

**A Prepositional-like Element (PLE) in Saudi Northern Dialect of  
Arabic (SNDA): A Syntactic Account**

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**Abstract**

*Occurrence of indefinite nouns in Saudi Northern dialect of Arabic (SNDA) is often characterized by the use of a preposition-like element (PLE). The complementary distribution of the PLE and the definite article al- “the” might be assumed as an evidence for the indefinite nature of the element. However, the restricted distribution of the PLE compared to the indefinite article where the PLE only appears in a position c-commanded by the verb in sentences with two nouns one of each is definite with which the PEL clitic agrees makes me argue that this element is a head of some sort; this head selects indefinite nouns. This paper investigates this specific syntactic phenomenon which has never been investigated in this dialect before and has never been manifested or reported in any of the Arabic dialects.*

**KEYWORDS:** Saudi Northern Dialect of Arabic, preposition-like element, indefiniteness, selection,

**Introduction**

Cross-linguistically, the prototypes of definiteness and indefiniteness vary. In English, for example, the former is expressed by the use of the definite article “the” and the latter by the indefinite article “a/an”. In French, the definite article is analogous to the English definite article “the”. It can vary according to the gender and number of the noun. So, the French definite article *le, la, l’* and *les*; the first three are used with singular and the last one with plural. In English, the noun without the definite article is used generically whereas in French, generic use of the noun requires the presence of the article. As for the indefinite article, French, unlike “a” and “an” in English, uses “un” and “une” for singular and *des* for plural. Turkish expresses indefiniteness explicitly whereas languages like Chinese and Russian do not use articles; and the word order affects interpretation and definiteness (Lyons (1999). In Standard Arabic (SA) and Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), for Arab grammarians, definiteness is expressed by the use of the definite article *al-* “the” which is attached to the noun as prefix; whereas the indefiniteness is expressed by the use of the marker “-n” nunation (*tanwin*), which appears as a suffix on the noun; as for generic nouns, they are expressed by the use of the definite article; see Benmamoun (2000, 2006), Borer (1988, 1996, 1999, 2005), Brustad (2000), Dobrovie-Sorin (2003), Fassi (1989, 1993, 1999), Kremers (2003, 2005), Mohammad (1988, 1999), Ohalla (1991,

1996, 2004), Ritter (1988, 1991), Shlonsky (1991, 2004) and Siloni (1990, 1994, 1996, 2001). In the dialect under investigation Saudi Northern Region Dialect of Arabic (henceforth SNRDA), the article al-“the” is used with definite nouns and nothing is used with indefinite. Generic noun generic are also expressed by the use of the definite article. Moreover, indefinite nouns are often characterized by the use of a preposition-like element (henceforth PLE). This PLE always surfaces right after the verb before the indefinite nouns.

1. ar-rjaal sharuu **li-hum** beet

the men bought.pl.mas for-them a house

"The men bought a house."

In (1), the PLE li-hum “for them” appears right after the verb sharuu “bought” and before the indefinite noun beet “a house”.

The complementary distribution of the PLE and the definite article al-“the” might be assumed as an evidence for the indefinite nature of the element. However, the restricted distribution of the PLE compared to the indefinite article where the PLE only appears in a position c-commanded by the verb in sentences with two nouns one of each is definite with which the PEL clitic agrees makes me argue that this element is a head of some sort; this head selects indefinite nouns.

The paper is structured as follows.

Section 2 briefly describes how definiteness and indefiniteness are marked and the distribution of the definite and indefinite nouns in Standard Arabic (SA), Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and in Saudi Northern Region Dialect of Arabic (SNRDA). Different word orders and the distribution of the definite and indefinite nouns in SNRDA are discussed under section 3. Section 4 provides a comparison between the PLE and the prepositional phrase (PP). Section 5 discusses the distribution of the PLE and provides a syntactic account of the PLE. Section 6 concludes the paper.

## **Definiteness and Indefiniteness in SA, MSA and SNRDA**

### **Definiteness and indefiniteness in SA and MSA**

According to Arab grammarians, Benmamoun (2000, 2006), Fassi (1989, 1993, 1999), Mohammad (1988, 1999), Ohalla (1991, 1996, 2004), and among others, definiteness in SA and MSA is expressed by the use of the definite article al- “the” which is attached to the noun as a prefix whereas the indefiniteness is expressed by the use of the marker -n nunation (tanwin), which appears as a suffix on the noun. Both are in complementary distribution. If one appears the other does not. Other non-Arab linguists also regard the nunation as the indefinite article, Borer

(1988, 1996, 1999, 2005), Brustad (200), Dobrovie-Sorin (2003), Kremers (2003, 2005), Ritter (1988, 1991), Shlonsky (1991, 2004), Siloni (1990, 1994, 1996, 2001), and among others. Generic nouns are expressed by the use of the article al- “the”. See the following:

2. a. wasala al-rajul-u.

arrived.sing.mas. the-man-nom.def.

