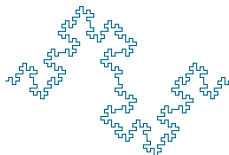# Definiteness, Specificity or Topicality?
The Semantics of Differential Object Marking in Persian

Masoud Jasbi


October 3, 2014

ROAD MAP

- ▶ Introduction
    - ▶ Definiteness
    - ▶ DOM
    - ▶ Persian
- ▶ Persian DOM
    - ▶ Formulating the problem.
    - ▶ Some preliminary answers.
    - ▶ 7 definite and indefinite constructions.
- ▶ Towards a compositional account.
- ▶ Previous approaches:
    - ▶ Topicality (Information Structural)
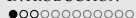   - ▶ Specificity
- ▶ Concluding Remarks

DEFINITENESS

▶ Frege and Strawson suggested that definite descriptions ("the book") carry two presuppositions:
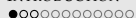
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    2. Uniqueness: there is no more than one entity that satisfies the description (in the salient context).
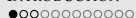
DEFINITENESS

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  ("the book") carry two presuppositions:
    1. Existence: there is an entity that satisfies the description.
    2. Uniqueness: there is no more than one entity that satisfies
       the description (in the salient context).

- ► If these presuppositions are not true, then the sentence
  containing a definite description is undefined or without
  truth-value.

DEFINITENESS

(1) (when there is no book on the table):
     # Give me the book!

     ▸   There is no book!

(2) (when there are multiple books on the table):
     # Give me the book!

     ▸   There is more than one book!

DEFINITENESS

(3) (when there is no book on the table):
    # Don't give me the book!

   ▶ There is no book!

(4) (when there are multiple books on the table):
    # Don't give me the book!

   ▶ There is more than one book!

DIFFERENTIAL OBJECT MARKING

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- ▶ DOM languages do not mark grammatical objects uniformly.
- ▶ Object Marking can be obligatory, optional or unacceptable, depending on <u>some</u> semantic features of the object NP.
- ▶ The usual suspects: definiteness, specificity, topicality, or animacy.

DIFFERENTIAL OBJECT MARKING

(5)   a. Juan besó $\boxed{*(a)}$ [María]$_{[+hum,+def]}$
          John kissed A   Mary

          John kissed Mary.

     b. Juan quiere $\boxed{(a)}$ [un abogado]$_{[+hum,-def]}$
          John wants   A   a   lawyer

          John wants **(a certain)** lawyer.

     c. Juan destruyó $\boxed{(*a)}$ [la cuidad]$_{[-hum]}$
          John destroyed A   the city

          John destroyed the city.   [Rodríguez-Mondoñedo, 2007]

     ▸ The presence of *a* in (5b) contributes "specificity".

PERSIAN

- ▶ Genealogy: Indo-European → Indo-Iranian → Iranian

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PERSIAN

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- Native to: Iran (Farsi) - Afghanistan (Dari) - Tajikistan (Tajik)

- Basic Word Order: SOV
- I investigate Tehrani Farsi. It is common practice to call this dialect Persian!

PERSIAN

(6) [Amir]$_S$ [keik]$_{DO}$ $\boxed{\text{rā}}$ be [barādar-ash]$_{IO}$ [dād-ø]$_V$
     Amir   cake   ACC to brother-his   gave-3.SG
     "Amir gave the cake to his brother."

PERSIAN

- There are two varieties of Persian: Formal (high variety) and Colloquial (low variety).

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- I investigate Modern Colloquial Persian.

PERSIAN

- There are two varieties of Persian: Formal (high variety) and Colloquial (low variety).
- I investigate Modern Colloquial Persian.
- The object marker rā has different forms depending on the variety:

Persian Object Marker	V ___	C ___
Formal Persian	*rā*	*rā*
Colloquial Persian	*ro*	*o*

PERSIAN

(7) Formal:

[Amir]*~S~* [keik]*~DO~* $\boxed{\text{rā}}$ be [barādar-ash]*~IO~* [dād-ø]*~V~*
 Amir   cake   ACC to brother-his   gave-3.SG

"Amir gave the cake to his brother."

(8) Colloquial:

[Amir]*~S~* [keik]*~DO~* $\boxed{\text{o}}$ [dād-ø]*~V~* [barādar-ash]*~IO~*
 Amir   cake   ACC gave-3.SG brother-his

"Amir gave the cake to his brother."

