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Information Structure: The Impact of Pragmatic Focus Categories on Word Ordering in the El Tarf Dialect of Algerian Arabic

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Abstract

The study examines how word order variations in the El Tarf dialect (Arabic dialect spoken in east Algeria) are affected by information structure. All participants are from El Tarf. The data is collected through an Answer/Question test. Following Lambrecht (1994). The paper's goal is to investigate how word processing varies per the pragmatic readings of Focus categories namely, Argument-Focus (identifying a new referent, the subject), Predicate-Focus (commenting on a topic), and Sentence-Focus (presenting a new situation). The findings reveal that these categories influence how constituents are organized, processed, and interpreted. In Argument-Focus, speakers prefer identifying new referents through marked narrow Focus (non-canonical constructions, namely VSO, VOS, OVS, and OSV). Meanwhile, the Predicate-Focus needs an unmarked SVO order, a VO order with an unaccented topic (subject) is also used. The Sentence-Focus is unmarked. The results also show that word order within the Argument-Focus is more flexible compared to Predicate-Focus and Sentence-Focus constructions.

Keywords: Information structure, Focus categories, Word order, Algerian Arabic; El Tarf Dialect.

1. Introduction

Even though language is constrained by a set of rules, there are times when it deviates from these rules due to emphatic, functional, and situational factors. Therefore, sentence constructions become a significant communicative part of the coding and receiving of information. Some structures can be used to specifically draw attention to and highlight specific messages. This is what is referred to as Information Structure (IS); Lambrecht (1994, 2000) conceives it as a linguistic aspect that deals with the study of the relationship between the form and meaning of a sentence. It describes how information is packaged/encoded in a sentence; it is also known in the literature as '*information packaging*' (Chafe 1976; Halliday 1967; Lambrecht 1994, 2000). '*Topic*' and '*Focus*' are the main elements used to express and package discourse information. So, the present study sheds light on the relationship between IS

'*pragmatic focus*' and word order in the El Tarf dialect[1] of Algerian Arabic, one of the least studied dialects of Algerian Arabic. It discusses the El Tarf constituent order from both syntactic and pragmatic viewpoints.

Lambrecht's approach to Focus assumes that sentence Focus articulations can be classified into several distinct types that correspond to different types of pragmatically structured propositions. These focus categories are used in various communicative situations and manifest in distinct formal categories across languages. First, the category of Argument-Focus (AF) has the communicative function of identifying a referent. This category is further subdivided into unmarked and marked narrow Focus. Second, the function of the Predicate-Focus category (PF) is to comment on a given topic. Third, the Sentence-Focus category (SF) has the communicative function of describing new situations (Lambrecht 1994, 2000).

Because the representation of meanings in the form of linguistic utterances is such an important part of interlocutors' language communication, information structure (IS) has remained a vast topic of research that has been pursued within various theoretical frameworks and has produced many empirical insights (Krifka 2007). However, most of the existing studies have shed light on the prosodic and syntactic properties used by users of the language to arrange and organize utterances and sentences (e.g., Moutaouakil 1989; Khalil 2000; Mahfoud 2002; Homeidi 2004; Souag 2006; Farghaly 2009; Holes 2010; Hocini 2011; Stevens 2013; Alzaidi 2014, Mansour 2017; Abdulhayri 2019; Alazzawie 2019; Announi 2021, among others). Henceforth, the present study attempts to approach both the syntactic and pragmatic levels and shed light on possible dependencies between them. The context of the problem inspired the researchers to conduct an exploratory study to determine the overlap between meanings and syntactic structures by investigating how the pragmatic readings of Lambrecht's three focus categories are related to sentence construction. This paper employs a functional interpretative analysis per Lambrecht (1994).

To the best of the researchers' knowledge, there are still unanswered questions about the interdependency between IS and word order in Algerian Arabic (AlA). And hence, it is expected that this study will contribute to the body of insights. Therefore, the paper adds to a line of linguistic research that aims to explain word order mobility and how it relates to IS, more precisely, the different pragmatic readings of focus categories. The study at hand addresses the following questions: Does the pragmatic interpretation of the Focus category affect the order of words (constituents) in sentences? If yes, how?

2. Literature Review

The notion of (IS) has recently gained momentum among linguists (e.g., Holes, 2010; Stevens 2013; Alzaidi 2014; Alazzawie 2019; Abduljawad 2020). These studies concentrated on the linguistic functions as well as the linguistic tools used by language speakers to mark IS. Most studies used different linguistic theories such as Chafe's Cognitive Model (1976), Autosegmental Approach (Humbert 1980), Lambrecht's Theory (1994), Cartographic Theory (Rizzi 1997), Information Packaging Frames (Vallduvi 1996), and Functional Discourse Grammar (Dik 1997).

