourse participant – something that natural language strategies such as response particles are sensitive to

(e.g. Farkas and Bruce, 2010; Krifka, 2013). While much of the literature on discourse dynamics focuses on the publicized *doxastic* commitments of interlocutors, accounts of imperatives recognize the centrality of *preferential* (or teleological) commitments (Condoravdi and Lauer, 2012; Lauer, 2013; Condoravdi and Lauer, 2017; Portner, 2018; Rudin, 2018), that some types of sentences may conventionally give rise to.⁸ Doxastic commitments commit an agent to treat a proposition as true, while preferential commitments commit an agent to treat a proposition as desirable. I build here on the approach taken by Condoravdi and Lauer, who, in a set of studies of imperatives, argue that these express preferential commitments for the speaker.

The relevant notion of preference here is one that guides an agent’s practical deliberation and action. The idea is that at least some preferences of agents – effective preferences – are grounded in the context of decision-making. An agent’s actions are influenced by a number of constraining factors and attitudes – desires, obligations, moral and social norms, among others. In order to act effectively, the agent must establish an overall ordering of priorities determined by these factors and choose their actions in a way that enables them to bring about these priorities. We might call this the agent’s over-arching preferential attitude in which all conflicts are resolved via ordering. Condoravdi and Lauer (2012) (and elsewhere) use the notion of an *effective preference structure* to model this ranking of an agent’s preferences. It is possible that an agent has inconsistent desires; i.e. they simultaneously wish to realize two situations that are incompatible. For instance, I might both want to sleep in on Sunday morning and to be up nice and early for a sunrise hike. But if I am to act on my desires, I must commit to one of these preferences being ranked higher than the other and undertake appropriate actions to bring about the more preferred situation. An *effective preference structure* for an agent a at world w is a partial ordering of preferences such that all incompatible preferences are strictly ranked relative to each other – i.e. the ordering is required to be consistent. The maximal elements of such a preference structure (those that are not ranked lower than any other preferences) are an agent’s effective preferences, and the agent’s actions are guided by the goal of realizing these.

A discourse participant a that takes on a preferential commitment for some proposition p commits to p being a maximal element of a ’s effective preference structure. $EP_w(a, p)$ stands for ‘ p is a maximal element of a ’s effective preference structure at w .’ Imperative clauses, according to Condoravdi and Lauer, are conventionally associated with the publicization of preferential commitments; i.e. using an imperative a publicly commits to act as though they have an effective preference for p . As is familiar, a declarative clause with semantic content p conventionally signals that the agent publicly commits to act as though they believe p to be the case. By virtue of being action guiding, both doxastic and preferential commitments constrain future states of the world – and thereby future discourse moves or linguistic actions.

3.1. Managing discourse commitments

One of the contextual components tracked in ongoing discourse is the individual discourse commitments of each participant. These are taken to be of two types. The common ground is derived as the intersection of individual doxastic commitments. I introduce here the parallel notion of *joint preferences*, which is a set derived from intersecting the preferential commitments

⁸Portner (2018) labels these as commitments to priorities – individual and joint – which are kept track of in parallel fashion to doxastic commitments in a Farkas and Bruce, 2010-style model, with the shared To-do list as the counterpart of the common ground and participant-specific to-do lists as the counterpart of individual participants’ doxastic discourse commitments.

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of all interlocutors. This notion allows for the consideration of strategies that make reference to the joint goals of interlocutors rather than only the preferences of a single agent.

- (17) a. DISCOURSE COMMITMENTS: For all discourse participants x , there is a set DC_x of propositions that x is publicly committed to. DC_x is the union of two sets:
 x 's doxastic commitments:
 $DC_{dox_x} = \{p \mid x \text{ is publicly committed to act as though they believe } p\}$
 x 's preferential commitments:
 $DC_{pref_x} = \{p \mid x \text{ is publicly committed to act though they prefer } p \text{ to be actualized}\}$
- b. COMMON GROUND: The intersection of the doxastic discourse commitments of each participant; jointly shared beliefs.
- c. JOINT PREFERENCES: The intersection of the preferential discourse commitments of each participant; jointly shared preferences.

The *joint preferences* of interlocutors evolve in parallel fashion to the *common ground* as the public commitments of interlocutors serve as signals to other interlocutors to take up these commitments and conduct future action in accordance with these.⁹ Following the general approach taken in Condoravdi and Lauer (2012) and Lauer (2013), I will take clause-type signals to be conventional strategies used by an agent a to publicly commit to some semantic content p , resulting in an incrementation of DC_{dox_a} or DC_{pref_a} by p .

