

Croatian *jedan* and *neki* as (non)specificity markers

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Introduction

BACKGROUND

- jedan* ‘one’; *neki* ‘some’, ‘(a) certain’ < etymologically “dunno” indefinite (Haspelmath 1997)
- Article-like indefinite determiners** in an article-less language (Katunar et al. 2013, Belaj & Matovac 2015)
 - Traditional view: *jedan* = “specific”, *neki* = “nonspecific”
- Contradictory accounts:** “speaker having in mind” definitions conflate *referential* and *epistemic* specificity (von Heusinger 2002)
- Aim: describe **distribution** and determine extent of **grammaticalization** (Givón 1981, Heine 1997, Haspelmath 1997)

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- How are *jedan* and *neki* **distributed** across **specificity** profiles?
- When **both** are possible, what conditions their **variation**?

Hypothesis

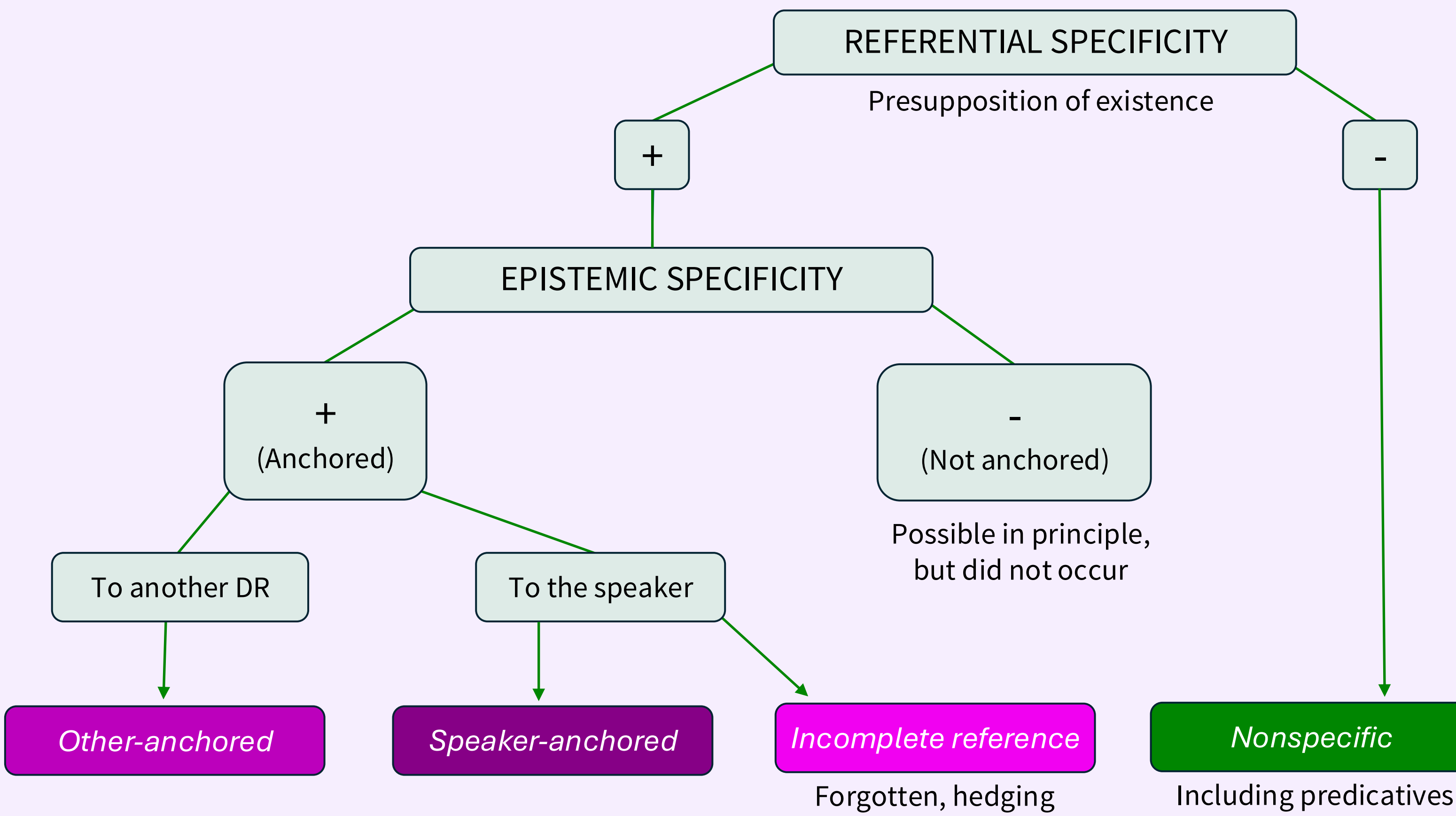
Specificity constrains the use of both indefinites, but *jedan* is **spreading** to nonspecific contexts, while *neki* is available in (epistemically) specific contexts. Within the resulting overlapping contexts, **discourse-related factors** constrain their variation.

