# The Syntactic Argumentation of the Word / le: š / in Jordanian Arabic

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*Abstract*—**This study aims at investigating the syntactic status of the word /le:š / in question formation in Jordanian Arabic (JA). It is argued that this word has two syntactic functions in JA questions. The first of which is that it works as interrogative operator, meaning 'why', which moved to the [Spec C] position in one type of wh-question. However, the second role of this word is found in other types of questions, wh-questions and yes-no questions. In these types of questions /le:š/ is realized as an interrogative complementiser formed within the C position and giving the interrogative force for the question. To this end, empirical evidence is given and discussed to distinguish between the two syntactic representations of this word especially in ambiguous cases of having two different types of questions sharing the same surface structure.**

*Index Terms*—**question formation, syntactic argumentation, Jordanian Arabic, syntactic functions**

## I. INTRODUCTION

Various studies have examined the syntax of question formation in Arabic, Standard and dialects. Some studies shed lights on the strategies followed for forming questions in Arabic and their constructions (see, e.g., Shlonsky, 2002; Fakih, 2003; Soltan, 2011a; Soltan, 2011b; Badie, 2018; and numerous others). However, the lion share in the body of literature goes for the studies probed to question phrase movement and question particles (see, e.g. Wahba, 1984; Abu-Jarad, 2008; Alsayed Gad, 2011; Al-Daher, 2016; Al-hamami & Al-fadly, 2018; Hallman, 2018; Jarrah et al, 2019; and numerous others).

Concerning the strategies followed for question formation, Soltan (2011a) highlighted four main types of question formation in Arabic dialects; these are: gap strategy, conventional resumptive strategy, Class II resumptive strategy, and in-situ strategy. What follow are examples for these strategies:

1. **Gap strategy**
   Ɂayya  walad  Šuft      b-l- madrasih?
   which  boy  saw.2sgm  in-the- school
   'Which boy did you see in the school?'

2. **Conventional resumptive strategy**
   Ɂayya  walad  Šuft-o          b-l- madrase?
   which  boy    saw.2sgm-him  in-the-school
   'Which boy did you see in the school?'

3. **Class II resumptive strategy**
   miin  yalli  Šuft-o          b-l- madrase?
   Who  that    saw.2sgm-him  in-the- school
   'Who is it that you saw in the school?'

4. **In-situ strategy**
   Šuft        Ɂayya          walad  b-l- madrase?
   saw.2sgm  which          boy  in-the- school
   'Which boy did you see in the school?'

One can tell that the second and the third strategies labelled as Conventional resumptive strategy and Class II resumptive strategy are similar to the two strategies discussed by Shlonsky (2002). According to Shlonsky (2002), two question formation strategies are found in Palestinian Arabic to form wh-interrogatives; these are known as Class I and Class II. The following are representative examples of Shlonsky's strategies

**5. Class I**

a. miin           l-ʔasad          ʔakal          mbaariħ

   who           def-lion         eat.pst.sg.m   yesterday

   "Who did the lion eat yesterday?'                  (Class I; Shlonsky 2002, p.138)

**6. Class II**

miin         ʔilli  l-ʔasad               ʔakal                      mbaariħ

who          that  def-lion              eat.pst.sg.m               yesterday

"Who did the lion eat yesterday?'          (Class II; Shlonsky 2002, p.138)

Studying the examples in (2) and (5), it is noticed that the same strategy has been applied to form the two questions except for the overt use of the pronoun, him, following the verb in (2),  Šuft-o, meaning saw.2sgm-him. The same applies for Slonsky's class II strategy and Soltan's Class II resumptive strategy, where in these two strategies the use of the resumptive pronouns ʔilli and yalli, respectively, distinguish them from Class I and Conventional resumptive strategy. Thus, it can be said that the overt use of the pronoun following the main verb in question formation found in 2 and 3 is a characteristic of the Egyptian Arabic (EA) when compared to the Palestinian Arabic (PA).

