

# (De)composing reference: typological perspectives

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SALT 36

## 1. Background: *definites vs. demonstratives*

- Kaplan (1989): **demonstratives** ≠ **definites**  
“true demonstrative” – (i) demonstrative + demonstration  
(ii) *directly refers* to demonstratum
- Hidden Argument Theory: demonstratives ~ definites + \_\_\_\_
  - Elbourne (2008): **pronominal layer (index + R)**
  - Nowak (2019), Dayal & Jiang (2022): **anti-uniqueness** (#*that sun*)
  - Ahn (2022, 2025), Ebert et al. (2020): **modality linker**
- Inherent to demonstratives: *deixis*  
*anti-uniqueness*

## 2. Mizo D-expressions

- Mizo (Tibeto-Burman) sheds new light on what definites and demonstratives encode and where they differ.
- Series of determiner morphemes which create two types of D-expressions: *deictic* & *anaphoric*.

| proximal  | distal     | above      | below      | anaphoric  |
|-----------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| <i>hi</i> | <i>saw</i> | <i>khi</i> | <i>khu</i> | <i>chu</i> |

- Appear in **2 templates**: NP-D & D-NP-D.
- Dayal’s (2026) questionnaire; diagnostics probing the markedness of D-expressions across discourse conditions.
- Significant overlap but some exceptions: functional uniqueness (1); contrastive use (2,3).

### Functional uniqueness

(1) *The speaker is reporting something to the addressee that she heard from her friend Dee. She says: **Dee was watching a soccer match**,...*

- a. **There**referee was partial.      b. #**That**referee was partial.
- c. **referee chu-an** tran lam a nei  
referee INDEX-ERG support side 3.SG have  
‘The referee was partial.’
- d. #**chu referee chu-an** tran lam a nei  
INDEX referee INDEX-ERG support side 3.SG have  
Lit.: ‘That referee was partial.’

(Mizo)

### Contrastive use

- (2) a. **This dog**→<sub>A</sub> is sleeping and **this dog**→<sub>B</sub> is running.  
b. #**The dog**→<sub>A</sub> is sleeping and **the dog**→<sub>B</sub> is running.

(3) a.  
**saw ui saw**→<sub>A</sub> a mu leh **saw ui saw**→<sub>B</sub> a tlan  
DIST dog DIST 3.SG sleep and DIST dog DIST 3.SG run  
‘That dog→<sub>A</sub> is sleeping and that dog→<sub>B</sub> is running.’

b.  
**#ui saw**→<sub>A</sub> a mu leh **ui saw**→<sub>B</sub> a tlan  
dog DIST 3.SG sleep and dog DIST 3.SG run  
Int: ‘That dog→<sub>A</sub> is sleeping and that dog→<sub>B</sub> is running.’

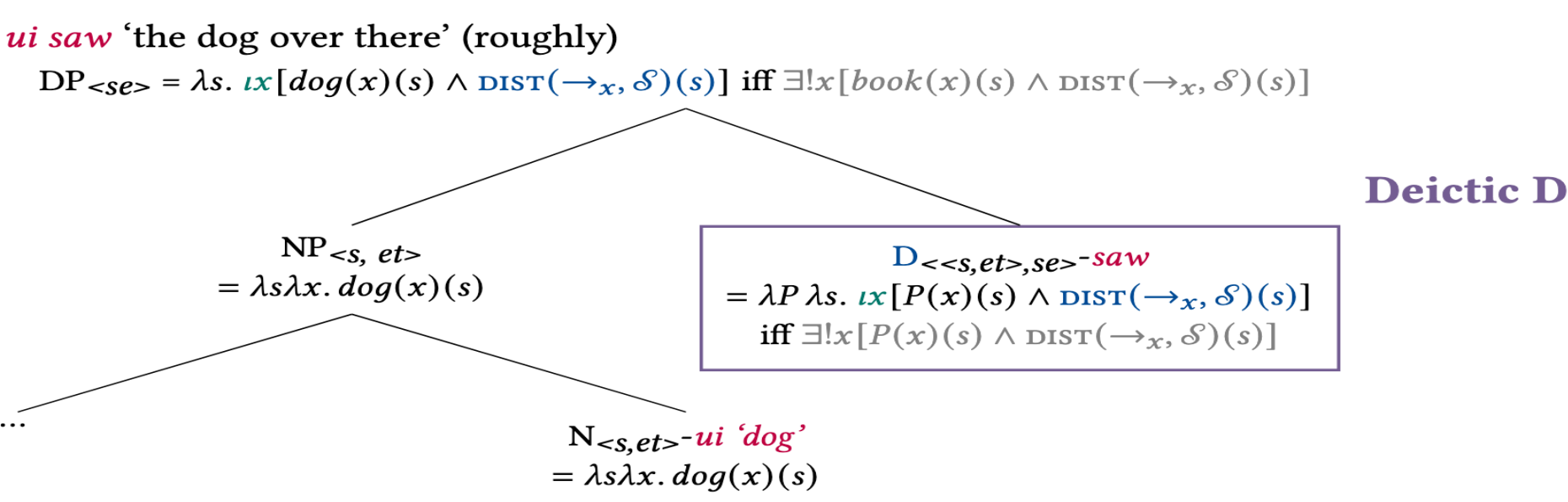
(Mizo)

