

Reference in Taluitiw

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This paper is an attempt to show the grammar and meaning of individuating and generic references of the NP in Taluitiw (often spelled as Taluitew). Taluitiw is a Tibeto-Burman language spoken in Manipur, India. It is largely an undocumented language and currently has approximately 4,500 speakers as per the local Village Authority census. The data for analysis comes mainly from one of the authors of the current paper who happens to be a native speaker of the language. The data has, however, been verified with other native speakers from the village. In our analysis, we have drawn on insights from Cognitive Linguistics.

Keywords: *Taluitiw, Reference, Individuating reference, Generic reference, Cognitive Linguistics*

1 Introduction

Taluitiw is a lesser-known Tibeto-Burman language spoken in Manipur, India. More specifically, it belongs to the Naga Sub-Branch of Tibeto-Burman languages (Burling 2003: 184) and is spoken in the Talui village, located in the Ukhrul District of Manipur, India. The name is derived from *Talui*, the name of the village, and *tiw*, which means ‘language.’¹

Unfortunately, there is not a wealth of information publicly available about Taluitiw. As said, it is a relatively small language with a limited number of speakers, and research on it is almost non-existent. However, its classification within the Tibeto-Burman language family places it alongside other significant languages like Tibetan, Burmese, and various Sino-Tibetan languages spoken across Asia.

This paper offers a first step towards a description of one crucial aspect of Taluitiw grammar: reference.

2 Types of reference

Typically, the speaker utters a sentence to talk about an instance of a particular type of thing to the hearer, e.g. *I bought a car yesterday*, where the phrase *a car* refers to an instance of the type of thing called *car*. Thus, in an act of reference the speaker grounds the instance he has in mind in the current discourse. Technically, the instance being referred to is a *referent*; the expression referring to the referent is a *referring expression*. Thus, by using the right kind of referring expressions, the speaker ensures that the hearer can reference or identify the same instance (see Radden & Dirven 2007: 88).

The two main types of reference are Individuative and Generic. In the case of individuative reference, the speaker refers to an individual instance of a kind of thing, e.g. the noun phrase *huí hi* ‘this dog’ in (1) below is a referring expression used to refer to a particular dog.

¹ *Tallui* and *Taloi* are erroneous spellings of *Talui*, used by members from other communities.

- (1) *huí hi ámine*
 huí hi á-mi-ne²
 dog DEM 3.PL-POSS-DECL
 ‘This dog is theirs.’
- (2) *səluì və pəŋŋe*
 səluì və pəŋ-ŋe
 buffalo F strong-DECL
 ‘Buffaloes are strong.’

In the case of generic reference, the speaker refers to the whole class of a particular type of thing as in (2) above, where the noun *səluì* ‘buffalo’ refers to the whole class of this type of animal (see 2.2 below).

2.1 Individuative reference

As previously discussed, an individuative reference is employed to designate a specific instance within a particular category or type of things. In the utterance, *please bring that book*, the speaker is referring to a specific exemplar from the category of books.

The two main types of Individuative reference are Indefinite and Definite:

2.1.1 Indefinite reference

In the case of indefinite reference, the speaker picks up an instance (or some instances) from a kind of thing to introduce it to the hearer. Thus, the NP *gari kəsik^{hə}* ‘one car’, in (3) below refers to a car, i.e. an instance of the car-kind. Now, the NP *gari kəsik^{hə}* ‘one car’, meaning one car, has an indefinite reference. Unlike the speaker, it is indefinite because the hearer has no clue exactly which car it is, i.e., it is indefinite from the hearer’s perspective. Thus, the indefinite NP is introductory, i.e. it introduces to the hearer the instance that the speaker wants to talk about in the current discourse.