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Khalil (2000) conducted an exploratory study to examine the differences between IS in Arabic and English. He summarized these differences in two points: One, Arabic relies more on word order inversions to reach different pragmatic interpretations. However, English relies more on clefts constructions. Two, due to its rich inflectional system (as OV, SOV, and VSO), Arabic allows users to play with language structures to achieve the intended pragmatic goals. English, in contrast, has an extremely limited inflectional system. This system places heavy constraints on word order inversions.

In terms of variationist sociolinguistics (Labov 1972), Owens et al. (2009) can be considered the first statistically accountable analysis of word order in colloquial Arabic dialects. Owens et al. (2009) conducted innovative, variationist research that explored word order variability in three dialects of Arabic (Emirati, Kuwaiti, and Hijazi) spoken in the Middle East. According to Owens et al. (2009: 44), the subject's definiteness, information status, and morpholexical category are crucial factors affecting word order variability. Pronouns prefer SV more than nouns do. Nouns exhibit a higher level of variation because definite nouns (proper names, nouns with the definite article "al," and the first NP in construct states) favor SV while the indefinite nouns favor VS. However, because their study was based on a small number of participants, it is difficult to generalize the conclusions drawn for a whole variety (Emirati, Kuwaiti, and Hijazi).

Alzaidi (2014) investigated how intonation and IS are related through a discussion of various word orders in Hijazi Arabic (HA). The findings indicated that there are two types of focus: informational focus and contrastive focus. It has been demonstrated that this dialect reflects each of these categories lexicographically. In other words, the study shows that information focus must be in-situ realized in the syntax. Contrastive focus, however, can be left-dislocated or expressed in-situ.

Albuhayri (2019) examined the interaction of word order variation and information structure in Modern Standard Arabic (MSA). The focus is on word order variation and its role in discourse structure. The study presented an analysis that combines the minimalist (Chomsky 2000) and cartographic approaches (Rizzi 1997). The results showed that VSO is the fundamental word order in Standard Arabic. As a result, any disruption to this order has interpretative consequences relevant to IS.

Using the Cartography Theory (Rizzi 1997), Alazzawie (2019) attempted to examine the Complementizer Phrase (CP) layer in MSA. The study is concerned with explaining the nature and position of topicalized and object-focused phrases in the left periphery. The findings revealed that there are two focus positions in MSA. The first one is positioned directly before the verb (verb phrase) and the second is right below the topic (topic phrase). However, Alazzawie's contribution to the study of information structure was purely syntactic. It provides insights into the features that cause and trigger inversions of word order in MSA.

Announi (2021) explored the relationship between word order and verbal movement in Moroccan Arabic (MA) using the Minimalist framework. The study revealed that the VSO order is derived from the unmarked SVO order by shifting the verb from the topic phrase to a focus phrase projection. The study explained that this syntactic movement was triggered for pragmatic reasons. Announi (2021) argued that this movement is used to emphasize and present new information.

It could be argued that the findings of the previously mentioned studies are significant because they correspond to some points in the Arabic information structure, which guides the current study to focus more on the area that needs additional discussion and to use them as parameters for the validity of the current study. The available literature indicates that there has not been much discussion about the relationship between these two interrelated aspects in AlA. The present study attempts to fill in this gap from a pragmatic standpoint.

3. Focus and Word Order

There are many definitions of 'F*ocus*' in the literature. For instance, Wal (2015) considers Focus as the most informative part that presents new and unknown information. A generally accepted definition of Focus is proposed by Jackendoff (1972) who considers Focus to be the unknown part of the sentence, i.e., the new information. In other words, Focus refers to the new information that has not been previously presented in the discourse. So, the speaker will assume that the addressee is unaware of it.

Although Focus is a complicated phenomenon with many different names, most theories fully agree that focus can be defined as the response to a question that is either explicitly or implicitly given. This condition is also known as '*pragmatic focus'* (Kadmon 2001). When compared to other proposed types of Focus (e.g., contrastive Focus), this concept of focus is often referred to as *'information Focus'* (Kiss 1998). Chafe (1976) defines Focus as the new information conveyed about a topic. Lambrecht (1994, 2000), based on two reasons, refutes this definition. First, focus cannot be specifically described as the complement of a topic because all sentences transmitting new information must have a focus, but not every sentence has a topic. Second, the Focus of a sentence is commonly regarded as an element of information that is added to, rather than superimposed, on the pragmatic presupposition. A Focus is part of an assertion without being identical to it, just as a topic is part of a presupposition without being identical to it.

