

The Functional View of Arabic VSO and SVO Word Orders: Implications for Modern Linguistics and Translation

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The purpose of the paper is to explore the pragmatic and semantic values of the SVO and VSO orders in light of the Arabic theory of Nazm, meaning, the order of words in certain consequences for a purpose. To this end, some uses of SVO versus VSO order types will be analyzed to highlight the functions of these orders in affirmative and non-affirmative structures and the implications of their translation into English. The study is based on the Arabic theory of Nazm at the core of which pre-posing plays a central role in communicating the message. The findings show that it is possible to overcome word-order rigidity by making appropriate linguistic alterations to convey the message of the source text. Also, the implication of the theory for modern linguistics will be highlighted.

Keywords: *emphasis; focus constituent; speech situation; relevance; linguistic context; Asymmetrical structures*

1 Introduction

The norm in Arabic is that the verb precedes the subject and object. In other words, the typical word order of these elements is verb-subject-object. But when the speaker chooses to place the subject or the object before the verb, such changes are not arbitrarily made but driven by the desire to express a certain message other than the propositional meaning contained in the typical order. Abdul Raof (2013) observes that the shift requires no extra words to be added to the sentence structure. The synthetic nature of Arabic “creates syntactic relationships through the use of case-endings, which are small inflectional signs attached to the word endings to indicate the words’ grammatical functions” (Raof 2013: 131). Nouns, for example, can end with either a *damma* (u) nominative case, *fatha* (a) accusative case, and *kasra* (i) genitive case. The importance of case-endings in creating word order variations is emphasized by Al-Lawindi (2001) who contends that the diacritics or small marking signs give flexibility to the Arabic word order because they allow for a certain constituent to be moved to an initial or earlier position for a particular purpose. In line with this, Khalil (2000) argues that Arabic uses order inversions and syntactic structures to mark different pragmatic meanings. Arabic, thus, has intentions behind shifting sentence constituents through the use of such diacritics.

English, by contrast, makes use of tonic syllables or cleft structures to give prominence to certain constituents that new syntactic elements are added to the sentence to give weight to a certain sentence constituent. Larson (1998: 442) argues that “cleft structures are used to mark focal prominence due to the relatively fixed order of English. Declarative sentences follow a fixed order of constituents (SVO) which gives natural prominence to the verb as occupying the middle position in the sentence.” In a similar vein, Baker (1992: 11) holds that within the SVO sentence frame, “the subject appoints the verb in the center and what follows cannot assume the role of the subject”.

To give prominence to the object, for example, in ‘The cat caught the fish’ that object is moved from its ordinary position into a separate clause with the use of some elements like ‘it’ or ‘that’: “It was the fish that the cat caught”. Thus, English may compensate for the flexible order of Arabic by adding new elements to the sentence structure rather than shifting the same sentence constituents to initial or earlier positions to match the communicative requirements of the speaker or writer of the source text. The use of cleft structures is a stylistic technique to give emphasis to a certain sentence constituent. To this effect, Abdul Raof (2013) holds that the order of constituents in English is relatively fixed (SVO) and the meaning of the sentence depends mostly on the order in which its constituents are arranged. The flexibility of Arabic order, by contrast, allows for word order variations to occur as unique ways of delivering messages from the speaker’s perspective. In other words, the flexible word order allows for a certain sentence constituent to be pre-posed or postponed for a particular purpose without the need for moving it into a separate clause for prominence.

The issue of pre-posing and postposing was not seriously tackled by ancient Arab grammarians like Sibawayh and Ibn Jinni “whose interest was purely in the case-ending that helps to display the inflectional marks, especially for the readers of the Qur’an, since the correct reading of the verses is the key to understanding their meaning” (Baalbaki 2007: 8). Their interest was not in the semantic and functional roles which the verbal and nominal sentences reveal because they were purely interested in the syntactic analysis of Arabic structures. This is not a claim that they had no interest in meaning at all. Baalbaki (2007:11), for instance, mentions that “Sibawayh, a great Arabic grammarian, displays a great interest in meaning, but his keenness on meaning is often eclipsed by his elaborate discussion on forms by reflecting on non-functional examples most of the time.” So, Sibawayh’s comments on the syntactic level of sentence structures were carried out with little reference to the meaning. He was probably driven by the idea of maintaining the correct forms of language rather than examining it according to its pragmatic motivations. To illustrate the point, consider the two-word order variations, VSO, SVO below:

- (1) *Wabbaxa al- Mudi:ru al-ʕa:mila*
 rebuked DEF- manager DEF- worker
 ‘The manager rebuked the worker’

This example is the typical, default order in Arabic, but if the speaker wishes to place more emphasis or draw special attention to the object, then the object is moved before the subject without affecting the characteristic case endings *u* and *a* which are inherently distinctive of the subject and the object, respectively, as indicated below:

- (2) *Wabbaxa al- ʕa:mila al - mudi:ru*
 rebuked DEF-worker DEF manager (NOM)
 ‘The worker, the manager rebuked him’

When Sibawayh refers to the functional role of a certain pre-posed element, “he views that role as nothing more than a kind of emphasis without any further elaborations on its semantic or pragmatic considerations” (al-Waer (1986: 127). He turned a blind eye to the relationship between structure

and its meaning. Sentence analysis is often run in terms of the explanation of the inflectional marks. According to Baalbaki (2007: 8),” Sibawayh’s interest in running this kind of analysis derives from the fact that he sees grammar as basically a matter of case-ending by placing very little prominence on pragmatic motivations”. in a similar vein, Al Zaidi (2014) mentions that ancient grammarians were interested in optional and obligatory pre-posing and postposing of the topic without indicating when and why the constituent is pre-posed according to its function.

