The Suffix that Makes Persian Nouns Unique

Masoud Jasbi
Stanford University

Leila Habibi
University of Western Ontario

Snapshot

- The nominal suffix -e in Farsi is a uniqueness marker.
- It makes bare nominals definitely definite!
- It makes indefinites scopally specific.

Definiteness in Persian

Definiteness in Persian

- No article or marker of definiteness like *the* in English.

- No article or marker of definiteness like *the* in English.
- Two indefinite markers:
    i. The indefinite determiner ye.
    ii. The indefinite clitic -i.

Definiteness in Persian

- No article or marker of definiteness like *the* in English.
- Two indefinite markers:
    i. The indefinite determiner ye.
    ii. The indefinite clitic -i.
- Two markers that cut across the definite/indefinite classification:
    i. The object marker -**rā**.
    ii. The suffix -e.

N	Definite, Generic, Indefinite
N-e	Definite
ye-N	Simple Indefinite
ye-N-e	Singleton (Specific) Indefinite

N	Definite, Generic, Indefinite
N-e	Definite
ye-N	Simple Indefinite
ye-N-e	Singleton (Specific) Indefinite

- What does -e do?

N	Definite, Generic, Indefinite
N-*e*	Definite
ye-N	Simple Indefinite
ye-N-*e*	Singleton (Specific) Indefinite

- What does -*e* do?

1. | N vs. N-*e* | → The suffix makes the noun definitely definite!

N	Definite, Generic, Indefinite
N-e	Definite
ye-N	Simple Indefinite
ye-N-e	Singleton (Specific) Indefinite

- What does -e do?

1. | N vs. N-e | → The suffix makes the noun definitely definite!
2. | ye-N vs. ye-N-e | → The suffix makes the noun scopally specific.

N	Definite, Generic, Indefinite
N-e	Definite
ye-N	Simple Indefinite
ye-N-e	Singleton (Specific) Indefinite

- What does -e do?

1. | N vs. N-e | → The suffix makes the noun definitely definite!
2. | ye-N vs. ye-N-e | → The suffix makes the noun scopally specific.
3. 1 & 2 → -e marks uniqueness.

Empirical Observations

N	Definite, Generic, Indefinite
N-e	Definite
ye-N	Simple Indefinite
ye-N-e	Singleton Indefinite

Bare Nominals

Generic Example

C_{Gen}: Amir is discussing cars and their problems. He says:

(1) māshin havā-ro ālude   mi-kon-e
    car   air-OM polluted   MI-do-3.SG
    "Cars pollute the air."

Bare Nominals

Generic Example

C_{Gen}: Amir is discussing cars and their problems. He says:

(1) māshin havā-ro ālude   mi-kon-e
    car   air-OM polluted MI-do-3.SG
    "Cars pollute the air."

Indefinite Example

C_{indef}: Amir is crossing the street without checking the traffic. Leila stops him and says:

(2) māshin mi-zan-e   be-het
    car   MI-hit-3.SG to--2.SG
    "Some car is gonna hit you."

Bare Nominals

Definite Example

C_{def_1}: Amir and Leila have one car only. One day Amir comes home and says:

(3) māshin xarāb shod-e
    car broken become.PST-3.SG
    "The car's broken."

Bare Nominals

Bare Nominals in Tehrani Farsi can be definite, indefinite, or generic.

N	Definite, Generic, Indefinite
N-e	Definite
ye-N	Simple Indefinite
ye-N-e	Singleton Indefinite

N

C_{Gen}: Amir is discussing cars and their problems. He says:

(4) māshin havā-ro ālude   mi-kon-e
    car   air--OM polluted MI-do-3.SG
    "Cars pollute the air."

N

C_{Gen}: Amir is discussing cars and their problems. He says:

(4) māshin havā-ro ālude   mi-kon-e
     car   air--OM polluted MI-do-3.SG
     "Cars pollute the air."