The concept of '*Focus*' in Lambrecht's theory is defined as that element of a pragmatically structured proposition whose presence allows the sentence to express pragmatic assertion, i.e., to convey new information to the interlocutor. While Focus is a purely pragmatic notion, the Focus category refers to a pragmatic type with specific formal manifestations in grammar (Lambrecht 1994, 2000; Krifka 2008). Lambrecht (1994, 54) gives the following definitions of Pragmatic Assertion and a Pragmatic Presupposition:

- **Pragmatic Presupposition (PP):** It is the set of propositions words evoked in a sentence that the speaker assumes the listener already knows or is prepared to take for granted at the time the sentence is uttered.
- **Pragmatic Assertion (PA):** It is the proposition expressed by a sentence that a listener is expected to know, believe, or take for granted because of hearing the sentence.

Put differently, the difference between a presupposition and an assertion should be made based on the context in which the statement is made—that is, the speaker's and his audience's attitudes and intentions rather than the content of the propositions being expressed. Broadly

speaking, the hearer does not need to go through the clarification process for each presupposition because, typically, presuppositions are not the focus of the speaker's utterance. The only case that requires such a clarification is when the speaker has introduced as their presupposition a topic perceived to be new '*asserted*' (Levinson 1983).

Examining word order patterns in simple sentence structures is still one of the most critical areas of language study and analysis (O'Grady et al. 1996 Souadkia 2017, Betti 2021). Souadkia's analytic study shows that the basic word order for Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) is SVO, known as '*verbal sentences.*' However, for stylistic reasons (e.g., emphasis), it is also possible to begin the Arabic sentence with the subject '*nominal sentences*.' In contrast, the common word order for Arabic dialects is the SVO, and similarly, due to emphasis (Focus), speakers may use a diverse set of word orders (see e.g., Fassi Fehri 1993; Aoun et al. 1994, 2010; Khalil 2000; Owens et al. 2009, among many others).

The following section presents Lambrecht's typology of Focus (1994). The three types are illustrated in this simple set of question/answer pairs.

4. Lambrecht's Typology of Focus Categories

Lambrecht (1994) divides the IS of an uttered sentence into four units, namely presupposition, assertion, focus, and focus domain. Lambrecht argues that the pragmatic structuring of propositions into presupposed and focal portions is cross-linguistically done in terms of several Focus categories which correspond to several types of communicative settings and are consistently coded across languages in different formal types.

Focus, in Lambrecht's view, refers to that part of an utterance that presents new information. Lambrecht's theory of IS (1994) divides Focus into two main groups: narrow Focus and broad Focus. Argument-Focus (AF) has a narrow Focus, while Predicate-Focus (PF) and Sentence-Focus (SF) are both included within the term broad focus. The three pragmatic functions established with those Focus categories are the '*identificational*,' '*topic-comment*,' and the '*event-reporting*' (or '*presentational*') Focus-structures, respectively. Lambrecht illustrates the three Focus-structure categories in three sets of English, Italian, (spoken) French, and Japanese examples[2].

4.1 Argument-Focus Category

When the speaker concentrates mainly on one noun phrase (NP- argument), AF happens. In other words, a subject, an object, a place, or a time can be the focal constituent, while the rest of the proposition is included in the listener's presupposition. It is worth noting that in AF, the word '*argument*' is used to describe any non-predicating expression in a proposition, including words that express place, time, and manner (Lambrecht 1994).

(1)   Q: I heard your motorcycle broke down!

          A: My **CAR** broke down (Lambrecht 1994, 223)

Lambrecht assumes that the relevant knowledge presupposition elicited in the response in (1) is that something belonging to the speaker has broken down; the assertion is that this thing is the speaker's car; and the focus is "car." The accent designates the argument "car" as the proposition's focus.

4.2. Predicate-Focus Category

The second type of focus is known as PF. In this focus construction, the predicate, which includes the verb of the sentence and some information about the subject, is in focus. The PF structure is the universally unmarked pragmatic articulation (Lambrecht 1994; Van Valin and LaPolla 1997; Rodionova 2001).

(2)   Q: What happened to your car?

        A: My car/ it **BROKE DOWN** (Lambrecht 1994, 223)

The relevant presupposition evoked in the reply (2), according to Lambrecht (1994), is that the speaker's car is pragmatically viewable as a topic for discourse. In other words, the proposition can be interpreted as a comment about this topic; the assertion is the establishment of an aboutness relation between the topic referent and the event indicated by the predicate; and the focus is the predicate '*broke down.*' The sentence accent identifies the predicate denotatum as the proposition's focal point.