The tendency toward limiting grammar to the inflectional marks dimension and the case-ending fell short of the prospects of scholars to formulate a comprehensive theory that can explain the process of sentence formation. The narrow scope of grammar “prompted Al-Jurjani, the greatest Arab author on rhetoric, to depart from that view of grammar, insisting that case-ending is just one facet of the field” (Baalbaki 2007: 10). Dissatisfied with the notion of grammar as a mere description of language structure to explain inflectional marks, Al-Jurjani advanced the Arabic theory of grammar on the assumption that language is a communicative system designed to convey messages. His treatment of sentence formation is not based on the notion that grammar is a sum of abstract rules that govern grammatical relations among words in a sentence but as a syntactic and semantic intention. He highlighted the impact of the social context and speech situation on the intention of the speaker, which was not adequately addressed by the ancient grammarians.

His new theory of grammar came to be known as the theory of *Nazm*, meaning the order of words for a purpose. According to Al-Jurjani (1989: 54), “*Nazm* is essentially an order of meanings that emerge when words relate to one another in construction.” Within this theory framework, the general rules of grammar can define and decide the possible relations among words but do not determine the actual relations that the speaker or writer can form among different words to match his intention. To this effect, Al-Jurjani (2007: 8) contends that the theory differentiates between “the rules of syntax which the speaker cannot change but follow to produce correct sentences and the practical application of these rules which require the speaker/writer’s knowledge to express himself by employing the prospects that the relations of grammar provide”. It follows from this explanation that what counts for pragmatic effect is the manner that allows the speaker or writer to communicate his intention rather than his mere abiding by the rules of grammar. In other words, the relations of grammar can provide speakers/writers with the tools they need to order the words according to their communicative needs.

The practical rules of grammar “can lead to variations in sentence structures based on the actual choices that speakers/writers can make to convey their messages” (Al-Jurjani, 2007: 54). In that vein, Abdul Raof (2006: 16) notes that “the speaker’s ability to make use of the practical rules of grammar demonstrates his effective use of language as a rhetorical device”. Commenting on this, Abbas (2004: 62) contends that” the practical use of grammar to deliver a particular message must be in conformity with the context in which the utterance is made”. The relationship between speech and the context of the situation is, therefore, inseparable. This, as we will see in the discussion section, forms the underlying principle of the theory of *Nazm*, which is most clearly manifested in the utilization of pre-posing and postposing for semantic and pragmatic considerations. Consequently, understanding why Arabic allows for the shifting of sentence constituents into sentence-initial or later positions underlies the possible types of contexts where they can be applied. For example, what the speaker can communicate through the SVO word order

would not be communicated by the VSO type of word order. Owens (2010) argues that the theory of *Nazm* came to improve an analysis of the pragma-linguistic structures in Arabic.

2 Theoretical Framework

The core of the Arabic theory of *Nazm* is based on *lafz* versus *ma'na* (form versus meaning) where *lafz* (form) follows from meaning and serves it. According to Al-sheik (2016), the theory of *Nazm* centers around the positioning of words in relation to each other according to the appropriate rules of grammar. He explains that words come in a certain linguistic context because they are intended also to express a certain message. Thus, *Nazm* which concerns the order of words also observes meanings of grammar in the meaning of speech. In other words, the grammatical relationships are but grammatical meanings. Likewise, Basyuni (2015: 16) contends that "the sequence in which words are ordered depends on the order in which meanings occur". Put differently, words get ordered in a sentence according to the order of meanings in the mind of the speaker who selects the suitable words and arranges them in relation to one another in such a way as to match his message. Looking at it like this, Al-Jurjani (2007: 82) treats "*Nazm* as a kind of rhetoric that refers back to the meaning of grammar". Rhetoric, therefore, is expressed through the fulfillment of the requirements imposed by the grammar of the language. This is clear in his book *Dala'il al-Ijaz* (the Indications of Inimitability) where he investigated the pragmatic possibilities of any deviation from the normal rules of grammar in the syntactic structures of the Glorious Qur'an.