Procedure

ANNOTATION

- Corpora:**
 - HrAL (spoken)
 - hrWaC (web)
- 1915 **tokens** after exclusions
 - 405 *jedan* (21%)
 - 1510 *neki* (79%)
- Tags: referential **specificity**, **anchor**, **completeness**, **human referent**, **pejorativity**, **discourse prominence**
- 4 final **specificity profiles:**

BREAKDOWN OF SPECIFICITY PROFILES



VARIATION: SPEAKER-ANCHORED

Corpus examples:

(1) *Imala sam mali okršaj s JEDNIM profesorom ovaj tjedan na faksu.*

I had a little fight with JEDAN professor this week at the university.

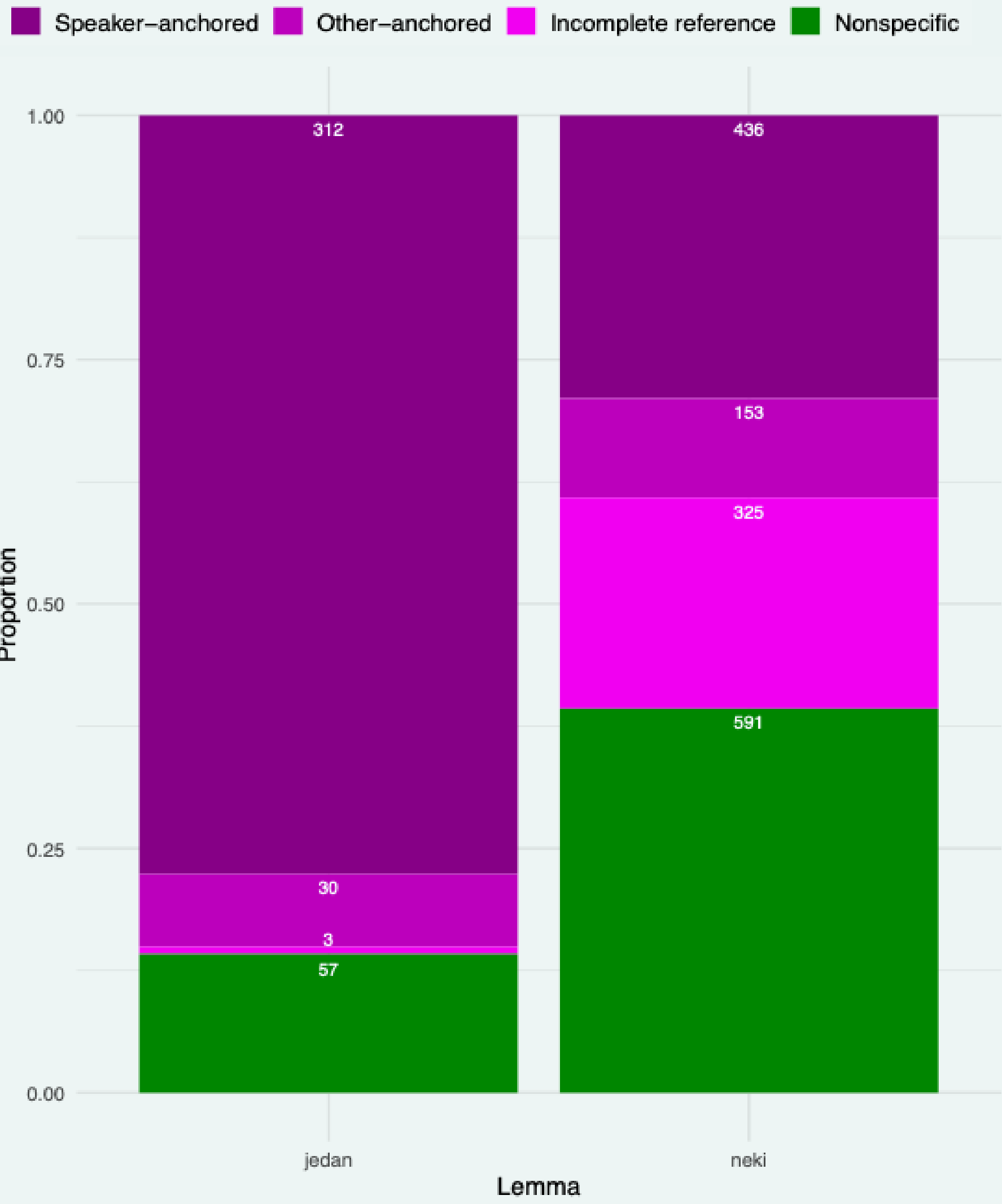
(2) *...a pored toga imam primanja za NEKI posao koji radim doma...*