Soltan (2011a) asserted that each dialect has its own way of forming questions; for instance, a dialect as Lebanese Arabic can apply all of the four mentioned strategies. Even though the same strategies may be found in various dialects, they may be used for different purposes.  In Jordanian Arabic (JA), the in-situe question is found in this dialect, but Jordanians commonly use it as an echo question to double check the information with the speaker as in (7):

7. **Speaker A**:        mħammad     đarab          **maha**.

                          mhammad    hit.3SGM       maha

                  (Intended meaning: 'Mohammad hit Maha.')

   **Speaker B**:        mħammad     đarab          **mi:n**?

                          mhammad    hit.3SGM       who?

                  (Intended meaning:   'Who did Mhammad hit?')

It is observed that speaker B in (7) applies the in-situ strategy to check the direct object of the first sentence, i.e. who did Mhammad hit. If speaker B wants to know who Mhammad hit, the common way to ask this question is highlighted in (8).

8.    mi:n   mħammad     đarab?

      Who    mhammad     hit.3SGM

The other three types of questions are used in JA; nevertheless, as Jordanian native speakers we think that the Gap strategy is the most common strategy used. What follows are examples from JA highlighting Soltan's strategies.

**9. Gap strategy**

   ʔayya   suʔa:l    dʒa:wabt           b-l- madrasih?

   which   question  answered.2sgm      in-the- school

   'Which question have you answered in school?'

**10. Conventional resumptive strategy**

   ʔayya   suʔa:l    dʒa:wabt        b-l- madrase?

   which   question  answered.2sgm   in-the-school

  'Which question have you answered in school?'

**11. Class II resumptive strategy**

   e:jsh (ya) lli  dʒa:wabt -o b-l- madrase?

    that   answered.2sgm-him   in-the- school question

  'What is it that you have answered in the school?'

**12. In-situ strategy**

   dʒa:wabt              ʔayya            suʔa:l     b-l- madrase?

   answered.2sgm         which            question   in-the- school

   'Which question have you answered in school?'

Thus, Soltan's four strategies are found in the formation of wh-question in JA. Here, several questions come to the mind concerning the formation of yes, no question in JA; what are the strategies followed to form these types of questions? Are the followed formation strategies similar to those used in Standard Arabic or other dialects?

For the formation of yes-no questions, other strategies are noticed to be followed. Perhaps the commonest way of forming yes-no question is by means of the sentential prosodic feature, i.e. the intonation. Intonation has a significant role in the production of a question. For example, in (13) below the given sentence is realized as a declarative sentence if read with a falling intonation, but with a rising intonation it would be interpreted either as an interrogative yes-no sentence or as an exclamation sentence.

13.            mħammad    Ša:f            **maha**.
               mhammad    saw.3SGM        maha
            (Intended meaning:   'Mohammad saw Maha.')

Even in wh-question, intonation plays a significant role in illustrating the two readings of the wh-sentence, i.e. as a question or as an exclamation sentence. The examples demonstrated in Hallman (2018) go with this claim. According to Hallman (2018) there are two readings for the sentence in (14).

14. ʔaddēʃ   Mona   ʃāṭr-a?/!
     How      mona    smart-FS
i.          'How smart is Mona?'
ii.          ii. 'How smart Mona is!'    (Hallman, 2018, p.309)

Hallman (2018) stated that the previous sentence could be interpreted as an interrogative sentence questioning how smart Mona is, or as an exclamation sentence expressing astonishment about Mona's smartness. Therefore, he argued that ʔaddēʃ has two functions; the first one, it works as an interrogative word like 'how' in English, and the second one is that the word ʔaddēʃ is used as an exclamative term. Hallman (2018) did not explicitly state the role of intonation in determining the intended meaning of the sentence. Instead, he used the word "the reading" of the sentence. However, as native speakers of JA, and because the same case is found in JA, we can say that it is the intonation that specify the meaning and the reading of the sentence.