However, it is possible that the referent is not identifiable even by the speaker, as in (4) below. The referent, in this case, is technically known as ‘non-specific indefinite’. One might question whether non-specific indefinite reference constitutes a distinct category of reference, given that non-specific noun phrases do not necessarily denote entities within the real or discourse world. Thus, Givón (1993: 224) speaks of ‘non-referring indefinites’. But drawing on insights from the mental space theory of cognitive linguistics³ we can argue that the referent in (4) inhabits a mental space that is different from the real world where real cars exist. It is the mental space of hypothetical cars as established by the two space builders⁴ in (4), i.e. the future tense ‘will buy’ and the temporal adverbial ‘someday’. Conversely, the present perfect tense used in (3) establishes a mental space that is factual with real cars bought or sold.⁵

² The Declarative is the last sound in the final word of the sentence, followed by *e*.

³ See Fauconnier (1994); also, Langacker (1991: 97-98).

⁴ See fn. 2 above.

⁵ Note, however, that the future is a space where both hypothetical and specific entities can coexist. While the linguistic construct “a car” in the future tense is inherently hypothetical (a general concept of a car that might be

Indefinite reference can thus be either specific (when the referent is identifiable by the speaker), as in (3); or it can be non-specific (when the referent is not identifiable even by the speaker), as in (4). As is clear from (3) and (4), it is clear that Taluitiw does not grammatically distinguish between a specific and a non-specific indefinite NP: the same indefinite NP *garí kəsik^{hə}* is realized as specific in (3) and as non-specific in (4).⁶

- (3) *ei garí kəsik^{hə} lúk^{hiu}wariuwe*
 ei garí kəsik^{hə} lúk^{hiu}-wa-riu-we
 1.SG car one buy-take-completion-PERF-DECL
 ‘I have bought a car.’
- (4) *ei t^{hə}əmət^{hə}əŋk^{hə} garí kəsik^{hə} lúrauwe*
 ei t^{hə}əmət^{hə}əŋk^{hə} garí kəsik^{hə} lúra-we
 1.SG someday car one buy-FUT-DECL
 ‘I will buy a car someday.’

2.1.2 Definite reference

Usually, something is introduced to the hearer to talk more about it. Thus, the speaker of (3) can be expected to describe the car in the second sentence, e.g. by saying, *The car is white*, where the NP *the car* refers to the car that the speaker mentioned in the initial sentence; it does not refer to a different car or any other car that the speaker or the hearer might have in their minds. This is to say that the definite article, ‘the’ in the NP determines the car that was introduced in the subsequent discourse, i.e. in the second mention of the car. “A second and further mention of the same referent will most often turn out to be definite” (Cyr 1993: 205).⁷

Thus, definite reference implies shared knowledge, i.e. both the speaker and the hearer know the instance being talked about. Taluitiw lacks a definite article like ‘the’ and uses demonstratives to determine an instance that has been introduced to be talked about in the subsequent discourse. Demonstratives are words that point to specific people or entities, helping us identify what the speaker or writer is referring to, e.g. *this*, *that* in English. In (5a) below, the NP *rək kəsik^{hə}* ‘one book’ is an indefinite NP; in (5b), we have its definite counterpart, i.e. *rək c^{hi}* ‘this book’, where the demonstrative *c^{hi}* is used to determine the book introduced in (5a).

- (5) a. *ei rək kəsik^{hə} lúk^{hiu}we*
 ei rək kəsik^{hə} lúk^{hiu}-we
 1.SG book one buy-take-DECL
 ‘I bought a book.’

purchased without specifying a particular model, make, or colour), it can be enriched with specific details from the speaker's personal mental world. This refers to a particular car the speaker envisions, characterized by specific attributes like make, model, and colour. The speaker's mental world can thus transform the hypothetical "a car" into a potential, concrete object. In other words, depending on the speaker's intension, (4) may mean an indefinite specific car.

⁶ This applies to a language like English, as is clear from the English glosses in the two examples.

⁷ However, the definite article may directly be used with a noun whose referent is not previously introduced, as in “The Earth revolves around the Sun.” This is common with unique nouns or nouns that are implicitly understood, such as “the sun,” “the moon,” or “the internet.”