...and beside that, I have income from NEKI job that I do at home...

Results and discussion

RESULT 1 - Specificity distinguishes distributions

Specificity by lemma, both corpora



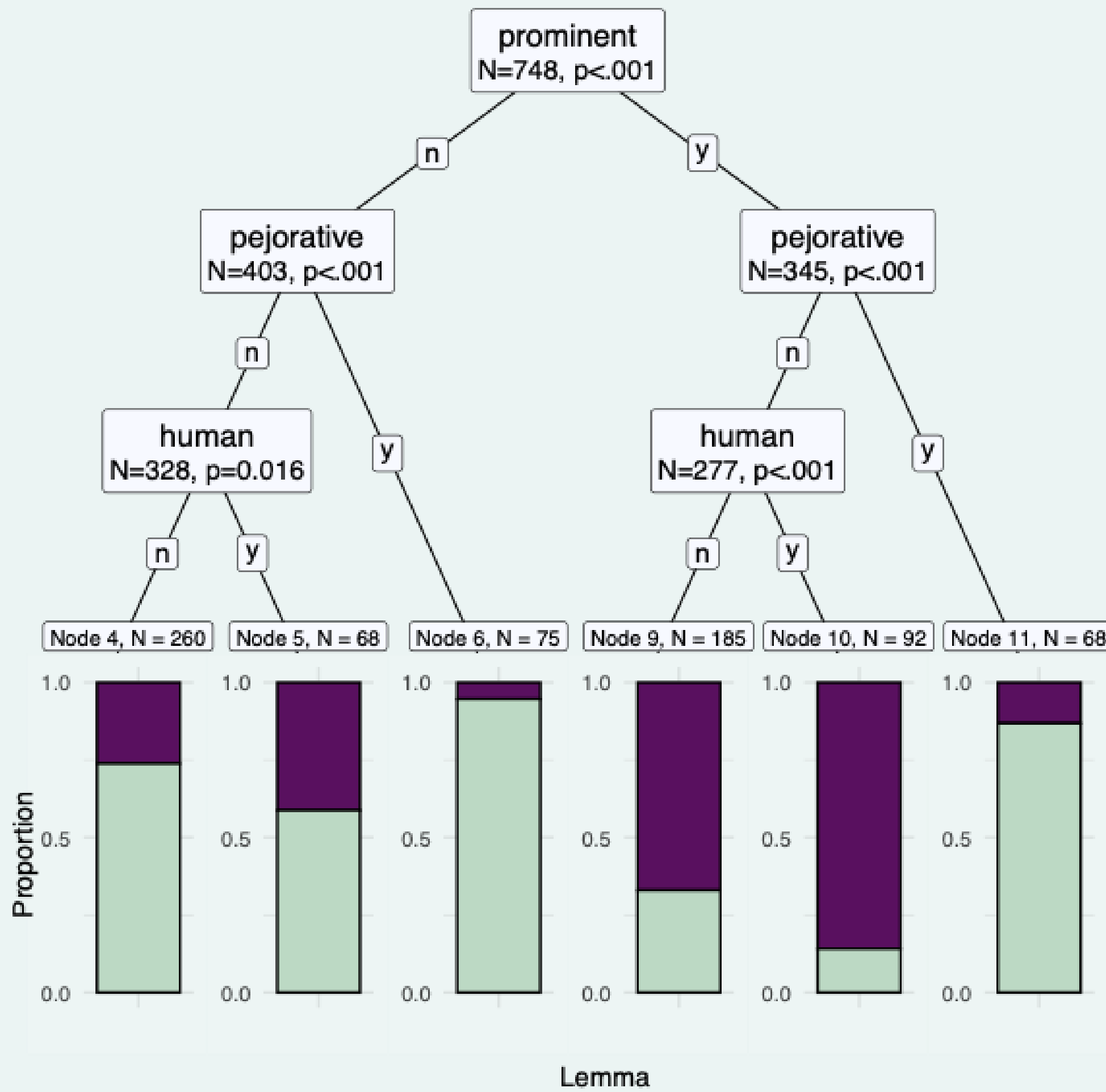
- jedan* strongly associated with speaker-anchoring, but also nonspecific or anchored to other DRs
- neki* occurs in all specificity profiles, including speaker-anchored full reference > **overlap context**

RESULT 2 - Pragmatic factors condition variation

Conditional inference tree predicting lemma

Subset: speaker-anchored, full reference

Lemma: jedan (dark purple), neki (light green)



- Discourse prominence is the strongest predictor: *jedan* associated with referents picked up in subsequent discourse
- Followed by pejorativity (*neki*)
- jedan* preferred with human referents, even if not prominent

DISCUSSION

- Specificity** explains much of the distribution:
 - jedan* is primarily (referentially and epistemically) specific
 - neki* has a wider distribution
- Both are **spreading** :