Thus, intonation plays a crucial role in specifying the syntactic configuration of sentences in Arabic; the elaboration of this point would be given in the following section.  Not only in Arabic, but also in Mehri intonation is found to have a role in forming yes-no question. This was explained by Alrowasa (2014) who provided examples from Mehri clarifying the role of intonation in yes-no question formation.

In addition to the use of intonation yes-no question can be formed by means of having certain question particles or complementisers at the question initial position, like /ʔa/ and /hal/ in Standard Arabic (Fakih & Al-deran, 2014), /huwwa/ in Egyptian Arabic (Soltan, 2011 b), and /ʔilli/ in Mehri (Alrowsan, 2014). In this research article, we argue that the word /le:š/ has a similar role like the complementisers /ʔa/, /hal/,/huwwa/ and /ʔilli/ , i.e. it  is used as an interrogative complementiser in yes-no question in JA. Here, the syntactic role of the word /le: š/ has to be distinguished from its conventional role that it plays as a wh-phrase meaning 'Why' in JA.

One significance of this research article is that the configuration and the analysis of question words in JA has received a sparse attention, up to the researchers' knowledge. Besides, this article is significant because it shed lights on the different behaviours of the word /le:š/  in the configuration of wh- question and yes,no questions. We show that in wh-questions, this word works as an interrogative operator, meaning 'why', which moved to the [Spec C] position. Nevertheless, we argue that in yes, no question this word /le:š/ is realized as an interrogative complementiser formed within the  C position  and giving the interrogative force for the question. We proved this by giving pieces of evidence that support this claim. Moreover, this article shows similarities among Arabic dialects where certain words, homophones, can have various syntactic structures and roles. For instance, in Egyptian Arabic, Soltan (2011b) showed that in EA the word huwwa has three 'homophones', i.e. has three syntactic functions: the q-particle that preceeds yes, no question, the third singular person pronoun for males, and the nominal copula. Hence, it is the context that determines the syntactic structure of this word. In Syrian Arabic, as well, Hallman (2018) stated that the words ʔaddēʃ and ka:m have mainly two syntactic functions. The first is that ʔaddēʃ and ka:m have an exclamative interpretation, whereas the second function is restricted to the interrogative interpretation of these words in forming questions.

The remainder of the article is structured as follows: Section II provides analysis of the role of the word / le: š / as a wh-phrase. It highlights the function and the position of / le:š / as a wh-phrase that moves to [spec Foc] and does not originate as a force occupying the highest operator in CP.  Section III investigates the role of the word / le: š / in yes, no questions. It analyses the role of this word as an interrogative complementiser similar to /ʔa/ and /hal/ in Standard Arabic (Fakih & Al-deran, 2014), /huwwa/ in Egyptian Arabic (Soltan, 2011 b), and /ʔilli/ in Mehri (Alrowsan, 2014). It also provides two pieces of evidence that prove in yes, no questions le:š functions as an interrogative complementiser and not as wh-phrase. Section IV summarizes the main findings of this article.

## II. / le: š / THE WH-PHRASE

If the given sentence (15) is produced with a falling intonation at the end, the word **/ le:š /** would be regarded as a wh-verbial phrase that is found at a sentence initial level if has moved from its original adjunct position. In this role, the word **/ le: š /** is used to inquire about justifications for the question statement, working as 'why' in English**.**

**15.**        **le:š**          **sa:far**          **mansu:r**        **ʔimbariħ**
               Why       travelled.3SGM        Mansour          yesterday
            (Intended meaning: 'Why did Mansour travel yesterday?)