- b. *rək c^{hi} əmin səkke*
 rək c^{hi} əmin sək-ke
 book DEM price difficult-DECL
 ‘The book is costly.’

A demonstrative, such as English *this*,⁸ is a deictic expression, primarily employed to specify an entity within a physically present, shared context. As in *This book is indeed worth reading*, the speaker identifies a particular item from a set of similar entities accessible to both interlocutors. Heine et al. (2020: 403-434) propose that the definite article evolved from a demonstrative-like function, shifting its primary referential domain from the physical to the mental space. In the hearer’s mental space, there may already be several cars, and when the speaker introduces his car by saying *I bought a car yesterday*, an additional car is introduced in the hearer’s mental space. Thus, with the help of the definite article *the*, the speaker determines this car amongst other cars in the hearer’s mental space and says, *The car is expensive*.⁹

As said, Taluitiw does not have a definite article like *the* in English so demonstratives are freely used to determine an entity both in the physical and the mental space. Thus, in (6) below, the demonstrative *hi* ‘this’ determines a book in the physical space, while the other determiner, i.e. *c^{hi}* ‘that’ determines it in the mental space.¹⁰

- (6) *rək c^{hi} hine*
 rək c^{hi} hi-ne
 book DEM DEM-DECL
 ‘That book this.’
 ‘This book is the book that was mentioned earlier.’

The demonstratives *hi* ‘this’ and *c^{hi}* ‘that’ are realized as *hei* and *c^{hei}* to mean respectively, ‘here’ and ‘there’, as in (7) – (9) below.

- (7) *wofu hei wolo*
 wofu hei wo-lo
 later here come-IMP
 ‘Come here later.’

⁸ A deictic expression is a word or phrase that points to the time, place, or situation of an utterance. Its meaning depends on the context and varies with the speaker, the time of speaking, and the place of speaking. For example, in the sentence “I’m going there now”, the words “I”, “there”, and “now” are deictic expressions. Their meaning depends on who is speaking, where they are speaking, and when they are speaking.

⁹ However, the demonstrative *this*, though basically related to the physical space, as noted, is also used to determine in the mental space, as in “This idea of his is insightful.”

¹⁰ It is true that even a physical object (e.g. a book) exists in our mental space as a concept. The distinction that we are making is primarily based on the immediate focus of reference. When we use *hi* ‘this’ to refer to the book, we are primarily pointing to the physical object in the immediate context. However, when we use *c^{hi}*, ‘that’ we are shifting the focus to a mental representation of the book, perhaps a memory of it or a hypothetical scenario involving it.

- (8) *wofu c^hei wolo*
 wofu c^hei wo-lo
 later there go-IMP
 ‘Go there later.’

- (9) *hei mət^hailə c^hei wot^halo*
 hei mət^hai-lə c^hei wo-t^ha-lo
 here NEG-keep-instead there go-keep-IMP
 ‘Keep it there instead of here.’

In (10) and (11) below, the demonstratives *hi* and *c^hi* are used, respectively. While *hi* ‘this’ in (10) refers to an event (i.e. the event of catching fish) temporally closer to the time of speaking, i.e. the present, *c^hi* ‘that’ in (11) refers to an event (i.e. the event of catching fish) at a time distant from present, i.e. past.

- (10) *nida símkəp^hæŋŋo hi rəŋpaiye*
 ni-də sím-kə-p^hæŋŋo hi rəŋpai-ye
 2.SG-ABS find-NMZ-meet dem happy-DECL
 ‘I am happy at this finding and meeting with you.’
 ‘I’m happy to meet you.’

- (11) *əc^hək^hə k^ha ic^huŋlan símkəp^hæŋŋo c^hi rəŋpaiye*
 əc^hək^hə k^hai c^huŋlan sím-kə-p^hæŋŋo c^hi rəŋpai-
 before fish many find-NMZ-meet that happy-
 -ye
 -DECL
 ‘I was happy at that catching of many fish.’
 ‘I was happy to catch many fish.’