In his famous book, *Dala'il al-Ijaz*, Al-Jurjani explores "the nature of meaning, syntactic patterns, and the interplay between the structure of thought and the structure of language by concentrating on the deep structure of linguistic utterance" (Günaydın 2012: 129). The point that Al-Jurjani is trying to make is that writers and speakers are not bound in their language production in a way that puts them on equal terms of expression. The "same meaning cannot be expressed in two different ways" (Günaydın 2012: 129). This fact indicates that normal structures do not make utterances valuable because they do not allow the speaker to choose the order he thinks best serves his intention. From a practical perspective, Al-Jurjani (1992) demonstrates that the theory of *Nazm* expresses the pragmatic and semantic aspects of the Quran and Arabic syntactic structures in general, which he considers a sort of rhetoric as it sheds light on the relationship between thinking and language.

The term that Al-Jurjani associates with the theory of *Nazm* is *mā'ānīl -nahw*, (meanings of syntax), "but the grammarians replaced this name later with *ilm al-ma'ānī*," the science of semantics" adding thereby nothing in their grammatical research to the theory" (Mustafa 2003: 19). By changing the name, he observes that they separated meaning from grammar in such a way that killed the spirit of the idea, and put it out of light. Despite this distinction, most grammarians still adhere to Al-Jurjani's doctrine of grammar where syntax is considered as an inseparable part of semantics. "This is specifically clear in their support of Al-Jurjani's doctrine when citing his examples or making some sort of explanatory points analogous to his doctrine.

One basic underlying principle of the theory is that the association is between the grammatical functions of individual words, not the words themselves. It follows that no connection is presupposed between words without an underlying meaning. To this effect. Al-Jurjani (1992:

62) argues that “any change on the syntactic level necessitates a change on the semantic level”. In light of this perspective, any pre-posing can be pragmatically interpreted if the hearer can infer the message that the utterance conveys”. Unlike the propositional meaning that reflects the direct meaning of the sentence, “the utterance is capable of pragmatic interpretation, and what determines the word-order type by the speaker is the speech situation and its relevance to the hearer” (Al-Jurjani 1992:63). In fact, the theory of *Nazm*, places emphasis on the communicative function of the utterance rather than on the grammatical accuracy, which is achieved through the stylistic force of the utterance. Accordingly, “grammar does not represent the set of criteria, which determines the correctness, and incorrectness of sentences but the body of rules that organizes the meaning by the structure of experience underlying the linguistic construction” (Günaydın 2012: 130)

The basic tenet of the theory stipulates that “the pragmatic function of a pre-posed element can be interpreted by a context that is actually or potentially assumed in any type of word order”. (Al-Jurjani 1992: 136). Although many scholars consider Arabic to be a VSO language (Raof 2006; Ryding 2005; Soltan 2007; Ouhalla 1993), to mention a few, the VSO order which is a presumably normal order is capable of pragmatic interpretations if “the addressee can infer some communicative meaning in light of the context of the situation, which the Arabic theory of meaning considers the pragmatic principle that motivates the arrangement of sentence elements in certain orders” (Al-Jurjani (1989:364). Accordingly, the pre-posed constituent represents the center of attention to which the speaker directs the attention of the hearer and invites him to infer some meaning other than the propositional one. So it is the utterance rather than the sentence that lies at the center of this theory.

3 Scope of the study

According to the theory of *Nazm*, all types of pre-posing are meaningful in the sense that some communicative intention is conveyed by the speaker that could not be signaled otherwise. However, it is not within the scope of this study to consider pre-posing or postposing in all Arabic word order permutations (SVO SOV VOS VSO OVS OSV). The study will be basically limited to the informative SVO versus VSO utterances to draw the reader’s attention to the contexts in which these types of sentences can be used. Other types of sentences such as performative and interrogative will not be explored within the SVO and VSO framework. The inclusion of other sentence types will not do just to the work due to the fact that the reader will get bored or distracted because there are too many details to focus on. Focus on the types of contexts in which VSO and SVO patterns are used will give a clear, focused picture of the semantic considerations and pragmatic strategies associated with Arabic linguistic thinking. Analysis of Arabic pragmatic thinking takes into consideration the speech situation and its relevance to the hearer as necessary factors in the conveyance of the speaker’s message, as we will see next. Finally, the study highlights how restrictions on the English word order do not coincide with the relatively free order in Arabic nor do they with the interpretive management of an utterance.

4 Pragmatic functions of Arabic word order

Despite the assumption that the normal basic order in Arabic is VSO where sentence constituents are presumably equally important and none is brought to focus by the speaker, Owens (1988: 9) states that “the Arabic VSO order is dealt with marginally “while deviations from this word order have attracted the attention of scholars under the assumption that the canonical word order VSO is intrinsically the default structure that emphasizes no constituent for a purpose”. Practically, the choice of word order depends on what the speaker intends to communicate. The speaker “can use particularly–chosen syntactic structures in specific contexts to accomplish specific purposes” (As-Sakka:ki (2000: 250). Thus, the inclusion of SVO and VSO types of word order will give the reader an insight into the contexts appropriate for their uses. According to As-Sakka:ki, the theory of *Nazm* differentiates between two types of meaning: “the primary meaning or the original meaning of words regardless of context and secondary that requires a context, in which case it denotes ‘meaning of meaning’ (2000: 250). So, the second meaning refers to the arrangement of words based on a specific context to derive the speaker’s intention.