**NP-D** expressions:: (English) *definites*; **D-NP-D** expressions:: *demonstratives*  
— both anaphoric & deictic D morphemes

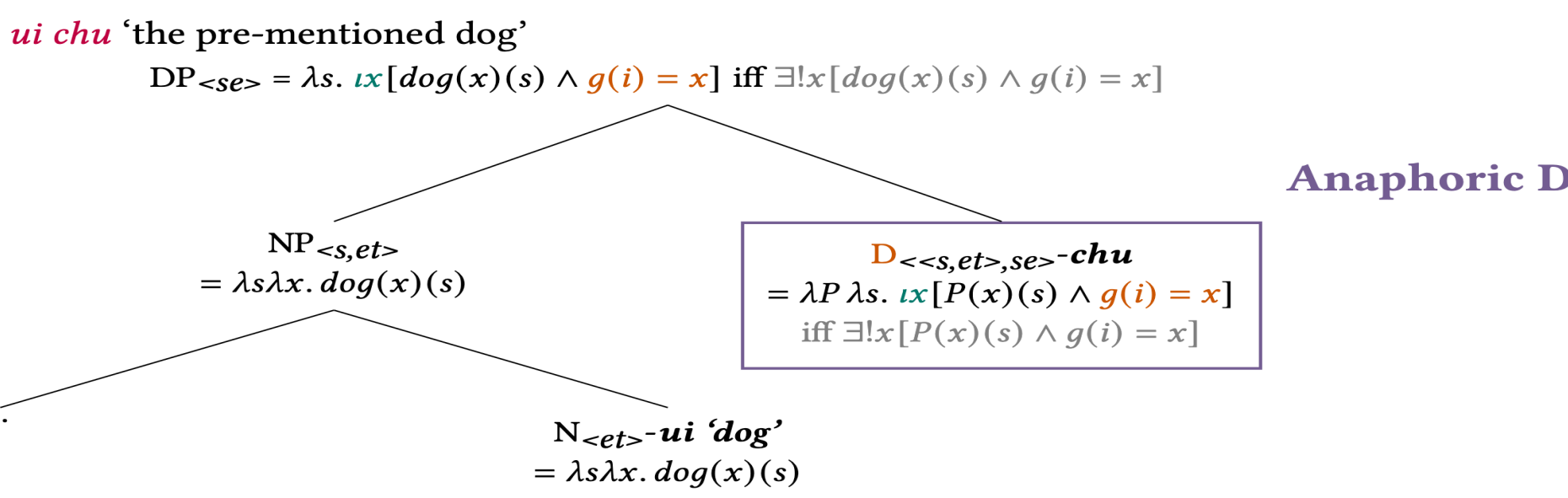
- Crosslinguistically, there are *incrementally informative* semantic blocks that build D-expressions
  - **uniqueness** in the **restricted situation** ( $U_{S_r}$ )
  - **anaphoric index** ( $\mathcal{I}$ )
  - **deictic property** ( $\mathcal{R}$ )
  - **anti-uniqueness** in the **larger situation** ( $AU_{S_l}$ )
- Particular subset associated with a D-expression determines its status as a demonstrative or definite description.
- Languages lexicalize these properties differently, but a language could, in principle, morphologically spell out each one.