PERSIAN INDEFINITES

- There are two markers of indefiniteness in Persian:
    1. *ye* : which behaves very much the English *a(n)*.
    2. *i* : which behaves a bit like the English *any*.

PERSIAN INDEFINITES

(9)   a.   *ye* keik xord-am
          a   cake eat-1.SG
          "I ate a cake."

      b.   * keik *i*   xord-am
            cake INDEF eat-1.SG

      c.   *ye* keik *i*   xord-am
          a   cake INDEF eat-1.SG
          "I ate a cake."

PERSIAN INDEFINITES

- *i* can appear by itself in a downward entailing environment:

(10)   a.   keik *i*   **na**-xord-am
             cake INDEF NEG-eat-1.SG
             "I didn't eat any cake."

THE PERSIAN DOM PUZZLE

(11)   man keik $\boxed{\text{o}}$ xord-am
     I   cake ACC eat-1.SG
     "I ate the cake."

- ▶ Uniqueness implication: #(11) if there are 2 or more cakes.
- ▶ Existence implication: #(11) if there is no cake.

THE PERSIAN DOM PUZZLE

(12) man *ye* keik xord-am
I INDEF cake eat-1.SG
"I ate a cake."

▸ No Uniqueness implication.
▸ Existence implication: (12) is false if there is no cake.

THE PERSIAN DOM PUZZLE

- ▶ The puzzling construction:

(13) man *ye* keik ⬚o⬚ xord-am
      I   INDEF cake ACC eat-1.SG
      "I ate a cake."

- ▶ No uniqueness implication.
- ▶ Existence implication: #(31) if there is no cake.
- ▶ Possible partitive reading: there are two or more cakes.
- ▶ Possible specific reading: I ate a certain cake.

THE PERSIAN DOM PUZZLE

▶ The plot thickens! The object marker *rā* can appear and interact with the indefinite markers *ye* and *i*.

THE PERSIAN DOM PUZZLE

- ▶ The plot thickens! The object marker *rā* can appear and interact with the indefinite markers *ye* and *i*.

  1.   NP - *i*
  2. *ye* - NP - *i*
  3. *ye* - NP
  4.   NP - *i* - | *rā* |
  5. *ye* - NP - *i* - | *rā* |
  6. *ye* - NP   - | *rā* |
  7. ø - NP - ø - | *rā* |

THE PERSIAN DOM PUZZLE

Q1 What is the semantic contribution of the object marker *rā*?

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Q2 What are the semantic contributions of *ye* and *i*?

THE PERSIAN DOM PUZZLE

Q1 What is the semantic contribution of the object marker *rā*?

Q2 What are the semantic contributions of *ye* and *i*?

Q3 How are these constructions different from each other semantically?

SOME PRELIMINARY SOLUTIONS

A1 Persian object marker *rā* introduces an existential presupposition.

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SOME PRELIMINARY SOLUTIONS

- A1 Persian object marker *rā* introduces an existential presupposition.
- A2 Persian indefinite markers *ye* introduce an existential quantifier.
- A3 In the following slides I will provide an examples for each construction to explain the semantics differences.

SOME PRELIMINARY SOLUTIONS

▶ In order to test the projection properties of the existential presupposition introduced by *rā*, I use negated sentences in the following examples.

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▶ I show that the existential presupposition triggered by the object marker is not cancelled when embedded under negation.

SOME PRELIMINARY SOLUTIONS

- ▶ In order to test the projection properties of the existential presupposition introduced by *rā*, I use negated sentences in the following examples.
- ▶ I show that the existential presupposition triggered by the object marker is not cancelled when embedded under negation.
- ▶ I show that the existential quantifier introduced by the indefinite markers participates in the scope relations with negation.

CONSTRUCTIONS

- A reminder:

  1.   NP - *i*   Indefinite
  2. *ye* - NP - *i*   Indefinite
  3. *ye* - NP   Indefinite
  4.   NP - *i* - $\boxed{r\bar{a}}$ Presuppositional Indefinite
  5. *ye* - NP - *i* - $\boxed{r\bar{a}}$ Presuppositional Indefinite
  6. *ye* - NP   - $\boxed{r\bar{a}}$ Presuppositional Indefinite
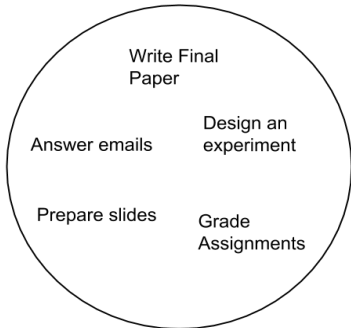 7. ø - NP - ø - $\boxed{r\bar{a}}$ Definite

1. NP-*i*

(14) man emruz [$_{NP}$kār]-***i*** [$_V$anjām na-dād-am]
      I   today   work-INDEF   finish NEG-give-1.SG
      "I didn't do any work today."