4.3. Sentence-Focus Category

The third type of focus structure is known as SF. In SF construction, the speaker presupposes nothing in the discourse, implying that every constituent in the utterance is new i.e., the entire sentence is in focus.

(3)   Q: What happened!

        A: **MY CAR BROKE DOWN** (Lambrecht 1994, 223)

Because the assertion extends over the entire proposition in (3), assertion and focus are entirely compatible in these structures. The lack of a presupposition is what arises from the all-new interpretation of the proposition.

According to Lambrecht (1994), the SF category of focus is different from the PF category because it does not include a topic-comment relation between the subject and the predicate. Also, it differs from the AF category because it does not include a focus-presupposition relation between an argument and a presupposition. The defining features of the three mentioned focus categories can be summarized as follows:

Argument in **focus** **Predicate in focus**

PF - +

AF + -

SF + +

Figure 1. Features of focus categories (Lambrecht 1994, 236)

After presenting the approach adopted in this study to consider how the pragmatic readings of Focus categories affect word order in the El Tarf dialect of AlA, the next section highlights the data collection process.

5. Data Collection

The participants in the study were drawn from the University of Chaddli Ben Djdid in El Taref. The sample was made up of 60 native El Taref Algerian Arabic speakers. The participants are from the city of El-taref, and they live in different regions. The participants are adults ranging in age from 18 to 30 years. Analyzing the impact of social factors such as gender, age, and education is far beyond the scope of the present paper.

The first author, a native speaker of the dialect, used a Question/Answer test to collect the needed data. According to Lambrecht (1994), a classical way to determine focus is with the help of a question-answer (Q/A) pair, where the new information given in the answer is assumed to be in focus. Furthermore, it is assumed that focus is somehow indicated by highlighting. The different Q/A pairs illustrate how the scope of focus may vary per the question. Data obtained from the respondents have been transcribed using the International Phonetic Alphabet, (IPA).

6. Analysis and Discussion

The paper presents an account of the relationship between the different pragmatic interpretations (communicative functions) of the three Focus categories developed by Lambrecht (1994) and the order of constituents. This section provides a functional analysis of the three Focus structures[3] as realized in the El Tarf dialect. It examines both the distribution of words within sentences and their pragmatic interpretations.

6.1 Argument-Focus in El Tarf

The first type to be examined is AF. Lambrecht (1994) also refers to it as 'N*arrow Focus*.' In a narrow Focus structure, the focus domain is limited to one constituent within the proposition. In this study, however, the data examples are limited to the focalized subject. The focal constituent is written in bold:

(5).	ʃku:n	ħreg	ʔel.məkla ?
	who	burned. 3PS	NP. the food

(Who burned the food?)

The use of the interrogative pronoun (ʃku:n 'who') in (5) implies that the emphasis in the hearer's answer should be on the doer of the action, the subject, not on the action itself. Moutaouakil (1989, 24) asserts that "In so-called 'partial' questions (or 'constituent questions'). New Focus is assigned to the interrogative pronoun".

	a.	**Radia**	ħerget	ʔel.məkla
		Radia	burned past-3PSF	NP. the food

Radia [S.NOM] + ħerget-ha [V past-3PSF] + ʔel.məkla [O.ACC]

(Radia burned the food.)

We see that (5. a) has an SVO word order. However, (5. a) allows, through the displacement of its constituents, the following sentences to be formed.

   b.   ħerget   **Radia**   Ɂel.məkla

       burned past-3PSF Radia   NP. the food

ħerget [V. Past-3PSF] + Radia [S.NOM] + Ɂel.məkla [O.ACC]

(burned Radia, the food.)

  (5. b) has a VSO word order in which the focalized subject (Radia) occurs in a post-verbal position.

   c.   Ɂel.məkla   ħerget   **Radia**

       NP. the- food   burned past-3PSF NP.Radia

Ɂel.məkla [O.ACC] + ħerget [V. Past-3PSF] + Radia [S.NOM]

(the food, burned Radia.)

  In (5. c) we have an OVS word order. The focalized subject, here, also occurs in a post-verbal position.

   d.   Ɂel.məkla   **Radia**   ħerget

       NP. the-food   NP. Radia burned past-3PSF

Ɂel.məkla [O.ACC] + Radia [S.NOM] + ħerget [V. Past-3PSF]

(the food, Radia burned.)

