

**GSAS Workshops  
Harvard Linguistics Circle**

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April 9, 2021  
12:00 pm – 1:30 pm**

**Puzzles from the Interrogative Left Periphery**

In this talk I present several interrelated puzzles.

**Puzzle 1:** Why does declarative syntax plus rising intonation lead to a biased question in some languages (English) but is ambiguous between a neutral and a biased question interpretation in others (Hindi-Urdu, Italian)?

**Puzzle 2:** Why can polar questions be mono-clausal as matrix questions in every(?) language but be allowed as embedded questions in some languages (English, Italian) but not in others (Hindi-Urdu)?

**Puzzle 3:** What is the role of intonation in overriding the ban on mono-clausal polar questions in a subset of embedded positions even in languages like Hindi-Urdu?

I argue for an articulation of the interrogative left periphery, with question meaning being built up incrementally at three points in the structure. The syntax, semantics, pragmatics and prosody of questions is distributed along these three points in ways that suggest new ways of addressing the questions raised by these puzzles.