

# IMPERSONAL AGREEMENT AS A SPECIFICITY EFFECT IN RURAL PALESTINIAN ARABIC

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## 1. Introduction

Rural Palestinian Arabic (*RPA*: Herzallah 1990; Younes 1993, 1994, 1995) is a variety of Arabic spoken in rural communities of the northern West Bank (Schmidt and Kahle 1918, 1930; Blau 1960). It shares many features of other Levantine dialects, but can be distinguished from urban dialects of the region (such as Jerusalem, Beirut, Damascus, Amman), as well as other rural and Bedouin dialects of Palestinian Arabic.

### 1.1 Agreement in *RPA* existential constructions

In *RPA* existential constructions, full agreement (in number and gender) between the verb and NP alternates with impersonal (3rd-person masculine singular) agreement marking on the verb:

- (1) a. **baqa** /**baqu** fiih xams izlaam fi-l-daar  
was3MS/were3MP THERE five menMP in-the-house  
“There were five men in the house.”
- b. **baaki** /**baaḳye** hanaak **ixtyaare** waraa-**ha** ḳowm ḳawiyiin  
bePARTMS/bePARTFS there oldFS behind-CL3FS clan strong  
“There was an old woman there who had a strong clan behind her.”

Semantic or pragmatic factors seem to interact with choice of agreement form. For example, agreement form can affect the semantic scope of an indefinite NP: in (2a), the verb *aḳa* “come” is marked for impersonal

agreement, and the clause asserts that *every day, there are boys (not necessarily the same ones each day) who come to class*, indicating that the existential quantifier denoted by the NP is within the scope of the universal quantifier *čill yowm* “every day.” In contrast, (2b) shows full agreement between the verb and NP, and the NP describes a particular set of boys who come to class every day, indicating inverse scope:

- (2) a. *čill yowm b-iiji la-l-šaff ulaad*  
 every day INDIC-come3MS to-the-class boysMP  
 “Every day, boys (some or another) come to class.”  
 $\forall x [(day(x)) \rightarrow \exists y [boys(y) \text{ and } come\text{-to-class}(y) \text{ at } (x)]]$
- b. *čill yowm b-iiju la-l-šaff ulaad*  
 every day INDIC-come3MP to-the-class boysMP  
 “Every day, (some particular) boys come to class.”  
 $\exists y [boys(y) \ \& \ \forall x day(x) \rightarrow come\text{-to-class}(y) \text{ at } (x)]$

Therefore, full agreement in (2b) seems to correlate with the NP taking scope outside of the quantifier *čill yowm* “every day.”

Similarly, in (3), agreement form affects the sense attributed to the prepositional predicate *šind-e* “at him”:

- (3) a. *ħanni, baqa šind-e xams ulaad*  
 Hanni, was3MS at-CL3MS five childrenMP  
 “Hanni, he had five children (i.e., *he was the father of five children*)” or “Hanni, he had five children (or *chez lui*).”
- b. *ħanni, baqu šind-e xams ulaad*  
 Hanni, were3MP at-CL3MS five childrenMP  
 “Hanni, he had five children (with him).”

In one reading, *Hanni was the father of five children*, the preposition *šind-* “at” expressing ‘inalienable’ possession (in the sense that being a father is a form of inalienable possession). In the second reading, *Hanni had five children* (not necessarily his own) *in his company* or *chez lui*. While (3a) is ambiguous between these two readings, (3b) has only the latter. While I do not have an account for this difference in meaning, what is important for the present paper is that the agreement marking in (3b) resolves the ambiguity in (3a). If we suppose for a moment that inalienable possession is a form of generic quantification over situations of

possession (see Portner 1992: 324-345), then the full agreement marking in (3b) somehow works to rule out generic quantification, making only existential quantification possible.

In addition to the semantic evidence discussed above, pragmatic evidence for an association between agreement marking and interpretation can be seen in the effect of nominal modification on agreement marking in RPA existential constructions. As we saw in (1) above, in an existential construction, both forms of agreement are usually acceptable. However, different kinds of nominal modification can create a preference (indicated with a “☞”) - which is frequently quite slight - for one form of agreement marking or the other.

For example, indefinites with “rich descriptive content” (such as adjectives or relative clauses) can favor full agreement. In particular, the more referentially specific the modification, the more likely there is to be a preference for full agreement. In (4a), the NP *ḥayye* “snake” is modified with the a relative clause containing an indefinite construct state NP, *bidd-ha toočil ifraax ṭeer* “intending to eat bird chicks,” and there was no preference in form of agreement. In (4b), the relative clause includes a definite construct state NP *ifraax il-ṭeer* “the bird’s chicks,” referring back to a specific bird mentioned previously in the discourse. Because of this anaphoric NP, the relative clause in (4b) is of higher referential specificity than the one in (4a), and correspondingly, there is a (admittedly slight) preference for full agreement:

- (4) a. **baaḵi** /**baaḵye** hanaak **ḥayye** bidd-**ha** **toočil**  
 bePARTMS/bepARTFS there snakeFS wish-CL3FS eat3FS  
 ifraax ṭeer  
 chicks bird  
 “There was a snake there that was going to eat a bird’s chicks.”
- b. baaḵi /☞**baaḵye** hanaak **ḥayye** bidd-**ha**  
 bePARTMS/ bePARTFS there snakeFS wish-CL3FS  
**toočil** ifraax il-ṭeer  
 eat3FS chicks the-bird  
 “There was a snake that was going to eat the bird's chicks.”

On the other hand, indefinites modified with the “indefinite” use of the demonstrative *hal-* “this” (similar to the presentational use of *this* in

colloquial English; see Prince 1981) can produce a slight preference for impersonal agreement:

- (5) a. *čaanat* / **čaan** tiht seer-e **hal-ṭabanṭe mnazzale**  
 was3FS/ was3MS under belt-CL3MS this-pistolFS inlaidFS bi-  
 l-fiḏḏe  
 with-the-silver  
 “There was under his belt this pistol inlaid with silver.”
- b. **čaan** / *čaanat* tiht seer-e **ṭabanṭe mnazzale**  
 was3MS/was3FS under belt-cl3MS pistolFS inlaidFS  
 bi-l-fiḏḏe  
 with-the-silver  
 “There was under his belt a pistol inlaid with silver.”

In (5a), the NP *ṭabanṭe* “pistol” has indefinite-*hal* as a determiner, and there is a (slight) preference for impersonal agreement. There was less of a preference indicated for impersonal agreement with (5b), in which *ṭabanṭe* is undetermined.

Also, modification with a numerical adjective or quantifier such as *sabiṭ taman* “seven or eight” or *ačam* “some, several” can create a preference for impersonal agreement, as seen in (6a-b):

- (6) a. *baḳyiin* / **baḳi** fi daar abuu-ha **sabiṭ taman**  
 bePARTMP/ bePARTMS in house father-CLFS seven eight  
**ḥarraṭiin**  
 plowmenMP  
 “There were in her father's house seven or eight plowmen.”
- b. *baḳyiin* / **baḳi** fi daar abuu-ha **ačam ḥarraṭ.**  
 bePARTMP/ bePARTMS in house father-CLFS some plowmanMP  
 “There were in her father's house several plowmen.”