 - jedan* extending to nonspecific uses (grammaticalization path)
 - neki* available in epistemically specific contexts
- But specificity **cannot explain variation** in the overlap context
 - Pragmatic factors:** division of labor based on discourse prominence, (avoiding) pejorativity, referent type

Conclusion

TAKE HOME MESSAGE

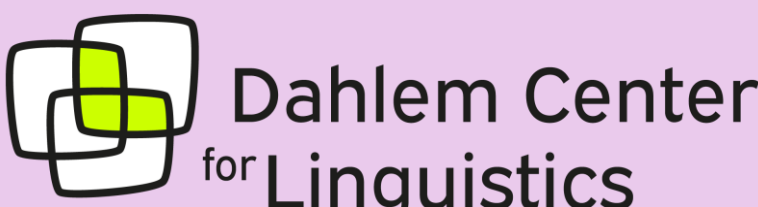
- Specificity** is a major factor, but it cannot fully explain the distribution
- The two determiners **overlap** significantly in speaker anchored, full-reference contexts
- Within this overlap, the choice is associated with **pragmatic and discourse-related** factors

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- Examine interplay of pragmatic factors in a **confirmatory** model (mixed-effects logistic regression)
- Investigate **number** differences – especially plural *jedan*
- Identify potential **bridging contexts** for *jedan*



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References:

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