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

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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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DEFINITENESS

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  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

- DOM languages do not mark grammatical objects uniformly.
Differential Object Marking

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DIFFERENTIAL OBJECT MARKING

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

(5)  

a. Juan besó *(a) [María][+hum,+def]  
John kissed A Mary  
John kissed Mary.

b. Juan quiere *(a) [un abogado][+hum,−def]  
John wants A a lawyer  
John wants (a certain) lawyer.

c. Juan destruyó *(a) [la ciudad][−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
PERSIAN

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- Native to: Iran (Farsi) - Afghanistan (Dari) - Tajikistan (Tajik)
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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!
(6) [Amir]$_s$ [keik]$_{DO}$ [rā] be [barādar-ash]$_{IO}$ [dād-Ø]$_V$

Amir  cake  ACC to brother-his  gave-3.SG

“Amir gave the cake to his brother.”
There are two varieties of Persian: Formal (high variety) and Colloquial (low variety).
PERSIAN

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Persian Object Marker</th>
<th>V ___</th>
<th>C ___</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Formal Persian</td>
<td>rā</td>
<td>rā</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colloquial Persian</td>
<td>ro</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(7) Formal:

\[ [\text{Amir}]_s \ [\text{keik}]_{DO} \ [\text{rā}] \ \text{be} \ [\text{barādar-ash}]_{IO} \ [\text{dād-∅}]_V \]

Amir cake ACC to brother-his gave-3.SG

“Amir gave the cake to his brother.”

(8) Colloquial:

\[ [\text{Amir}]_s \ [\text{keik}]_{DO} \ [\text{o}] \ [\text{dād-∅}]_V \ [\text{barādar-ash}]_{IO} \]

Amir cake ACC gave-3.SG brother-his

“Amir gave the cake to his brother.”
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 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 - $ø$ - $rā$
Introduction

The Persian DOM Puzzle

Q1 What is the semantic contribution of the object marker rā?
Q1 What is the semantic contribution of the object marker rā?
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?
A1 Persian object marker *rā* introduces an existential presupposition.
**SOME PRELIMINARY SOLUTIONS**

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

A2  Persian indefinite markers *ye* introduce an existential quantifier.
**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 - rā  Presuppositional Indefinite
  5. ye - NP - i - rā  Presuppositional Indefinite
  6. ye - NP - rā  Presuppositional Indefinite
  7. ø - NP - ø - rā  Definite
1. NP-\textit{i}

(14)  man emruz $[_{NP}k\text{"ar}]$-\textit{i}   $[_{V}\text{anj"am na-d\text{"a}d-am}]$

I today work-INDEF finish NEG-give-1.SG

“I didn’t do any work today.”

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

$[\text{work}] \cap [\text{do}] = \emptyset$

The set denoted by “work” can be empty or non-empty (no existence implication).
BUSY-LAZY STUDENT SCENARIO

WORK

- Write Final Paper
- Design an experiment
- Grade Assignments
- Answer emails
- Prepare slides

DO

- Playing Angry Brid
- Eating
- Daydreaming
- Facebooking
- Napping
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.”

- \( \exists x \text{ work}(x) \land \neg \text{ do}(m,x) \)
- \( [\text{work}] \cap \neg [\text{do}] \neq \emptyset \)
- The intersection might be empty or not.
BUSY-LAZY STUDENT SCENARIO

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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)

- $\exists x \text{ work}(x) \land \neg \text{ do(m,x)}$
- $\neg [ \exists x \text{ work}(x) \land \text{ do(m,x)}]$
(18) man emruz \[_{NP}kār]-i \[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)) \land \neg (\exists x \text{work}(x) \land \text{do}(m,x)]
\[\text{[work]} \cap \text{[do]} = \emptyset \text{ (but [work]} \neq \emptyset)
\[\text{The set denoted by “work” is presupposed to be non-empty.}
BUSY-LAZY STUDENT SCENARIO

WORK

Write Final Paper
Design an experiment
Grade Assignments
Answer emails
Prepare slides

DO

Playing Angry Brid
Eating
Daydreaming
Facebooking
Napping
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.”

