

## The Influence of Word Order on Modern Standard Arabic Information Structure

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While it is naturally assumed that Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), a language with relatively extensive case and agreement marking, consequently allows for variations on its word order, most comprehensive grammars of the language largely fail to address the possibilities for word order variation and the implications that varied order has on the sentence. In fact, MSA allows for all six permutations of the basic sentence constituents Subject, Verb and Object. What's more, all 'marked' variations in word order are related to each other, as each one denotes some aspect of the information structure of the language, either topicalizing or focusing a constituent. This paper presents a comprehensive overview of word order variation in MSA as it relates to the information structure of the language. It draws primarily on the work of Bakir, who in his 1979 work gives a much more extensive transformational analysis of word order variation. For the purposes of this paper, we will not concern ourselves with a grammatical explanation of how to derive the variant word orders from an underlying structure; we shall accept at face value that such variation exists, and focus instead on its relation to the semantic components of Topic and Focus.

### Overview of Word Order Permutations

Following are the examples that Bakir offers to illustrate word order variation (p. 6). I have modified these to better render Topic and Focus in the English translations; these should not be taken to be literal grammatical rendering of the construction. In addition, I have indicated topicalization by underlining that constituent, and focus via *italics*. This practice will be continued throughout the paper. I have added 4) to the original list of six as an alternate ordering of 3), and distinguished by case from 6).

- 1) *ʔiʃtaraa* muḥammad-un kitaab-an  
bought Muhammad-NOM book-ACC  
'Muhammad bought a book.' (VSO)
- 2) muḥammad-un *ʔiʃtaraa* kitaab-an  
Muhammad-NOM bought book-ACC  
'Muhammad, he bought a book.' (SVO)
- 3) al-kitaab-u muḥammad-un *ʔiʃtaraa*-hu  
DEF-book-NOM Muhammad-NOM bought-it  
'The book, Muhammad bought it.' (O<sub>N</sub>SV)<sup>1</sup>
- 4) al-kitaab-u *ʔiʃtaraa*-hu muḥammad-un  
DEF-book-NOM bought-it Muhammad-NOM  
'The book, Muhammad bought it.' (O<sub>N</sub>VS)

<sup>1</sup> The subscript N and A refer to Nominative and Accusative case marking, respectively. When the grammatical Object comes first, the case it assumes is important to the pragmatic interpretation of the structure. This is explained in greater detail in the sections on these word orders.

- 5) muḥammad-un *kitaab-an* ḥiṣṭaraa  
 Muhammad-NOM book-ACC bought  
 ‘Muhammad, it was *a book* that he bought.’ (SOV)
- 6) *kitaab-an* ḥiṣṭaraa muḥammad-un  
 book-ACC bought Muhammad-NOM  
 ‘Muhammad bought *a book*. (O<sub>A</sub>VS)
- 7) ḥiṣṭaraa *kitaab-an* muḥammad-un  
 bought book-ACC Muhammad-NOM  
 ‘It was *a book* that Muhammad bought.’ (VOS)

### Establishment of an Unmarked Word Order

Before proceeding further with the discussion of information structure and ‘marked’ word orders, it is necessary to establish if an unmarked word order exists. The existence of an unmarked order is necessary to justify the claim that permutations to that word order can render meaningful pragmatic information. Arabic exhibits typological properties most typical with VSO languages (cf. Greenberg 1963), but Bakir provides even further evidence for a basic VSO order (pp. 8-10).

First, VSO order is the only word order that can be used in i) Discourse-initial sentences; ii) Responses to questions that require a full-sentence answer to supply the information, i.e. “What happened?” i) implies that VSO does not topicalize any constituent as old information, which as an introductory sentence in a discourse cannot contain new elements. ii) verifies that VSO does not focus any particular constituent, in contrast to other orders which cannot be used because they only focus a particular constituent.

Further evidence comes from a survey of syntactic structures in the language, in which we find that VSO has the greatest distribution. A great many construction types, including nominalization structures and subjunctive mood clauses, can only be expressed using VSO order. Generic embedded clauses, however, may exhibit both SVO and VSO orders.

Finally, the Arabic case system sometimes fails to distinctly mark grammatical arguments. This especially occurs when the case marker, which is always added at the end of the noun, cannot be included because the noun ends with a long vowel rather than a consonant. When this occurs, interpretation of word order becomes strictly VSO, in opposition to VOS. Such an occurrence is given in 8), where lack of case marking on the NPs requires the first NP to be interpreted as the Subject.