Due to the flexibility of Arabic word order, information that is new may precede that which is old. Therefore, the focus constituent is not associated with the English informative structure in which the given information comes before the old information. In Arabic, a speaker may bring to focus the subject in violation of the typical word order (VSO) because he thinks it serves better his intention. Therefore, Arabic non-canonical order may violate foreign readers’ expectations regarding the given/new order of information or Theme -Rheme division. The use of the Theme-Rheme division in English “does not help the flow of information because the information that is supposed to be familiar or given usually comes before that which is supposed to be new” (Mayer 2009:98). From a translation perspective, the flexibility in the Arabic word order poses a challenge to translators not acquainted with the pragmatic considerations of the Arabic word order.

Although the focal word orders of the study are VSO and SVO, a reference to the other two orders VOS and OVS is deemed necessary just to give a general view of the pragmatic effects of the theory. Consider

- (3) a. *qatala al- Xa:riziyy -a* (ACCU) *Zayd-un* (NOM)
killed DEF-Xa:rijiyya Zayd
‘The outsider, Zaid killed him’
- b. *qatala Zaydun al-Xa:rijiyya*
killed Zayd the outsider
‘Zayd killed the outsider’

In light of the functional view of the Arabic theory of *Nazm*, the speech situation motivates the arrangement of grammatical relations in the mind of the speaker. *Zayd* is postponed in the source text (3a) because of the speaker’s assumption that in a given speech situation (where the *Xariziyy* is notoriously known for wreaking havoc throughout the community and causing destruction to people, the killer of the-*Xariziyy*, literally, the outsider, is of no concern to the community. Thus, one can see that it is postponed after the object as presupposed because it is not the focus

constituent to which the speaker directs the attention of the addressee. The constituent that has a greater communicative value and is more relevant to the hearer within the speech situation is the object constituent because it represents the source of evil that the community would like to bring to an end. This fact attests to Versteegh's (1997: 117) comment that "meaning is syntactic since it is constrained by syntactic rules of the language". In a word, pragmatic effects are a product of the syntactic rules of the language.

If the killer is known as a timid, scary person and happened to kill the *Xarijiyy*, the killer would become of interest to the community because of what Al-Jurjani (1998: 260) calls "peculiarity and exceptionality" That is, the subject (Zayd) becomes the constituent to which the attention is directed as the hearer would not believe that Zayd could kill the *Xa:rijiyy*. Thus, what brought Zayd to the focus of attention as new information in utterance (3b) is the background knowledge that Zayd lacks the strength of mind and spirit to kill. As such, the killer is the focus constituent that represents the peculiar, exceptional, or unexpected aspect of the event and is subsequently more relevant to the audience. Given that the interpretation of an utterance depends on the context of the actual or presupposed situation, one can argue that the subject is pre-posed before the object in (3b) because the speaker assumes that it is the most relevant element within the speech situation, while the object is the most relevant element that the speaker assumes in utterance (3a). The VOS order is the only shift from the basic order VSO as long as the verb is maintained sentence-initial.

The Arabic theory of *Nazm* is based on the assumption that "the speaker's communicative intention is expressed in the order of the words he has chosen (Abdul Raof 2006:11). It follows from this fact that any change in the word order necessarily entails a change in the meaning. Along the same lines, Basyuni (2015: 17) asserts that "words get structured according to the occurrence of meaning in the speaker's or writer's mind accounts for word order variations in Arabic". Unlike English where the tension between the requirements of the syntax and those of communicative function is greater due to the restricted word order, there is no such tension in Arabic because of its flexible word order. The speaker may opt for SVO instead of VSO to give the subject a prominent position and lay much emphasis on it. Therefore, the SVO order implies a stronger communicative intention than the VSO. Consider the two structures below:

- (4) a. *Zayd-un qatala al-Xa:rijiyya.*
 Zayd killed the outsider'
 'It was Zayd that killed the outsider'
 or
 'Zaid, he killed the *Xa:rijiyya*'
- b. *Al -Xa:rijiyya qatala Zayd-un*
 The outsider killed Zayd
 'The outsider, Zayd killed him'
 or
 'It was the outsider that Zayd killed'

According to El-Imam (2020:5), “the pre-posed element emphasizes what is mentioned and negates, at the same time, what is not mentioned”. In simple terms, he argues that the pre-posed constituent is intended to confirm the link between the action and the subject as well as to restrict the action to the pre-posed constituent. On the other hand, he observes that restriction implies negation that no one else has carried out the action other than the pre-posed constituent. Thus, utterance (4a) confirms the link between the action and the pre-posed subject and implies negation that no one else has carried out the action.