N-e

$\#C_{Gen}$ C_{def_3}: Amir shows the video of an old car with a smokey exhaust. He says:

(5) māshin-*e* havā-ro ālude   mi-kon-e
     car-UM   air--OM polluted MI-do-3.SG
     "The/that car pollutes the air."

N

C_{indef}: Amir is crossing the street without checking the traffic. Leila stops him and says:

(6) māshin mi-zan-e   be-het
     car   MI-hit-3.SG to--2.SG
     "A car is gonna hit you."

N

C_{indef}: Amir is crossing the street without checking the traffic. Leila stops him and says:

(6)   māshin mi-zan-e   be-het
     car   MI-hit-3.SG to--2.SG
     "A car is gonna hit you."

N-e

$\#C_{indef}$ C_{def_4}: Amir is walking in a parking lot. A car is backing out. Leila stops him and says:

(7)   māshin-*e* mi-zan-e   be-het
     car-UM   MI-hit-3.SG to--2.SG
     "The/that car is gonna hit you."

N

C_{def_1}: Amir and Leila have one car only. One day Amir comes home and says:

(8) māshin xarāb shod-e
     car   broken become.PST-3.SG
     "The car's broken."

N

C_{def_1}: Amir and Leila have one car only. One day Amir comes home and says:

(8) māshin xarāb shod-e
car broken become.PST-3.SG
"The car's broken."

N-e

C_{def_1}

(9) māshin-e xarāb shod-e
car-UM broken become.PST-3.SG
"The/that car's broken."

Summary

Adding -e to a bare nominal makes it (definitely) definite.

13

N	Definite, Generic, Indefinite
N-e	Definite
ye-N	Simple Indefinite
ye-N-e	Singleton Indefinite

ye N

C*indef*: Leila looks out the window. She says:

(10) ye   zan   dam-e dar-e
     Indef.D woman close-EZ door-3.SG
     "A woman is at the door."

---

ye N

C*indef* : Leila looks out the window. She says:

(10) ye   zan   dam-e dar-e
     Indef.D woman close-EZ door-3.SG
     "A woman is at the door."

---

ye N-e

C*indef* : Leila looks out the window. She says:

(11) ye   zan-e   dam-e dar-e
     Indef.D woman-UM close-EZ door-3.SG
     "A woman is at the door."

What is the difference between ye-N and ye-N-e?

What is the difference between ye-N and ye-N-e?
Answer: Scope! ye-N-e always takes wide scope!

De-re De-dicto

ye N

(12) Amir mi-xā-d   bā   ye doxtar ezdevāj kon-e
      Amir MI-want-3.SG with In.D girl   marry do-3.SG
      "Amir wants to marry a girl."

De-re De-dicto

ye N

(12) Amir mi-xā-d   bā   ye doxtar ezdevāj kon-e
      Amir MI-want-3.SG with In.D girl   marry do-3.SG
      "Amir wants to marry a girl."
      1. ∃ > WANT
      2. WANT > ∃

De-re De-dicto

ye N

(12) Amir mi-xā-d   bā   ye   doxtar ezdevāj kon-e
      Amir MI-want-3.SG with In.D girl   marry   do-3.SG
      "Amir wants to marry a girl."
      1. ∃ > WANT
      2. WANT > ∃

ye N-e

(13) Amir mi-xā-d   bā   ye   doxtar-e ezdevāj kon-e
      Amir MI-want-3.SG with In.D girl-UM   marry do-3.SG
      "Amir wants to marry a girl."
      1. ∃ > WANT

Scope with the Universal Quantifier

ye N

(14) emruz hame   be ye   ostād   salām kard-im
      today everyone to Indef.D professor hello do-1.PL
      "Today everyone said hello to a professor."

