

Antisingleton Indefinites in Persian

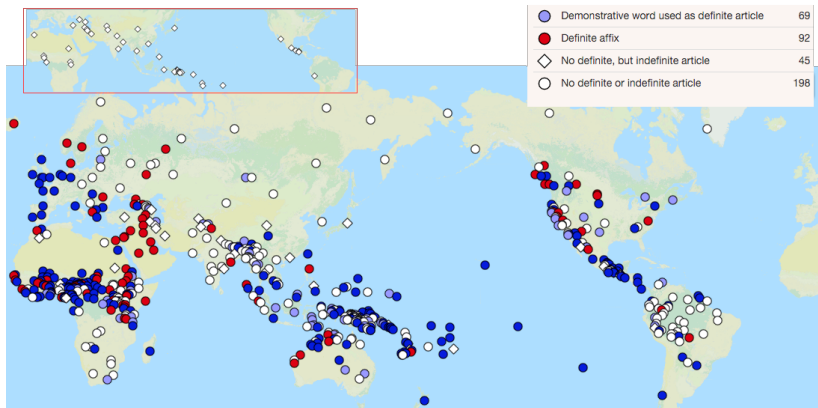
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Semantics and Pragmatics (CUSP 8)

DEFINITENESS



- ▶ No definite but indefinite article: around 7% of the languages in WALS.
- ▶ Persian is among these languages with Japanese, Quechua, and Turkish.
- ▶ In this talk, I focus on singular definite and indefinite descriptions in Modern Tehrani Colloquial Persian.

(Dryer, 2013; Dryer and Haspelmath, 2013)

DEFINITENESS IN PERSIAN

- ▶ No overt marker of definiteness.
- ▶ There are two indefinite markers¹:
 - i. The indefinite determiner “ye”.
 - ii. The indefinite clitic “-i”.

¹See Ghomeshi (2003); Toosarvandani and Nasser (2015) for some previous discussions of these markers

DEFINITENESS IN PERSIAN

- ▶ No overt marker of definiteness.
- ▶ There are two indefinite markers¹:
 - i. The indefinite determiner “ye”.
 - ii. The indefinite clitic “-i”.
- ▶ Four constructions:
 1. NP
 2. **ye**-NP
 3. **ye**-NP-i
 4. NP-i

Definite
 Indefinite
 Antisingleton Indefinite
 Antisingleton Indefinite

¹See Ghomeshi (2003); Toosarvandani and Nasser (2015) for some previous discussions of these markers

MAIN QUESTIONS

- ▶ What are the empirical facts on singular (in)definites in Persian?
- ▶ What is the semantic contribution of each indefinite morpheme?
- ▶ Can we have a compositional story when they appear together?
(**ye-NP-i**)

MAIN QUESTIONS

- ▶ What are the empirical facts on singular (in)definites in Persian?
- ▶ What is the semantic contribution of each indefinite morpheme?
- ▶ Can we have a compositional story when they appear together?
(ye-NP-i)
- ▶ Good News: Yes!

PLAN FOR THE TALK

Construction	Form	Implication	Projective	CG
Definite	NP			
Indefinite	ye-NP			
Antisingleton Indefinite	ye-NP-i			
Antisingleton Indefinite	NP-i			

PLAN FOR THE TALK

Construction	Form	Implication	Projective	CG
Definite	NP			
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Antisingleton Indefinite	NP-i			

BARE NOMINALS: IMPLICATIONS

- ▶ Bare nominals can carry EXISTENCE and UNIQUENESS implications².

- (1) [The Falling Child Scenario | There is a family party. Suddenly there comes a loud thud. The host asks what happened. Someone says the following sentence. How many children are at the party?]

[_s bache] [_v oftād]
 child fall.PERF.3.SG

“The child fell.”

CHILD =	0	1	2+
	#	✓	#

²They can also be interpreted as generic.