The usage conventions associated with the declarative and imperative clause-types can now be modeled as in (18a) and (18b). $PEP_w(Sp, p)$ represents the speaker's public commitment to p being a maximal element of their effective preference structure. Any such preference publicized by the speaker would make it an element of $DC_{pref_{sp}}$.

- (18) a. $\llbracket \text{DEC} \rrbracket = \lambda p \lambda w. PB_w(Sp, p)$ 'Speaker publicly commits to acting as though they believe p .'
- b. $\llbracket \text{IMP} \rrbracket = \lambda p \lambda w. PEP_w(Sp, p)$ 'Speaker publicly commits to acting as though p is an effective preference for them.'

3.2. Source vs. dependent status

In the spirit of Gunlogson (2001, 2008), I distinguish between discourse commitments for which the agent is a source and commitments for which the agent is a dependent. The basic idea is that an agent a is a source for some proposition p at a context c iff a is (possibly publicly) committed to p at c and a 's commitment to p at c does not depend on another agent's testimony that p . An agent a is a dependent for p at c iff a is (possibly publicly) committed to p at c and a is not a source for p at c . Gunlogson makes use of this distinction for doxastic commitments in describing the contextual conditions for rising declaratives in English. More generally, the distinction is useful for thinking about ways in which linguistic strategies might conventionally signal interlocutor (in)dependence in the undertaking of commitments.

⁹Rudin (2018) introduces the notion of the *teleological common ground* which is essentially equivalent to what I am calling joint preferences here. His setup, which is aimed at analyzing rising imperatives, extends the Table model of Farkas and Bruce (2010) by bifurcating it into identical doxastic and teleological halves. So for each component of the context according to the Table model (which restricts its attention to the evolution of belief states via negotiation of doxastic commitments), Rudin has a teleological counterpart.

I extend the application of the source/dependent distinction in two ways: First, given that individual discourse commitments can be either doxastic or preferential, it is natural to assume that sourcehood/dependence is also tracked for both types of commitments. This is clearly seen in response particles used in discourse moves following utterances of imperative clauses, which as assumed above, express an effective preference of the speaker. Consider two minimally distinct conversations below between Anu and her secretary Nina after a sensitive meeting with a small subset of Anu's team.

- (19) a. Anu: Keep the discussion we had at this meeting confidential.
 Nina: Ok/Yes.¹⁰
- b. Nina: I will circulate the minutes among all the staff by tomorrow.
 Anu : No, keep the discussion we had at this meeting confidential.
 Nina: Ok/#Yes.

In (19a), Nina can respond to Anu's directive illocution (uttered using an imperative clause) with either *ok* or *yes*. Anu's utterance publicly commits her to a preference for keeping the discussion confidential. By responding with *ok*, Nina takes on this preferential commitment as a dependent while by using *yes* she signals that she is committing to the preference independently. In (19b), Nina has expressed an intention to circulate the minutes, something incompatible with the preference Anu commits to in her response. Nina can no longer agree with Anu using *yes*, which would convey independent commitment to the preference.

The other application of the source/dependent distinction is with respect to its role in constraining addressee uptake of semantic content introduced at a context. Here is what I mean: while expressions like *ok* and *yes* in their response particle use convey that the speaker is committing to content introduced by a prior discourse move either as dependent or source, there might be (possibly related) linguistic strategies where the speaker signals their opinion about *how* the addressee should take on the commitment to content introduced in the immediate context. On the analysis here, *bərə* illustrates such a strategy.

Let $DC_{x_{ind}} \subseteq DC_x$ stand for that set of doxastic or preferential commitments that participant x is taken to be the source for. Correspondingly, $DC_{x_{dep}} \subseteq DC_x$ is the set of doxastic or preferential commitments that x takes on as a dependent – based on another participant's testimony or expressed preference.

3.3. The convention(s) associated with *bərə*

We are now in a position to consider the conventional effect of *bərə* in its utterance-final uses and how it interacts with conventional contribution of declaratives and imperatives to generate the right discourse effects and patterns of (in)felicity. The intuition emerging from the facts described in §2 was that *bərə* is restricted to those declarative and imperative uses where the semantic content provides information (new or shared) intended to guide (and change) the addressee's action choices towards some salient goal. A crucial contextual condition on the felicity of both imperative and declarative clauses with *bərə* is the absence of any contextual

¹⁰Notice that although both response particles are acceptable here, only *ok* can be followed up with a continuation like *I had been planning to circulate the minutes to the full team*. This shows that only the use of *ok* by Nina is compatible with a change whereby she aligns her preference with that expressed by her superior. Because *yes* conveys an independent preference for keeping the information confidential, explicit reference to a prior incompatible preference in the continuation becomes infelicitous.