- \( \partial(\exists x \text{work}(x)) \land \exists x \text{work}(x) \land \neg \text{do}(m, x) \)
- 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-RĀ

(21) man emruz ye-[NP kār] 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)

▶ ∂(∃x work(x)) ∧ ∃x work(x) ∧ ¬ do(m,x)
▶ ∂(∃x work(x)) ∧ ¬ [∃x work(x) ∧ do(m,x)]
7. Ø-NP-Ø-[RĀ]

(22) man emruz □-[NPKār] □ o anjām na-dād-am
I today one- work ACC finish NEG-give-1.SG
“I didn’t do the work.”

▶ ¬ do(m, ₓ.work(x))
DEFINITE SCENARIO

WORK

Write Final Paper

DO

Playing Angry Brid
Eating
Daydreaming
Facebooking
Napping
SUMMARY

- Semantic differences between constructions:

1. NP - $i$ : $\neg [\exists x \text{ work}(x) \land \text{do}(m,x)]$
2. ye - NP - $i$ : $\exists x \text{ work}(x) \land \neg \text{do}(m,x)$
3. ye - NP
4. NP - $i$ - $\overline{r\ddot{a}}$ : $\partial(\exists x \text{ work}(x)) \land \neg [\exists x \text{ work}(x) \land \text{do}(m,x)]$
5. ye - NP - $i$ - $\overline{r\ddot{a}}$ : $\partial(\exists x \text{ work}(x)) \land \exists x \text{ work}(x) \land \neg \text{do}(m,x)$
6. ye - NP - $\overline{r\ddot{a}}$
7. $\varnothing$ - NP - $\varnothing$ - $\overline{r\ddot{a}}$ : $\neg \text{do}(m, ix.\text{work}(x))$
Towards a Compositional Account

(23)  

a. man keik [ ] 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 [ ] 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 [o] xord-am
    I     cake ACC eat-1.SG
    “I ate the cake.”

b. man *ye* keik [o] xord-am
    I     INDEF cake ACC eat-1.SG
    “I ate a cake.”
AN INTERESTING EXAMPLE

(25) \([\text{Asghar Farhadi}]_{DO} [\text{mi-shnās-i}]_{V}\) ?
Asghar Farhadi \quad \text{HAB-know-2.SG}

“Do you know Asghar Farhadi? (Is that a thing?!)”

(26) \([\text{Asghar Farhadi}]_{DO} \boxed{\text{ro}} [\text{mi-shnās-i}]_{V}\) ?
Asghar Farhadi \quad \text{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
The Information Structural Approach

- The intuition behind the information structural account is that case-marked objects are discourse-old.
The Information Structural Approach

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- Focus is that part of the utterance that contains new information.
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- An utterance can also have two topics:
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  1. Primary topic is the entity that the sentence is about.
The Information Structural Approach

- The intuition behind the information structural account is that case-marked objects are discourse-old.
- Information in an utterance is divided into pragmatic presupposition (old) and a pragmatic assertion (new).
- Focus is that part of the utterance that contains new information.
- 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.
(27)  
a. Whatever became of John?  
   [Lambrecht, 1996]  
b. \([\text{He}]_{T_1} [\text{married Rosa}]_f.\)  
   Pragmatic Presupposition: John did X.  
   Pragmatic Assertion: \(X = \text{married Rosa}.\)  
c. but \([\text{he}]_{T_1} [\text{didn’t really love}]_f [\text{her}]_{T_2}.\)  
   Pragmatic Presupposition = John stands in the relation \(X\) to Rosa.  
   Pragmatic Assertion: \(X = \text{didn’t really love}\)
THE INFORMATION STRUCTURAL APPROACH

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

a. What did you decide about the book?

b. \([\text{man}]_{T_1} [\text{ketāb}]_{T_2} \underline{\square} [\text{xarid-am}]_f\)
   I book ACC buy.PST-1.SG
   “I bought the book.”

- *rā* in Persian marks secondary topics

[Dabir-Moghaddam, 1992, Dalrymple and Nikolaeva, 2011].
Problem 1: $rā$ appears frequently on question words such as $ki$ (who), $chi$ (what), and it is obligatory on $kodum$ (which).