Henceforth, the syntactic configuration of (15) would be (15.1):
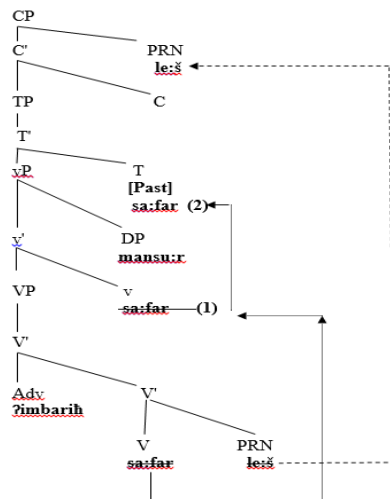
Following Radford (2009), the word **/le:š/** would be originated in the Verb bar of the lexical verb safar, but it moves to satisfy the edge feature of the null interrogative complementiser to [Spec C] position.

Applying Rizzi (1997) proposal for splitting CP, **/le:š/** would move to the [Spec Foc] position, while the verb **sa:far** would move to the Affixal head Focus. Here, it is noteworthy highlighting that the verb **sa:far** originated in the lexical verb position then it moves to the light affixal, since the light verb has a strong affixal feature, as in (1). After that the strong affixal feature of T would also cause the movement of this verb to T, as in 2. Finally, the verb would move from T to the affixal head Foc as its last destination. Thus, the verb moves in successive-cylices from V to Foc. Consequently, the given sentence in (15) would be analyzed as in (15.2) by following splitting CP.

15.2 [ ForceP [Force Ø] [Foc P  **le:š** [ Foc **sa:far**][TP **sa:far mansu:r sa:far ʔimbariħ  sa:far le:š**]]]

Occupying [Spec Foc] position would support the argument that the word **le:š** in this type of question is an interrogative operator that moves to satisfy the interrogative condition.  Other empirical piece of evidence that also support this argument is the presence of the preposition /la/ before this operator in such question, as in (16).

**16.        la.le:š            sa:far            mansu:r    ʔimbariħ**
    **Prep.**Why          travelled.3SGM        Mansour    yesterday
    (Intended meaning:  'Why did Mansour travel yesterday?'

The occurrence of such preposition would indicate that the following constituent, **le:š**, is not the highest operator in the sentence and thus could not be the force of the sentence. This in turns leads to the conclusion that the word **le:š** is a wh-phrase that moves to [spec Foc] and does not originate as a force occupying the highest operator in CP. Knowing that this preposition precedes also other wh-operators, as given in (16), goes along with our assumption that **le:š** in (15) is a wh-operator.

16. A**.        we:n        sa:far            mansu:r**
    Where      travelled.3SGM        mansour
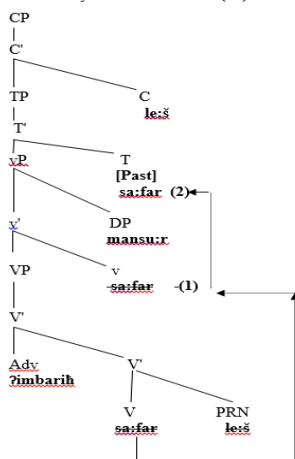    (Intended meaning:  Where did Mansour travel?)

    B.        **la. we:n        sa:far                    mansu:r**
    **Prep**. Where      travelled.3SGM                mansour
    (Intended meaning:  Where did Mansour travel?)

### III. / le: š / THE INTERROGATIVE COMPLEMENTISER

In this section the other syntactic function of the word **/le:š/** would be investigated. Going back to the sentence in (15); if this sentence is read with a raising intonation, a yes-no question would result inquiring to affirm or to deny the given proposition, i.e. whether Mansour has travelled yesterday or not. In this regard, the word **le:š** may be assumed to be an interrogative complemntiser that occur before  TP and not being in sentence initial position by means of A-bar movement. Therefore, the question would be interpreted as in (17):

**17. le:š            sa:far                mansu:r    ʔimbariħ**
    COMP        travelled.3SGM    Mansour    yesterday
    (Intended meaning:  Did  Mansour travel yesterday?)