Now, a unique entity, i.e. which is the only one of its kind, has a definite reference because both the speaker and the hearer know about it at the same time. Speakers and hearers from the same speech community share a common knowledge of their environment and the world in general. Thus, many things do not have to be introduced if the speaker wants to talk about them as they are already known to the hearer. These referents are unique to the shared socio-cultural world (see Radden & Dirven 2007: 104). Thus, by way of a simple example, in most cultures, a kitchen being a part of a house is part of our consciousness so the speaker does not have to introduce it to the hearer that there is a kitchen in their house and that his mother is in the kitchen right now. Thus, in responding to the query, *Where’s your mother right now?*, the hearer just says: *The mother is in the kitchen right now*; he does not introduce the kitchen first and says: “There is a kitchen in our house and mother is in the kitchen”! In other words, the kitchen is already there in the hearer’s mind as some shared knowledge (i.e. that every household has a kitchen in it), the hearer does not have to introduce it in the mental space of the hearer by using an indefinite NP, i.e. a kitchen; he is in a position to directly use the definite NP, i.e. the kitchen. This is often called ‘framed uniqueness’, which can be defined as a type of unique reference in which a referent can be uniquely identified due to our knowledge of frames, where “frames are packages of knowledge about a coherent segment of experience; e.g. the ‘book’ frame contains components such as pages, contents, copies, etc.” (see Langacker 2008). Thus,

in the second utterance in (12), i.e. (12b), *sot^heinai* ‘relish’ is directly marked (i.e. without a preceding indefinite reference) by the presence of the demonstrative *c^{hi}* ‘this’, because both the speaker and the hearer have the same meal frame in their mind, i.e. both know that chutney ‘relish’ constitutes part of the meal they have in their (Indian) culture.

(12)

- a. *ei eic^hu amirei p^hər^hoye*
 ei eic^hu a-mi-rei p^hər^ho-ye
 1.SG today 3.PL-POSS-LOC eat-DECL
 ‘I had my meal at their house today.’
- b. *sot^heinai c^{hi} faipaiye*
 sot^heinai c^{hi} faipai-ye
 relish DEM tasty-DECL
 ‘The relish (that was served as part of the meal) was tasty.’

A proper name also has a unique reference since proper names do not refer to a category but are associated with a single referent such as a person or a place, which is the only one of its kind or unlike anything else.¹¹ Thus, proper names are already determined and unique (Abbot 2014: 323ff). In (13) below, we have two proper names, *Khalengshai* and *Jorhat*.

- (13) *k^həlæŋfai jərhatdə pəmme*
 k^həlæŋfai jərhat-də pəm-me
 Khalengshai Jorhat-LOC live-DECL
 ‘Khalengshai lives in Jorhat.’

In (13), *Khalengshai* refers to a unique individual and *Jorhat* a unique location. Thus, no demonstrative or definite marker is used with *Khalengshai* and *Jorhat*.

In (14) below, *ukət^{hiu}* ‘the earth’ is thus not marked by the presence of a definite marker.

- (14) *ukət^{hiu} ŋəc^hæŋ rək^hk^he*
 ukət^{hiu} ŋə-c^hæŋ rə-k^h-k^he
 earth NMZ-end FUT-IMM-DECL
 ‘Ending of the earth is very close.’
 ‘The earth will cease to exist at some point in the near future.’

However, *ukət^{hiu}* ‘the earth’, in (15) below, is marked by the presence of the demonstrative *hi* ‘this’ to mean ‘this earth’. In other words, the demonstrative *hi* ‘this’ here is used to add emphasis, i.e. it highlights a specific planet we inhabit. Second, there can be a subtle emotional connotation, i.e. a sense of closeness or even negativity towards something. Thus, it could imply a feeling of resignation or even frustration about the fate of the planet.