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evidence that the addressee's action choices are already aligned towards reaching this salient goal. Moreover, in all imperative uses, the speaker is understood to presume authority over the addressee with respect to influencing their action choice. On the other hand, in declarative uses, the speaker is understood to urge the addressee (whether while warning, advising, or reminding) to take on the semantic content of the clause as a commitment.

I take *bəṛə* to be conventionally associated with a speaker preference with respect to the addressee's commitment behavior. Using *bəṛə* the speaker conveys that they are publicly committed to an effective preference that the addressee take up the content of the *bəṛə*-containing clause as a dependent commitment – doxastic or preferential – as indicated by the clause-type it occurs with. This speaker commitment operates independently of the commitment induced by the clause type of the sentence uttered.

- (20) **The core *bəṛə* convention:** If a speaker *s* utters an expression *u* with semantic content *p* using *bəṛə*, *s* thereby publicly commits to an effective preference that $p \in DC_{Addep}$ be actualized (i.e. *p* come to be among the dependent commitments of the addressee).

The expression *u* may contain an imperative or a declarative with content *p*, each of which will give rise to the commitment conventionally associated with them, given in (18a) and (18b) respectively. The idea is thus that the use of *bəṛə* does not modify clause-type triggered commitments in any way; it operates independently of them and the resulting discourse effects come about through the cumulative presence of both commitments in the post-utterance context.

I alluded above to some contextually salient goal towards which *bəṛə*-containing declarative and imperative uses guide the addressee's action choices. This goal might involve the addressee's safety and well-being, obligations, compliance with general moral/social norms, or prior commitments. Realizing the goal may also be mutually benefiting to the speaker and the addressee, as in the case where Anu tells Bilal that she is leaving the house. Here the salient goal that the plumber be able to access the house and do their job is among the joint preferences of Bilal and Anu. It is such a goal that is implicitly referenced by the speaker publicizing a preference for the addressee's dependent commitment to some semantic content. Crucially, the salient goal may not be one that exclusively benefits the *bəṛə*-using speaker.¹¹

I take this to indicate that all *bəṛə* uses present the speaker's preference for the addressee's dependent commitment as in (20) as being guided by a salient goal that benefits the addressee (and in some cases, both the speaker and addressee). It follows that such a goal *g* is among the speaker's effective preferences. The goal may or may not be among the addressee's effective preferences; certainly (from the perspective of the speaker) there must be no evidence that the addressee's existing action choices will serve this goal.¹² Given this obligatory addressee-benefiting requirement, I take *bəṛə* to come with a secondary conventional component:

¹¹More accurately, any *bəṛə*-uses guiding the addressee's actions towards a goal that appears to exclusively benefit the speaker are construed as referencing existing moral/social obligations or commitments of the addressee. So, if the speaker asks the addressee to give them money or make them a sandwich or give them a ride to the airport using a *bəṛə*-imperative, this is understood as conveying that the addressee should realize the semantic content of the imperative with the goal of not rescinding an existing commitment or obligation.

¹²The examples in (12) and (14) illustrate cases where the addressee does not share the speaker's goal that they give up a pleasurable activity in the interest of getting enough rest or learning to express gratitude. In the context associated with 13, the addressee most likely does share the speaker's goal that the addressee not be harmed.

- (21) **A secondary convention:** If a speaker s utters an expression u with semantic content p in w using $b\bar{e}r\bar{e}$, s takes addressee uptake of p to be a pre-condition for fulfilling a contextually salient addressee-benefiting goal $g_c \in EP(s, w)$.

This implication is more a felicity condition on the use of $b\bar{e}r\bar{e}$ or a pre-condition on the commitment state of the speaker at pre-utterance time rather than a commitment incurred by its use. There are consequences associated with this: if the speaker commits to a preference that the addressee take on p as a dependent and conveys that such uptake is a pre-condition for fulfilling a goal that is among the speaker's preferences (although it benefits the addressee), they cannot reasonably be expected to be uninvolved in ensuring the eventual realization of this goal. Thus, $b\bar{e}r\bar{e}$ -imperatives with semantic content p often indirectly signal that the speaker is willing to undertake action that will enable (or compel) the addressee to bring about p – acquiring the flavor of encouraging support or threats, depending on contextual conditions.

