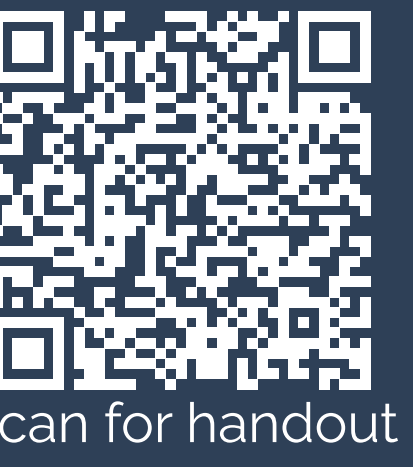


Two Paths to Superlatives in Palestinian Arabic



1. Background

- ▶ Superlatives such as in (1) are well known to be ambiguous between two readings [1]: (7)
- (1) Mary climbed the highest mountain
- e.g. Mary climbed the highest mountain *in Africa* (Absolute)
 - e.g. Mary climbed the highest mountain *among her friends* (Relative)

- ▶ **Absolute:** the comparison is among contextually relevant mountains
- ▶ **Relative:** the comparison is among contextually relevant people

- ▶ The literature is divided on the role of definiteness marking [2, 3, 4, 5]

2. Focus: Superlatives in Palestinian Arabic

- ▶ PA disambiguates the two readings via distinct syntactic structures and unexpected definiteness marking:

- (2) a. Bare/optional definite superlative
jasmin jarat (el)-ayla baskalet
Yasmine bought (the)-expensive.ER bike
 'of all relevant bikes at the store) Yasmine bought the most expensive bike.'
- b. Polydefinite superlative
jasmin jarat el-baskalet el-ayla
Yasmine bought the-bike the-expensive.ER
 '(Of all the relevant people) Yasmine bought the most expensive bike.'

- ▶ **Baseline:** Definiteness marking in Positive (non-comparative) DPs

- (3) a. **jasmin jarat el-baskalet el-ya:li**
Yasmine bought the-bike the-expensive
 'Yasmine bought the expensive bike' Polydefinite Pos.
- b. **jasmin jarat baskalet ya:li**
Yasmine bought bike expensive
 'Yasmine bought an expensive bike.' Bare positive

- ▶ Morphological definiteness does not predict semantic definiteness: the bare superlative is semantically definite & determinate despite optional definiteness marking, while the polydefinite superlative is indeterminate despite polydefiniteness

- ▶ Definiteness = uniqueness presupposition (wDP); determinacy = referentiality (sDP) [5]

3. Main Proposal

- The DP in the bare superlative is definite and determinate; the structure is of a bona fide superlative composed of SUP + ER
- The DP within the polydefinite superlative is definite and indeterminate, and the structure is of a comparative with an anaphoric pro standard

4. Definiteness and Determinacy

- ▶ Diagnostic: determinate DPs are infelicitous in existentials [1]

Superlatives:

Positives:

- (4) a. #a:dam ʕind-a (el)-aḏka oxot
 Adam at-him smart.ER sister
 'Adam has the smartest sister'
- b. a:dam ʕind-a el-oxot
 Adam at-him the-sister
el-aḏka
 the-smart.ER
 'Adam has the smartest sister'
- (5) a. a:dam ʕind-a oxot
 Adam at-him sister.3SGF
ḏakiia
 smart.3SGF
 'Adam has a smart sister' (Bare)
- b. #a:dam ʕind-a el-oxot
 Adam at-him the-sister.3SGF
el-ḏakiia
 the-smart.3SGF
 'Adam has the smart sister' (Polydef.)