 The last sentence (5. d) has an OSV word order. In this construction, the focalized subject pre-verbally appeared.

  In the El Tarf dialect of AlA (as exemplified in 5. c and 5. d, the object (Ɂel.məkla) is topicalized), like English, object topicalization is marked and appears quietly in spoken register (Lambrecht, 1994). Lambrecht adds that the object's initial position serves to limit the topic of the discourse and informs the hearer in advance what the following clause is going to be about, and hence puts further emphasis on the rest of the proposition.

  The earlier examples show that the El Taref dialect (AlA), like other spoken Arabic dialects (e.g., Lebanese, Moroccan, and Iraqi Arabic), has a full agreement between the subject and verb. As can be seen in the sentences above, all the subject's features (number, gender, and person) are copied onto the verb regardless of their position concerning each other.

  All examples in (5) (a, b, c, and d) are grammatically acceptable. The examples show that the focalized element, the subject here, can occur pre-verbally as in (5. a) and (5. d), post-verbally in the middle position as in (5. b), or post-verbally as in (6. c) and (6. d). The examples use the following word orders: SVO, VSO, OVS, and OSV, respectively.

  According to Lambrecht (1994), the category of AF construction has the communicative function of identifying a referent. This category is further subdivided into unmarked and marked narrow Focus. The unmarked narrow Focus happens when the words within a sentence, including the focal constituent, occur in their canonical position, that is, their default/original syntactic place (5. a). The marked narrow Focus, in contrast, happens when the constituents occur in a non-canonical position, which we refer to in this

context as structures in which one or more elements/constituents are syntactically dislocated as in 6 (b, c, and d).

This line of thought holds that the subject (Radia) is recognized as a constituent with a narrow Focus in all five instances. However, the examples differ from each other in terms of markedness and unmarkedness. Put differently, the subject, the focal component, appears in its canonical position in (5. a). Considering this, the study supports Souadkia's (2020) finding that the SVO is the common/unmarked word order for Arabic dialects. The construction in (5. a) is therefore an example of unmarked narrow Focus.

On the other hand, examples in 5 (b, c, and d) are instances of marked narrow Focus. In (5. b), the verb comes initially and precedes the subject. In (5. b), the verb comes before the subject. In (5. c), the object is topicalized and precedes both the verb and the subject, and the subject occurs in the final position. In (5. d), the object also occurs initially followed by the subject then the verb. From the analysis of the data, we found that SVO is the unmarked word order in the El Tarf AlA dialect, and any variations could be cases of marked Focus.

In short, the Focus structure in (5. a) is unmarked narrow Focus while the examples in 5 (b, c, and d) are marked constructions. As previously said, all the instances are used and acceptable with putting focus accent (Focus accent or '*prosodic marking*' is far beyond the scope of the present study) on the subject. This leads us to conclude that the AF category has a flexible word order.

The instances with narrow Focus either lead to the explanation that the canonical pre-verbal position is unmarked while the non-canonical post-verbal positions are marked, or they point toward the conclusion that the narrow focus placement is free. Given that the second conclusion does not provide an account of alternative word orders, it is easy to assess the first hypothesis put forth by Lambrecht (1994), according to which unmarkedness is associated with the canonical positions of constituents and markedness with their non-canonical positions. Lambrecht argues that language employs markedness to prevent focus interpretation ambiguity.

Put differently, the argument and subject in this study, under narrow Focus may be interpreted in numerous ways when they appear in their default order (SVO), for example, SF for subjects. As a result, syntactically marked positions such as VSO, OVS, and OSV aid in resolving this pragmatic confusion.

6.2 Predicate-Focus in EL Tarf

The second examined Focus category is PF. PF is defined as the universally unmarked type of Focus (e.g., Lambrecht, 1994; Rodionova, 2001). In this type, the predicate and a part of the proposition are emphasized. The Focus assertion in PF expresses a comment on the topic, and the pragmatic presupposition includes knowledge of that topic. The examples below lay this out.

(6).   wəʃ   ʕməl   ju:cef?

what   did 3PS   Youcef?

(What did Youcef do?)

The speaker in example (6) is aware that (Youcef) did something. When the other speaker is asked about what Youcef did, he or she responds that the fact that Youcef did something is presupposed and that this thing (action) is the new information, or the Focus. The direct object is also a part of the focus domain in this type of focus structure when the verb is transitive, as it is in example (6).

      a.   ju:cef   **kla**   **lakrem**

            Youcef   ate 3PS   NP.ice cream

Youcef [S.NOM] + kla [V. Past 3PS] + lakrem [O.ACC]

(Youcef ate the ice cream.)