“The man arrived.”

b. wasala rajul-u-n

arrived.sing.mas. a man-nom.-indef.

“A man arrived.”

3. \*wasala Al-rajul-u-n.

arrived.sing.mas. the-man-nom.indef.

“The man arrived.”

4. al-hayaat-u hilwat-un

the-life-nom. good.nom.

“Life is good.”

In (2a), we could notice that when the definite article al- “the” is used with the noun al-rajulu “the man” the noun is interpreted as definite. and in (2b), when the indefinite article –n is used with the noun rajulun-n “a man” the noun is interpreted as indefinite. However, in (3), the co-occurrence of both articles in the same sentence renders the sentence ungrammatical. In (4), the article al- “the” is used with the generic noun al-hayaat “life”.

### **Definiteness and indefiniteness in SNRDA**

Definite and indefinite nouns in SNRDA are only distinguished by the use of the definite article al- “the”; if the definite article is used, the noun is interpreted as definite; if it is not used, it is indefinite; that is to say, the indefinite article –n never used as an indefinite marker in SNRDA.

5. a. wisal ar-rajaal.

arrived.sing.mas. the-man

“The man arrived.”

b. wisal rajaal.

arrived.sing.mas. a man

“A man arrived.”

In (5a), we could notice that when the definite article al- “the” is used with the noun al-rajaal “the man”, the noun is interpreted as definite. and in (5b), when there is no article used, the noun rajaal “a man” is interpreted as indefinite. However, SNRDA also uses PLEs before indefinite nouns.

6. shift l-i (\*al-)rajaal

saw.I for-me the- a man

“I saw a man.”

In (6), we could notice when the PLE l-i “for me” is used, the indefinite noun without the al- “the” rajaal “a man” is used. The focus of this paper is studying the distribution of this element and attempting to provide a syntactic account for it.

It is also worth mentioning that the nunation is manifested in this dialect in different syntactic positions. First, nunation is used for emphasis; this is clear from the way the words are uttered; they are uttered with higher pitch. See the following.

7. ali rajaali-in haqeeri-n, wiSkhi-n kathaab

Ali a man-n VILLAINOUS.sing.mas.-n indecent.sing.mas.-n LIAR. sing.mas.-n

“Ali is a VILLANIOUS, INDECENT and LIAR MAN.”

In (7), we could notice from the English gloss that the – n appears at the end of the words rajaali-n “a man”, haqeeri-n “villainous”, and wiSkhi-n “indecednt”; and it is only the last word kathaabi-in “liar” which does not take the –n ending. As a fact in SNRDA, the more the speaker adds words, the more s/sh uses –n endings; and it is only in the last word where the –n ending is not used. Moreover, we could notice that rajaali-in “a man”, haqeeri-n “villainous”, wiSkhi-n, “indecednt” and kathaab “liar” are all focused or emphasized.

The emphasis use of the –n is clearly manifested with the use of the two frequent thanking words shukra-n “thanks” and afwa-n “welcome”. The first of which is uttered when thanking someone for doing you a favor, the second is uttered by the listener as a reply.

8. Ali: khabart sideeqi-na fahad ygabil-k mithil-ma talb-t.

told.I friend-our Fahad meet-you as requested.you

Ali: I have told our friend Fahad to meet you as you have requested.

Khalid: shikra-n.

thanks

Ali: afwa-n.

welcome.

In (8), we could notice that the –n ending surfaces onto the two thanking words *shikra-n* “thanks” and *afwa-n* “welcome”.

The – n is also appears onto certain adverbs such as *ahyaana-n* “sometimes” and *aadita-n* “often”.

9. *ahyaana-\*(n) neruuh la-lhadeeqah*

sometimes, go.we to-zoo

“we often go to the zoo.”

In (9), we could notice that the obligatory use of the –n ending onto the adverb *ahyaana-n* “sometimes”.