BARE NOMINALS: PROJECTION

- ▶ The EXISTENCE and UNIQUENESS implications of the bare nominals are projective.

(2) a. Question:

bage oftād?

child fall.PERF.3.SG

“Did the child fall?”

b. Negation:

bage na-yoftād

child NEG-fall.PERF.2.SG

“The child didn’t fall.”

c. Antecedent of Conditionals:

age bache oftād, be-m be-gu

if child fall.PERF.2.SG, to-1.SG IMP-say

“Tell me if the child fell.”

d. Possibility Modal:

shāyad bache oftād

maybe child fall.PERF.2.SG

“Maybe the child fell.”

BARE NOMINALS: CG STATUS

- ▶ They also need to be COMMON GROUND between the speaker and the addressee.
- (3) a. [The Sleeping Child Scenario: Uniqueness | Amir goes to a family party. When he comes back home his wife asks if there were any children at the party. Amir says yes and continues with ...]
- # bache hamash xāb bud
 child all.3.SG.CLC sleep be.PST.3.SG
- “The child was constantly asleep.”
- b. [The Sleeping Child Scenario: Existence | In Amir’s family, only his sister has a child but sometimes she leaves the child with a babysitter for family parties. Amir comes back home. His wife asks how the party was. He says: “oh it was great ...]
- ! bache hamash xāb bud
 child all.3.SG.CLC sleep be.PST.3.SG
- “The child was constantly asleep.”

Construction	Form	Implication	Projective	CG
Definite	NP	Existence Uniqueness	Yes Yes	Yes Yes
Indefinite	ye-NP			
Antisingleton Indefinite	ye-NP-i			
Antisingleton Indefinite	NP-i			

Construction	Form	Implication	Projective	CG
Definite	NP	Existence Uniqueness	Yes Yes	Yes Yes
Indefinite	ye-NP			
Antisingleton Indefinite	ye-NP-i			
Antisingleton Indefinite	NP-i			

YE-NP: IMPLICATIONS

- ▶ NPs modified by the indefinite determiner “*ye*” carry an EXISTENCE implication but no UNIQUENESS implication.

(4) [The Falling Child Scenario]

[_s *ye* *bage*] [_v *oftād*]
 Indef.D child fall.PERF.3.SG

“A child fell.”

CHILD =	0	1	2+
#	✓	✓	✓

YE-NP: IMPLICATIONS

- ▶ NPs modified by the indefinite determiner “*ye*” carry an EXISTENCE implication but no UNIQUENESS implication.

(4) [The Falling Child Scenario]

[_s *ye* *bage*] [_v *oftād*]
 Indef.D child fall.PERF.3.SG

“A child fell.”

$ CHILD =$	0	1	2+
	#	✓	✓

- ▶ “*ye-np*” is compatible with a singleton indefinite reading.

YE-NP: PROJECTION

- The EXISTENCE implication of a “ye”-indefinite is **not** projective.

(5) a. Question:

ye bache oftād?
 Indef.D child fall.PERF.3.SG
 “Did a child fall?”

b. Negation:

ye bache **na**-yoftād
 Indef.D child NEG-fall.PERF.2.SG
 “A child didn’t fall.” ($\exists > \neg$)

c. Antecedent of Conditionals:

age ye bache oftād, be-m be-gu
 if Indef.D child fall.PERF.2.SG, to-1.SG IMP-say
 “Tell me if a child fell.”

d. Possibility Modal:

shāyad ye bache oftād
 maybe Indef.D child fall.PERF.2.SG
 “Maybe a child fell.”

YE-NP: CG STATUS

- ▶ The existence implication of the indefinite determiner need not be common ground between the speaker and the addressee.