    The topic (which is the subject of the sentence), can be expressed as a full lexical NP like (6. a).

      b.   **kla**   **lakrem**   ju:cef

            ate 3PS   NP. ice cream   Youcef

kla [V. Past 3PS] + lakrem [O.ACC] + Youcef [S.NOM]

(ate the ice cream, Youcef.)

    The topic (Youcef) can also be expressed as a left-dislocated NP such as in (6. b) in which the subject (Youcef) is positioned after the verb placing the presupposed topic in the final position of the sentence while the focused predicate is first.

      c.   **kla**   **lakrem**

            ate 3PS   NP. ice cream

kla [V. Past 3PS] + lakrem [O.ACC]

(ate the ice cream.)

    Or the subject (Youcef) can be expressed as an unpronounced[4] as in (6. c).

(7).   wəʃ   səra: l   saħbek

        what   happened 3PS   to   friend.your

(what happened to your friend?)

a.   saħbi   kaser   telefu:nu:

      friend.my   broke 3PS   phone.his

Saħbi [S.NOM] + kaser [V. Past 3PS] + telefu:nu: [O.ACC]

(my friend broke his phone.)

    The sentence (7. a) has an SVO word order. In this construction, the topic, subject, is overt and appears in the front of the sentence.

b.   kaser   telefu:nu: saħbi

      broke 3PS   phone.his   friend.my

kaser [V. Past 3PS] + telefu:nu: [O.ACC] + Saħbi [S.NOM]

(broke his phone, my friend.)

    In (7. b) the focused predicate (including the verb and the object) comes at the beginning of the sentence putting the presupposed topic, subject 'Saħbi', at the end of the sentence (left-dislocated).

c.   tkaser   telefu:nu:

      broken 3PS   phone.his

kaser [V. Past 3PS] + telefu:nu: [O.ACC]

(broke his phone.)

The presupposed constituent (subject) is deleted from the sentence in (7. c). Because the sentence's argument is already known to the speakers, the response does not require it to be stated again.

Lambrecht (1994) asserts that the function of PF is commenting on a given topic of conversation. Following this line of thought, we assume that although each of the previously mentioned constructions is grammatically acceptable, it reveals a different pragmatic reading. According to Lambrecht (1994), the pragmatic presupposition of this type assumes familiarity with a particular topic giving a pragmatic relationship between the form of a sentence and its meaning, known as a '*topic-comment relationship.*'

Following Lambrecht (1994, 2000), we assume that the subject post-verbal position is pragmatically unacceptable within PF constructions. In (6. b) and (7. b), the VOS is used. Subsequently, the subject is left-dislocated, appearing in the final position. Since the PF category has the communicative function of commenting on a presupposed topic (topic-comment function), such a sentence cannot be proper with the pragmatic interpretation of PF construction. In other words, PF is a subject-predicate structure in which the comment, or predicate, is in Focus. And hence, it is pragmatically inappropriate that the subject, or topic, appear in a post-verbal position.

The constructions (6. a) and (7. a) have the SVO unmarked word order because their syntactic constituents (subject, verb, object) appear in their canonical order. Again, following Lambrecht (1994, 2000), such construction in which the subject is followed by the predicate is pragmatically the most appropriate one. El Tarf AlA speakers also use the incomplete sentence form, where the presupposed constituent, the subject, is dropped from the front of the sentence. Since the argument of the sentence is already known to the speakers, the reply does not require it to be said again as in examples (6. c) and (7. c).

Regarding the word order flexibility within PF constructions, the construction with an unpronounced subject as (6. c) and (7. c) sounds the most natural in the minimal context given here. This is because the Arabic language, including Arabic dialects, seems to be a pro-drop language[5] (Souadkia 2017). This subject omission, however, does not affect the meaning of the sentence. So, both SVO and VO deliver the same pragmatic interpretation.

6.3 Sentence-Focus in El Tarf

The last type of Focus to be analyzed is SF. This category is also common in the literature as the '*all-new*'; the whole uttered sentence is in Focus. In this type, all the sentence's constituents are in Focus. So, in this case, the proposition lacks a focus presupposition articulation (Lambrecht 1994, 2000). This is demonstrated in the examples below.

(8).   wəʃ   isra ?

         What   happened 3PS?

(What happened?)

According to Lambrecht (1994; Gécseg 2006), asking the question (wəʃ isra? '*what happene*d?') such as (8) by someone who has no previous information about the situation, a speaker cannot assume any topic in his/her response.

a.	**Amine**	**də:r**	**akcidon**
	NP Amine	had past 3PS	NP accident

Amine [S. NOM] + də:r [V. Past 3PS] + akcidon [O. ACC]

(Amine had an accident.)