¹¹ However, a proper name in Talutiw, when pluralized with the definitive plural marker -bəŋ, can acquire a generic meaning, as in *mɯŋbəŋ və ʃəŋŋe* ‘Mungs are rich’.

- (15) *ukət^{hiu} hi ηəc^hæŋ rək^hk^he*
 ukət^{hiu} hi ηə-c^hæŋ rə-k^h-k^he
 earth DEM NMZ-end FUT-IMM-DECL
 ‘This earth of ours will cease to exist at some point in the near future.’
- (16) *ukət^{hiu} hi sosæriuwe*
 ukət^{hiu} hi so-sæ-riū-we
 Earth DEM hot-put-PRF-DECL
 ‘This earth of ours is getting warmer.’

One further type of uniqueness is “here” and “there”, which is unique reference achieved by restrictive descriptive qualification. In other words, the speaker may point out to a salient qualitative aspect of the referent that allows the hearer to distinguish it from other referents, as in “My coat is the black one”; “The books on that table are mine”; “The boys sitting on the floor, please come here”. In the example, “John’s father”, qualified uniqueness has been achieved through a reference point, i.e. “John”. On the other hand, in the examples, “the main reason behind this”; “the only solution to the problem”; “the tallest girl in the class”, the determining adjectives, i.e. “main”, “only”, “tallest” have the function of uniquely specifying things (note that in the third example, “tallest”, a superlative adjective, is signalling uniqueness, selecting the extreme instance of tallness to be found in the class).

In Taluitiw, the following examples show unique references:

- (17) *c^{hiu}meikəp kəc^he kətimnau c^{hi} hei k^həwolo*
 c^{hiu}-mei-kəp kəc^he kətimnau-c^{hi} hei k^hə-wo-lo
 tall-more-most NMZ-be student-DEM here please-come-IMP
 ‘The tallest student(s)¹², please come here.’
- (18) *káirəwi p^heitæk kəfəŋo c^{hi} əwine*
 kái-rə-wi p^heitæk kə-fəŋo c^{hi} ə-wi-ne
 outside-LOC-POSS slippers NMZ-red DEM 1.SG-POSS-DECL
 ‘The red slippers outside are mine.’

2.1.3 The bare noun in Taluitiw and individuating reference

Drawing on insights from Cognitive Linguistics, we argue that a noun, e.g. dog, refers to a kind of thing; an NP, e.g. a dog, refers to an instance of the kind. As is clear from the example, the bare count noun (e.g. dog) in English is not an NP. But in Taluitiw, as in many other TB languages of the Northeast, and also in Indo Aryan Assamese, the lingua franca of this region, the bare noun is also an NP (see Borah 2012). Such an NP, depending on the context, can have an indefinite, definite, or generic reference. This is clear from (2) above, reproduced as (19) below along with (20).

- (19) *səlui və pəŋŋe*
 səlui və pəŋ-ŋe
 buffalo F strong- DECL
 ‘Buffaloes are strong.’

¹² *c^{hiu}-mei-kəp* ‘tallest’ may have multiple simultaneous referents.

- (20) *kúkġġiro vā ək^hun rarre*
 kúkġġiro vā ək^hun rar-re
 sparrow F noise often-DECL
 ‘Sparrows are noisy.’

In (21) below, the bare noun *kombla* ‘orange’ refers to one or more oranges and has an indefinite reference.

- (21) *einā eiġo komblalúye*
 ei-nā eiġo komblalúye
 1.SG-ERG yesterday orange buy-DECL
 ‘I bought orange yesterday/I bought some oranges yesterday.’

On the bare hand, in (22) below, the bare noun *khuiminao* ‘guest’ has a definite reference.

- (22) *k^huiminao ratthiowa riowe*
 k^huiminau rət-thiū-wa riū-we
 guest go-leave-finish PRF-DECL
 ‘The guest has left/The guests have left.’