#### 8) raʔaa mustafaa ʔiisaa

saw Mustafa Isa

‘Mustafa saw Isa’ (cannot mean ‘Isa saw Mustafa’)

It is worth noting that, given *any* way of grammatically differentiating the arguments, varied word order is permissible. For example, if in 8) the Subject was a female, the verb would take a Subject agreement marker indicating that the Subject is female, thus eliminating ambiguity. Or, if the Object was inanimate, semantics would selectionally restrict the Subject to the animate argument.

## Topic-Comment Structures

### Topicalization of Subject: SVO

Most of the literature on this construction refers to it not as a “Topic-Comment” structure but as a “nominal” sentence, as opposed to the “verbal” sentence VSO (Anshen and Schreiber 1968). The evidence seems clear, however, that we can safely call this construction Topic-Comment, as it consists of a topicalized, presupposed Subject followed by a predicate Comment that is comprised of new (non-given) information (Bakir, p. 125).

Historically, the concept of a topicalized Subject appears to have been a heated debate among the Classical Arabic grammarians. The Basra school of grammar, one of two primary Arabic grammar schools, held that SVO was never a possible word order. Its acceptance in modern grammar seems widespread, however; Ryding (2005) attests to the common usage of SVO order for the headline of a newspaper, while the lead sentence of the article may recapitulate the same sentence in the VSO order appropriate to discourse-initial contexts. SVO functions as a sort of “attention-getter” that makes it particularly useful in contexts like newspaper headlines.

Haywood and Nahmad (1965) define the nominal sentence (known as *jumla ismiyya* in Arabic) as a sentence introduced by the Subject, whether or not the Subject is followed by a verb. Thus, both equative (verbless) sentences and nonequative SVO sentences may be considered nominal. Anshen and Schreiber (1968) highlight a feature typically found in the Arabic grammars, drawing a distinction between the SVO nominal sentence and the verbal sentence (in which the verb appears first), based on a variation in Subject agreement. When the Subject precedes the verb, the verb agrees with the Subject in gender, person and number. When the verb comes first, however, the agreement for number is dropped, always being expressed as singular. The result is that there will be an incongruity in the Subject agreement in a verbal sentence if the Subject is dual or plural, that is not present in a nominal sentence. This is expressed in the relative glossing of 9) as compared with 10):

- 9) ta-ʃtarii al-nisaaʔ-u xubz-an  
 3S.F-buy DEF-women-NOM bread-ACC  
 ‘The **women she**-buys bread.’ (VSO)
- 10) al-nisaaʔ-u ya-ʃtarii-na<sup>2</sup> xubz-an  
 DEF-women-NOM 3P.F-buy- bread-ACC  
 ‘The **women**, **they** buy bread.’ (SVO)

### Topicalization of Object: O<sub>N</sub>VS and O<sub>N</sub>SV

Somewhat surprisingly, the term “Topic-Comment Structure” refers primarily to the topicalization of *Objects* (Farghal 1992; Ryding 2005). Subjects may also be topicalized, according to most schools of thought, but receive much less attention and are typically known by a different title. Since I hold that both Subject and Object could be topicalized in what could be called a “Topic-Comment” structure, I shall avoid using this ambiguous term when referring to the topicalization of either particular grammatical relation.

Bakir’s introduction to word order types (p. 6) is somewhat misleading in regards to Object topicalization. Here he suggests that Object topicalization is accomplished through an OSV structure.

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<sup>2</sup> The ya-...-na is an agreement circumfix, required for certain classes of agreement on imperfective verbs.

However, all his subsequent discussion on Object topicalization (i.e. pp. 60-61) assume that the structure is OVS. Farghal's discussion of Topic-Comment structure likewise assumes that the structure is OVS, as does Ryding's grammar. An in-depth look at the transformational analysis is beyond the scope of my research, and so I can only postulate that Topic-Comment structure is typically OVS, with optional switching of constituents to OSV without any change in meaning.

In this discussion of word order, it is very important to clarify that the same basic order of constituents is used to accomplish two very different pragmatic purposes. OVS (and its henceforth assumed twin OSV) are used both to topicalize and to focus.