This is perhaps due to the fact that numerical modifiers emphasize a set-referring denotation for the NP, rather than reference to a specific individual or the individual characters of a group of individuals.

Similar facts are reported by Sigler (1996) for Standard Western Armenian, a language with a very different syntax from RPA, but which

shows variation in agreement marking in existential type clauses. In this language, nominals can be unmarked for number but still construed as plural. If subject NPs are marked for number and/or definiteness, they must control full agreement on the verb, while if they are unmarked for number, they do not control full agreement. If an indefinite NP is modified by a numerical modifier, number marking and hence full agreement is dispreferred or ungrammatical.

For example, in (7a), the NP *hink zinvor* “five soldier(s)” is unmarked for number, and number marking on the noun and agreement marking on the verb are dispreferred, although the NP still has plural construal. Likewise, in (7b), the NP *šad hay* “many Armenian(s)” is unmarked for number, and agreement marking on the verb *ga* “exist” is dispreferred:

- (7) a. ayt baderm-i-n meč **hink zinvor**/#-ner əsbann-ve-c-**av** /#-an  
 that battle-GEN-the in five soldier /-P kill-PASS-AORIST-3S/-3P  
 “In that battle five soldiers were killed.”
- b. **šad hay**/#-er **ga**/#-an hon?  
 many Armenian/-P exist-3S/ -3P there  
 “Are many Armenians there?”

If number and/or definiteness is marked, the NP must control full agreement on the verb. For example, in (8a), the NP *hink zinvorner* “five soldiers” is marked with a plural morpheme *-ner*, and the verb must be marked with full agreement. In (8b), the NP is made definite, and full agreement is also required:

- (8) a. ayt baderazm-i-n meč **hink zinvor-ner** əsbann-v-ec-**an** /\*-av  
 that battle-GEN-the in five soldier-P kill-PASS-AORIST-3P/-3S  
 “In that battle five soldiers were killed.”
- b. ayt baderazm-i-n meč **hink zinvor-ner-ə** əsbann-ve-c-**an** /\*-av  
 that battle-GEN-the in five soldier-P-the kill-PASS-AORIST-3P/-3S  
 “In that battle the five soldiers were killed.”

These facts being considered, Sigler notes that modification of the NP with a relative clause can create an option or preference for number

marking on the noun, and hence for full agreement marking on the verb, as in (9):

- (9) a. **šad parsga-sdan-en nor yegad hay/-er gan** hon?  
 many Iran-ABL-the new come Armenian/-P exist3S/-3P there  
 “Are many Armenians there [who are] recently arrived from Iran?”

These facts suggest that in Standard Western Armenian, as in Rural Palestinian Arabic, the degree of modification of an NP can affect the form of a morphosyntactic process like agreement marking, and that such effects are not an idiosyncrasy of RPA.

To summarize, different kinds of nominal modification induce a preference for either full or impersonal agreement. Modifiers that include “referential” descriptions favor full agreement, while numerical quantifiers and indefinite *hal-* “this” favor impersonal agreement.

### 1.2 *Agreement and specificity*

Richness of nominal modification affects the degree of SPECIFICITY attributed to an indefinite description (c.f. Prince 1981; Lumsden 1988; Kamp and Reyle 1993; Abbott 1993, 1995), where SPECIFIC means “particular” or “referential”:

Indefinite descriptions admit of a use in which the speaker employs them to refer to some particular object he has in mind, and which he could, if he wanted to, describe in uniquely identifying terms...Indefinite [NPs] used in this way are sometimes referred to as *specific* indefinites. (Kamp and Reyle 1993: 289)

How specificity is to be analyzed has been the subject of much controversy in the semantics literature, with little agreement as to what kind of phenomena it describes, and whether these phenomena are properly described as semantic or pragmatic. Those who have argued for a pragmatic analysis include Prince (1981), Lumsden (1988), Abbott (1993, 1995); those who have argued for a semantic one include Fodor and Sag (1982), Enç (1991), Diesing (1992), Abusch (1994), Reinhart (1997), Kratzer (1998), and Matthewson (1999).

There seems to be little doubt that specificity is at least a pragmatic notion; the controversy being over whether it should also be considered a semantic one. Given that specificity is *at least* a pragmatic notion (and

perhaps semantic as well), I will assume its pragmatic usage, similar in connotation to ‘identifiability’ as used by Lambrecht (1994: 81):

...a “specific indefinite NP” is one whose referent is identifiable to the speaker but not to the addressee, while a “non-specific indefinite NP” is one whose referent neither the speaker nor the listener can identify at the time of utterance.

A richly modified indefinite NP is therefore more “identifiable,” or in Lumsden’s (1988:86-109) terms, it signals increased commitment on the part of the speaker to the existence of a referent matching the description of the NP. In pragmatic terms, then, the variation we see in agreement marking in existential constructions seems to correlate with the amount of identifiability attributed to the NP by the speaker. Agreement variation in RPA existential constructions can thus be seen as a form of SPECIFICITY EFFECT.

### 1.3 *Agreement, specificity, and strong modularity*

In sum, variation in agreement marking in RPA existential constructions seems to have both semantic and pragmatic effects. The question for a strongly modular theory of grammar is, therefore, how can semantic and/or pragmatic phenomena like these influence a morpho-syntactic process like agreement marking? I claim that the association is actually indirect, in that the syntactic processes which produce full or impersonal agreement translate into distinct semantic or pragmatic interpretations. In other words, interpretation does not directly affect agreement marking per se, but rather, the correlation between the two is an epiphenomenon of how syntactic structure is mapped into semantic or pragmatic representations.

Specifically, impersonal agreement occurs when the subject NP of an unaccusative verb occupies at the syntactic level of Logical Form (LF) its base-generated position, which I argue to be the specifier of Verb Phrase. By not raising, the NP does not enter a structural relation in which agreement morphology is licensed, and therefore the verb is marked with “default” 3rd-person masculine singular agreement. By contrast, the subjects of unergative or transitive verbs are base-generated in a higher syntactic position in which agreement is licensed, and therefore control full agreement with both narrow or wide scope semantic interpretations. In existential constructions with full agreement, the NP



- d. u-hi ʔaaʕde hanaak **nafað** **arbʕiin** ifdaawi  
 and-she sit<sub>PARTFS</sub> there appeared<sub>3MS</sub> forty **bandits**<sub>MP</sub>  
 “...and while she was sitting there, forty **bandits** appeared.”
- e. yowm min il-iyyaam **lafa** ʕalee-h **ðyuuf**  
 day from the-days happened<sub>3MS</sub> upon-<sub>CL3MS</sub> guests<sub>MP</sub>  
 “One day guests happened upon him.”
- (11) a. **injamaʕ** fi-s-sahl **naas** **içtaar**  
 gathered<sub>pass3MS</sub> in-the-plain people<sub>MP</sub> many<sub>PL</sub>  
 “Many people gathered on the plain.”
- b. **inčasar** fi-l-maṭbax **suħun**  
 broke<sub>pass3MS</sub> in-the-kitchen bowls<sub>FP</sub>  
 “In the kitchen broke bowls.”
- c. čill yom **b-inmasiç** fi-l-madiine **ħarrimiye**  
 every day <sub>INDIC-arrest</sub><sub>PASS3MS</sub> in-the-city thieves<sub>MP</sub>  
 “Every day in the city are arrested thieves.”