Scope with the Universal Quantifier

ye N

(14) emruz hame   be ye   ostād   salām kard-im
      today everyone to Indef.D professor hello do-1.PL
      "Today everyone said hello to a professor."
      1. ∃ > ∀
      2. ∀ > ∃

Scope with the Universal Quantifier

ye N

(14) emruz hame   be ye   ostād   salām kard-im
     today everyone to Indef.D professor hello do-1.PL
     "Today everyone said hello to a professor."
     1. ∃ > ∀
     2. ∀ > ∃

ye N-e

(15) emruz hame   be ye   ostād-e   salām kard-im
     today everyone to Indef.D professor-UM hello do-1.PL
     "Today everyone said hello to a specific professor."
     1. ∃ > ∀

Scope with the Universal Quantifier

ye N

(16) hame-ye doxtar-ā hame-ye eshtebā-hā-ye ye   pesar ro   tasih
     all-EZ   girl-PL   all-EZ   mistake-PL-EZ Indef.D boy   OM correct
     kard-an
     do-3.PL
     "All the girls corrected all the mistakes of a boy."

Scope with the Universal Quantifier

ye N

(16) hame-ye doxtar-ā hame-ye eshtebā-hā-ye ye   pesar ro   tasih
     all-EZ   girl-PL all-EZ   mistake-PL-EZ Indef.D boy OM correct
     kard-an
     do-3.PL
     "All the girls corrected all the mistakes of a boy."
     1. ∃ > ∀ > ∀
     2. ∀ > ∃ > ∀

Scope with the Universal Quantifier

ye N

(16) hame-ye doxtar-ā hame-ye eshtebā-hā-ye ye   pesar ro tasih
      all-EZ   girl-PL all-EZ   mistake-PL-EZ Indef.D boy   OM correct
      kard-an
      do-3.PL
      "All the girls corrected all the mistakes of a boy."
      1. ∃ > ∀ > ∀
      2. ∀ > ∃ > ∀

ye N-e

(17) hame-ye doxtar-ā hame-ye eshtebā-hā-ye ye   pesar-e ro tasih
      all-EZ   girl-PL all-EZ   mistake-PL-EZ Indef.D boy-UM OM correct
      kard-an
      do-3.PL
      "There is a boy that every girl corrected all his mistakes."
      1. ∃ > ∀ > ∀

Scope with Temporal Adverbials

ye N

(18) Sārā hamishe bā   ye   pesar davā-sh   mi-sh-e
Sara always   with Indef.D boy   quarrel-3.SG MI-become-3.SG
"Sara always gets into a fight with some boy."

Scope with Temporal Adverbials

ye N

(18) Sārā hamishe bā ye pesar davā-sh mi-sh-e
Sara always with Indef.D boy quarrel-3.SG MI-become-3.SG
"Sara always gets into a fight with some boy."
1. ∃ > ALWAYS
2. ALWAYS > ∃

Scope with Temporal Adverbials

ye N

(18) Sārā hamishe bā   ye   pesar davā-sh   mi-sh-e
     Sara always   with Indef.D boy   quarrel-3.SG MI-become-3.SG
     "Sara always gets into a fight with some boy."
     1. ∃ > ALWAYS
     2. ALWAYS > ∃

ye N-e

(19) Sārā hamishe bā   ye   pesar-e   davā-sh   mi-sh-e
     Sara always   with Indef.D boy(-UM) quarrel-3.SG MI-become-3.SG
     "Sara always gets into a fight with some boy."
     1. ∃ > ALWAYS

Scope with Belief Verbs

ye N

(20) hame fekr   mi-kon-an Ali bā   ye   doxtar ezdevāj kard-e
      all   thought MI-do-3.PL Ali with Indef.D girl   marriage do-PF.3.SG
      "Everyone thinks Ali has married a girl."