In this context, the reply in (8. a) is entirely new. Such SF construction adds both a new argument and a new predicate. It then presents a completely new situation in an occurring discourse. The sentence (8. a) then has an SVO word order. In this construction, the topic, subject, is overt and appears in the front of the sentence. Answering a question as (8) using other word orders such as VSO, OSV, and OVS (as exemplified in a, b, and c, respectively) is unacceptable/infelicitous in the El Tarf dialect.

b.	*də:r	Amine	akcidon[6]
c.	*akcidon	Amine	də:r
d.	*akcidon	də:r	Amine

The instances in (a, b, and c) can be acceptable in another context. They can have an AF reading in which the topic, the subject of the sentence, is the focal element. The following example, too, holds the same discussion.

(9).	wəʃ		isra ?
	What		happened 3PS?

(What happened?)

a.	Amina	**kasəret**	ʔel-vaza
	NOM. Amina	broke. 3PSF	ACC. the-vase

Amina [S. NOM] + kasəret [V. Past 3PSF] + akcidon [O. ACC]

(Amina broke the vase.)

b.	*kasəret	ʔel-vaza	Amina
c.	*ʔel-vaza	kasəret	Amina
d.	*ʔel-vaza	Amina	kasəret

As has been already mentioned in (7. 1), thetic articulation has the communicative function of describing situations or reporting events in their entirety, rather than introducing a topic and then supplying background/commenting on it. Thetic sentences can only express a fully focused sentence (Lambrecht 1994, 2000).

When the question is posed in this context as in (8) and (9), there is no pragmatic presupposition about what happened to Amine and Amina. In this sense, the information provided in the response is completely new. An important constraint on SF sentences is that their subject argument must be coded lexically, i.e., that it cannot appear in pronominal or null form (Lambrecht 1994, 2000).

Lambrecht argues that SF articulation is restricted by certain universal principles. De-topicalization of the subject and the Principle of Subject-Object Neutralization (PSON)[7] have been used by Lambrecht

(2000) as a constraint that specifies the nature of SF structures. The function of the SF category is best defined negatively, i.e., in terms of the absence of predicate focus, i.e., of the lack of a topic-comment relation between the subject and the predicate.

Lambrecht clarifies that de-topicalization and objectivization of the subject in SF constructions is a pragmatically driven phenomenon and do not undergo a change in grammatical relation (NOM case). Rather, the SF subject tends to lack the pragmatic function which is associated with the role of the subject as the topic of the PF sentence.

However, the study's finding contradicts Lambrecht's (1994) assumption that SF is a marked focus type. In the El Tarf dialect, SF is unmarked. Speakers of the El Tarf dialect use the SVO order to present new situations. Put differently, when a sentence is fully asserted, the subject (which must be overt and indicated by a nominative case) comes first and is followed by the predicate. This property sets SF apart from other clearly defined marked narrow constructions (5. b, 5. c, and 5. d). Additionally, due to the overt subject, SF reading (8. and 9. a) differs from PF (6. c and 7. c).

To summarize what has been found up to this point, the distribution of constituents within each Focus category is affected by its pragmatic interpretation. Put differently, AF (identifying a new referent) prefers a variety of marked narrow-focus constructions. PF (topic-comment) requires the unmarked SVO order. An authorized VO order preceded by an unaccented subject is also possible. SF can only be unmarked.

6. Conclusions

The present study investigates how word order variations and IS are related to each other. It examines how the pragmatic reading of various categories of Focus structure affects word order variability in the El Tarf dialect of Algerian Arabic. The study lends support to Souadkia (2017) and is aligned with the one reported by Al-Shawashreh (2016) on Jordanian Arabic (JA) in that SVO is the unmarked word order for Arabic dialects.

Accordingly, SVO is the unmarked order in the El tarf dialect; however, due to pragmatic reasons, the dialect allows other marked word orders, namely, VSO, VOS, OVS, and OSV. The paper found that the three categories of Focus articulation namely, AF, PF, and SF affect the way how words are arranged, grouped, and interpreted within a given sentence:

- AF is divided into unmarked narrow Focus through an SVO word order and marked narrow Focus which allows VSO, VOS, OVS, and OSV word orders. The marked orders are preferably used by El Tarf Algerian native speakers. It is important to restate that all examples given in the AF category are instances of the focal subject. The results revealed that a focalized subject can occur in distinct positions.