## 2.2 Agreement and word order in RPA

In RPA (as in all other forms of Arabic), full agreement is required with SV or SAuxV word order:

- (12) a. **in-naas** **aĵu** ta-yiṣtru min-him iṭneen  
 the-people<sub>3MP</sub> went<sub>3MP</sub> in-order-buy<sub>3MP</sub> from-<sub>CL3MS</sub> two  
 “The people went in order to buy two.”
- b. **kowm-u** **baaĵyin** čuffaar  
 clan<sub>MP-CL3MS</sub> be<sub>PARTMP</sub> unbelievers<sub>MP</sub>  
 “His clan were unbelievers.”

In compound tenses, the subject can precede or follow the auxiliary (13a-b), positions restricted to definite or “specific” indefinite NPs (Mohammad 1998; Halila 1992; Wright 1967: 261-264; Cowell 1964: 409-410). In either case, full agreement is required:

- (13) a. **čill il-ʕarab** **baaĵye** tiĵði ʕind-e  
 all the-Bedouin<sub>FS</sub> be<sub>PARTFS</sub> plead<sub>FS</sub> at-<sub>CL3MS</sub>  
 “All the Bedouin would seek justice by him.”

- b. **ḵaamat haaḏi raahat** ḵa-hal-waad  
 rose3FS this3FS went3FS at-this-valley  
 “Then she went to this valley.”

Full agreement is also required in VS word order, where the subject (definite or indefinite) follows the main verb but precedes an object NP or predicative complement:

- (14) a. **baaḵye** /\*baaḵi **l-ixtyaare** fi-l-maṭbax bi-tsawwi xubz  
 bePARTFS/bePARTMS the-oldFS in-the-kitchen INDIC-make3FS bread  
 “The old woman was in the kitchen making bread.”
- b. **baaḵye** /?baaḵi **xyaare** fi-l-maṭbax bi-tsawwi xubz  
 bePARTFS/ bePARTMS oldFS in-the-kitchen INDIC-make3FS bread  
 “An old woman was in the kitchen making bread.”

Full agreement is required in V...S word order, where the subject NP follows the main verb as well as other constituents, if the subject NP is definite, as in (15a-b):

- (15) a. yowm min il-yaam **láfu** /\*láfa ḵalee-h  
 day from the-days came3MP/ came3MS upon-CL3MS  
**ḵamaaḵiat il-ḏyuuf**  
 groupFS the-guestsMP  
 “One day a group of guests happened upon him.”
- b. ruuḥ la-l-ḥífte illi **báḵat** /?báḵa ḵínd-ha  
 goIMP to-the-grave rel was3FS/ was3MS at-CL3FS  
**xeemit bínt-i**.  
 tentFS daughter-CL1S  
 “Go to the grave that my daughter's tent was next to.”

However, if the subject NP is indefinite, either full or impersonal agreement is possible:

- (16) a. **ṣaar** /ṣaarat máḵ-ha **ḵirṣiin** imlaaḥ  
 became3MS/became3FS with-CL3FS moneyP goodP  
 “She made some good money.”

- b. haaḏi **b-iruuḥu** /bi-ruuḥ ʕind-ha **maʕaniin**  
 thisFS INDIC-go3MP/INDIC-go3MS at-CLFS insaneMP  
 “This woman, the insane would come to her.”

In compound tenses, both auxiliary and main verb show impersonal agreement:

- (17) a. haaḏa, **baaḑi** čill leeḗ **yijii-h** **meede**  
 thisMS bePARTMS each night come3MS-CL3MS tableFS  
 “This fellow, every night a set table would come to him.”
- b. abuu-i u-ʕámm-i ma-**baḑaa-š** **yijii-him**  
 father-CL1S and-uncle-CL1S not-was3MS-NEG come3MS-CL3MP  
**ulaad**  
 children3MS  
 “My father and uncle, they hadn’t had any children.”

In (17a), the auxiliary *baaḑi* “be” and the main verb *yijii* “come” are both marked with impersonal agreement, while the logical subject *meede* “table” is grammatically feminine. Likewise, in (17b), the same auxiliary and main verbs are marked for impersonal agreement, where the logical subject is the masculine plural NP *ulaad* “children.”

To summarize: (i) impersonal agreement is only felicitous when an indefinite NP occurs in V...S word order; (ii) full agreement is available in all positions with both definite and indefinite NPs. Full agreement is always required with definite NPs, and is required in most positions with indefinites. It follows that impersonal agreement is by far the more marked option in the RPA agreement paradigm.

### 2.3 *Reduced agreement and verb valence*

Impersonal agreement occurs only with RPA verbs the English counterparts of which are unaccusative, meaning that their subjects share syntactic properties with the objects of transitive verbs. Impersonal agreement is marginal or unacceptable with verbs like *wašwaš* “whisper,” *naam* “sleep,” or *rakaḑ* “run,” the English counterparts of which are unergative, meaning that their subjects have syntactic properties of the subjects of transitive verbs:

- (18) a.  $\xi$ am-i **naamat** /??naam  $\xi$ uddaam daar-e **člaab**  
 uncle-CL1S slept3FS/ slept3MS before house-CL3MS dogs  
 “My uncle, in front of his house slept dogs.”
- b. **baačyaat yurkuđin**/\*baači yurkuđ min il-biir **banaat**  
 bePARTFP run3FP/ bePARTMS run3MS from the-well girls  
 “From the well were running girls.”

This suggests that the ability to show variable agreement with an indefinite, post-verbal subject is a diagnostic for unaccusativity in RPA.

Impersonal agreement can also occur in interrogative constructions, but only when the verb is unaccusative, and when the question word is a weak quantifier (c.f. Milsark 1974) such as *ačam* “how many” in (19a) below. Impersonal agreement is unacceptable in (19b), with the same verb but the “strong” quantifier *ayy* “which”:

- (19) a. **čam walad bača** /**baču** fi-l-madrased l-šubiħ  
 how-many boys were3MS/were3MP in-the-school the-morning  
 “How many boys were in school this morning?”
- b. **ayy ulaad \*bača** /**baču** fi-l-madrased l-šubiħ  
 which boys were3MS /were3MP in-the-school the-morning  
 “Which boys were in school this morning?”