Moreover, the – n appears after the determiner *kill* “all” when the noun following it is not used.

10. a. *killi\*(-n) wahid yabi haajah*

each one want need

“Each one wants something.”

b. *killi\*(-n) yabi haajah*

each want need

“Each wants something.”

In (10b.) compared to (10a.), we could notice that obligatory use of the – n when the determiner *killi-n* “each” is used without the noun *wahid* “one”. From the positions where the –n ending is used, contrary to Brustad’s (2000) who argues that many Arabic Bedouin dialects use –n with indefinite Arabic written nouns but not with spoken ones, it is obvious that SNRDA uses the – n ending with nouns, adjectives and adverbs in spoken and written language.

Given that the – n is used in other positions for other purposes other than expressing indefiniteness, I will assume that there is no overt indefinite marker used in SNRDA. (see Fassi-Fehr (1993) who argues that noun to which the – n attached is not always interpreted as indefinite). Next section discusses the different word orders used and the distribution of definite and indefinite nouns in SNRDA.

### **Word Orders and distribution of the Definite and Indefinite Nouns in SNRDA**

SNRDA has three word orders, VSO, SVO and VOS. In VSO, the two arguments, the subject and the object, are always interpreted neutrally. As for the SVO word order, the subject can be interpreted as neutral or as a topic or as a focus. As for VOS word order, the subject is always

interpreted as topic and the VO or the object is interpreted as a focus. See the following:

11. sharuu ar-rjaal al-beet

bought.pl.mas. the men the house

"The men bought the house."

12. sharuu ar-rjaal beet

bought.pl.mas. the men a house

"The men bought a house."

13. sharuu rjaal al-beet

bought.pl.mas. men the house

"Men bought the house."

13. sharuu rjaal beet

bought.pl.mas. men a house

"Men bought a house."

In (11, 12, 13 and 14), we could notice that in VSO word order, both the definite and indefinite nouns whether in the subject or object positions are interpreted as neutral.

In SVO word order, only definite nouns can occur preverbally.

15. ar-rjaal sharuu al-beet

the men bought.pl.mas. the house

"The men bought the house."

"As for the men, they bought the house."

"THE MEN bought the house."

16. \*rjaal sharuu al-beet

men bought.pl.mas the house

"Men bought the house."

We could notice in (15) that the definite noun al-rjaal "the men" as the subject appears preverbally; it is interpreted as neutral or as a topic or as a focus. On the contrary, the indefinite noun rjaal "men" can not surface preverbally; which is the reason behind the ungrammaticality of (16). However, the indefinite noun rjaal "a man" can surface preverbally when it is indefinite specific; in other words, the referent is known to the speaker or to the speaker and the hearer or it is modified by attribute

adjectives or relative clauses. See the following sentence uttered by the speaker while both the speaker and the hearer are looking at a man coming towards them:

17. *shif, rajaal (tweel mi?ih sayyarah) wisal.*

look, a man tall.sing.mas. with-him a car arrived.sing.mas.

“Look, a man with a car arrived.”

We could notice the indefinite noun *rajaal* “a man” in (17) surfaces preverbally as it is interpreted as indefinite specific noun. We could notice the optionality of the use of the adjective *tweel* “tall” and preposition phrase *mi?i-h sayyari-h* “with his car”; as the noun *rajaal* “a man” is known for both of the interlocutors.

As for VOS word order, only definite nouns can occur postverbally when the VO is being focused.

18. *sharuu al-beet ar-rjaal*

bought.pl.mas. the house the men

“As for the men, THEY BOUGHT THE HOUSE.”

“As for the men, they bought THE HOUSE.”

\*“The men bought the house.”

19. \**sharuu al-beet rjaal*

bought.pl.mas the house men

\*“Men BOUGHT THE HOUSE.”

We could notice that the definite noun *al-rajaal* “the man” in (19) surfaces after the verb and the object *sharuu al-beet* “bought the house” compared to the indefinite noun *rajaal* “a man” in (17) which can not surface in that position.

Before investigating the distribution of the PLE and providing a syntactic account for it, one needs to exclude that the PLE is not a mere preposition follow its object (PP). The following section makes clear that the PLE is not really a PP.

### **Preposition-like element (PLE) and Prepositional Phrase (PP)**

Although the PLE looks like a PP, both differs in a number of respects. First of all, the verb and the PLE form one prosodic unit; they are uttered as one word compared to the verb and the PP following it which are uttered with a pause between them. Second, the meanings differ; one is a PP and one is not.