2.2 Generic reference

Generic reference is a linguistic device employed to talk about the general properties of a category rather than specific instances within it. It is fundamental to making generalizations and conveying knowledge about the world. Typically, generic references are associated with classes, which are groups of entities sharing common characteristics (Cruse & Croft 2004).

Generic reference allows us to make statements that apply to most class members. ‘Dogs are loyal companions’ suggests loyalty is a general characteristic of dogs, but does not claim every dog is loyal. Thus, it is generally accepted that generic reference relies heavily on prototypes, which are essentially mental representations of a category. They are the ‘best example’ of a category that comes to mind when we think of a category (Rosch 1978: 312-322). Thus, generic reference allows us to talk about a category without specifying every individual instance (see Jackendoff 1983: 95ff).

As observed in 2.1.3, Taluitiw uses the bare noun generic reference as is clear from (19) and (20) which are repeated below as (23) and (24).

- (23) *səlui vā pəŋŋe*
 səlui vā pəŋ-ŋe
 Buffalo F strong-DECL
 ‘Buffaloes are strong.’
- (24) *kukġġiro vā ək^hunrarre*
 kukġġiro vā ək^hun-rar-re
 sparrow F noise-often-DECL
 ‘Sparrows are noisy.’

Another way Taluitiw adopts for generic reference is the singular definite NP, as is clear from the following examples:

- (25) *səlui hi pəŋŋe*
 səlui hi pəŋ-ŋe
 buffalo DEM strong-DECL
 ‘The buffalo is a strong animal.’
- (26) *kukʃiro hi əkʰunrarre*
 kukʃiro hi əkʰun-rar-re
 sparrow DEM noise-often-DECL
 ‘The sparrow is a noisy bird.’

Yet another way Taluitiw adopts for generic reference is the definite plural NP, suffixed by the DCM¹³ *bəŋ*, as in the following examples.

- (27) *kʰəŋətuknaubəŋ və pəŋŋe*
 kʰəŋətuknaub-əŋ və pəŋ-ŋe
 wrestler-DCM F strong-DECL
 ‘The wrestlers are strong.’
- (28) *a:samisbəŋ və əcʰəm fuiye*
 a:samis-bəŋ və əcʰəm fui-ye
 Assamese-DCM F behavior good-DECL
 ‘Assamese are well mannered.’

In the following examples, the definite marker *hi* has made the NPs non-generic.

- (29) *səlui bəŋ hi pəŋŋe*
 səlui-bəŋ hi pəŋg-ŋe
 buffalo-DCM DEM strong-DECL
 ‘These buffaloes are strong.’
- (30) *kukʃiro-bəŋ hi əkʰunrarre*
 sparrow-DCM DEM noise-often-DECL
 ‘These sparrows are noisy.’

¹³ As Borah (forthcoming) demonstrates, most Tibeto-Burman languages and languages of other language families spoken in Northeast India possess a set of Definite Collective Markers (DCMs) that function as definite counterparts to a set of inherently indefinite quantifiers. While these indefinite quantifiers (e.g. *cʰuŋlan* ‘many’ in Taluitiw) quantify nouns for an indefinite unspecified quantity or measure of the noun referent as in *ʃæ cʰuŋlan* ‘many chickens’, a DCM quantifies the noun to produce the definite counterpart of that unspecified quantity or measure as in *ʃæ-bəŋ* ‘the chickens’. While these languages employ these quantifiers for imprecise quantification, they utilize numerals (with or without classifiers) for precise quantification, as exemplified by *məyərnau məti* ‘boy four’ (= ‘four boys’) and its definite counterpart *məyərnau məti hi/cʰi* ‘the four boys’, marked by the presence of either *hi* ‘these’ or *cʰi* ‘those’.

It appears that in Taluitiw, the choice between a bare noun and a definite plural NP for generic reference is influenced by the degree of personalization involved in the generalization.