- ¬ [∃x work(x) ∧ do(m,x)]
- $\llbracket$work$\rrbracket$ ∩ $\llbracket$do$\rrbracket$ = ∅
- The set denoted by "work" can be empty or non-empty
  (no existence implication).

BUSY-LAZY STUDENT SCENARIO

WORK

Write Final
Paper

Answer emails

Design an
experiment

Prepare slides

Grade
Assignments

DO

Playing Angry
Brid

Eating

Facebooking

Daydreaming

Napping
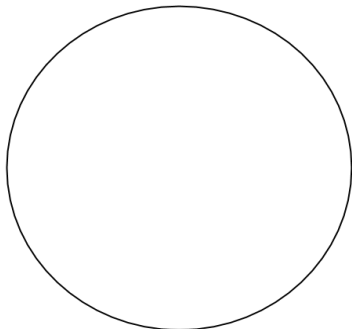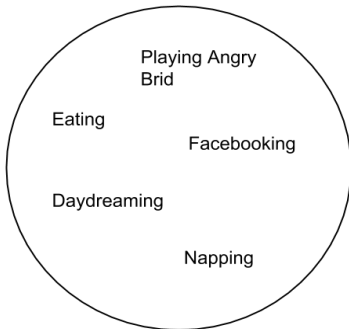
FREE STUDENT SCENARIO

FREE STUDENT SCENARIO

▶ The free student:

(15) man emruz [kār]-***i***   anjām na-dād-am   chon
      I   today work-INDEF finish NEG-give-1.SG because
      kār-***i***   na-bud-ø   ke anjām be-da-m
      work-INDEF NEG-was-3.SG that finish SUBJ-give-1.SG
      "I didn't do any work today because there was no work
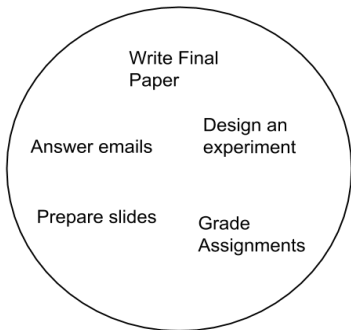   to do."

2.*ye*-NP-*i*

(16)   man emruz *ye*-[$_{NP}$kār]-*i*   [$_{V}$anjām na-dād-am]
     I   today a-   work-INDEF   finish   NEG-give-1.SG
     "There is some work I didn't do today."

- ▶ $\exists x$ work$(x) \wedge \neg$ do(m,x)
- ▶ $\llbracket$work$\rrbracket \cap \neg \llbracket$do$\rrbracket \neq \emptyset$
- ▶ The intersection might be empty or not.
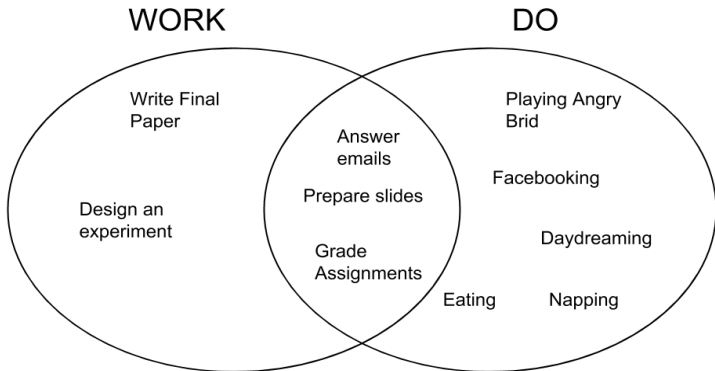
BUSY-LAZY STUDENT SCENARIO

BUSY-WORKING STUDENT SCENARIO

3.*ye*-NP

(17)   man emruz *ye*-[$_{NP}$kār] anjām na-dād-am
       I   today   a-   work finish NEG-give-1.SG

     ▸   "There is some work I didn't do today."
     ▸   "I didn't do a (single) task today."
        (special intonation)