(6) [The Crying Baby Scenario | Amir comes back from a trip and his wife asks how the flight was. He says:]

ye bache hamash gerye mi-kard
 Indef.D child all.3.SG.CLC cry IMPERF-be.PST.3.SG

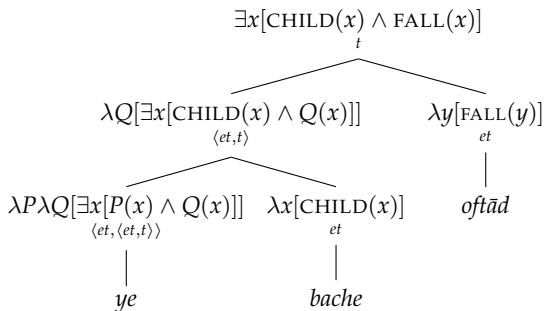
“A child was constantly crying.”

Construction	Form	Implication	Projective	CG
Definite	NP	Existence Uniqueness	Yes Yes	Yes Yes
Indefinite	ye-NP	Existence	No	No
Antisingleton Indefinite	ye-NP-i			
Antisingleton Indefinite	NP-i			

Construction	Form	Implication	Projective	CG
Definite	NP	Existence Uniqueness	Yes Yes	Yes Yes
Indefinite	ye-NP	Existence	No	No
Antingleton Indefinite	ye-NP-i			
Antingleton Indefinite	NP-i			

- The crucial difference between definites and indefinites is their status with respect to the CG.

YE-NP INDEFINITES: FORMAL MODELING



DEFINITENESS IN PERSIAN

Construction	Form	Implication	Projective	CG
Definite	NP	Existence Uniqueness	Yes Yes	Yes Yes
Indefinite	ye-NP	Existence	No	No
Antisingleton Indefinite	ye-NP-i			
Antisingleton Indefinite	NP-i			

YE-NP-I: IMPLICATIONS

- ▶ NPs marked by both the indefinite determiner and the indefinite clitic carry an ANTIUNIQUENESS implication.

(7) [The Falling Child Scenario]

[_S ye bache-i] [_V oftād]
 Indef.D child-Indef.C fall.PERF.3.SG

“A child fell.”

CHILD =	0	1	2+
	#	#	✓

YE-NP-I: IMPLICATIONS

- ▶ NPs marked by both the indefinite determiner and the indefinite clitic carry an ANTIUNIQUENESS implication.

(7) [The Falling Child Scenario]

[_S ye bache-i] [_V oftād]
 Indef.D child-Indef.C fall.PERF.3.SG

“A child fell.”

CHILD =	0	1	2+
	#	#	✓

- ▶ Here the domain is plural but the claim is not about a plurality of individuals. A single child falling verifies the statement.

THE ANTIUNIQUENESS IMPLICATION

- Given $|JOB| = 1$:



(8) [You Had One Job! | ...]

- a. [YE kār] be-t separd-am ke be un-am
 Indef.D work to-2.SG give-1.SG that to that-even/too
 gand-zad-i
 stink-hit-2.SG

“You had ONE job and you even screwed that up!”

- b. # [ye kār-i] be-t separd-am ke be
 Indef.D work-Indef.C to-2.SG give-1.SG that to
 un-am gand-zad-i
 that-even/too stink-hit-2.SG

YE-NP-I: PROJECTION

- ▶ I set this aside for now. As we will see, antiuniqueness in Persian is the combination of two implications in my analysis and each needs to be checked independently.

(9) a. Question:

ye bache-i oftād?
 Indef.D child-Indef.C fall.PERF.3.SG
 “Did a child fall?”

b. Negation:

ye bache-i **na**-yoftād
 Indef.D child-Indef.C NEG-fall.PERF.2.SG
 “A child didn’t fall.” ($\exists > \neg$)

c. Antecedent of Conditionals:

age ye bache-i oftād, be-m be-gu
 if Indef.D child-Indef.C fall.PERF.2.SG, to-1.SG IMP-say
 “Tell me if a child fell.”

d. Possibility Modal:

shāyad ye bache-i oftād
 maybe Indef.D child-Indef.C fall.PERF.2.SG
 “Maybe a child fell.”