Scope with Belief Verbs

ye N

(20) hame fekr   mi-kon-an Ali bā   ye   doxtar ezdevāj kard-e
     all   thought MI-do-3.PL Ali with Indef.D girl   marriage do-PF.3.SG
     "Everyone thinks Ali has married a girl."
     1. $\exists > \forall > B$
     2. $\forall > B > \exists$

Scope with Belief Verbs

ye N

(20) hame fekr   mi-kon-an Ali bā ye   doxtar ezdevāj kard-e
     all   thought MI-do-3.PL Ali with Indef.D girl   marriage do-PF.3.SG
     "Everyone thinks Ali has married a girl."
     1. ∃ > ∀ > B
     2. ∀ > B > ∃

ye N-e

(21) hame fekr   mi-kon-an Ali bā ye   doxtar-e ezdevāj kard-e
     all   thought MI-do-3.PL Ali with Indef.D girl-UM marriage do-PF.3.SG
     "Everyone thinks Ali has married a girl."
     1. ∃ > ∀ > B

Adding -e to a bare nominal makes it (definitely) definite.
Adding -e to an indefinite enforces the widest scope reading.

Summary

Adding -e to a bare nominal makes it (definitely) definite.
Adding -e to an indefinite enforces a widest scope reading.

Summary

Adding -e to a bare nominal makes it (definitely) definite.
Adding -e to an indefinite enforces a widest scope reading.
What meaning for -e can result in both these effects?

Adding -e to a bare nominal makes it (definitely) definite.
Adding -e to an indefinite enforces a widest scope reading.
What meaning for -e can result in both these effects?
Uniqueness!

Does -e make an indefinite epistemically specific ?
Does ye-N-e require the speaker to have a specific referent in mind?

Does -e make an indefinite epistemically specific ?

Does ye-N-e require the speaker to have a specific referent in mind?

Examples

(22) dust-am   eshtebāhi   eskirin-shāt-e   chat-esh-o   bā   ye
      friend-1.SG mistakenly screen-shot-EZ   chat-3.SG-OM with In.D
      doxtar-e ferestād
      girl-UM   sent.3.SG
      "My friend mistakenly sent me a screen shot of his chat with a girl."

A Proposal

The clitic -e encodes a uniqueness implication.

Proposal

The clitic -e encodes a uniqueness implication.
Adding it to a bare nominal makes it definite.

The clitic -e encodes a uniqueness implication.

Adding it to a bare nominal makes it definite.

Adding to an indefinite results in a singleton indefinite, making scope relations inert (Schwarzschild 2002).

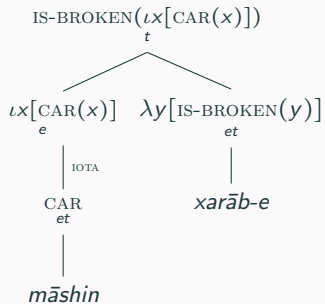The clitic -e encodes a uniqueness implication.

Adding it to a bare nominal makes it definite.

Adding to an indefinite results in a singleton indefinite, making scope relations inert (Schwarzschild 2002).
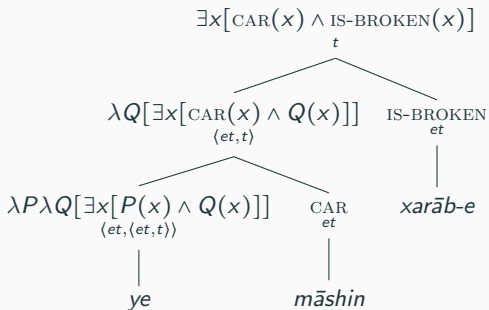
Formal Analysis

Analysis

How can we implement these intuitions formally?

Bare Nominal

$$\text{IS-BROKEN}(\iota x[\text{CAR}(x)])$$
$$t$$

$$\iota x[\text{CAR}(x)] \qquad \lambda y[\text{IS-BROKEN}(y)]$$
$$e \qquad\qquad\qquad et$$

$$\text{IOTA}$$

$$\text{CAR} \qquad\qquad\qquad xar\bar{a}b\text{-}e$$
$$et$$

$$m\bar{a}shin$$

The car is broken.