When a generalization is impersonal or unbiased, such as ‘birds can fly,’ a bare noun is typically employed as the generic NP, as illustrated in examples (23) and (24). In these cases, the generalization is not rooted in specific personal experiences but rather reflects a more abstract understanding of the category.

Conversely, a personal generalization, often stemming from direct experiences with particular instances of a kind, tends to involve a closer mental or physical connection to the subject matter. This explains the use of a definite plural NP in examples (27) and (28): *k^həŋətuknau-bəŋ* ‘the wrestlers’ and *kukfiro-bəŋ* ‘the sparrows’ designate ‘personal collectives.’ These definite plural NPs refer to specific groups of wrestlers and sparrows that the speakers have encountered and observed. By employing these metonymic references, the speakers extend the generalization beyond the particular individuals to encompass the entire class (see Borah, forthcoming). In (25) and (26), even when referring to a single instance, the definite singular NP suggests a personal connection to that instance.

In essence, the use of a definite singular or plural NP for generic reference in Taluitiw highlights the role of personal experience in shaping linguistic generalizations.

3 Conclusion

This paper has examined the grammar and meaning of individuating and generic reference in Taluitiw, a Tibeto-Burman language spoken in Manipur, India. Drawing on insights from Cognitive Linguistics, the paper has analyzed how the language employs various grammatical constructions to express different types of reference.

We have shown that Taluitiw utilizes indefinite NPs (e.g. *gari kəsik^hə* ‘one car’), which are not marked for indefiniteness, for introducing new entities and definite NPs (e.g. *rək c^hi* ‘this book’) for referring to entities already introduced in the discourse. Taluitiw lacks not only an indefinite article, but also a definite article so that demonstratives (i.e. *hi* ‘this/these’, *c^hi* ‘that/those’) are the primary tool for definite reference in Taluitiw. They can point to entities in both the physical and mental space. Additionally, unique entities and proper nouns have definite reference without requiring demonstratives.

Unlike a language like English, bare nouns in Taluitiw can function as NPs with individuating reference, depending on the context. They can be interpreted as indefinite, definite, or generic.

Taluitiw employs various strategies for generic reference: Bare nouns (e.g. *səlui* ‘buffalo’) are used for generic statements about a whole class. Definite singular NPs, such as *səlui hi* ‘the buffalo’, can be employed to express generic reference, often indicating a personal connection to the category. By using the definite article, the speaker suggests a familiarity with the category and potentially references a prototypical or idealized member. Similarly, definite plural NPs like *k^həŋətuknau-bəŋ* ‘the wrestlers’ are used to make generic statements about the category as a whole, based on a ‘personal collective’. This involves a sense of shared experience with a specific group of wrestlers, which is then extended to the category in general.

The paper concludes by suggesting that the choice between different constructions for generic reference in Taluitiw reflects the degree of personalization involved in the speaker’s generalization. Bare nouns are used for impersonal and unbiased statements, while definite NPs

indicate a closer mental or physical connection to the subject matter. This highlights the role of personal experience in shaping how Taluitiw speakers express generic truths.

This study contributes to the understanding of reference mechanisms in under-described Tibeto-Burman languages. It highlights the importance of investigating diverse languages to discover how reference systems are shaped by specific linguistic and cultural contexts.

Further research could explore how these reference strategies interact with other grammatical features of Taluitiw and investigate how they are used in different discourse contexts. Additionally, comparative studies with other Tibeto-Burman languages would be valuable to identify typological similarities and variations in reference systems within this language family.

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Abbreviations

DECL	Declarative
DEM	Demonstrative
F	Focus
FUT	Future
ERG	Ergative
IA	Indo Aryan
IMM	Immediacy
IMP	Imperative
LOC	Locative
NEG	Negative
NMZ	Nominalizer
NP	Noun Phrase
PRF	Perfect
PL	Plural
POSS	Possession
Q	Question
SG	Singular
TB	Tibeto-Burman

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