(29) $[\text{Amir}]_s [\text{chi}]_{DO} \ [\text{ro}] \ [\text{xord-Ø}]_v$?
Amir what ACC ate--3.SG

“What did Amir eat?”
Problem 2: $r\bar{a}$ appears on primary topics as well.

(30)  a. What happened to Amir?

b. ye shir [Amir]$_T_1$ [ ] xord-ø?

  a lion Amir   ACC ate.PST-3.SG

  “A lion ate Amir.”
The Information Structural Approach

- 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.
The Information Structural Approach

- 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 Approach**

- $rā$ 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 APPROACH

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

- [Farkas, 1994] differentiates three types of specificity:
  1. Epistemic
  2. Scopal
  3. Partitive
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)
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.”
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. İki kız taniyordum  
   two girl I-knew.  
   “I knew two girls.” (Partitively Non-Specific)

b. İki kız-i taniyordum  
   two girl-ACC I-knew.  
   “I knew two (of the) girls.” (Partitively Specific)
Partitive Specificity

- Partitive Specificity is very close to the decomposed definiteness account.
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- It is also a presuppositional account that suggests the set denoted by the rā-marked NP is familiar and non-empty.
Partitive Specificity

- 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 …

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

“\text{I ate a cake myself.}”

- No implication that there was more than one cake.
PARTITIVE SPECIFICITY

▷ In the decomposed definiteness account, the partitive reading can be derived through the competition of type-shifting (iota) and application of ye.
PARTITIVE SPECIFICITY

- In the decomposed definiteness account, the partitive reading can be derived through the competition of type-shifting (*iota*) and application of *ye*.
- The addressee uses the following Gricean reasoning applies:
  - The speaker used *ye* instead of *iota*. 
PARTITIVE SPECIFICITY

▶ In the decomposed definiteness account, the partitive reading can be derived through the competition of type-shifting (\textit{iota}) and application of \textit{ye}.

▶ The addressee uses the following Gricean reasoning applies:
  ▶ The speaker used \textit{ye} instead of \textit{iota}.
  ▶ \textit{iota} would’ve been a better choice of there was only one object satisfying the description.
Partitive Specificity

- In the decomposed definiteness account, the partitive reading can be derived through the competition of type-shifting (iota) and application of ye.
- The addressee uses the following Gricean reasoning applies:
  - The speaker used ye instead of iota.
  - iota would’ve been a better choice of there was only one object satisfying the description.
  - Therefore, it must be that there was more than one object.
PARTITIVE SPECIFICITY

- In the decomposed definiteness account, the partitive reading can be derived through the competition of type-shifting \( \text{iota} \) and application of \( \text{ye} \).
- The addressee uses the following Gricean reasoning applies:
  - The speaker used \( \text{ye} \) instead of \( \text{iota} \).
  - \( \text{iota} \) would’ve been a better choice of there was only one object satisfying the description.
  - Therefore, it must be that there was more than one object.
- Of course, such an inference is cancellable if the context requires.
CONCLUDING REMARKS

- I have argued that:
- In the Persian object position, definiteness is achieved through two different mechanisms:
CONCLUDING REMARKS

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- In the Persian object position, definiteness is achieved through two different mechanisms:
  - Introduction of the existential presupposition with the object marker.
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- In the Persian object position, definiteness is achieved through two different mechanisms:
  - Introduction of the existential presupposition with the object marker.
  - Introduction of the uniqueness presupposition with $iota$.
CONCLUDING REMARKS

- I have argued that:
  - In the Persian object position, definiteness is achieved through two different mechanisms:
    - Introduction of the existential presupposition with the object marker.
    - Introduction of the uniqueness presupposition with *iota*
  - This account captures the intuitions behind some of the previous accounts, namely topicality and specificity.
CONCLUDING REMARKS

- I have argued that:
- In the Persian object position, definiteness is achieved through two different mechanisms:
  - Introduction of the existential presupposition with the object marker.
  - Introduction of the uniqueness presupposition with *iota*
- This account captures the intuitions behind some of the previous accounts, namely topicality and specificity.
- It also shows better empirical coverage than the previous accounts.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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In L. Nash and G. Tsoulas (eds), *Langues et Grammaire 1*. Citeseer.


