Uniqueness in Definites and Indefinites: Evidence from Persian

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The classical theory of definite descriptions posits that definites differ from indefinites in two ways: 1. Uniqueness: definites imply uniqueness of the NP’s descriptive content while indefinites only imply existence. 2. Presuppositionality: the uniqueness implication of definites is presupposed while the existence implication of indefinites is not necessarily so. I show that in Persian (Indo-European), a uniqueness implication can be enforced by the nominal suffix -e on both definites and indefinites. However, the uniqueness implication enforced on a definite is required to be common ground while that of an indefinite is only projective and results in a scopally inert singleton indefinite. I provide a compositional analysis of definites and indefinites with the uniqueness marker -e and argue that the Persian data points to presuppositionality as the crucial difference between definites and indefinites. I also show that the uniqueness implication of the nominal suffix -e starts as projective but its presuppositional status is decided later in the derivation. I discuss some consequences of this analysis for theories of projective content.