20. sharuu li-hum beet

sharuu, li-hum beet (a pause used)

bought.pl.mas. for-them a house

“They bought a house for them.” (PP meaning)

“They bought a house.” (PLE meaning)

From the English gloss in (20), we could notice that there are two different interpretations for the sentence; one when the li-hum “for them” is interpreted as a PP with a short pause after the verb sharuu “bought”, and one when it is interpreted as a PLE.

The third difference is that the PP can be stressed or focused whereas the PLE can not.

21. sharuu LI-HUM beet

bought.pl.mas. FOR-THEM a house

“They bought a house FOR THEM (not someone else).”

“\*They bought a house.”

In (21), we could notice that when the preposition clitic is stressed or focused LI-HUM “FOR THEM” it is only interpreted as a PP; never as PLE.

Forth, PP can be preposed whereas the PLE can not.

22. li-hum sharuu beet

for-them bought.pl.mas. a house

“For them, they bought a house.” (PP meaning)

\*“I bought the car.” (PLE meaning)

Again, in (22), we could notice from the gloss that the preposed item li-hum “for them” is a PP not a PLE.

Fifth, PLE can not be used before definite nouns; whereas the PP can.

23. sharuu li-hum al-beet

bought.pl.mas. for-them the house

“They bought the house for them.” (PP meaning)

“\*They bought the house.” (PLE meaning)

In (23), we could notice that interpretation of the PLE is not available when the definite noun al-beet “the house” is used after li-hum “for them”.



Sixth, PP can stand on its own as a complete sentence as a reply for a question but not the PLE.

24. li-hum.

For-them

“It is for them.” (PP meaning)

\*l-clitic.” (PLE meaning)

In (24), we could notice that interpretation of the PLE is not available when li-hum “for them” is used on its own.

Seventh, both the PLE and the PP can appear in the same sentence.

25. sharuu li-hum beet la-ha

bought.pl.mas. for-them the house for-her

“They bought a house for her.”

From (25), we could notice that both the PLE li-hum “for them” and the PP la-ha surface in the same sentence.

From the above differences, one could conclude that although the PLE looks like PP, it not really a PP. The next section discusses the distribution of the PLE and provides a syntactic account for the PLE.

### **Distribution and Syntactic Account of the PLE**

In this section, I discuss the distribution of the PLE in SNRDA and attempt to provide a syntactic account of its occurrence. Before investigating the distribution of the PLE with reference to the three word orders, we first show that the PLE is in complementary distribution with the definite article or any other element functioning as a determiner. See the following sentence:

26. ar-rjaal sharuu li-hum (\*al-)beet.

the-men bought.pl.mas. for-them a house

“The men bought a house.”

27. b. ar-rjaal sharuu beet sideeq-hum

the-men bought.pl.mas. friend-their

“The men bought their friend’s house.”

b. \*ar-rjaal sharuu li-hum beet sideeq-hum

the-men bought.pl.mas. for-them friend-their

“The men bought their friend’s house.”

In (26), we could notice that the definite article *al-* “the” can not be used before the noun *beet* “house” when the PLE *li-hum* “for them” is used. (27b) compared to (27a) shows that even the possessive pronoun *-hum* “their” can not be used when the PLE is used. Another important fact is that the PLE clitic *-hum* “them” and the verb *sharuu* “bought” always agree with the definite noun *ar-rjaal* “the men”. From the same sentences (26) and (27), it is also clear that PLE surfaces before indefinite nouns in sentences with two nouns one of which is a definite noun with which the verb and the PLE clitic agree; this is to say, PLE can not be use in sentences with one or two indefinite nouns. See the following:

28. a. *sharuu rjaal beet*.

bought.pl.mas. men a house

“Men bought a house.”

b. \**sharuu (li-hum) rjaal (li-hum) beet*.

bought.pl.mas. for-them men for-them a house

“Men bought a house.”

(28b) compared to (28a) shows that the PLE *li-hum* “for them” can not appear before any of the indefinite nouns *rjaal* “men” and *beet* “a house” as both of the sentences do not have a definite noun. Moreover, PLE never appears before indefinite nouns in sentences with intransitive and ergative verbs as the following show:

29. a. *wisal rajaal*.

arrived.sing.mas. a man

“A man arrived.”

b. \**wisal li-h rajaal*.

arrived.sing.mas. for-him a man

“A man arrived.”