YE-NP-I: CG STATUS

- ▶ The antiuniqueness implication does not have to be common ground between the speaker and the addressee.
- (10) [The Dancing Party Scenario | There was a party last night and Ali danced with a girl. Reza is spreading the gossip the next morning: Guys, you know what happened last night? ...

Ali bā [ye doxtar-i] raqsid
 Ali with Indef.D girl-Indef.C dance.PERF.3.SG

“Ali danced with a girl!”

Construction	Form	Implication	Projective	CG
Definite	NP	Existence Uniqueness	Yes Yes	Yes Yes
Indefinite	ye-NP	Existence	No	No
Antisingleton Indefinite	ye-NP-i	Antiuniqueness		No
Antisingleton Indefinite	NP-i			

Construction	Form	Implication	Projective	CG
Definite	NP	Existence Uniqueness	Yes Yes	Yes Yes
Indefinite	ye-NP	Existence	No	No
Antisingleton Indefinite	ye-NP-i	Antiuniqueness		No
Antisingleton Indefinite	NP-i			

NP-I

- ▶ The indefinite clitic cannot generate an indefinite reading by itself in positive episodic sentences.

(11) * to sib-i xord-i
2.SG apple-Indef.C eat.PREF-2.SG
“You ate an apple.”

- ▶ The acceptability of such sentences can be salvaged in two ways:
 1. Modification.
 2. Embedding.

NP-I: MODIFICATION

(12) Quantifiers:

- a. to **ye** sib-i xord-i
 2.SG Indef.D apple-Indef.C eat.PERF-2.SG
 “You ate an apple.”
- b. ? to **har** sib-i xord-i
 2.SG each apple-Indef.C eat.PERF-2.SG
 “You ate every apple.”
- c. to **hich** sib-i na-xord-i
 2.SG no apple-Indef.C NEG-eat.PERF-2.SG
 “You didn’t eat any apples.”

(13) Relative Clauses:

- a. to sib-i **ke āvord-i** xord-i
 2.SG apple-Indef.C that bring.PERF-2.SG eat.PERF-2.SG
 “You ate the apple you brought.”

NP-I: EMBEDDING

(14) a. Question:

to sib-i xord-i?
 2.SG apple-Indef.C eat.PERF-2.SG
 “Did you eat any apples?”

b. Negation:

to sib-i na-xord-i
 2.SG apple-Indef.C NEG-eat.PERF-2.SG
 “You didn’t eat any apples.” ($\neg > \exists$).

c. Antecedent of Conditional:

age sib-i xord-i, be-m be-gu
 if apple-Indef.C eat.PERF-2.SG, to-1.SG IMP-say
 “If you ate any apples, tell me.”

d. Possibility Modal:

shāyad sib-i xord-i
 maybe 2.SG apple-Indef.C eat.PERF-2.SG
 “Maybe you ate an apple”

NP-I: IMPLICATION AND PROJECTION

(15) a. Negation:

to sib-i na-xord-i
 2.SG apple-Indef.C NEG-eat.PERF-2.SG
 “You didn’t eat any apples.” ($\neg > \exists$).

b. Antecedent of Conditional:

age sib-i xord-i, be-m be-gu
 if apple-Indef.C eat.PERF-2.SG, to-1.SG IMP-say
 “If you ate any apples, tell me.”

- ▶ No existence implication.

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 “If you ate any apples, tell me.”

- ▶ No existence implication.
- ▶ However, these sentences can never mean that a specific entity satisfies the claim (wide scope existential).

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 “If you ate any apples, tell me.”

- ▶ No existence implication.
- ▶ However, these sentences can never mean that a specific entity satisfies the claim (wide scope existential).
- ▶ Therefore, “NP-i” constructions are incompatible with singleton NPs but unlike the Spanish *algún* (Alonso-Ovalle and Menéndez-Benito, 2010), they are compatible with situations where no entity satisfies the description.