## 3. NP-D: *anaphoric* & *deictic*

(4)  $\llbracket D_{\mathcal{R}} \rrbracket^{c,g} = \lambda P \lambda s. \text{ix} [P(x)(s) \wedge \mathcal{R}(\rightarrow_x, \mathcal{I})(s)]$   
iff  $\exists! x [P(x)(s) \wedge \mathcal{R}(\rightarrow_x, \mathcal{I})(s)]$ .  $\mathcal{R}$ : deictic relation;  $\rightarrow$ : demonstration;  $\mathcal{I}$ : speaker



(5)  $\llbracket D_i \rrbracket^{c,g} = \lambda P \lambda s. \text{ix} [P(x)(s) \wedge g(i) = x]$  iff  $\exists! x [P(x)(s) \wedge g(i) = x]$   $i$ : index



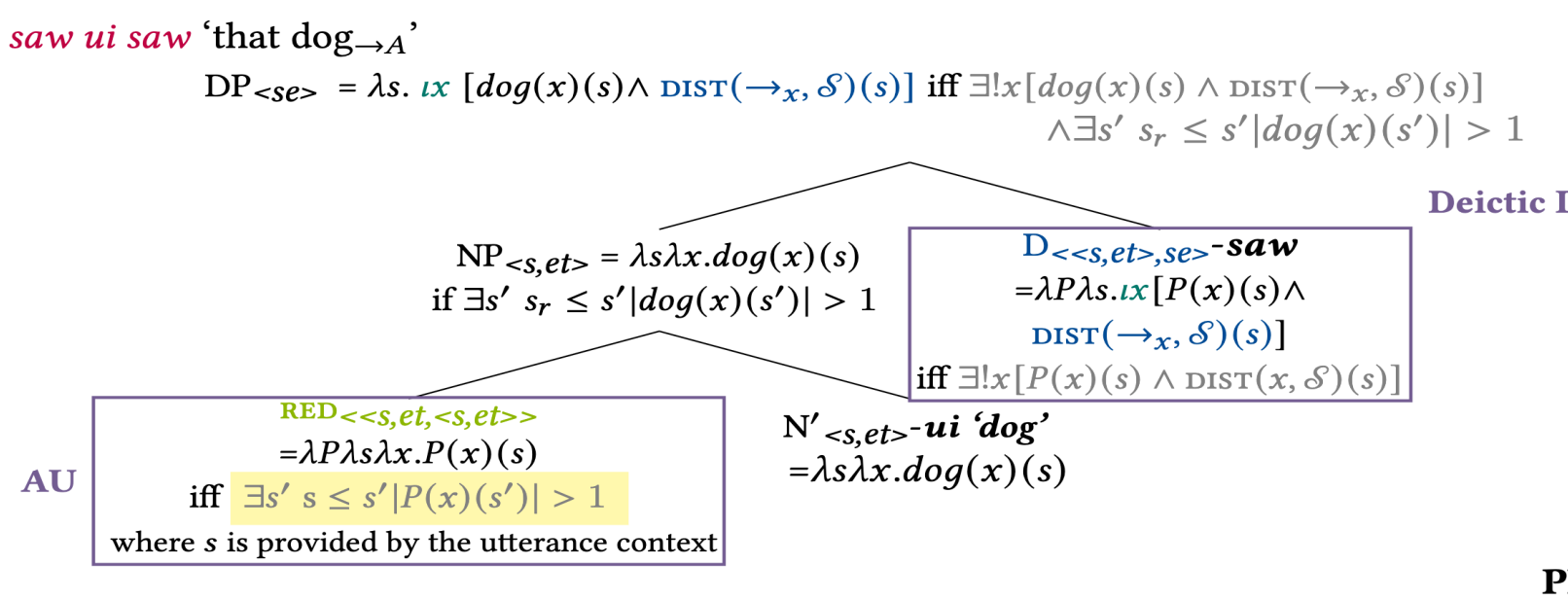
## 4. D-NP-D: *anti-uniqueness*

- Pre-nominal morpheme = reduplicative morpheme RED, PF features: D.
- Mismatched combinations are ungrammatical, never a standalone D
- NP-modifier; number agreement with NP