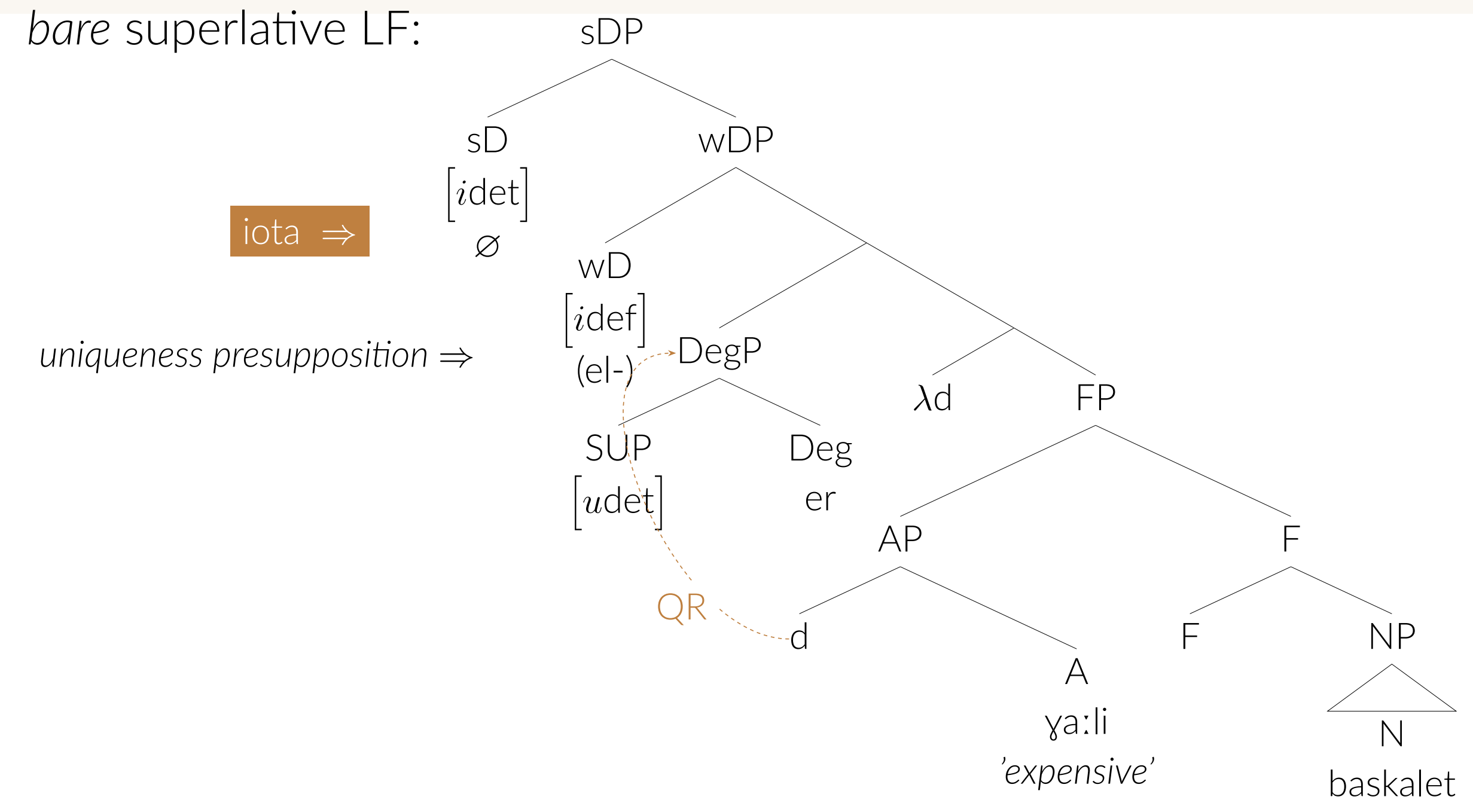
5. The Superlative-Comparative Split

- ▶ Two diagnostics distinguish superlatives from comparatives [2, 6]:

- (6) Standard clause:
- ***jasmin jarat (el)-ayla baskalet men ma jara el-baki**
Yasmine bought the-expensive.ER bike from COMP bought the-others
 'Yasmine bought the most expensive bike than the others bought'
 - jasmin jarat el-baskalet el-ayla men ma jara**
Yasmine bought the-bike the-expensive.ER from COMP bought
el-baki
the-others
 'Yasmine bought a more expensive bike than the others bought.'

- ▶ The bare superlative cannot take a clausal standard → Superlative
- ▶ The polydefinite superlative can take a clausal standard → comparative
- ▶ Differential phrases (see handout): The bare superlative cannot take differential phrases, while the polydefinite superlative can