The emphasis, according to Versteegh (1994), is two-fold. First, it is signaled by the subject placed initially as the focus constituent. Second, emphasis derives from the fact that there is an underlying structure to account for the apparent structure. So, in (4a) the verb *qatala* (killed), has an implicit subject (*huwa*) which co-refers to its pre-posed subject. This is in line with the rules of Arabic which state that “every verb must have a pronoun that implicitly occurs after it and correlates with its pre-posed subject” (Ryding 2005: 60). So, the underlying structure of (4a) is *Zaydun qatala huwa al- Xarijiyya*, literally, *Zayd killed he the Xarijiyya*, where the subject is emphasized twice, once by being pre-posed, second by having another subject *huwa* referring to the pre-posed subject (Zayd). This kind of emphasis also implies restriction where the verb is restricted to its pre-posed subject. It is very interesting to observe that it is hard to differentiate between emphasis and restriction as if the emphasis is a byproduct of restriction. Accordingly, SVO in (4a) is addressed to someone who thought it was someone else who killed the outsider bearing thereby contrastive information. The emphatic function, by contrast, “intends to confirm/emphasize the action in connection with the subject, without intending to deny that the action has been carried out by someone other than the pre-posed subject” (El-Imam 2020: 5) Likewise, in (4b), the speaker is either anxious to eliminate any doubt concerning the object and denies that the person being killed is someone other than the pre-posed object, or that he wants to clear doubts about the identity of the slain without intending to correct false presuppositions previously mentioned. “The speaker’s intention from pre-posing, therefore, implies denial of previously false assumptions or refutation of any potential claims” (As-Sakkaki 2000: 125).

The above discussion shows that focusing is not necessarily associated with the information structure in terms of the given/new dichotomy. It also shows that the definite noun is capable of providing new information when brought into focus. In (4b), for example, it is presupposed that the hearer knows that the *Xa:rijiyy* is evil and this forms his old background knowledge, but what surprises the addressee as new information is the killing of this sinful person. The killer, Zayd, is less important and irrelevant to the situation since the killing itself is what interests the audience rather than the killer. Due to this intention, the speaker chose to place Zayd after the object to highlight the unexpected aspect of the event.

The pre-posting of the object carries the function of making specific reference to that object, which is a kind of specification to give it prominence. The fact that a pre-posed element is meant to magnify its importance for a purpose is also evident in Quranic syntactic structures. Consider the following verse in the opening chapter of the Quran (verse 4)

- (5) *Iyya:ka naʿbud- u* (we)
 you worship we’
 ‘It is you that we worship’

Grammatically speaking, the subject of the verb is the implicit plural pronoun (we) that is assumed after the verb. According to the Arabic theory of *Nazm*, “the subject must occur after the verb and agree with its corresponding verb in number and gender” Ryding. (2005: 60). This is a well-established fact in Arabic. The pragmatic intention of the pre-posed object pronoun is “to eliminate any doubt concerning the object specifically and denies that the action denoted by the verb is done to anyone other than the pre-posed object”. (Abdul Raof 2006: 164). Accordingly, the speaker (God) intends to restrict worship only to Him and disapprove claims that he has associates besides Him. In case the order is inverted into VSO, the statement no longer implies emphasis or denial of any doubts, simply because this word order implies that worship is not restricted to God, so others can be associated with Him in worship, which is not the intended meaning of the original verse (4)

Likewise, the pre-posing of the subject before the verb and the object in the Quran is predominant for pragmatic purposes. Consider the Quranic verse (24:38)

- (6) *Alla:hu yarzuqu man yasha: ?u biyayr hisa:b*
 God provides whomever He wills without reckoning
 ‘It is only God who provides sustenance to whomever He wills, without stint’

According to the Arabic theory of *Nazm*, the occurrence of the subject before the verb restricts the verb to the pre-posed subject, thereby negating that the action is done by anybody other than the pre-posed subject. It also emphasizes the link between the subject and the action. Thus, “the subject is pre-posed to confirm the link between the performer and the action and implies, at the same time, that nobody else can perform the action” (El Imam 2020: 5). The speaker’s attempt to eliminate doubts attached to the performer of the action than to the action itself occurs when “the speaker associates himself with the context of the situation to deny or refute claims on the part of the hearer that someone else is the performer of the action” (Al-Jurjani: 1989: 134). However, when the speaker disassociates himself from the situation, the choice of the SVO order does not always intend to deny any claim that the action is carried out by someone other than the pre-posed subject. Consider the two-word order variations below:

- (7) a. *Huwa yukrimu daiifa-hu (his)*
 He honors his guests
 ‘Indeed, he honors his guests’
- b. *Ana: katab - tu al-qasi:da*
 I wrote I the poem
 ‘It was I who wrote the poem’

Utterance (7a) intends to affirm the link between the subject referred to by the singular pronoun and the performance of the action, without intending to deny that nobody else can perform the verb of the action except the pre-posed subject. According to Owens (1988: 11), the use of “the habitual present does not imply a comparison that someone is more or less assertive in performing the action than the pre-posed subject, hence no contrasted information is implied”. Owens maintains that utterances with the habitual present are appropriate in situations where the speaker anticipates

doubts, suspicions, or denial from the hearer concerning the performance of the action by the pre-posed subject. Thus, (7a) does not intend to refute any claim that the action is carried out by someone other than the pre-posed subject, but only to confirm the person's habitual act of feeding/honoring guests.