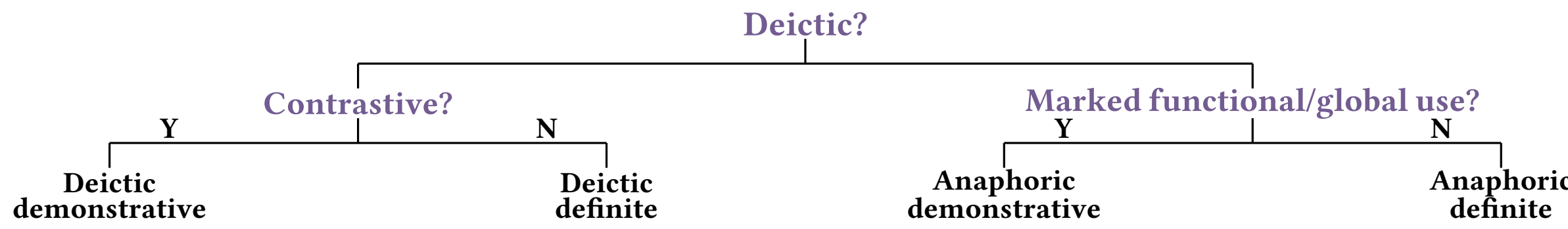
(6) \***he** lekhabu **saw**/ \***saw** lekhabu **hi**/ \***he** lekhabu  
PROX book DIST/ DIST book PROX/ PROX-book

(7) **saw**-(**ng**) mikhual **saw**-(**ng**) **an** chhuak dawn  
DIST-PL guest DIST-PL 3.PL leave MOD  
Int: The guests (over there) are leaving.’

(8)  $\llbracket \text{RED} \rrbracket^{c,g} = \lambda P \lambda s \lambda x. P(x)(s)$  iff  $\exists s' s \leq s' |P(x)(s')| > 1$



- (9) *The speaker and addressee are hiking and the sun looks magnificent.*  
a. **ni saw en teh**  
sun DIST look IMP  
‘Look at the sun (over there)!’  
b. #**saw ni saw en teh**  
DIST sun DIST look IMP  
Int: ‘Look at the sun (over there)!’



## 5. Cutting the D-expressions pie

- In line with Ahn (2022, 2025), an act of demonstration contributes at-issue meaning of a D-expression, but not exclusive to demonstratives.
- (10) *A Spanish woman is sitting to the right of an Argentinian woman. The speaker points at the Spanish woman and says: **If they exchanged seats...***
- a. #*dinglam-ah hmeichhia saw*→ Argentinian a ni ngei ang  
right-LOC woman DIST Argentinian 3.SG is MOD MOD  
‘The woman on the right (who I’m pointing at) would have been Argentinian.’
- b. #**saw** dinglam-ah hmeichhia **saw**→ Argentinian a ni ngei ang  
DIST right-LOC woman DIST Argentinian 3.SG is MOD MOD  
‘That woman on the right (who I’m pointing at) would have been Argentinian.’

### Prediction:

If a language has a linguistic exponent of D that encodes deictic information, it will contribute to the at-issue meaning of the D-expression.

– Iberian Spanish D-expressions (Bombi 2025),

(11) #**ese chico**/#**el chico ese** sería argentino  
that boy / the boy that would.be Argentinian  
‘... that boy / the boy on the right would be Argentinian.’

- It is the encoding of *anti-uniqueness* that drives the divide - as evidenced in Mizo (in line with Dayal & Jiang 2022).

## 6. What’s in a name?

- It is true that anaphoric demonstratives in Mizo are not accompanied by an act of demonstration. In fact, they override any indexical information the D-expression may carry (Ahn & Davidson 2018).
- (12) *I saw[a water-type Pokemon]<sub>i</sub>. [**That Pokemon**]<sub>i</sub>→\*<sub>i</sub> looked happy.*
- They nevertheless constitute a distinct category of expressions with their own morphosyntax: D-NP-D.
  - Crucially, it is in complementary distribution with anaphoric definites (NP-D) (= 1c,d)
  - Whatever label we assign to them, they constitute a distinct class characterized by the encoding of *anti-uniqueness*.

**Selected references:** Ahn, Dorothy. 2022. Indirectly direct: An account of demonstratives and pointing. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 45(6): 1345–1393; Bombi, Carla. 2025. Non-focal demonstratives: Deixis with Spanish and Italian backgrounded *that*. *Sinn und Bedeutung*; Dayal, Veneeta and Li Julie Jiang. 2022. The puzzle of anaphoric bare nouns in Mandarin: A counterpoint to Index! *Linguistic Inquiry* 54(1): 147–167; Elbourne, Paul. 2008. Demonstratives as individual concepts. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 31(4): 409–466; Kaplan, David. 1989. Demonstratives: An essay on the semantics, logic, metaphysics and epistemology of demonstratives and other indexicals.