30. a. *Taah rajaal*.

fell.sing.mas. a man

“A man fell.”

b. \**Taah li-h rajaal*.

fell.sing.mas. for-him the/a man

“A man fell.”

From the ungrammaticality of (29b and 30b), one could notice that PLE is not used with the transitive verb *wisal* “arrived” and the ergative verb *Taah* “fell”.

In addition, PLE can not surface with equational sentences in which the two nouns refer to the same identity.

31. a. *al-rajaal mdarris*

the-man teacher.sing.mas.

“The man is a teacher.”

b. \**al-rajaal li-h mdarris*

the-man for-him teacher.sing.mas.

“The man is a teacher.”

We could notice in (31b) compared to (31a), the PLE *li-h* “for him” use renders the sentence ungrammatical. Not surprisingly, PLE is not also used in existential sentences.

32. a. *kan hnaak rajaal ysamma ali*

was there a man called Ali

“There was a man called Ali.”

b. \**kan hnaak l-ih rajaal ysamma ali*

was there for-him a man called Ali

“There was a man called Ali.”

We could notice that in (32b) compared to (32a), the PLE *li-h* “for him” use renders the sentence ungrammatical.

Now, let us investigate the distribution of the PLE with reference to the three word orders VSO, SVO and VOS. First, let us start with VSO sentences where the subject is the definite noun and the object is the indefinite one.

33. a. *sharuu ar-rjaal beet.* (VSO order)

bought.pl.mas. the-men house

“The men bought a house.”

b. *sharuu li-hum ar-rjaal beet.* (VSO order)

bought.pl.mas. for-them the-men a house

“The men bought a house.”

In (33b) compared to (33a), we could notice that definite subject ar-rjaal “the men” with which the verb sharuu “bought” and PLE clitic –hum “them” agree come between both the PLE li-hum “for them” and the indefinite noun beet “a house” and still the sentence is grammatical. That is to say, PLE is used with nouns interpreted as neutral. Let us see if the same is true for sentences with SVO word order.

34. a. ar-rjaal sharuu beet. (SVO order)

the-men bought.pl.mas. a house

“They bought a house.”

“As for the men, they bought a house.”

“THE MEN bought a house.”

b. ar-rjaal sharuu li-hum beet. (SVO order)

the-men bought.pl.mas. for-them a house

“They bought a house.”

“As for the men, they bought a house.”

“THE MEN bought a house.”

As in VSO word order, in (34b), one could also notice that with the definite subject ar-rjaal “the men” being positioned preverbally, the use of the PLE li-hum “for them” before the indefinite beet “a house” is still grammatical. Now, let us take sentences with VOS word order.

35. a. sharuu beet ar-rjaal. (VOS order)

bought.pl.mas. a house the-men

“As for the men, THEY BOUGHT A HOUSE.”

“As for the men, they bought A HOUSE.”

“\*They bought a house.”

b. sharuu li-hum beet ar-rjaal. (VOS order)

bought.pl.mas. for-them house the-men

“As for the men, THEY BOUGHT A HOUSE.”

“They BOUGHT A HOUSE.”

“\*They bought a house.”

As in VSO and VOS word orders, in (35b), we could notice that the use of the PLE li-hum “for them” in VOS word order is also grammatical. This is expected as this word order, VOS, is derived from VSO word order. From the above discussed examples, we could conclude that the

PLE surfaces before indefinite nouns in sentences with definite nouns with which the verb and PLE clitic agree. Let us see if PLE surfaces in sentences with indefinite subjects and definite objects. Let us start with VSO word order:

36. a. sharuu rjaal al-beet.

bought.pl.mas. men the- house

“Men bought a house.”

b. \*sharuu li-h rjaal **al-beet**.

bought.pl.mas. for-it men the- house

“Men bought a house.”

In (36b) compared to (36a), one could notice that the use of the PLE “li-h” “for it” with its clitic agreeing with the definite object al-beet “the house” renders the sentence ungrammatical. Recall that in the VSO word order above in which the subject is the definite noun and the object is the indefinite one, the PLE with its clitic and the verb agree with the definite subject. In other words, both the verb and the PLE clitic carry the same agreement features. In (36b), the PLE clitic li-h “for it” only agrees with the definite object al-beet “the house”; the verb sharuu “bought” does not; it agrees with the indefinite noun rjaal “men”. See what happens when a clitic co-indexing with the definite object appears onto the verb:

37. a. sharuu-h li-h rjaal al-beet.

bought.pl.mas-it for-it men the- house

“Men bought a house.”

b. \*sharuu-h rjaal al-beet.

bought.pl.mas-it men the- house

“Men bought a house.”