NP-I: IMPLICATION AND PROJECTION

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- ▶ No existence implication.
- ▶ However, these sentences can never mean that a specific entity satisfies the claim (wide scope existential).
- ▶ Therefore, “NP-i” constructions are incompatible with singleton NPs but unlike the Spanish *algún* (Alonso-Ovalle and Menéndez-Benito, 2010), they are compatible with situations where no entity satisfies the description.
- ▶ This ANTISINGLETON implication ($|\text{NP}| \neq 1$) is projective.

NP-I: CG STATUS

- ▶ The antingleton implication (constraint) does not have to be common ground between the speaker and the addressee.

(16) a. **age** sib-i xord-i, be-m be-gu
 if apple-Indef.C eat.PERF-2.SG, to-1.SG IMP-say
 “If you ate any apples, tell me.”

Construction	Form	Implication	Projective	CG
Definite	NP	Existence Uniqueness	Yes Yes	Yes Yes
Indefinite	ye-NP	Existence	No	No
Antisingleton Indefinite	ye-NP-i	Antiuniqueness		No
Antisingleton Indefinite	NP-i	Antisingleton	Yes	No

Construction	Form	Implication	Projective	CG
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Antingleton Indefinite	ye-NP-i	Antiuniqueness		No
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- ▶ “ye” \rightsquigarrow EXISTENCE ($|\text{NP}| \geq 1$)

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- ▶ “ye” \rightsquigarrow EXISTENCE ($|\text{NP}| \geq 1$)
- ▶ “-i” \rightsquigarrow ANTISINGLETON ($|\text{NP}| \neq 1$)

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Antisingleton Indefinite	NP-i	Antisingleton	Yes	No

- ▶ “ye” \rightsquigarrow EXISTENCE ($|\text{NP}| \geq 1$)
- ▶ “-i” \rightsquigarrow ANTISINGLETON ($|\text{NP}| \neq 1$)
- ▶ “ye” + “-i” \rightsquigarrow EXISTENCE + ANTISINGLETON ($|\text{NP}| > 1$)

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Antisingleton Indefinite	NP-i	Antisingleton	Yes	No

- ▶ “ye” \rightsquigarrow EXISTENCE ($|\text{NP}| \geq 1$)
- ▶ “-i” \rightsquigarrow ANTISINGLETON ($|\text{NP}| \neq 1$)
- ▶ “ye” + “-i” \rightsquigarrow EXISTENCE + ANTISINGLETON ($|\text{NP}| > 1$)
 - ▶ ANTIUNIQUENESS

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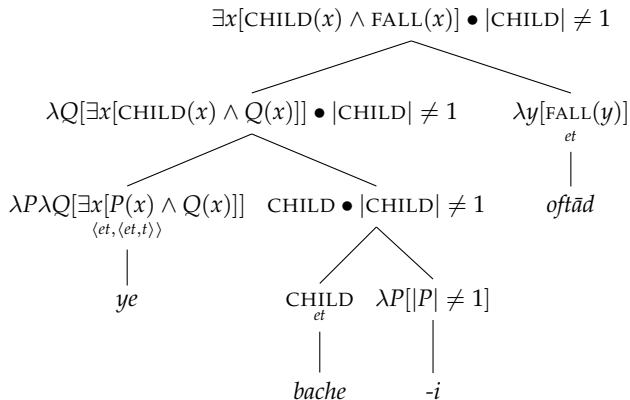
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Antisingleton Indefinite	NP-i	Antisingleton	Yes	No

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Indefinite	ye-NP	Existence	No	No
Antisingleton Indefinite	ye-NP-i	Existence Antisingleton	No Yes	No No
Antisingleton Indefinite	NP-i	Antisingleton	Yes	No

YE-NP-I INDEFINITES: FORMAL MODELING



THANK YOU!

- ▶ An indefinite number of thanks to:
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