The key to distinguishing Object Topic and Object Focus, as may already have been surmised by the necessity of subscripts on the Objects, is case marking. Whereas Focus structures retain the expected accusative case on the Object, so as to distinguish it from the nominative Subject, Object Topicalization structures are unique in that they require the fronted Object to take on nominative case. No other alternative word order structure has this operation of case changing, making it somewhat unique in comparison to its Subject counterpart, SVO.

While the Object assumes nominative case, the Subject retains its original nominative case. The function of the case marking system—to distinguish arguments from one another—has been lost with the formation of this structure. To 'repair' the interpretational ambiguity, some other marking feature must be enacted. This occurs in the form of an obligatory resumptive pronoun that attaches to the verb, whose antecedent is the topicalized Object and which refers to that antecedent by agreement in gender and number (Ryding 2005). Farghal offers the following contrast to illustrate the obligatory nature of this pronoun:

11) al-muʕallium-u<sub>i</sub> madaña-hu<sub>i</sub> al-mudiir-u  
 DEF-teacher-NOM praised-him DEF-headmaster-NOM  
 'The teacher, the headmaster praised him.' (O<sub>N</sub>VS)

12) \*al-muʕallium-u madaña-∅ al-mudiir-u  
 DEF-teacher-NOM praised-∅ DEF-headmaster-NOM

Further, this pronoun can only be used to refer to the Object; an ungrammatical situation would also exist when it is present in Subject Topicalization clauses (Farghal):

13) \*al-ʕurtʕijj-u<sub>i</sub> ʔiʕtaqala-hu<sub>i</sub> al-liss-a  
 DEF-policeman-NOM arrested-him DEF-thief-ACC

14) al-ʕurtʕijj-u ʔiʕtaqala-∅ al-liss-a  
 DEF-policeman-NOM arrested-∅ DEF-thief-ACC  
 'The policeman, he arrested the thief.' (SVO)

A final condition on Topic-Comment structure is the necessity for the Topic NP to be definite (Bakir p. 62).<sup>3</sup> This is an extremely common, if not universal, condition on the grammar of Topics. We could not, in English, topicalize an indefinite NP and say something such as, \*"As for a book, Muhammad found it." This is due to the pragmatic function of Topic as the thing which a sentence is about, an entity previously

<sup>3</sup> Though no data is given to overtly demonstrate the necessity of definiteness when the Subject is topicalized, I assume that this condition is necessary, in keeping with the general pragmatic association of Topic and definiteness cross-linguistically.

identified in the discourse and known to the hearer. By necessity, that which is already known must be definite, and therefore attempting to express the Topic as indefinite presents a logical contradiction. Thus, the above sentence rendered in Arabic must be expressed as 15):

15) al-kitaab-u<sub>i</sub> waḍẓada-hu<sub>i</sub> muḥammad-un  
 DEF-book-NOM found-him Muhammad-NOM  
 'The book, Muhammad found it.'

16) \*kitaab-un<sub>i</sub> waḍẓada-hu<sub>i</sub> muḥammad-un  
 book-NOM found-him Muhammad-NOM  
 '\*A book, Muhammad found it.'<sup>4 5</sup>

We will not greatly concern ourselves with structural considerations, except to postulate that Topics appear to be sentence-initial. That is, in a Topic construction, no other term may ever precede the Topic. Bakir notes that, while other constituents apart from topics (including prepositional phrases, adjectival complements, etc.) may be pre-verbally preposed, the Topic is required to occur before them.

17) ʿalijj-un<sub>i</sub> maḍẓnuun-an ḏ<sup>ʿ</sup>annat-hu<sub>i</sub> faat<sup>ʿ</sup>imat-u  
 Ali-NOM crazy-ACC thought-him Fatima-NOM  
 'Ali, Fatima thought him crazy.'

18) \*maḍẓnuun-an ʿalijj-un<sub>i</sub> ḏ<sup>ʿ</sup>annat-hu<sub>i</sub> faat<sup>ʿ</sup>imat-u  
 crazy-ACC Ali-NOM thought-him Fatima-NOM

According to Bakir (pp. 66-67), it is permissible to topicalize an argument in-situ, in which case the above restriction on Topic location naturally does not apply, since the Verb naturally precedes any argument in the default VSO word order. No explicit marking is given that allows in-situ topicalization to be marked; all constituents receive their default case or agreement marking. It is likely that intonational patterns provide marking of an in-situ topic, but I cannot provide any data to support this, as all data available to me is in written form.

### Grammatical Structures Associated with Topic-Comment Structures

Several modifiers or clausal constructions are very relevant to topicalization word orders. Two notable modifications to word orders that topicalize an argument will be briefly discussed.