In (37a) compared to (37b), it is clear that the use of the clitic –h “it” with which the definite object al-beet “the house” and the PLE clitic li-h “for it” agree render the sentence grammatical. This is surprising knowing that object clitics surface onto verbs when the object is topicalized; and the object al-beet “the house” in (36a) is not topicalized; it is neutral. A syntactic fact in SNRDA, the clitic co-indexing with neutral definite objects is possible in VSO order if and only if a PLE is used. As for SVO and VOS word orders, recall that it is not possible to have an indefinite noun preverbally or at the end of the sentence after the VO is being focused. Therefore; PLE use in SVO and VOS word orders with indefinite subject is not possible.

The above discussed sentence have active verbs; PLE can also be used with passive verbs.

38. madhruub li-h dharba

was.beaten.sing.mas. for-him a beat

“He was beaten with a sever beat.”

We could notice in (38) that the PLE li-h “for him” is used after the passive verb madhruub “was beaten” and before the indefinite noun dharba “beat”.

From the so far discussed data, the following generalizations can be made:

1. PLE is in complementary distribution with the definite article al- “the” and any element in the determiner slot.
2. It occurs before indefinite nouns in sentences with two nouns one of which is definite with which the verb and the PLE clitic agree.
3. In the VSO word order in which the neutral definite noun is the object and the indefinite noun is the subject a clitic appears onto the verb co-indexing with the definite object with which the PLE clitic agrees.

So far, we have discussed the use of PLE with indefinite nouns in the argument positions. The PLE also surfaces after the verbs before indefinite nouns inside PPs. See the following sentence:

39. ar-rajaal b- hifrah.

the-man in- a hole

“The man is in a hole.”

40. ar-rajaal rah ykuun li-h b-hifrah.

the-man will be for-him in- a hole

“The man will be in a hole.”

From (40), we could notice that the PLE lih “for him” surfaces after the verb ykuun “be” before the indefinite noun hifrah “hole” inside the PP b-hifrah “in a hole”. Recall that we have shown that PLE does not surface in sentences with intransitive and ergative verbs; now, when adding a PP with an indefinite object to a sentence with intransitive or ergative verb, PLE surfaces. See the following:

41. a. wisaluu ?ala hmaar.

arrived.pl.mas. on a donkey

“They arrived on a donkey.”

b. wisaluu li-hum ?ala hmaar.  
arrived.pl.mas. for-them on donkey

“They arrived on a donkey.”

42. a. Taahuu b-hifrah.

fell.pl.mas. in-a hole

“They fell in a hole.”

b. Taahuu li-hum b- hifrah.

fell.pl.mas. for-them in- a hole

“They fell in a hole.”

In (41b) and (42b), we could notice that the PLE li-hum “for them” surfaces after the intransitive verb wisal “arrive” and Taah “fell” before the indefinite nouns hmar “a donkey” and hifrah “a hole” when the prepositional phrases ?ala hmar “on a donkdy” and b- hifrah “in a hole” are added to the sentences.

At this point, from the above discussed data, one could draw the following new generalization:

PLE surfaces after the verb before the indefinite noun in the argument position or in the object position of the preposition.

To exclude that the indefinite noun before which the PLE appears is a specific noun, the following shows that PLE can appear before the indefinite nonspecific nouns:

43. itha shift la-k asad hij

if see. you for-you a lion flee

“If you see a lion flee.”

From (43), we could notice the the PLE la-k “for you” surfaces before the indefinite nonspecific noun asad “a lion”.

The question now is where exactly the position of the PLE is. Is it part of the DP? or is it outside it? A number of syntactic pieces of evidence show that the PLE is not part of the DP although it appears before it. First, recall that I have stated that one of the differences between the PLE and the PP is that the PLE and the verb preceding it form one prosodic unit. Thus, we expect that no element can break this prosodic unit; in other word, no word can appear between them; this turns to be true. However, elements can surface between the PLE and the indefinite noun following it. See the following:

44. a. sharuu li-hum ar-jaal beet.

bought.pl.mas. for them the-men a house

“The men bought a house.”

b. \*sharuu ar-rjaal li-hum beet.

bought.pl.mas. the-men for-them a house

“The men bought a house.”

c. \*sharuu ams li-hum ar-jaal beet.

bought.pl.mas. yesterday for-them the-men a house

“The men bought a house yesterday.”