3.4. Application of the analysis

I will now turn to showing how this analysis predicts the generalizations observed in §2. Consider the context in (5) with the declarative utterance in (5a). Let r stand for the prejacent *It is raining hard today*. $b\bar{e}r\bar{e}$ occurs in a declarative clause and we have analyzed it as an expression that modifies the conventional effect of clause-type signals. The use of $b\bar{e}r\bar{e}$ thus gives rise to two commitments: (i) it commits the speaker Bilal to the preference that the addressee Anu doxastically commit to r dependently based on his testimony; and (ii) it commits Bilal to acting as though he believes r .

- (22) a. $PEP_w(Sp, r \in DC_{Ad_{dep}})$ effect of $b\bar{e}r\bar{e}$
 b. $PB_w(Sp, r)$ effect of the declarative

In this particular case, the warning flavor of $b\bar{e}r\bar{e}$ is salient. It comes about because Bilal's preference for dependent uptake on part of Anu is related to Bilal's goal $g_{safe}(anu)$ that Anu stay safe and not be harmed by driving in dangerous road conditions. It is clear in this context that although Anu probably shares this goal, her existing action choices are not already aligned towards this goal according to Bilal (she plans to drive on the dangerous route). Given Bilal's understanding of Anu's existing action choices, he reasons that if Anu were to commit to r , she would modify her action choices accordingly raising the probability that $g_{safe}(anu)$ is fulfilled. That is, Bilal takes Anu's committing to r to be a precondition for fulfilling $g_{safe}(anu)$.¹³ (5b) is predicted to be infelicitous here since (as stated in the prose there), Anu's committing to it being sunny tomorrow is not a precondition for fulfilling $g_{safe}(anu)$.

For the imperative case, consider the example in (12). Let b stand for the prejacent *Deepa goes to bed immediately*. The use of $b\bar{e}r\bar{e}$ predictably gives rise to two commitments: (i) it commits the speaker Anu to the preference that the addressee Deepa preferentially commit to b dependently based on Anu's preference (regardless of Deepa's preference); and (ii) it commits Anu to acting as though b is an effective preference for her.

- (23) a. $PEP_w(Sp, b \in DC_{Ad_{dep}})$ effect of $b\bar{e}r\bar{e}$
 b. $PEP_w(Sp, b)$ effect of the imperative

¹³Given that $g_{safe}(anu)$ is among Bilal's effective preferences, it would be natural for him to follow up with something like *I will drive you to Mumbai myself tomorrow, if you stay home today*, thus committing to further action that ensures goal fulfillment.

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bəɾə strengthens the directive force of the imperative here, making Anu's authority over Deepa salient. This effect comes about because Anu's preference for dependent uptake on part of Deepa is related to Anu's goal $g_{rested(deepa)}$ that Deepa get enough rest and maintain a regular routine. Deepa clearly does not share this goal and her existing action choices are not aligned towards it (she would choose to continue playing the video game for hours more). Given Anu's understanding of Deepa's existing action choices, she explicitly directs Deepa to commit to *b*, and given that she has deontic authority over Deepa, Deepa is obligated to act as though she prefers *b* as well. Like before, Anu takes Deepa's committing to *b* to be a precondition for fulfilling $g_{rested(deepa)}$. This goal is an effective preference of Anu's, so she can undertake further action to ensure Deepa's compliance (e.g. through punishment or physical intervention).

Beyond these acceptable cases, we can account for the reminder and advice-giving uses of *bəɾə* in declaratives. The former (e.g. (7) or (8)) occur when the speaker's utterance contains some content *p* assumed to be in the common ground/known to the addressee because they have evidence that the addressee's existing action choices do not reflect commitment to *p* (which, in turn, is a precondition for some salient addressee-benefiting goal g_c). In such a context, it is reasonable for the speaker to make a move that signals that the addressee dependently commit to *p*, raising the chance that g_c will be realized. With advice-giving (as in (6)), the speaker's relative expertise gives them the authority to express preference for dependent commitment and thus shape the addressee's action choice towards g_c ; the addressee has no pre-existing action choices that align with g_c .