The speaker's attempt to eliminate doubts concerning the performer of the action is also clear in the SVO order where the speaker associates himself with the past action, as in (7b) where the emphatic form by the speaker is associated with doubt or denial on the part of the hearer that someone else other than the speaker has carried out the action. The speaker associates himself with such a situation to deny or refute such claims, and to imply that he/she is anxious to ascribe the writing of the poem to himself. Unlike (7a), which intends only to affirm the habitual action of the performer, the SVO in (7b) intends to deny the verb of the action by anyone other than the speaker. It is so far clear that by affirming the link between the performer and the performance, the SVO order implies a contrastive pragmatic function as, for example, in (6) and (7b) or may signal emphasis without intending to deny that the action has been carried out by someone else as in (7a). It is worth mentioning, however, that, unlike the VSO type which is normally less emphatic and has no implicated information, the SVO is strongly affirmed because the predicate, including reference to the topic, partly repeats the information conveyed by the pre-posed constituent. Versteegh (1994) notes that affirmation/emphasis is not only considered a function of the pre-posed constituent but also of the predicate that involves another subject explicitly attached to the verb as indicated in (7b) or implicitly occurs after the verb like (6) as the rules of Arabic stipulate.

The pragmatic functions associated with the SVO type order no longer hold if the order is inverted into VSO which generally implies no restriction or emphasis since it brings no sentence constituent into focus. The shift of (6), (7a), and (7b) into the VSO order implies that the performance of the action is not restricted to the pre-posed subject, but that others can perform the action as well. In other words, the VSO order is informative and generally implies no pragmatic meanings.

5 SVO and VSO in circumstantial clauses

A circumstantial clause is a special kind of Arabic construction that may contain *waw* (*when*) as part of a circumstantial description. Such constructions with *waw* are not easy to translate into English since translation depends on the understanding of how the connotations vary depending on the structure of the circumstantial clause. The underlying principle of the Arabic theory of *Nazm* is based on the assumption that "the speaker anticipates doubts from the hearer and, in reaction to that anticipation, the speaker uses his words such that he aims to remove doubts/uncertainty on the part of the hearer" (Al-Jurāni 1989: 125). In this kind of circumstantial structure, the speaker arranges his words to express his beliefs about the realization of the event he is concerned with and to remove any possible doubts whatsoever concerning the event. Consider:

- (8) a. *zur-tu-hu wa huwa qad fa:raqa al-haya:t*
 Visited-I-he. and he already departed the life
 'I visited him when he had already died'

- b. *Zur-tu-hu wa gad fa:raqa al-haya:t.*
 visited-I-he when already departed the-life
 ‘I visited him when he had already died’

The presence of the nominal in (8a) creates a subtle difference in the speaker’s message. Al-Jurjani (1989) argues that circumstantial clauses containing a nominal after the circumstantial *waw* are more emphatic than those with a nominal missing. To him, (8a) is appropriate if the speaker believed he would visit the person before the person passed away. In other words, ‘seeing’ that person earlier was conceived by the speaker as a realizable event, while his passing away at the time it happened, was unexpected. If the speaker, however, expected the person to die at a certain time, then (8b) is more appropriate than (8a). According to Al-Jurjani (1989), utterances like (8a) are more emphatic than those of the type of (8b), simply because the speaker did not expect he might fail to reach his destination to see the person in question, whereas he is less sure regarding (8b). This implies that “the speaker in (8a) did not slow down on his way to visit the intended person, contrary to some possible doubts that he was not serious in his mission” (Al-Jurjani 1989: 123). As for (8b), the speaker did not have high expectations he would reach the person before his departure, contrary to possible doubts that he would see the person in time. The message is more emphatically conveyed by SVO than by VSO. Again, the pragmatic difference depends on whether the speaker chooses to use a specific- word order according to his state of mind and his expectation of possible realizable events.

Disambiguation and elimination of doubt can be conveyed by similar structures in which the speaker disassociates himself from the event by referring to someone else. Consider these two sentences:

- (9) a. *Rajaʕ-a (he) wa al- zʕala:m qad yatʕal ʔrd*
 returned he and the darkness already covered the earth
 ‘He returned when darkness had already covered the earth’
- b. *Rajaʕ-a (he) wa qad yatʕal zʕala:m al ʔrd*
 returned he and covered the darkness the earth
 ‘He returned when the darkness had already covered the earth’

The speaker’s utterance in (9a) is appropriate if he believed he would expect the person referred to by the pronoun (*huwa*) to return before it got dark. So the speaker had high expectations to see that person at an earlier time before sunset while returning back after sunset was unexpected. If the speaker, however, expected the person to arrive at night, then (9b) is more appropriate than (9a)

These examples show that SVO versus VSO with circumstantial clauses may render sentences pragmatically different depending on the structure of the circumstantial clause, which determines whether or not the realization of the event by the subject is highly expected. With the SVO type of circumstantial structure like (9a), the speaker’s message is more emphatically conveyed whereas it is less so with a similar VSO circumstantial structure like (9b). This, as has

been indicated, is due to a two-fold emphasis. The pragmatic function depends on whether the speaker chooses to use a specific word order according to his state of mind and his pragmatic intention. The pragmatic message displayed in the examples above indicates that “the given discourse is effective not as a result of its constituent lexical items, but in the way they are selected and precisely ordered in line with the speaker’s pragmatic intention” (Abdul Roaf 2013: 10). There is no wonder, therefore, that the juxtaposition of the constituent units of a given statement is context-sensitive and pragmatically motivated as the examples discussed above demonstrate. In a nutshell, pre-posting and postposing are linguistic phenomena that must be treated in pragmatic, syntactic, and semantic terms.