From (44b and c), we could notice that the appearance of the subject ar-rjaal “the men” or the adverb ams “yesterday” between the verb sharuu “bought” and the PLE li-hum “for them” renders the sentences ungrammatical. Thus, we could conclude that there is an adjacency requirement between the verb and PLE. Moreover, as we have seen before, we could also notice that the subject ar-rjaal “the men” surfaces between the PLE li-hum “for them” and the indefinite noun beet “a house” which shows that the PLE is not part of the DP.

The second piece of evidence comes from the use of the PLE in Construct States; the PLE appears before the CS and never surfaces inside it. See the following.

45. a. wiqafauu fuuq jdaar beet

stood.pl.mas. above a wall a house

“As for them, they stood above a house wall.”

b. wiqafauu li-hum fuuq li-hum jdaar (\*li-hum) beet

stood.pl.mas. for-them above a wall for-them house

“As for them, they stood above a house wall.”

In (45), one could notice the PLE li-hum “for them” surfaces before the CS jdaar beet “a house wall” and never surfaces before the indefinite noun beet “a house”.

The third evidence comes from the acceptability of preposing the indefinite noun without the PLE.

46. a. beet, sharuu.

a house, bought.pl.mas.

A HOUSE, they bought.”



b. beet, sharuu li-hum.

house, bought.pl.mas. for-them

“A HOUSE, they bought.”

In (46b), compared to (46a), one could notice that the indefinite noun beet “a house” is preposed leaving the PLE li-hum “for them” behind. The forth evidence comes from the conjoined nouns.

47. a. sharuu beet w sayyarah

bought.pl.mas. a house and a car

“They bought a house and a car.”

b. shruu li-hum beet w (\*li-hum) sayyarah

bought.pl.mas. for-them a house and for-them a car

“They bought a house and a car.”

We could notice from (47b) that the PLE li-hum “for them” surfaces before both conjoined nouns beet w sayyarah “a house and a car” and never before the second noun sayyarah “a car”. If the PLE is part of the DP, we expect it to surface before each of the nouns. The fifth piece of evidence comes from the wh- and echo- question formation.

48. wish shruu li-hum?

what bought.pl.mas. for-them

“What did they buy?”

49. shruu li-hum wish?

bought.pl.mas. for-them what

“They bought what?”

We could notice from (48) and (49) that the PLE li-hum “for them” is not affected when the wh-item wish “what” is used. In (48), the wh-item wish “what” is moved to the left periphery of the clause and the PLE is left behind; and in (49), the ech-wh-item wish “what” appears in its base position and the PLE is still there.

To recap, in this section, I have shown that the PLE is in complementary distribution with the definite article al- “the” and other determiners. It is used before indefinite nouns; it forms a prosodic unit with the verb. Its appearance in the sentence is conditioned by the use of two nouns; one of which is a definite with which the verb and the PLE clitic agrees. A clitic surfaces onto the verb when the definite noun is the object; a phenomenon that is unique to SNRDA and is linked to the use of PLEs. Moreover, I have also shown that the PLE is not part of the DP. From

these facts, I assume that the verb comes with the numeration inflected with agreement; in other words, the clitic that surfaces onto the verb in case of neutral objects is part of the verb before the verb comes from the numeration. And as the PLE always occupies a position right after the verb and form one prosodic unit with it, I argue that PLE is a marker or an XP of some sort whose head is the 1- “for-“; it is merged somewhere above the VP to which the VP is attracted for checking agreement features and the same head has a selection requirement; it selects an indefinite noun.

### **Conclusion**

In this paper I have investigated the occurrence of the preposition-like element (PLE) in Saudi Northern Region Dialect of Arabic (SNRDA) which always surfaces before the indefinite nouns. I have shown that this element is in complementary distribution with the definite article al-“the” and other determiners. The element appears in very restricted syntactic environment; it appears in a position right after the verb in sentences with two nouns one of each is definite with which the verb and the PLE clitic agree; the verb and the PLE form one prosodic unit. In addition, I have also shown that the PLE is not part of the DP. Therefore, I have argued that there is a phrase an XP of some sort merged above the VP to which the verb is attracted for checking agreement features and that there is a selection requirement for the PLE. It selects indefinite nouns.

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