▸ $\exists x \, \text{work}(x) \wedge \neg \, \text{do}(\text{m},x)$

▸ $\neg \, [\, \exists x \, \text{work}(x) \wedge \text{do}(\text{m},x)]$
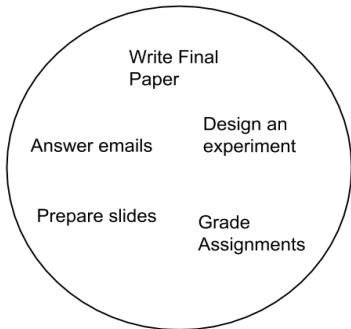
4.NP-*i*-$\boxed{\text{RĀ}}$

(18) man emruz [$_{NP}$kār]-*i* $\boxed{\text{ro}}$ [$_V$anjām na-dād-am]
I today work-INDEF ACC finish NEG-give-1.SG
"(I had work to do but) I didn't do any work today."

- $\partial(\exists x\, \text{work}(x)) \wedge \neg\, [\exists x\, \text{work}(x) \wedge \text{do}(m,x)]$
- $[\![\text{work}]\!] \cap [\![\text{do}]\!] = \emptyset$ (but $[\![\text{work}]\!] \neq \emptyset$)
- The set denoted by "work" is presupposed to be non-empty.

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BUSY-LAZY STUDENT SCENARIO

(19) # man emruz [kār]-*i*   ro anjām na-dād-am
      I   today work-INDEF ACC finish NEG-give-1.SG
      chon   kār-*i*   na-bud-ø   ke anjām
      because work-INDEF NEG-was-3.SG that finish
      be-da-m
      SUBJ-give-1.SG
      "I didn't do any work today because there was no work
      to do."

5. *ye*-NP-*i*- RĀ

(20)   man emruz *ye*-[$_{NP}$kār]-*i*   ro [$_V$anjām
       I   today one- work-INDEF ACC   finish
       na-dād-am]
       NEG-give-1.SG

   "(I had work to do but) I didn't do any work today."

- $\partial(\exists x \, \text{work}(x)) \wedge \exists x \, \text{work}(x) \wedge \neg \, \text{do}(m,x)$
- Often used in contexts where both the speaker and addressee are familiar with the set of things the speaker had to do.

6. *ye*-NP-$\boxed{\text{RĀ}}$

(21)   man emruz *ye*-[$_{NP}$kār] $\boxed{\text{o}}$ anjām na-dād-am
     I   today   one-   work   ACC   finish   NEG-give-1.SG

- ▸ "There is some work I didn't do today."
- ▸ "I didn't do a (single) task today."
  (special intonation)

- ▸ $\partial(\exists x\ \text{work}(x)) \land \exists x\ \text{work}(x) \land \neg\ \text{do}(\text{m},x)$
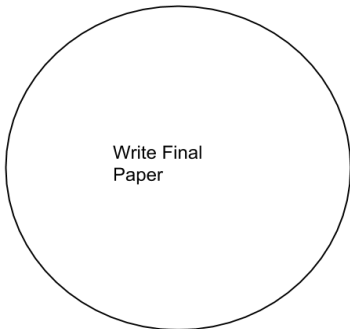- ▸ $\partial(\exists x\ \text{work}(x)) \land \neg\ [\exists x\ \text{work}(x) \land \text{do}(\text{m},x)]$

7. Ø-NP-Ø- $\boxed{\text{RĀ}}$

(22) man emruz $_\square$ -[$_{NP}$kār] $_\square$ $\boxed{\text{o}}$ anjām na-dād-am
      I   today one - work ACC finish NEG-give-1.SG
      "I didn't do the work."

  ► ¬ do(m, ιx.work(x))

DEFINITE SCENARIO
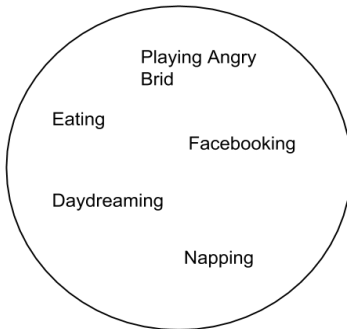
SUMMARY

▸ Semantic differences between constructions:

1.   NP - i : $\neg\,[\,\exists x\ \mathrm{work}(x) \wedge \mathrm{do(m,}x)]$

2. ye - NP - i : $\exists x\ \mathrm{work}(x) \wedge \neg\,\mathrm{do(m,}x)$

3. ye - NP

4.   NP - i - $\boxed{r\bar{a}}$: $\partial(\exists x\ \mathrm{work}(x)) \wedge \neg\,[\,\exists x\ \mathrm{work}(x) \wedge \mathrm{do(m,}x)]$

5. ye - NP - i - $\boxed{r\bar{a}}$: $\partial(\exists x\ \mathrm{work}(x)) \wedge \exists x\ \mathrm{work}(x) \wedge \neg\,\mathrm{do(m,}x)$

6. ye - NP   - $\boxed{r\bar{a}}$

7.   ø - NP - ø- $\boxed{r\bar{a}}$: $\neg\,\mathrm{do(m,}\ \iota x.\mathrm{work}(x))$

TOWARDS A COMPOSITIONAL ACCOUNT

(23)   a. man keik ⬚o⬚ xord-am
          I   cake ACC eat-1.SG
          "I ate the cake."

     b. man *ye* keik xord-am
          I   a cake eat-1.SG
          "I ate a cake."

     c. man *ye*   keik ⬚o⬚ xord-am
          I   INDEF cake ACC eat-1.SG
          "I ate a cake."

▶ This distribution encourages a decomposed account of
  definiteness in which existence and uniqueness
  presuppositions are triggered by different mechanisms
  [Coppock and Beaver, 2012].

TOWARDS A COMPOSITIONAL ACCOUNT

- ▶ Introduce the existence presupposition by *rā*.
- ▶ To make a definite, add a uniqueness presupposition by type-shifting with *iota*.
- ▶ To make a presuppositional indefinite, add *ye* to introduce an existential quantifier.

(24) a. man ø keik $\boxed{\text{o}}$ xord-am

   I   cake ACC eat-1.SG

   "I ate the cake."

   b. man *ye*   keik $\boxed{\text{o}}$ xord-am

   I   INDEF cake ACC eat-1.SG

   "I ate a cake."

AN INTERESTING EXAMPLE

(25) [Asghar Farhadi]$_{DO}$ [mi-shnās-i]$_V$?
Asghar Farhadi HAB-know-2.SG
"Do you know Asghar Farhadi? (Is that a thing?!)"

(26) [Asghar Farhadi]$_{DO}$ ⟨ro⟩ [mi-shnās-i]$_V$?
Asghar Farhadi ACC HAB-know-2.SG
"Do you know Asghar Farhadi? (He is a thing.)"

PREVIOUS APPROACHES

- Two main approaches to the semantics of DOM in Persian:
    1. Topic Marking
       [Dabir-Moghaddam, 1992, Dalrymple and Nikolaeva, 2011]
    2. Specificity
       [Karimi, 1990, Karimi, 1996, Karimi, 2003]

THE INFORMATION STRUCTURAL APPRAOCH

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- ▶ An utterance can also have two topics:
  1. Primary topic is the entity that the sentence is about.
  2. Secondary topic is the entity such that the sentence is about the relationship between it and the primary topic.

THE INFORMATION STRUCTURAL APPRAOCH

(27)   a.   Whatever became of John?   [Lambrecht, 1996]

     b. $[He]_{T_1}$ [married Rosa]$_f$.
        Pragmatic Presupposition: John did X.
        Pragmatic Assertion: X = married Rosa.

     c.   but $[he]_{T_1}$ [didn't really love]$_f$ $[her]_{T_2}$.
        Pragmatic Presupposition = John stands in the relation X
        to Rosa.
        Pragmatic Assertion: X = didn't really love

THE INFORMATION STRUCTURAL APPRAOCH

(28)   Pragmatic Presupposition: You did X to the book.
       Pragmatic Assertion: X = bought.

   a.   What did you decide about the book?

   b. $[man]_{T_1}$ $[ketāb]_{T_2}$ $\boxed{o}$ $[xarid\text{-}am]_f$
        I   book   ACC   buy.PST-1.SG
        "I bought the book."

▶ *rā* in Persian marks secondary topics
   [Dabir-Moghaddam, 1992, Dalrymple and Nikolaeva, 2011].

THE INFORMATION STRUCTURAL APPRAOCH

- ▶ Problem 1: *rā* appears frequently on question words such as *ki* (who), *chi* (what), and it is obligatory on *kodum* (which).

(29)   [Amir]$_S$ [chi]$_{DO}$ $\boxed{\text{ro}}$ [xord-ø]$_V$?
       Amir   what   ACC   ate--3.SG
       "What did Amir eat?"