In (20), both *ačam* and *ayy* occur with the unergative verb *naam* “sleep”, but in both cases, impersonal agreement is ungrammatical:

- (20) a. **čam ulaad naamu** /\*naam fi-l-šaff il-yowm?  
 how-many boys slept3MS/ slept3MS in-the-class the-day  
 “How many boys slept in class today?”
- b. **ayy ulaad naamu** /\*naam fi-l-šaff il-yowm?  
 which boys slept3MP / slept3MS in-the-class the-day  
 “Which boys slept in class today?”

The contrast between (19) and (20) shows that impersonal agreement is only available when the base position of the question word is the argument position of an unaccusative verb.

### 2.5 *Other facts related to NP-modification*

In addition to the agreement fact presented above, NP modification has been noted as affecting other grammatical processes in Arabic. These include easing restrictions on SVO word-order, clitic left-dislocation (CLLD), and quantifier restriction.

A widely noted fact of Arabic grammar (both in Standard Arabic as well as the dialects) is that modified or “specific” indefinites appear in the preverbal subject position, which is usually restricted to definite NPs. As we saw above, an indefinite NP subject generally follows the verb (examples from Belyayeva 1994: 53; Nablus dialect of Urban Palestinian):

- (21) a. \***walad** ?akal ?effaaħa  
           boyMS ate3MS apple  
           “A boy ate an apple.”  
       b. ?akal **walad** ?effaaħa  
           ate3MS boyMS apple  
           “Same.”

However, if the indefinite NP is pronounced with focal stress or is “modified,” it can precede the verb:

- (22) a. **waahad ism-e** **mxeemir** xarraf  
           oneMS name-CL3MS Muxemir narrated3MS  
           “A person named Muxemir narrated...” (RPA)  
       b. **walad izyiir** ?akal ?effaaħa  
           boyMS smallMS ate3MS apple  
           “A small boy ate an apple.” (Belyayeva 1994)  
       c. **zalame wa-walad aju**  
           manMS and-boyMS came3MP  
           “A man and a boy came.” (Mohammad 1998: 21; Northern Palestinian)  
       d. **WALAD aja**  
           boyMS came3MS  
           “A BOY came.”

Such modification can be “by anything,” including by an adjective, by another nominal in apposition, by being the first member of a construct state, by being a part of a conjoined NP, or by participating in some event “out of the ordinary” (Mohammad 1998: 21-24).

### 2.5.2 *Indefinites in clitic-left-dislocation*

A modified indefinite can also be *clitic-left-dislocated*, binding a resumptive pronoun in the position to which its thematic role is assigned. This construction is also usually restricted to definite NPs (Lalami 1996; Ouhalla 1997; Abdul-Raof 1998; Aoun and Benmamoun 1998), but this restriction is relaxed by the same conditions that relax the restriction on SV word order:

- (23) a. **baṣal žassant pazraʔ**, fiih ʕənd-i xamse mazruuʕiin bi-fəxxaar  
bulb hyacinth blue, THERE at-CL1S five plantedP in-pots  
“Blue hyacinth bulbs, I have five planted in pots.”
- b. **žooz itwaar li-l-ħart** b-isammuu-**hon** faddaan  
pair oxenP to-the-plowing INDIC-name3MP-CL3P yoke  
“A pair of oxen for plowing, they call them a ‘yoke’.” (Syrian Arabic; Cowell 1964: 429-435)

In (23a), *baṣal žassant pazraʔ* “blue hyacinth bulbs” refers to a particular set of objects in a given context; a particular set of five hyacinth bulbs the speaker has planted in flower pots. The NP in (23b) is more generic in denotation: it does not refer to any particular pair of oxen, but rather to any pair of oxen in a situation of plowing.

### 2.5.3 *NP-modification and quantifier restriction*

According to Halila (1992: 353), Tunisian Arabic has a “weak” definiteness restriction, meaning that it allows definite NPs to occur felicitously in the existential construction without requiring a so-called “list” interpretation (called a “contextualized interpretation” by Abbott 1995). This means it also allows “strong” quantificational NPs to occur there, provided the common noun is “sufficiently” modified:

- (24) a. kaan famma **kul mra barraniyya** fi-l-ħafla.  
was3MS there every womanFS foreignFS at-the-party  
“?There were all the foreign women at the party.”  
”All the foreign women were at the party.”

- b. ?? kaan      **famma kul mra**      fi-l-ħafla.  
 was3MS there    every womanFS at-the-party  
 “?There was every woman at the party.”  
 “Every woman was at the party.”

The same is true in Catalan, another language with a “weak” definiteness restriction (c.f. McNally 1992; Rigau 1994):

- (25) a. hi    havia **cadascú de les estudiantes del**    **segon any**  
 there had each    of the students    of-the second year  
 a la festa  
 at the party  
 “There were each of the second year students at the party.”  
 “Each of the second year students was at the party.”
- b. ?? hi    havia **cadascú dels**    **estudiantes** a la festa  
 there had each    of-the students    at-the-party  
 “There were each of the students at the party.”  
 “Each of the students were here/there at the party.”

Proper restriction of the quantifiers in these examples seems to require that the sets denoted by the common nouns be identifiable within a given context: the more richly modified the noun, the more felicitous the restriction. This supports observations that descriptive “richness” is associated with some kind of referential specificity.

Note that according to my Tunisian Arabic and Catalan informants both, the data in (24) and (25) do not sound entirely natural: for Tunisian Arabic speakers, they are “acceptable” within forced-choice pairs, but would likely not occur in “normal” use, although some informants did allow that the more heavily the NP is modified, the more acceptable the example becomes. Similarly, for Catalan speakers, example (25a) is highly suspect, but acceptability increases in proportion to the amount of modification; the more heavily the NP is modified, the more acceptable the example becomes. The point is that the equivalents of (25) are *entirely* unacceptable in RPA, no matter how much modification is applied to the NP, whereas the acceptability of (24) and (25) can be increased by further modification.

## 2.6 Summary

The discussions in this section have demonstrated that modification of NPs interacts with word order restrictions and other syntactic phenomena in Arabic. In particular, NPs which are richly modified create a preference for full agreement marking in existential/presentational clauses. Rich modification also seems to relax word order restrictions on indefinite NPs in contexts that involve specificity of reference. Taken together, these observations support the link discussed above between rich modification and referential specificity.

## 3. Theoretical Framework

I assume a syntactic framework based on Bowers (1993), Chomsky (1995), and Collins (1997). I adopt Bowers' (1993) claim that a functional projection PREDICATION PHRASE (PrP) occurs in any clausal structure (including finite, infinitive, and "small clauses"). PrP selects a lexical projection (VP, AP, PP, NP), and an argument which is predicated of that projection. PrP is also the locus of abstract case checking and agreement licensing; any agreement that takes place does so in PrP, and if an NP occurs in PrP, it will "agree" with it. It follows that NPs that do not control agreement do not occur in PrP.