17.1 The syntactic structure of (17) is:

```
CP
 |
 C'
 |
 TP            C
 |            le:š
 T
 |
 vP           T
 |          [Past]
 v'         sa:far (2)
 |
 VP          DP
 |         mansu:r
 V'
 |            v
 Adv        sa:far  (1)
?imbariħ
              V'
              |
         V        PRN
       sa:far    le:š
```

According to this, **/le:š/** occupies the interrogative force to the sentence. Thus, applying Rizzi (1997) Split projection analysis structure of the given sentence in (10) would be reported as 10.2:

17.2 [ ForceP [Force **le:š** ] [Foc P**[** Foc **sa:far**][TP **sa:far mansu:r sa:far ?imbariħ  sa:far**]]]

In this structure, the word **/le:š/** is the force P head of the sentence which cannot be precede by other head like a prepositional head. This would satisfy the ungrammaticality of sentences (17) if it follows the prepositional head **la** as in (18)**.**

18.   * **la.le:š**          **sa:far**              **mansu:r   ?imbariħ**
         **\*Prep.Comp**        travelled.3SGM          Mansour    yesterday
   (Intended meaning:  Did  Mansour travel yesterday?)

What we mean by the ungrammaticality in the previous example is that if we were asked such a question, **la.le:š sa:far    mansu:r    ?imbariħ**, we will answer it by giving justifications and reasons for Mansours' travel. This means that we have realised this question as a wh-question that requires giving reasons in order to answer 'Why did Mansour travel yesterday? This in turn indicates that the question **la.le:š     sa:far    mansu:r    ?imbariħ** cannot be interpreted as a yes, no question, consequently  it proves the claim that in yes, no question le:š occupies the interrogative force of the sentence. Therefore, in this position le:š cannot be preceded by a preposition.

It can be noticed from the sentences in (15) and (17) how intonation plays a crucial role of intonation in specifying the syntactic function. Since wh-question starting with the wh-operator **le:š** is produced with a falling intonation, whereas yes-no question would result from reading the sentence with a rising intonation. Hence, going with the **direct theory** concerning the match between phonological domains and the syntactic ones, although the specification of such a match is beyond the scope of this paper (For more details about prosodic domains and the syntax-phonology interface, see Dobashi, 2014).

Another piece of evidence that indicates the use of the word **le:š** as an interrogative complementiser is its appearance in the initial position in certain wh-question other than the one having this word as a wh-operator. The following questions would clearly illustrate this point:

19. A.      **mi:n     šuft        ?imbaariħ?**
                who     saw.2SGM      yesterday
      (Intended meaning:  'Who did you see yesterday?)
       B.  **le:š      mi:n     šuft        ?imbaariħ?**
              Comp     who     saw.2SGM      yesterday
      (Intended meaning:   'Who did you see yesterday?)

20.    A.  **we:n      ruħt        ?imbaariħ?**
              Where      went. 2SM      yesterday
      (Intended meaning:     'Where did you go yesterday?')
       B.   **le:š   we:n      ruħt        ?imbaariħ?**
              Comp   Where      went. 2SM      yesterday
   (Intended meaning:  'Where did you go yesterday?')

21.   **A. mata     ruħt     ?.al    madrasih?**
         When   went. 2SM    to.the      school
      (Intended meaning:  'When did you go to school? ')
       B. **le:š     mata      ruħt     ?a-l    madrasih?**
         Comp.    when   went. 2SM     to-the       school
         (Intended meaning:  'When did you go to the school? ')

22. A. **ke:f     ruħt     ʔa-l     madrasih?**
    How    went. 2SM    to-the        school
    (Intended meaning:'How did you go to school?')

B.    **le:š        ke:f     ruħt     ʔ-al     madrasih?**
    Comp      how    went. 2SM    to-the        school
    (Intended meaning:   'How did you go to school?')

21    **A. ʔade:Š       haʔ   li.lktab?**
    How much         price   the.book
    (Intended meaning:   'How much is the price of the book?'

B.    **le:š ʔade:Š        haʔ   li.lktab?**
    How much             price   the.book
    (Intended meaning:   'How much is the price of the book?')