Several authors note the *ʔamma...fa-* construction as a more formal way of expressing Topic-Comment structure. This construction consists of the conjunction *ʔamma* (glossed "as for" by Haywood and Nahmad) followed by the Topic Nominal. A second conjunction, the prefix *fa-* then occurs before the Comment that follows. This marker is also used in other types of constructions, most commonly the temporal succession conjunction 'then' or 'so' (Wehr & Cowan 1994). There are no grammatical differences between an *ʔamma...fa-* construction and a generic Topic-Comment structure; the only difference in marking is the presence of these two particles. Traditional Arab grammar defines this construction as "strengthening" the predicate (Haywood and Nahmad). It seems to me that this structure primarily makes

<sup>4</sup> The case marking changes from –un to –u with the addition of the definite marker al-.

<sup>5</sup> The indefinite construction can, in the proper context, be used as an adjectival relative clause—in this example, 'a book that Muhammad found.'

the Topic more salient and marked, much like the use of an “As for...” external topic constructions in English.

19) al-tʿaalib-u<sub>i</sub> dʿaraba-hu<sub>i</sub> al-muʿallim-u  
 DEF-student-NOM beat-him DEF-teacher-NOM  
 ‘The student, the teacher beat him.’

20) *ʔamma* al-tʿaalib-u<sub>i</sub> fa-dʿaraba-hu<sub>i</sub> al-muʿallim-u  
 as.for DEF-student-NOM then-beat-him DEF-teacher-NOM  
 ‘As for the student, the teacher beat him.’

Haywood & Nahmad state that what follows the *ʔamma* particle must take Nominative case, though it may be used for both varieties of Topic-Comment structures (SVO and O<sub>N</sub>VS). Other authors such as Farghal do not give any evidence to the contrary of this statement. However, while it may be true that this is the case for MSA, it is interesting to note that Qurʿanic Arabic demonstrates counterexamples. In one Qurʿanic passage (Surah 93: 9-11), all three consecutive verses utilize the *ʔamma...fa-* construction, but none of them modify a Nominative NP (Yusuf Ali 2004). The verb also does not contain any agreement to the Topic, contrary to typical Object topicalization structure. Examples of the first two of these verses are given below.

21) *fa-ʔamma* al-jatiim-a<sub>i</sub> fa-laa taqhar-ø<sub>i</sub>  
 so-as.for DEF-orphan-ACC then-NEG subjugate-ø  
 ‘As for the orphan, do not subjugate (him).’

22) *wa-ʔamma* al-saaʔil-a<sub>i</sub> fa-laa tanhar-ø<sub>i</sub>  
 and-as.for DEF-beggar-ACC then-NEG rebuff-ø  
 ‘As for the beggar, do not rebuff (him).’

One possible interpretation of these facts is that these sentences are not Topic-Comment structures at all, but an odd type of Focus structure. As we shall see later, the grammatical marking of these sentences (except for the *ʔamma...fa-*) corresponds to a basic Object Focus construction. But semantically, this theory doesn’t seem to hold up. At least the *orphan* in v. 9 is an active element in the discourse, having been mentioned in v. 6. Topicalization of this NP in v. 9 makes sense, whereas Focus does not. Secondly, the clause that follows *fa-* is not presupposed, as suggested by the imperatives. On top of these reasons, there is no evidence anywhere else that the *ʔamma...fa-* construction can be used with anything but Topic-Comment structures, and the common gloss of sentences using this construction supports that. It would appear, then, that Qurʿanic Arabic can sometimes differ from MSA in regards to the topical case marking of *ʔamma...fa-* structures, perhaps due to its semi-poetic nature.

A rather similar construction is the particle *ʔinna*, which is most often regarded as the head of a set of a handful of related particles (Haywood & Nahmad 1965). Traditionally translated ‘*verily*’, it renders a similar emphatic interpretation to a Topic-Comment structure. What makes this and its related particles unique is that their presence at the beginning of the sentence overrides the correct NOM case marking on the Topic, as these particles require a default ACC case on the constituent that they mark (Farghal 1992,

Wright 2005). Unlike the Focus OVS structure, however, it retains the resumptive pronoun on the verb that is characteristic of the Object Topicalization structure.

23) *ʔinna zajd-an* d<sup>ʕ</sup>araba-hu<sub>i</sub> ʔalijj-un

verily Zayd-ACC beat-him Ali-NOM  
'Zayd, Ali did beat him.'