As far as the translations are concerned, it is obvious that they have failed to match the functional meaning of the situation in the context of the source text. Catford (1996) contends that a matching translation occurs only when the SL and TL characterized in a given situation have relevant functions, which is not the case here. Therefore, the translations given along the source texts are truly inaccurate since the speaker’s pragmatic intention is not equivalently translated. The translator’s unawareness of the pragmatic knowledge of such constructions is likely to lead to a loss of meaning in the translations, because of the syntactic differences between the ST and TT. To highlight the subtle difference in such constructions, the translator needs to add a few more words to the translations above such as (the event is highly expected to be realized) in (9a) and (less likely expected to be realized) in (9b).

6 SVO and VSO in non-affirmative structures

The non-affirmative particles *ma:* and *la:* are the most common non-affirmative particles in Arabic. The function of the particle depends on whether it occurs before the pre-posed subject or verb. According to the Arabic theory of *Nazm*, the meaning of the sentence depends on the position of the negating particle in the structure. AL-Samirrai (2006) observes that the occurrence of the negating *ma:* before the pre-posed subject denies that the action denoted by the verb is carried out by the subject and attributes it to someone else. In similar terms, Al-Jurjani (1989:125) argues that “when *ma:* immediately precedes the subject in SVO order, it intends to affirm that the action is carried out by someone other than the subject”. If the particle, however, precedes the verb in VSO order, then the speaker, according to al-Jurjani, denies that the action is carried out by the subject, but there is no intention to restrict the verb to the subject or attribute it to someone else. Consider (10a) and (10b) below:

- (10) a. *Ma: katab-(tu) al- darsa.*
 not wrote I the lesson
 ‘I did not write the lesson’
- b. *Ma: ana: katab-(tu) al-darsa*
 not I wrote the lesson
 ‘It was not I who wrote the lesson’

The meaning of such non-affirmative structures depends on word order and the position of the non-affirmative particle in relation to the subject and the verb, as explained earlier. The denial of the link between the subject and the action denoted by the verb in (10b) and the uncertainty that the action is carried out by someone else in (10a) are “actually meanings grammatically set regardless of the context of the situation or their relevance to the hearer” (Al-Jurjani 1989: 124-125). These meanings are grammatical because they derive from their linguistic contexts. Relevance nonetheless is treated in “non-affirmative structures in terms of grammatical correctness and semantic well-formedness” So, the non-affirmative constructions involving VSO and SVO have been tested by way of applying the same conjunct to both constructions to substantiate the grammaticality of the structure from the semantic point of view. Put differently, the two parts of the construction must be semantically congruent in order to be grammatically sound. Any violation of the principle of relevance in terms of semantic well-formedness will render sentences semantically ill. Consider the two sentences below:

- (11) a. *Ma: katab-tu al-darsa wala- kataba-hu ahadun- du:ni,*
not wrote-I the-lesson and not wrote it anyone else
‘I did not write the lesson, and neither did anyone else’
- b. *Ma: ana: katab-tu al-darsa walā kataba-hu ahadun du:ni.*
not I wrote I the lesson and not wrote it anyone else
‘It was not I who wrote the lesson, and neither did anybody else’

In light of Al-Jurjani’s notion that grammatical meaning is not something different from semantic meaning, one can see that (11a) is grammatically correct because the second part is semantically congruent with the first part. In this case, the possibility that someone else may have written the lesson, which (10a) implies, no longer holds in (11a) because the latter denies that the lesson is written by the speaker or anybody else. As for (11b), it is obvious that the second conjunct contradicts the first part of the statement and thus the two parts are deemed structurally ungrammatical and therefore semantically ill-formed because the two parts are asymmetrical. According to the theory of *Nazm*, linguistic relevance must apply symmetrically in the sense that the second conjunct must show a relevant element in congruence with that of the first part. In other words, “the semantic meaning depends on the grammatical correctness of the structures and is thus unassociated with extra-linguistic factors such as speech situation or relevance to the addressee”. (1989:123). Interpretation of such non-affirmative structures requires the interpreter to have adequate grammatical competence in Arabic to distinguish semantically between different structures and appropriately render them into English.