Syntactic trees are (at most) binary branching, and are constructed by cyclic application of the operations INSERT and MOVE. Insert and Move are constrained by the principles ATTRACT, LAST RESORT, and the MINIMAL LINK CONDITION:

*Attract:*

A node  $K$  attracts a feature  $F$  iff  $F$  is the closest feature that can enter a checking relation with a sub-feature of  $K$ .

*Last Resort:*

An operation  $OP$  involving  $\alpha$  may apply only if some property of  $\alpha$  is satisfied.

*Minimal Link Condition:*

$\alpha$  can raise to target  $K$  only if there is no legitimate operation Move  $\beta$  targeting  $K$ , where  $\beta$  is closer to  $K$ .

Trees so constructed have to satisfy "output conditions" at two "interfaces": SPELL-OUT, at which features related to phonological performance systems are fed to the phonological component; and LOGICAL

FORM (LF), at which the terminal output of the derivation is applied to translation rules feeding the interpretation component of the grammar. The most important output condition for our purposes is FULL INTERPRETATION, which says that a structure is well formed at an interface (i.e., Spell-Out or LF) if it consists of “legitimate objects,” those that are interpretable at that interface.

### 3.1 *A note on the use of the term “case”*

The term “case” will figure largely in the following discussion. It is important to note that case as used here has nothing to do with morphological case as found in Standard Arabic. Instead, it refers to the theoretical notion of ‘abstract case’ (c.f. Chomsky 1981), a property of syntactic constituents which is assumed to be present even in the grammar of languages which lack *morphological* case (such as Colloquial Arabic and English). In order to strengthen the distinction between morphological and abstract case, I will capitalize it as “Case” when referring to the latter.

### 3.1 *Heads and features*

Lexical items are “sets” of features: PHONOLOGICAL features, FORMAL features (such as PHI-features: person, gender and number), STRUCTURAL features (such as Case or D-features), and LEXICAL features, such as categorial and selectional features (C- and S-features respectively). Features are classed as STRONG vs. WEAK, and INTERPRETABLE vs. UNINTERPRETABLE. According to Full Interpretation, uninterpretable features must be “checked” prior to Spell-Out, while interpretable features provide information to LF, and therefore persist through the derivation and are not checked. Strong features must be checked by Spell-Out; weak uninterpretable features must be checked by LF, and weak interpretable features need not be checked at all. Features are checked against like features (e.g., Phi-features against Phi-features, D-features against D-features, etc.).

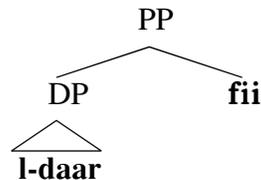
I argue, following Bowers (1998, 1999) that locative inversion or *fiih*-insertion is a strong D-feature in the head of PrP, which, being strong, must be checked by Spell-out. Indefinite NPs are not specified for Case or D-features and cannot raise to check the D-feature in Pr. Therefore, the prepositional phrase is the closest constituent that can check this D-feature, as the PP has a D-feature “inherited” from its argument (*l-daar* “the house” in the following examples). So the PP raises and adjoins to PrP, checking its strong D-feature. The PP is then at-

tracted by the EPP-feature in T, and raises to adjoin to TP. The Phi- and Case features of PrP are checked at LF either (a) by a null pronominal merged into PrP when the NP in VP is unable to raise (in the Case of impersonal agreement); or (b) by the LF-raising of the NP's formal features raising (in the Case of full agreement).

### 3.2 Derivation of the locative complement

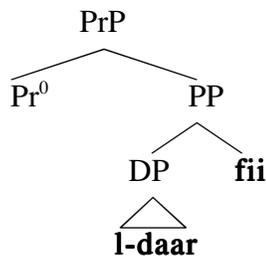
A prepositional phrase consists of a PrP and its PP complement. In other words, a prepositional phrase has clausal structure (c.f. May 1977; Wunderlich 1991; den Dikken and Naess 1994; Heim and Kratzer 1998). The DP *l-daar* “the house,” the “internal” argument of the preposition *fii* “in,” is merged into the PP checking its S-features:

Figure 1



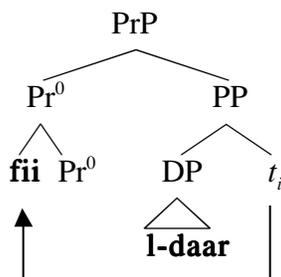
PP merges with  $Pr^0$ , checking its S-features and projecting PrP:

Figure 2



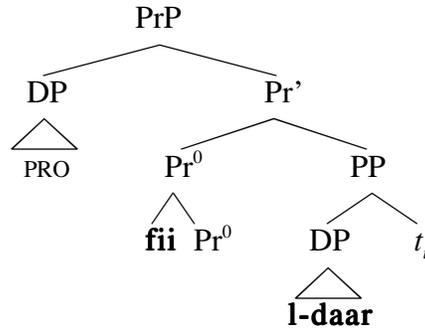
Given a lexical argument, the preposition raises and adjoins to  $Pr^0$ , checking its strong PF-features:

Figure 3



Next, a PRO is merged into the PrP, checking the Case, Phi and D-features of Pr<sup>0</sup> and re-projecting PrP:

Figure 4

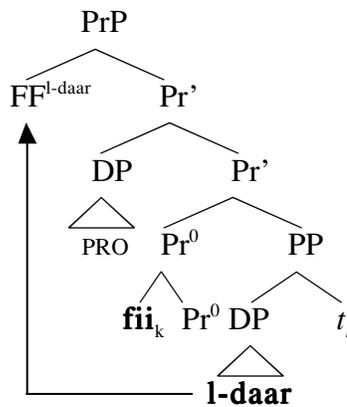


Later, at LF, the Phi- and Case features of the NP *l-daar* “the house” raise and adjoin to PrP, checking these strong features:

Figure 5

**fii-l-daar**

*in-the-house*  
“in the house”

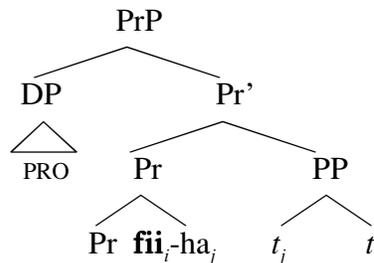


### 3.2.2 Derivation with an inflected preposition

In a derivation with an inflected preposition, the clitic incorporates into the PP head, and raises with it to Pr<sup>0</sup> (Diesing and Jelinek 1994:134-147; see also Shlonsky 1997: 175-203). There it checks its Case and Phi features in the overt syntax, rather than at LF (as in Figure 5). Otherwise, the derivation proceeds just as with bare PPs:

Figure 6

**fii-ha**  
*in-CL<sup>3FS</sup>*  
“in it”

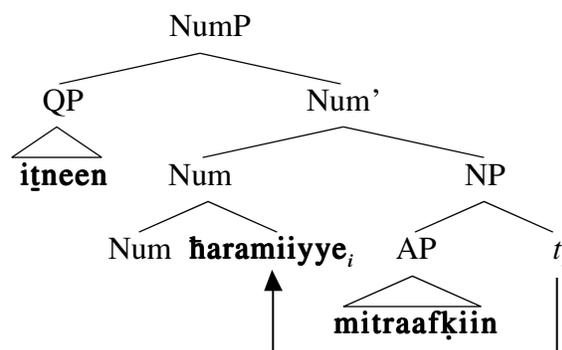


### 3.3 Structure of NPs

Sigler (1996: Ch. 2) argues that Standard Western Armenian NPs are not specified for number or person, and this lack prevents them from engaging in syntactic raising. Adapting this analysis, I claim that the difference between full- and impersonal agreement reduces to the properties of the NP: “bare” nouns are only specified for Phi-features, and not Case-features. Therefore, a bare NP cannot engage in syntactic operations involving the checking of Case. In the case of full agreement, the NP has a (null) DP “shell,” and is therefore specified for Case, and can engage in checking operations. Assuming that Case is a non-interpretable feature, an NP specified for Case will have to raise by LF in order to check it, leading to simultaneous agreement checking of agreement features. I will propose that indefinite *hal-* is a variant form of definite *hal-* unspecified for Case. Because of this, it does not raise.

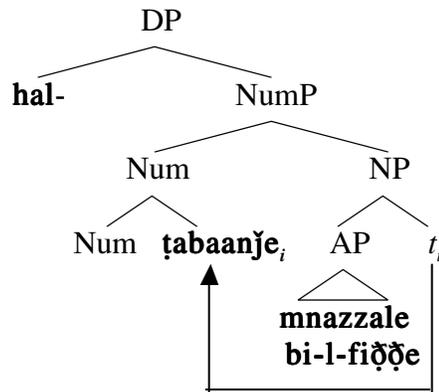
Indefinite NPs project a Number Phrase (NumP; Ritter 1987, 1991, 1993), but not a DP layer (c.f. Ritter 1988, 1991; Borer 1996). The noun head is attracted by the strong PF-features in Num<sup>0</sup>, to which it raises, deriving its order relative to the adjective:

Figure 7     **itneen haramiiyye mitraafkiin**  
 two thievesMP companionedMP  
 “two inseperable thieves”



When the NP is modified by indefinite *hal-* “this,” a determiner “shell” is projected, but it is not specified for Case features.

Figure 8 hal-ṭabaanje mnazzale bi-l-fiḏḏe  
 this-pistolIFS decoratedFS with-the-silver  
 “this pistol decorated with silver”



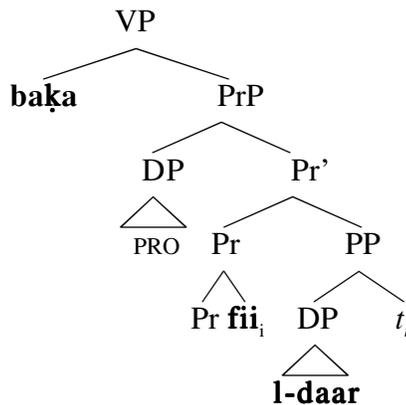
To summarize, Case is a property of determiners in Arabic: only DPs are specified for Case features, and can participate in syntactic operations driven by Case checking. The indefinite determiner *hal-* “this” is a variant of the definite determiner *hal-* unspecified for structural Case (c.f. Belletti 1988; Diesing 1992; Enç 1991; de Hoop 1992; Lasnik 1992; Runner 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995; Vainikka and Maling 1996).

#### 4. Locative Inversion and Agreement Licensing

##### 4.1 The Spell-Out Cycle

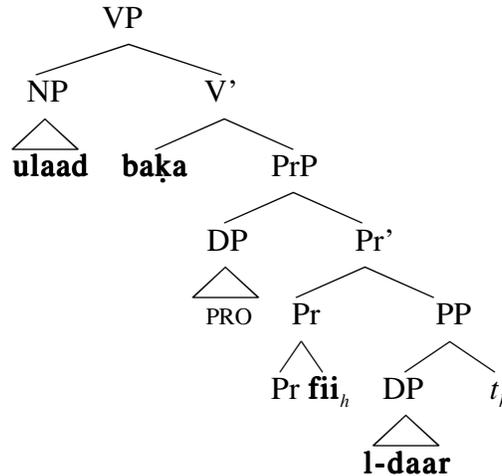
We start with a completed PP *fi-l-daar* “in the house” (Figure 4 above) merging with *baḡa*, checking its S-features and projecting VP:

Figure 9



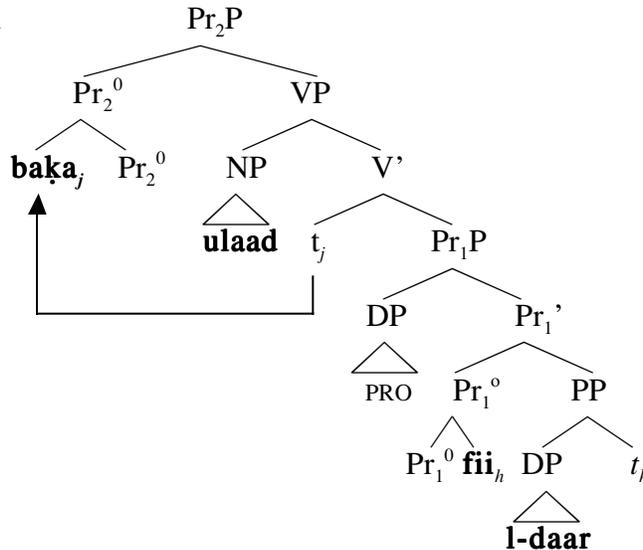
The NP *ulaad* merges with VP, checks its S-features and projects VP:

Figure 10



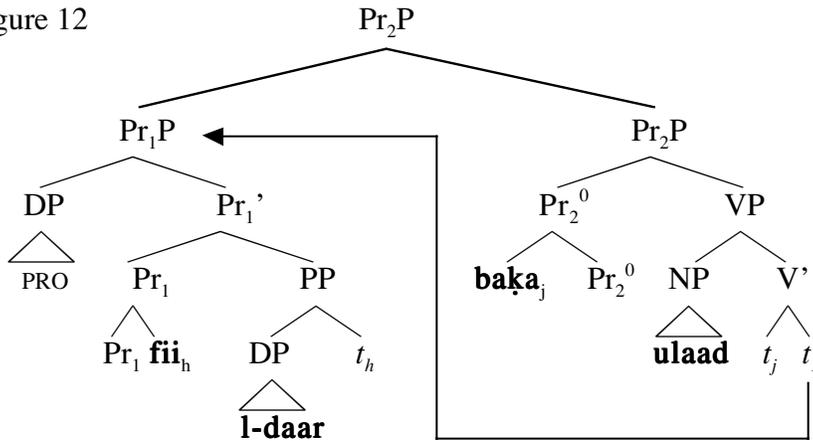
Then, the copula adjoins to  $\text{Pr}^0$ , checking its strong PF-features:

Figure 11



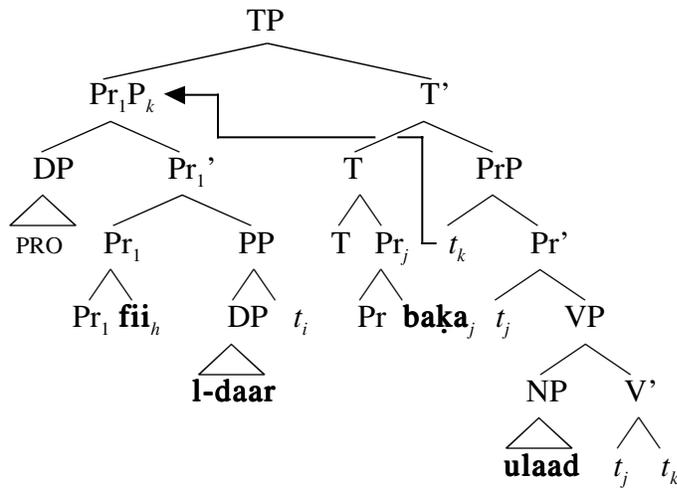
The Phi- and Case-features of the matrix  $\text{Pr}^0$  are weak, and need not be checked until LF, but its D-feature is strong, and must be checked before Spell-Out. The NP *ulaad* “children” lacks D-features, so if it raises to check the Phi-features in PrP, the Case and/or D-feature of  $\text{Pr}^0$  remain unchecked, leading to an ill-formed derivation. The nearest constituent with a D-feature is the locative  $\text{Pr}_1\text{P}$ , which inherits the D-feature of the DP *l-daar* “the house.” Thus,  $\text{Pr}_1\text{P}$  is attracted by  $\text{Pr}_2^0$ , and raises and merges into  $\text{Pr}_2\text{P}$ , checking its D-feature:

Figure 12



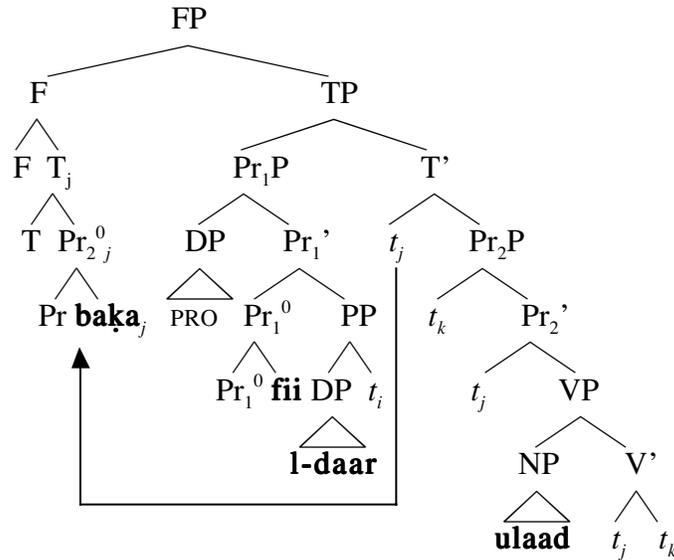
$Pr_2P$  merges with  $T^0$ , projects  $TP$  and checks  $T$ 's S-features. The  $Pr^0$ -copula head adjoins to  $T^0$ , checking its strong PF-features.  $T^0$  has an EPP-feature to be checked, so  $Pr_1P$  raises into  $TP$  to check it:

Figure 13



$F^0$  merges with  $TP$ , checks its S-features and projects  $FP$ . The  $T$ - $Pr_2$ -copula head raises to  $F^0$ , checking its PF-features:

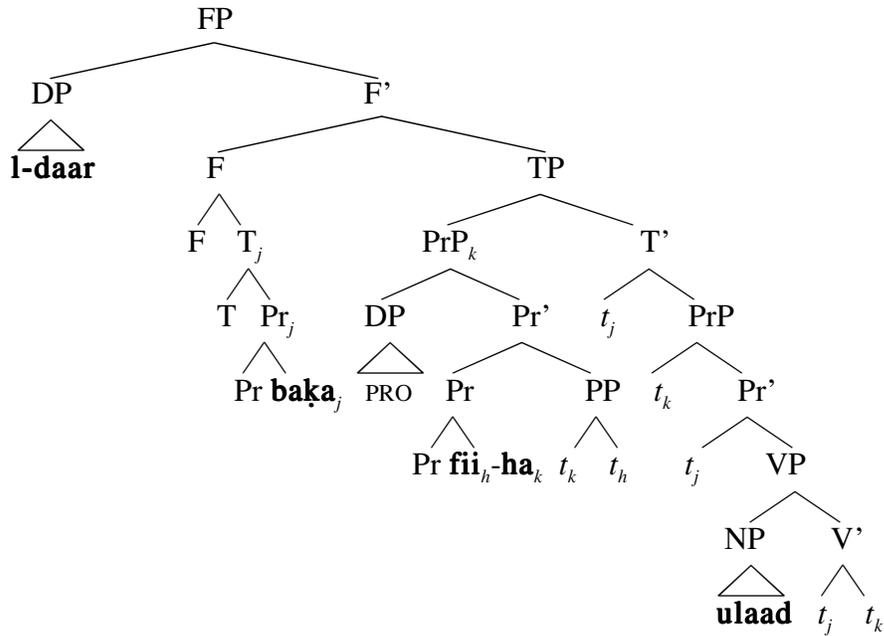
Figure 14



#### 4.1.2 Derivations with Inflected Prepositions

Locative inversion with inflected prepositions differs from that with bare prepositions in the expression of negation; inflected prepositions are negated with the *ma-...-š* morpheme, which only applies to  $X^0$ -level categories; PPs with full NPs cannot host negation at all (Hoyt 2000). Otherwise, both are preposed in the same way. Substituting an inflected preposition *fii-ha* “in it” for *fi-l-daar* “in the house” in the previous example gives the string *baka fii-ha ulaad* “in it were children”:

Figure 15

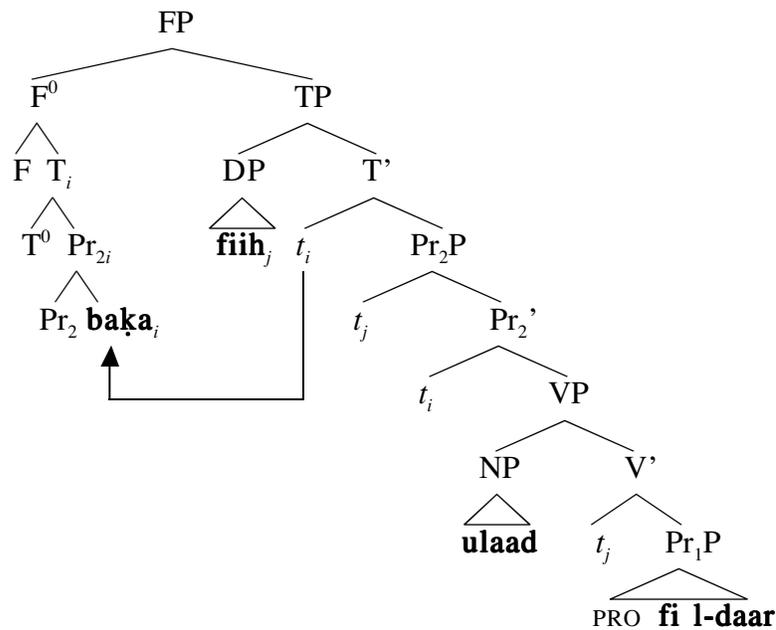


It has been noted that inflected prepositions seem to behave as much like syntactic heads as they do like phrasal constituents. Halila (1992) and Eid (1993) note that inflected prepositions, like existential *fiih* and verbal heads, can host the *ma...-š* negation morpheme, which is usually hosted by the tensed verb in a clause. Because of this, they argue that inflected prepositions behave like verbal heads when they have a predicational function. However, according to my analysis, their head-like behavior is simply due to the fact that their object NP is incorporated as a clitic, rather than being an independent constituent. This means that inflected prepositions are ambiguous as to their constituency, or, to put it differently, they are both head-level and phrasal constituents. If we assume that *ma...-š* has a morphological property that it selects for a head-level host, then this apparent difference between inflected prepositions and prepositions with lexical arguments is not a syntactic fact, strictly speaking (c.f. Hoyt 2000).

#### 4.1.3 Derivation with existential *fiih*:

*Fiih* constructions are like locative inversion constructions, except that *fiih*, rather than the locative expression merges into Pr<sub>2</sub>P and TP to check the D-, Case, and EPP-features.

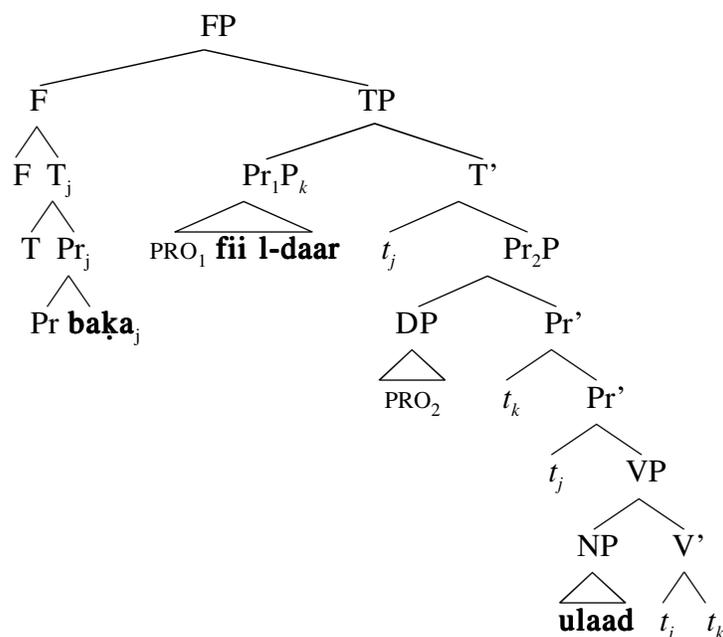
Figure 16



#### 4.2 The LF cycle

At LF, the formal features of the DP *l-daar* “the house” adjoin to  $Pr_1P$ , checking its Phi and Case-features, and a null pronoun ( $PRO^2$ ) merges into  $Pr_2P$ , checking its Phi- and Case features. This produces impersonal agreement (c.f. Eid 1993):

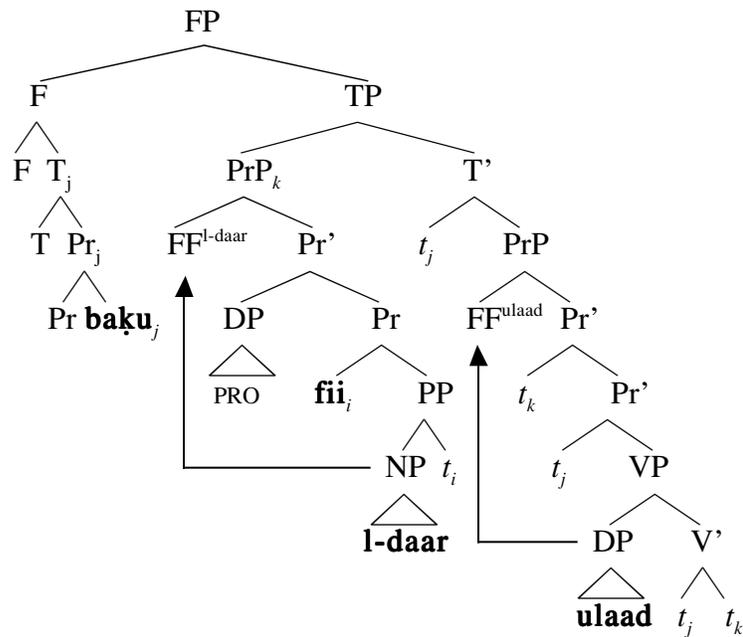
Figure 17



##### 4.2.2 Derivation with full agreement

In the previous discussion, I argued that impersonal agreement arises when the NP *ulaad* lacks a determiner layer and so is not specified for Case. As a result, it cannot participate in the raising operations which feed agreement checking. In the case of a derivation with full agreement, the NP is selected by a determiner, which is specified for Case. The noun phrase is therefore properly a DP. Its formal features raise at LF, adjoining to  $Pr_2P$  to check Case and Phi-features, licensing full agreement marking on the verb:

Figure 18    **baqa**    fi-daar-him    **ulaad**.  
 were3MP in-house-CL3MS children3MP  
 “In their house were children.”



The two derivations are otherwise identical. The difference resides in the structure of the noun phrases: if only determiners are specified for Case features, only DPs can engage in syntactic raising and other contingent operations such as feature checking. Bare NPs are therefore not syntactic arguments, but rather behave like adjunct modifiers, although they are able to control agreement on constituents within their scope (such as relative clauses, or pronouns within the locative phrase). Bare NPs that *do* engage in syntactic operations therefore must be selected by a null determiner.

## 5. Summary

I have argued that the association between agreement variation and interpretational differences in Rural Palestinian Arabic existential constructions is indirect. The apparent association reduces to an ambiguity in the structure of indefinite noun phrases. Indefinite NPs with a “non-specific” reading lack a determiner layer, and so are not specified for Case. Because of this, they do not engage in the syntactic operations that feed agreement licensing. “Specific” indefinite NPs, on the other hand, do have a determiner layer headed by a null determiner, which therefore allows them to enter into structural relations that license agreement.

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