24) \**ʔinna zajd-un* d<sup>ʕ</sup>araba-hu<sub>i</sub> ʔalijj-un

verily Zayd-NOM beat-him Ali-NOM

### Topic-Focus Structure (SOV)

Yet another way to topicalize a constituent via word order is by using the SOV word order. This appears to be a much less commonly used structure than any of the Topic-Comment orders previously mentioned; Bakir is the only source I have been able to find who attests to it as a possible order and even his treatment is very limited, so not much can be said about it. I do not believe that he provides any more examples of it than example 5) in the introduction of this paper.

This structure, like SVO, topicalizes the Subject; fronting the Subject always seems to result in its topicalization, though even this shall be contested at the conclusion. The difference between the two seems to rely primarily on the accessibility of the Verb. Whereas in SVO, the entire predicate is marked as Comment—that is, as new information that elaborates on the Topic—SOV considers the Verb to be known information to the discourse, or at least easily accessible or inferable. Only the Object is considered new information in this structure, and because of this narrow limitation of new information to a specific constituent, it is considered marked as focus. SVO would most typically be used to answer a question such as “What did Muhammad do?” (“Muhammad bought a book.”) SOV would be more appropriately used in answering the question, “As for Muhammad, what did he buy?” (Muhammad bought a book.)

### Focus Structures

Narrow Focus of Object: O<sub>A</sub>VS

Recall in the sections above that it was deemed necessary to mark a preposed Object with a subscript Nominative marker. This was because the same word order, but with the Object marked in its natural Accusative case, is also a pragmatic structure in Arabic. While the Nominative case marking topicalizes the Object, Accusative case focuses it. The Subject and verb are presupposed, as is indicated by the question-and-answer pair that Bakir provides:

25) *maaḏaa ʔiʔtaraa muḥammad-un?*

what bought Muhammad-NOM  
'What did Muhammad buy?'

26) *kitaab-an ʔiʔtaraa muḥammad-un*

book-ACC bought Muhammad-NOM  
'Muhammad bought a book.'

There are no restrictions on definiteness for this structure; as can be seen in 26) above, the focused constituent may be indefinite, but it can likewise be a definite NP (Farghal 1992). Farghal also implies that this Focus structure allows for Object agreement to occur on the verb, in the same manner as the Object

Topicalization structure, though no other authors mention this as a possibility. In consideration of these facts, it seems that  $O_AVS$  is a much freer structure grammatically than most other marked word orders. Both the options of definiteness and Object agreement are shown in example 28) below, which is the answer to the question in 27), and thus *the girl* is proven to be the focused constituent.

27) *man* qabbala ʕamr-un?

who kiss Amr-NOM  
'Who did Amr kiss?'

28) *al-bint-a*, qabbala-ha, ʕamr-un

DEF-girl-ACC kissed-her Amr-NOM  
'Amr kissed her, *the girl*.'

It seems, then, that both topicalization and focus involve the preposing of the pragmatically marked element. We have already thoroughly observed this in regards to topicalization. Evidence that preposing is also the domain of focus comes from the fact that all WH-Question words, regardless of the sentence constituent that they are questioning, are conventionally placed sentence-initially, in the Focus position (Bakir p. 81). As far as can be gathered from the written research, explicit topic and focus are mutually exclusive except in the case of SOV in which the narrow focus of the Object is implied by its limitation as the only new information in the sentence. Apart from this, emphasis in any given sentence can be given to either one or the other, but not both simultaneously. Of course, to a certain extent, focus must occur in topicalized sentences, because they still contain elements which are new information (i.e. SVO order marks the predicate as new or non-given information). Ouhalla refers to such 'in-situ focus' in his examination of Arabic Focus structures (1999). It does not seem, though, that new information in these sorts of structures are as saliently marked as emphatic focus; only a Focus structure may be used to overtly mark focus, and this will thus exclude the possibility of topicalizing a constituent.

Bakir notes that that it is possible to focus more than one constituent via preposing (pp. 26-27). It does not seem that Subjects may undergo focusing in this structure, but any combination of Object, Prepositional Phrase, Participial Complement, Temporal Adverb, etc. may jointly be focused. In this case, it does not matter which order the focused constituents are in, so long as they both occur before the verb, and the Subject plus any non-focused sentence constituents follow it. Two examples from Bakir are provided below.<sup>6</sup>

29) *faat'imat-a albaariḥata* qaabal-tu fii al-suuq-i

Fatima-ACC yesterday met-I in DEF-market-GEN  
'Yesterday, I met *Fatima* in the market.'