Simple Indefinte (ye N)

$\exists x[\text{CAR}(x) \land \text{IS-BROKEN}(x)]$
t

$\lambda Q[\exists x[\text{CAR}(x) \land Q(x)]]$
$\langle et,t \rangle$

IS-BROKEN
et

$\lambda P \lambda Q[\exists x[P(x) \land Q(x)]]$
$\langle et,\langle et,t \rangle \rangle$

CAR
et

$xar\bar{a}b\text{-}e$

ye

māshin

A car is broken.

Singleton Indefinite (ye N-e)

A specific car is broken.

$$\text{IS-BROKEN}(\iota x[\text{CAR}(x)]) \bullet |\text{CAR}| = 1$$
$$t \bullet t^c$$

$$\iota x[\text{CAR}(x)] \bullet |\text{CAR}| = 1 \qquad \lambda y[\text{IS-BROKEN}(y)]$$
$$e \bullet t^c \qquad\qquad et$$

IOTA

$$\text{CAR} \bullet |\text{CAR}| = 1 \qquad xar\bar{a}b\text{-}e$$
$$et \bullet t^c$$

CI APPLICATION

$$\text{CAR} \qquad \lambda P[|P| = 1]$$
$$et \qquad \langle et, t^c \rangle$$
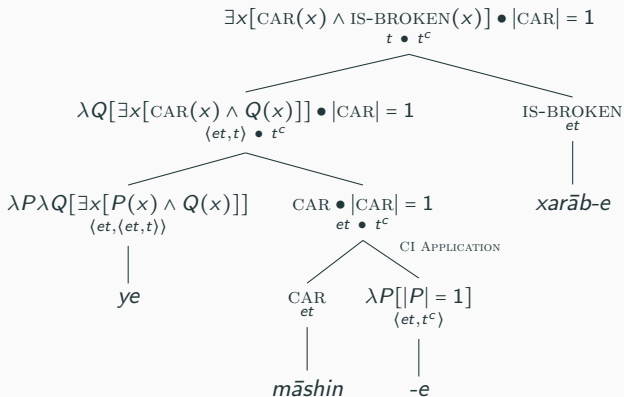
$$m\bar{a}shin \qquad \text{-}e$$
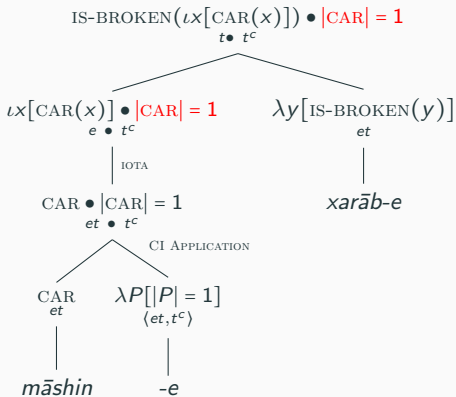
The/that car is broken

Conclusion

- The nominal suffix -e in Farsi is a uniqueness marker.
- It makes bare nominals definitely definite!
- It makes indefinites scopally specific.

Thank You!

- An indefinite number of thanks to Cleo Condoravdi for continued help and support with this project.

References

Abbott, B. (1999). Support for a unique theory of definite descriptions. In *Proceedings of Semantics and Linguistic Theory 9*, pages 1–15. Ithaca, NY: CLC Publications.

Ariel, M. (1990). *Accessing noun-phrase antecedents*. Routledge.

Ariel, M. (2001). Accessibility theory: An overview. In *Text representation: Linguistic and psycholinguistic aspects*, volume 8, pages 29–87.

Christophersen, P. (1939). *The articles: A study of their theory and use in English*. Copenhagen: Munksgaard.

Dryer, M. S. (2013). *Definite Articles*. Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology, Leipzig.

Dryer, M. S. and Haspelmath, M., editors (2013). *WALS Online*. Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology, Leipzig.

Gundel, J. K., Hedberg, N., and Zacharski, R. (1993). Cognitive status