With imperatives, the analysis predicts that *bəɾə* can only occur in those illocutionary acts in which the addressee cannot be assumed to independently have a preference for realizing the relevant semantic content: this immediately rules out permissions and concessions. Further, a *bəɾə*-using discourse move conventionally signals a preference for dependent commitment to the relevant preference: this rules out offers and invitations. Finally, if the addressee's uptake of the imperative content is understood as a pre-condition for a salient addressee-benefiting goal, *bəɾə*'s use in requests and pleas (which benefit the speaker alone) and curses (which are detrimental to the addressee) is predicted to be infelicitous.

bəɾə does not occur in commissives – as in (9), nor in responses to these – as in (16), because the former typically involve alignment with a manifest addressee preference, while the latter respond to an expressed alignment by the addressee with the speaker's original preference.¹⁴ In either case, there is clear contextual evidence that the addressee is independently committed to the prejacent content, eliminating motivation for using any strategy to explicitly induce a dependent commitment.

4. Conclusion

The empirical profile of Marathi *bəɾə* as an utterance-final particle motivates an analysis in which *bəɾə* and the clause-type signals it occurs with are allowed to induce distinct commitments for the speaker. Together with the felicity condition on *bəɾə*'s use, these conventional contributions cumulatively constrain the illocutions possible with *bəɾə*-containing declaratives and imperatives. The observed felicity patterns and discourse effects emerge from an interac-

¹⁴Commissives that threaten the addressee's interests are acceptable with *bəɾə* (e.g. *If you don't go to bed right now, I will take away your video game for a week bəɾə!*) Space constraints prevent me from elaborating on why these allow *bəɾə*.

tion between independent conventional meanings. *bəɾə* is thus not a force-modifying strategy in the strict sense – it does not change the level/type of commitment associated with the basic clause-type signal. Rather, it provides an explicit signal of an ever-present implicit preference in discourse: that the addressee commit to the speaker-introduced content with the goal of incrementing the set of joint commitments. It adds two constraints: (i) the preference is that the addressee commit as dependent, based on the speaker’s testimony/preference; and (ii) *bəɾə* can only occur in the presence of a salient addressee-benefiting goal of the speaker’s. Given this, one might call it a force-augmentation strategy – it adds a new commitment over and above the commitment induced by the clause-type signal, affecting the overall sentential force.

Marathi *bəɾə* (originally an adjective meaning fine/good/well), is synchronically used as a response particle signaling dependent commitment or compliance with prior discourse moves, like *ok* and *alright* in English. In its utterance-final use then, one might compare *bəɾə* to tag constructions involving these particles (as suggested in the introduction). While *ok-* and *alright-* tagged declaratives and imperatives haven’t been independently explored, tagged questions more generally have often been described as creating a call on the addressee to respond (Beysade and Marandin, 2006; Heim and Wiltschko, 2020; Scheffler and Malamud, 2023). As expressions that, on the surface, contain two clause-type signals (e.g. a declarative and an interrogative), these are analyzed as involving speech-act level disjunction (Krifka, 2015) or context updates that modulate the speaker’s credence/commitment to the proposition (Farkas and Roelofsen, 2017; Scheffler and Malamud, 2023) and/or influence projected conversational futures (Roberts and Rudin, 2024; Scheffler and Malamud, 2023).

One might say that *ok-* and *alright-* tagged clauses, in keeping with their behavior as response particles, call on the addressee to check whether they can comply with the prior discourse move, projecting conversational futures in which the compliance obtains and those in which it does not. It remains to be seen if that is the right analysis for English, but on the analysis provided here, the *bəɾə*-using speaker crucially does not make such a call on the addressee. With *bəɾə*, dependent commitment (or compliance) is preferred (and thereby expected) rather than checked for. Added empirical support for this claim comes from the fact that *bəɾə*-containing clauses are unacceptable with utterance-final addressee referencing vocatives that are allowed to co-occur with other closely-related discourse particles. Additionally, there is an augmented strategy using *bəɾə* and the question particle *ka* – utterance-final *bəɾə ka?* that explicitly checks for compliance and is compatible with addressee particles/honorifics. Third, unlike *ok-* and *alright-* tagged clauses, *bəɾə*-containing clauses are only felicitous in the presence of an addressee-benefiting goal on the speaker’s perspective making checking for addressee compliance superfluous as far as the speaker is concerned.

A closer comparative study of English *ok-* and *alright-* tagged clauses (tags more generally) and Marathi *bəɾə* and closely related utterance-final particles will no doubt reveal nuanced differences that enable consideration of the following question: Is there a systematic difference between types of strategies that check for whether or not there is addressee compliance to introduced content via an integrated complex discourse move, and those that express a preference that there be such compliance? And possibly an even more interesting question: Is there a pragmatically driven historical pathway such that the latter strategy type evolves from the former strategy type? I leave these questions for future research.

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