THE INFORMATION STRUCTURAL APPRAOCH

- ► Problem 2: *rā* appears on primary topics as well.

(30)   a.   What happened to Amir?
       b.   ye shir [Amir]$_{T_1}$ $\boxed{\text{o}}$ xord-ø?
            a lion Amir   ACC ate.PST-3.SG
            "A lion ate Amir."

THE INFORMATION STRUCTURAL APPRAOCH

- The decomposed definiteness account captures the
  intuition behind the IS approach (that *rā* is
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THE INFORMATION STRUCTURAL APPRAOCH

- The decomposed definiteness account captures the intuition behind the IS approach (that *rā* is presuppositional or discourse-old) without running into problem 1 or 2.

- It also obviates the need for positing "secondary topics" in Persian.

THE SPECIFICITY APPRAOCH

- *rā* marks specific direct objects.

  (31) man *ye* keik ⌐o⌐ xord-am
        I   INDEF cake ACC eat-1.SG
        "I ate a specific cake."

- The problem is that the definition of specificity is very nonspecific [Farkas, 2002].

THE SPECIFICITY APPRAOCH

- [Farkas, 1994] differentiates three types of specificity:

THE SPECIFICITY APPRAOCH

- [Farkas, 1994] differentiates three types of specificity:
  1. Epistemic
  2. Scopal
  3. Partitive

EPISTEMIC SPECIFICITY

- An indefinite is epistemically specific if the speaker has a specific referent in mind.

  (32) Mr. Darcy didn't like a girl at the party.

      a. Her name is Elizabeth. (Epistemically Specific)

      b. We are all trying to figure out who she is. (Epistemically Nonspecific)

EPISTEMIC SPECIFICITY

- However, *rā* can appear on epistemically nonspecific NPs:

(33) Context: my three-year-old cousin takes my phone and
      accidentally deletes a picture:

      In bache *ye* aks   (*i*) |o| pāk kard-e
      this kid   INDEF picture INDEF ACC clean did.PERF.3.SG

      "This kid has deleted a picture."

EPISTEMIC SPECIFICITY

▶ The decomposed definiteness account predicts that
  epistemically specific readings of rā-marked NPs can be
  derived pragmatically in the right context.

EPISTEMIC SPECIFICITY

- ▶ The decomposed definiteness account predicts that epistemically specific readings of rā-marked NPs can be derived pragmatically in the right context.
- ▶ However, it also predicts that such readings might be absent in other contexts.

SCOPAL SPECIFICITY

▶ An indefinite is scopally specific if it takes the widest scope:

    (34)   Mr. Darcy didn't like a girl at the party.
          a. Although he liked some other girls. (Scopally Specific)
          b. He thought all the girls were utterly intolerable. (Scopally Nonspecific)

SCOPAL SPECIFICITY

- *rā* appears on scopally nonspecific NPs too:

  (35) man emruz [*NP*kār]-***i***   ro   [*v*anjām
        I   today   work-INDEF   finish ACC
        na-dād-am]
        NEG-give-1.SG
        "I didn't do any work today."

- NOT the wide scope reading: "there is some work I didn't do".

- As I suggested earlier, *rā* does not participate in scope relations.

PARTITIVE SPECIFICITY

▶ An indefinite is partitively specific if it is interpreted as part of a set introduced in previous discourse [Enc, 1991].

(36) Several children entered my room . . .

    a. Iki kiz taniyordum
       two girl I-knew.

       "I knew two girls." (Partitively Non-Specific)

    b. Iki kiz-$\boxed{i}$ taniyordum
       two girl-ACC I-knew.

       "I knew two (of the) girls." (Partitively Specific)

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- Partitive Specificity is very close to the decomposed definiteness account.
- It is also a presuppositional account that suggests the set denoted by the rā-marked NP is familiar and non-empty.
- However, it predicts that a partitive reading should always be present.

PARTITIVE SPECIFICITY

- But some rā-marked objects have no partitive reading:

(37) Last night in the party . . .

   man [ye keik]_{NP} (i) $\boxed{\text{o}}$ tanhāyi xord-am
   1.SG one cake   (*i*) ACC ate-1.SG

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    - Therefore, it must be that there was more than one object.
- Of course, such an inference is cancellable if the context requires.

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- It also shows better empirical coverage than the previous accounts.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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