- PF is unmarked (SVO order). However, the subject can also be unpronounced. This result can be explained by the fact that the speakers already know the topic (subject) of the sentence, so the response does not necessarily require repeating it.

- SF category can only be unmarked. Thus, other constructions are unacceptable answers to the question of '*what happened*' in the El Tarf dialect.

In addition, the results show that word order within the AF structure is more adaptable, while the PF and SF Focus constructions have more rigid word order variation. The paper concludes that this wide range of variability and the diverse set of transformations/variations that affect the internal structure of the sentence as well as its pragmatic interpretation are meaningful and not random. Simply put, the pragmatic interpretation of each Focus category encodes a particular grammatical structure.

البنية الإخباريّة: تأثير القراءة البراغماتيّة على ترتيب الكلمات في اللهجة العربيّة الجزائريّة الطارفيّة

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الملخص

تناولت الدراسة مدى تأثر ترتيب الكلمات في اللهجة الطارفيّة (لهجة متحدث بها شرق الجزائر) بالبنية الإخباريّة للجملة، وجُمعِتْ البيانات من مشاركين من ولاية الطارف باستخدام اختبار سؤال\جواب. تبعاً لنظرية لامبريخت (1994)، وتدرس هذه الورقة تأثير القراءة البراغماتيّة لفئات تركيز البنية وهي: تركيز المفرد (تحديد مرجع جديد، وهو الفاعل هنا)، تركيز المُسند (التعليق على موضوع ما)، وتركيز الجملة (تقديم موقف جديد) على ترتيب عناصر الجملة، وبينت النتائج أن هذه الفئات الثلاثة تؤثر على تموضع عناصر الجملة، ومعالجتها، وتفسير معناها. أولاً في البنية الإخباريّة لتركيز المفرد، فضل المتحدثون ترتيب الكلمات على نحو: فعل فاعل مفعول به، أو فعل مفعول به فاعل، أو مفعول به فعل فاعل، أو مفعول به فاعل فعل، مع ملاحظة استخدام الفاعل في ترتيبه غير الأصلي، في حين في فئة التركيز المسند ضبط المتحدثون ترتيب الكلمات حسب مكانها الأصلي، فاعل فعل مفعول به، كما عمدوا أيضاً إلى عدم نطق الفاعل وتقديره بضمير مستتر. وثالثاً في بنية تركيز الجملة رتّب المشاركون العناصر حسب مكانها الأصلي، وأظهرت النتائج أيضاً أن ترتيب الكلمات في تركيز المفرد أكثر مرونة من تركيز المسند وتركيز الجملة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: البنية الإخباريّة، فئات التركيز، ترتيب الكلمات، العربيّة الجزائريّة؛ اللهجة الطارفيّة.

Information Structure: The Impact of Pragmatic Focus Categories on Word
Ordering in the El Tarf Dialect of Algerian Arabic

Endnotes

[1] El Taref is in the northeastern corner of Algeria, near the Tunisian border. El Taref residents use the colloquial Arabic known as '*Derija*' in their daily communication.

[2] All examples in this article are from the El Tarf dialect of ALA unless otherwise stated.

[3] Lambrecht (1994) used the term "focus structure" of a sentence to refer to the conventional association of a focus meaning with a sentence form.

[4] In this case, the subject of the sentence has an abstract NOM case which is not phonologically realized.

[5] The term pro-drop was coined by Chomsky (1981) in his masterpiece Lectures on Government and attachment. According to the Universal Grammar (UG) and in the principles and   Parameters (PP), The pro-drop concept is supported by cross-language evidence (see Alnajdat, 2017).

[6] The word '*akcidon*' is a French term that Algerians have adopted. Algerians are heavily influenced   by French, which can be attributed to a variety of factors, including the French colonization of Algeria for more than 130 years.

[7] The Principle of Subject–Object Neutralization (PSON): In an SF construction, the subject tends to be grammatically coded with some or all the prosodic and/or morphosyntactic features associated with the focal object in the corresponding PF construction   (Lambrecht, 2000).

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List of Abbreviations

ACC	Accusative Case
AF	Argument Focus
AlA	Algerian Arabic
CA	Classical Arabic
FOC	Focus
JA	Jordanian Arabic
IS	Information Structure
NOM	Nominative Case
MA	Moroccan Arabic
O	Object
PF	Predicate Focus
S	Subject
SF	Sentence Focus
TA	Tunisian Arabic
V	Verb
VO	Verb Object
2PS	Second Person Singular
3PS	Third Person Singular
3PSF	Third Person Singular Feminine