<sup>6</sup> Providing proof that both of these are focused is difficult to do, as MSA does not allow the use of multiple question words in a single sentence, which would be needed to mark the double focus. Piecemeal evidence could probably be provided if we constructed either of these answers as a combined response to two back-to-back questions; for example, "Whom did you meet in the market?" "When did you meet her there?" could presumably be answered using example 28).

- 30) *fii al-faariʿi ʿamsi qaabal-tu muḥammad-an*  
 in DEF-street-GEN yesterday met-I Muhammad-ACC  
 ‘Yesterday, I met Muhammad *in the street*.’<sup>7</sup>

Example 30) is especially revealing, as it contains all major constituents V, S and O as non-focused items, present in this order. This indicates that focusing is entirely accomplished through preposing a constituent (or two) within the basic VSO sentential framework. Any non-Subject constituent, moved out of normal word order to a pre-verbal position, will receive a focus interpretation.

There is some disagreement as to what type of focus this structure renders. Ouhalla (1999) claims that this represents contrastive focus, as opposed to in-situ focusing, which is of the New Information variety only. Bakir, on the other hand, claims that this construction renders non-contrastive focus, and compares it to the VOS structure, which in his analysis *does* render contrastive focus (pp. 7-8). Lacking empirical evidence and native speaker intuition, I will assume that Bakir’s analysis is the correct one, especially since Ouhalla does not mention the VOS structure in his treatment of focus. We thus assume that the constituent(s) focused here are singled out for emphasis, rendering a narrow focus interpretation.

#### Contrastive Focus of Object: VOS

Given the assumptions laid out above, the VOS focus structure is analyzed as specifically providing contrastive focus of the Object; the statement is used to correct a false presupposition contained within the Object that was stated earlier in the discourse. According to Bakir, it cannot be used in contexts that are not contrastive or corrective. Thus, 32) below could only be used in response to a previous statement such as 31):

- 31) ʾiʿtaraa muḥammad-un saaʿat-an  
 bought Muhammad-NOM watch-ACC  
 ‘Muhammad bought a watch.’

- 32) ʾiʿtaraa *kitaab-an* muḥammad-un  
 bought book-ACC Muhammad-NOM  
 ‘(No,) Muhammad bought *a book*.’

As a verbal sentence, by Haywood and Nahmad’s definition (1965), the Subject agreement marker on the verb should lack Number agreement, as does the VSO order (See examples 9) and 10) above for this discussion). Ryding provides the data for this:

- 33) ø-ḥad<sup>ʿ</sup>ara *al-liqaaʿ-a* ʿadad-un min ʾas<sup>ʿ</sup>ḥaab-i al-ʾixtis<sup>ʿ</sup>aas<sup>ʿ</sup>-i.  
 3.S-attended DEF-meeting-ACC number-NOM from companions-GEN DEF-specialist-GEN  
 ‘**A number of specialists, he** attended *the meeting*.’

Ryding’s description of VOS takes a somewhat different perspective. Her grammar does not address the issue of focus, but instead makes the claim that VOS can be used especially if the Object is substantially shorter than the Subject. This hypothesis of constituent length is also claimed to be what motivates preposed Adverbs in MSA. Under her analysis, it would appear that what motivates the word order change is ease of information flow—reserving an abnormally long Subject constituent until the end

<sup>7</sup> As far as can be determined, the two Arabic words meaning “yesterday” are synonymous and interchangeable.

presumably makes processing the sentence easier. This view doesn't seem to directly relate to the issue of focus, but is an interesting alternative perspective.

### Focus of Subject?

It may be noted that nowhere in the introductory examples or in the discussion on focusing above was there a mention on whether Subjects could be focused. An important question that thus remains is whether it is actually possible to do so. In fact, this has been a heated issue between the two traditional schools of Arabic grammar, the schools of Basra and Kufa; the former school denied entirely that Subjects could be preposed at all. This view seems quite preposterous, as SVO order is highly attested. But a great amount of the motivation for this view came from the necessity that, should SVO order be allowed, there was no overt grammatical way of differentiating between a topicalized Subject and a Focused Subject. On the assumption that SVO order is indeed legitimate, contra the Basri view, the exact same structure, given in 34), could be used to answer either the question, "What did Muhammad do?" (topicalizing 'Muhammad') or the question, "Who bought a book?" (focusing 'Muhammad').