It can be observed from the B examples in the provided examples (19-21) that in JA, wh-questions can be also formed by means of having an overt interrogative complementiser, which is **le:š**. These examples would be empirical evidence to our analysis of the word **le:š** as an interrogative complementiser in certain contexts. Since in these examples the [Spec Foc] position is already filled with the wh-operator, while the Force head position is occupied by le:Š.

Concerning the different readings of sentence (15) and (17) in JA, what follows would illustrate the difference.
Sentence (15)    **le:š     sa:far         mansu:r   ʔimbariħ**
        Why    travelled.3SGM        Mansour    yesterday
   (Intended meaning:   'Why  did Mansour travel yesterday?
would be reported as (19):
22.    **ʔana   saʔalt      Le:š  sa:far        mansu:r   ʔimbarih**
    I    asked. 1SG      Why   travelled.3SGM   Mansour      yesterday
    (Intended meaning:  'I asked why Mansour traveled yesterday.'

In (22) it is noticed that the wh-particle, le:š , remained the same in the reported sentence in 18; yet would this be applicable for the interrogative complementiser le:š? The sentence (23) would clarify how sentence (17) would be reported.
**Sentence (17) le:š        sa:far         mansu:r   ʔimbariħ**
        COMP     travelled.3SGM        Mansour    yesterday
   (Intended meaning: 'Did  Mansour travel yesterday?')

**23. ʔana   saʔalt      ʔi ða   sa:far         mansu:r   ʔimbarih**
    I    asked. 1SG    **whether. Comp**      travelled.3SGM   Mansour      yesterday.
    (Intended meaning:'I have asked if Mansour travelled yesterday.')

It appears from (22) that le:š in (10) was replaced with  another interrogative complementiser which leads to the conclusion that le:š in (16) is a complementiser and not a wh-operator. To double check this, it seems useful to apply this test on other wh-question and investigate whether the wh-operator would remain the same or be converted to a complementiser. Hence, sentence (13. A) is chosen and be reported in (21).
Sentence  13. A.  **mi:n     šuft      ʔimbaarih?**
       who    saw.2SGM      yesterday
    (Intended meaning: 'Who did you see yesterday?')

21. **ʔana   saʔalt      mi:n     šuft      ʔimbaarih**
    I     asked. 1SG     who    saw.2SGM      yesterday
    (Intended meaning: 'I asked who you saw yesterday.')

It appears from sentence (21) that wh-particle, mi:n, does not change when reported. Consequently, the paper assumption that the word le:š is a wh-operator in (15) and an interrogative complementiser in (17) is successfully proved.


## IV. Conclusion

To sum up, in JA the word **le:š** has two syntactic configurations in JA questions. The first one is found in wh-question where this word is realised as an interrogative operator, meaning why, that moved to the [Spec C] position. The other behaviour of this word appears in yes, no questions where le:š is realized as an interrogative complementiser similar to /ʔa/ and /hal/ in Standard Arabic (Fakih & Al-deran, 2014), /huwwa/ in Egyptian Arabic (Soltan, 2011 b), and /ʔilli/ in Mehri (Alrowsan, 2014). Here, it is argued that le:š  is formed within the  C position  and giving the interrogative force for the question. Two pieces of evidence were used to prove that in yes, no questions le:š functions as an interrogative complementiser and not as wh-phrase. The first piece of evidence is the insertion of the prefix

preposition la before le:š to form lale:š. It is noticed that the use of lale:š is only restricted for the wh-question, while for yes, no question the insertion of this preposition leads to the ungrammaticality of the question and hence changing the intended meaning of the question. The other piece of evidence that indicates the use of the word **le:š** as an interrogative complementiser is its appearance in the initial position in certain wh-question other than the one having this word as a wh-operator. In this vein, it is recommended to search for the reason(s) why we cannot have the word le:š as an interrogative complementiser followed by a wh-question that has the word le:š as a wh-word, as in

    \* le:š   le:š   **sa:far   mansu:r   ʔimbariḥ.**

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