6. Bare Superlative: Syntax & Semantics



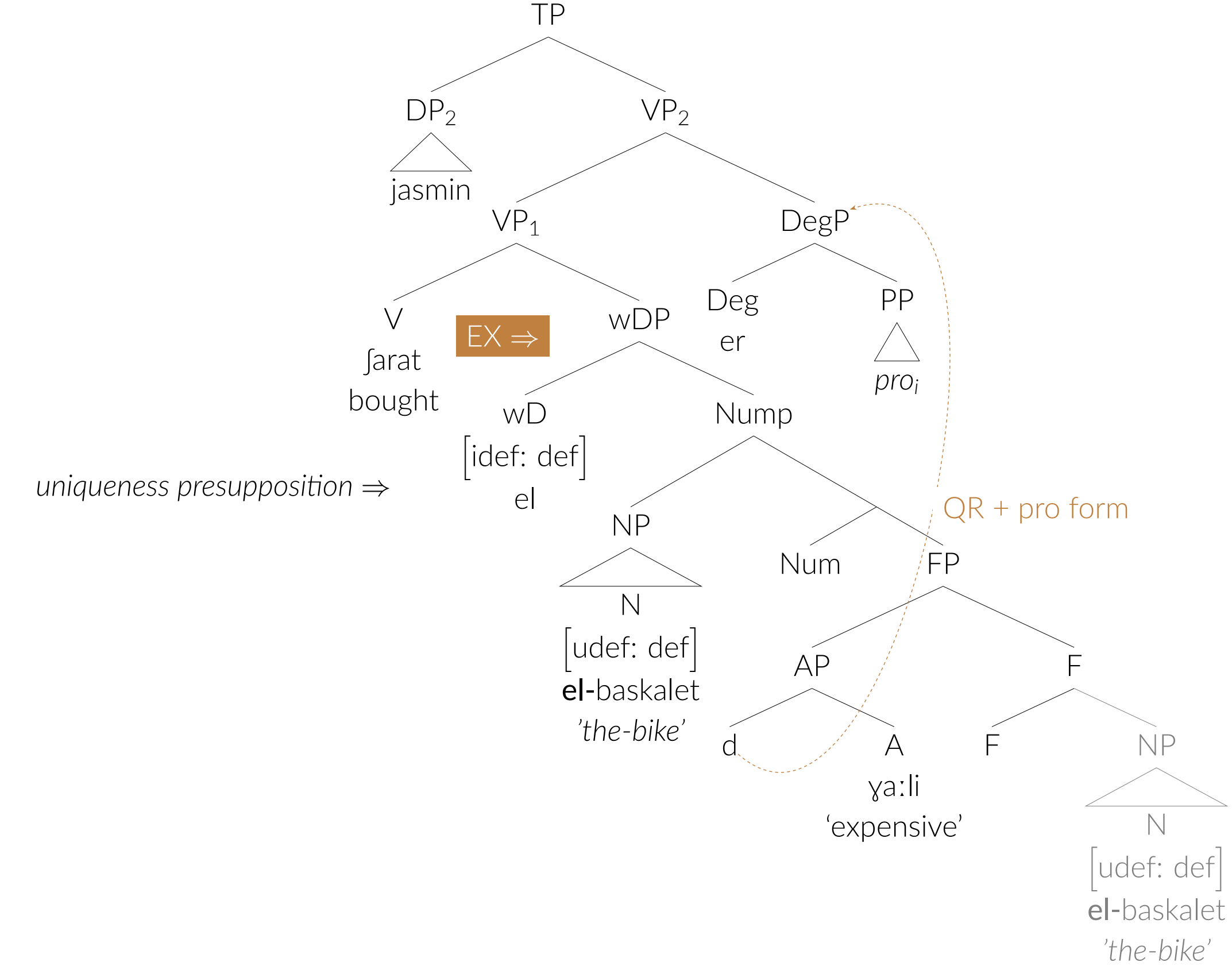
- ▶ Definite and Determinate: sDP = *iota* and wDP = uniqueness presupposition
- ▶ DegP undergoes internal QR; ER combines with SUP that has a udef [7, 6]:

- (8) a. $\llbracket er \rrbracket = \lambda z. \lambda G. \lambda b. MAX(\lambda d. G(d)(b)) > MAX(\lambda d'. G(d')(z))$
- b. $\llbracket sup \rrbracket = \lambda R_{e, det, et}. \lambda A. \lambda x. \forall y [y \neq x \rightarrow R(y)(A)(x)]$
- c. $\llbracket DegP \rrbracket = \lambda A. \lambda x. \forall y [y \neq x \rightarrow MAX(\lambda d. G(d)(x)) > Max(\lambda d'. G(d')(y))]$

$\llbracket sDP \rrbracket = \iota x. [\partial \llbracket bike(x) \ \& \ \mu_{cost}(x) \geq d' \rrbracket \leq 1] \ \& \ \forall y [y \neq x \rightarrow MAX(\lambda d'. bike(x) \ \& \ \mu_{cost}(x) \geq d') > MAX(\lambda d''. bike(y) \ \& \ \mu_{cost}(y) \geq d'')]$

7. Polydefinite Superlative: Syntax & Semantics

- (9) polydefinite superlative LF :



- ▶ Definite and Indeterminate DP: wDP = uniqueness presupposition and an $\exists x$ is applied for indeterminacy
- ▶ The standard argument of er is an anaphoric *pro*

- $\llbracket pro_i \rrbracket^g = g(i)$
- e.g. in context 1: {Ahmad \oplus Lina \oplus Mariam}
- e.g. in Context 2 = {Ali \oplus Amir \oplus Haneen}

$\llbracket TP \rrbracket = MAX(\lambda d. \exists z [bought(j, z) \ \& \ [\partial \llbracket bike(z) \ \& \ \mu_{cost}(z) \geq d \rrbracket \leq 1] \ \& \ bike(z) \ \& \ \mu_{cost}(z) \geq d]) > MAX(\lambda d'. \exists y [bought(g(i), y) \ \& \ bike(y) \ \& \ \mu_{cost}(y) \geq d'])]$

8. Conclusions

	Structure	Reading	DP type	Projection
bare superlative	superlative	absolute	referential	sDP
polydefinite superlative	comparative	relative	non-referential	wDP

Table 1. Morphosyntax and semantics of PA superlatives

9. Theoretical Implications

- ▶ Morphological definiteness \neq semantic definiteness: the locus of determinacy is the sDP layer, not morphological *el*-
- ▶ The absolute/relative split is structural and not a matter of a context-dependency resolution

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