34) muḥammad-un ʔiṣṭarāa kitaab-an

Muhammad-NOM bought book-ACC

'Muhammad bought a book.'

I would hypothesize that the Arab grammarians take a natural dislike to ambiguity, preferring that marking within the sentence make meaning explicit. Even when the surrounding semantic context makes the meaning clear, there ought to be overt grammatical marking as well, so that the meaning can be preserved even when severed from context. Thus, the Basris went to great pains to attempt to reanalyze apparent SVO structure to eliminate this ambiguity (Bakir p. 125). Of course, as we have seen earlier in the paper, the potential for ambiguity in the language is fairly great, given limitations such as the small case system!

I agree with Bakir that the evidence is overwhelming that SVO structure does legitimately exist, and that without the context of an SVO construction, it is potentially ambiguous as to whether the Subject is topicalized or focused. Undoubtedly, though, due to the cross-linguistic association of Subjects and Topics, a prototypical SVO construction would be assumed to represent a topical Subject. The necessity of allowing it to also represent focused information comes from the fact that no other distinct structure allows for the focusing of Subjects, which is deemed to be a needed structure for certain contexts.

### Conclusion

This paper has presented a very basic overview of the various strategies involving word order that are employed by Modern Standard Arabic to mark the pragmatic features of Topic and Focus on constituents. Evidence was shown that convincingly proves that VSO is the most basic and pragmatically unmarked word order, while all other permutations of the basic sentence constituents result in a marked structure of some kind. Two kinds of Topic-Comment structures were presented: SVO, which topicalizes the Subject, and O<sub>N</sub>VS, which topicalizes the Object. The Object topicalization structure has the option of reordering its constituents to O<sub>N</sub>SV without any apparent change in meaning. There is also an additional Subject topicalization structure, SOV, which has the distinction of marking the Object as focus, and thus establishing the Verb as old information, in contrast with SVO.

The Object Topicalization structure, though consisting of the same basic order of elements as the Object focus structure,  $O_AVS$ , was shown to differ in several respects, including different case marking on the fronted Object, the presence or lack of a resumptive pronoun agreeing with the Object, and restrictions on definiteness of the Object. We conclude that these are, in fact, two entirely different structures, that result in a similar word order through different syntactic processes.  $O_AVS$  also differs in its pragmatic function from another focus structure,  $VOS$ ; the former is apparently used for the noncontrastive purpose of introducing new information, while the latter may only be used to contrast or correct a previous statement, focusing the corrective item in the sentence. There is, however, uncertainty as to the exact types of focus that are contained within these two structures, due to a general lack of data and native speaker knowledge. Finally, it was shown that  $SVO$  can also be used to focus the Subject as well as topicalize it, though the focusing function is much less commonly used. The above considerations have all been consolidated into a reference table, given below.

Summary Table of Word Orders and Pragmatic Functions in MSA

Word Order	Pragmatically Marked?	Topical Element	Focused Element	Case Change?	New Information	Summary Description of Construction
VSO	N			N	-	Unmarked sentence; Sentence Focus
$\underline{S}VO$	Y	SUBJ		N	V+O	Topic-Comment Subject Topicalization
$\underline{O}_NVS$	Y	OBJ		Y	S+V	Topic-Comment Object Topicalization
$\underline{O}_NSV$	Y	OBJ		Y	S+V	Topic-Comment Object Topicalization
$\underline{S}OV$	Y	SUBJ	OBJ	N	O	Topic-Focus Construction
$O_AVS$	Y		OBJ	N	O	Narrow Focus of Object
VOS	Y		OBJ	N	O	Contrastive Focus of Object
SVO	Y		SUBJ	N	S	Focus of Subject

One issue that was not adequately covered is how information structure can be used in-situ. Bakir shows how VSO can be used to provide sentence focus (p. 69), and Ouhalla claims that Objects may also receive narrow focus in-situ. And Farghal even suggests that VSO, with appropriate particle usage, may be used to form an in-situ Topic-Comment structure in which the Object is topicalized!

The movement rules required to produce each structure (which we conclude is different for topic and focus constructions) have also been left largely unaddressed. The reader is advised to look at Bakir's work for a full treatment of the transformational analysis necessary to generate the attested structures.

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