The functional reason for pre-posing a certain constituent in non-affirmative sentences is also evident in the Qur’an. To understand the link between negation and emphasis, consider the SVO word order in Chapter 3, verse (8) as opposed to the VSO order of the same verse:

- (12) a. *Wa-ma Alla:hu yurīdu z’ulman lil- ġa:lami:n.*
and not God wants wrong to the creatures
‘It is not God Who intends injustice to His creatures’

- b. *Wa-m ma: yuri:du Alla:hu z'ulman lil ʕa:lami:n*
 and not want God wrong to His creatures
 ‘And God means no injustice to His creatures’

According to the theory of *Nazm*, (12a) and (12b) are two structures that are syntactically and interpretively different. The non-affirmative particle *mā* is sensitive to the presence of focus. The negating particle in (12a) precedes the focused constituent (God) and thus has “the pragmatic influence of giving rise to the presupposition that there is no link between the subject and the action, but that the action denoted by the verb is linked to someone else”. (Ouhalla 1993: 42). In light of this theory, the occurrence of *ma:* immediately before the subject affirms the action and negates the subject whereas its occurrence before the verb in (12b) negates the entire proposition. In other words, in (12a), it is not God who wants to wrong His creatures; it is His creatures that wrong one another.

If the two structures (12a) and (12b) were to be translated into the English SVO typical order, the ST meaning differences in these structures would be distorted or improperly conveyed. The English SVO word order is appropriate for (12b), but not for (12a), simply because the pragmatic function of the Arabic SVO will be lost in the TT due to such a grammatical loss.

7 The implication of the Arabic theory of *nazm* for modern linguistics

The Arabic theory of *Nazm*/grammar (the arrangement of words) that Jurjani advanced to pragmatic levels of meanings has been adopted for several decades now. Contemporary grammarians strictly adhere to its tenets, which express similar thoughts in modern linguistics. For example, context is one of the most essential elements in the communication process and a direct determiner of understanding the message. Modern linguists such as Grice and Searle emphasize that language cannot be understood from its internal structure but must be understood from the psychological aspect of the speaker and the social environment that surrounds it. Such views raise questions about the interaction between grammar and pragmatics which attracted the attention of many scholars in modern linguistics as it did for Arab linguists. For example, Cuddon (1991: 349) notes that “pre-posing is a linguistic device that pushes the act into the foreground so that language draws attention to itself” Along the same lines, Carter (2004) notes that pre-posing is a technique used to attract the reader’s attention, not to what is being said, but to the way it is said. He seems to suggest that the way something is said conveys more than what is explicitly said.

The Arabic theory of *Nazm* seems to align with the Holistic Cognitive Grammar and Functional Grammar theories which treat grammar and pragmatics as dependent on each other. Proponents of this view such as Garcia Velasco and Portero Munoz (2002), among others, contend that pragmatic information is either involved in the constructions, i.e., grammar or it provides the necessary motivation for the existence of construction. This view echoes the underlying principle of the Arabic theory of *Nazm*, according to which, the words in the sentence get ordered according to the order of the meaning in the speaker’s mind. To explain, the pre-posing of the subject, for instance, conveys a pragmatic message that is different from the message communicated by the

pre-posing of the object. Such prepositions serve as cues for pragmatic interpretation. The context of the speech situation, factual or potential, as well as its relevance to the hearer, provide insights for an appropriate interpretation of the utterance. The normal order (VSO), nevertheless, may be interpreted pragmatically if the hearer can envisage an appropriate context. The Arabic theory of *Nazm* thus shows that the meaning in the speaker's mind and the grammatical meaning are one thing since assigning positions for meanings in the mind and assigning positions for words in speech are identical. On the other hand, "the context of the speech situation provides the necessary motivation for the existence of construction" (As-Sakkaki (2000:273). Looking at it like this, the Arabic theory shows that the operation of pragmatics is based on grammar and is thus dependent on it.

What feeds into that idea is the fact that the Arabic theory is based on the assumption that language is a communicative system designed to communicate messages at all levels. In a similar vein, Mey (1993) mentions that pragmatics concerns all levels of language and examines linguistic phenomena according to the motivation and effects of the linguistic choices speakers make. This also demonstrates that grammar and pragmatics are not two different entities since language and language use are not distinguished from each other. The speaker's intention is determined by the order of words in the sentence, and the order of words in a given structure is determined by the order of the meaning in the speaker's mind. The Arabic theory of *Nazm* equates grammar with language use, stipulating that any change on the semantic level necessitates a change on the syntactic level. It is, therefore, unavailing to claim that "language is a mere abstract ability, dissociable from the uses and functions of language", as Levinson (1988:35) observes.

8 Implications of the study for translation

An important issue in rendering the Arabic ST function into English is the fact that Arabic has a more flexible order while English enjoys a relatively fixed order. The SVO order seems the most logical arrangement for dispatching the information in English. This order is unmarked and therefore brings no particular constituent into focus. Thus the use of the unmarked order to render the Arabic marked order will not achieve the pragmatic function of the utterance which is interpreted in terms of an actual or potential context of the situation as outlined earlier. In other words, the surface structure of the utterance must be interpreted in terms of the deep structure which represents the speaker's state of mind and feelings.

Considering this fact, the translator may have to use linguistic devices to compensate for the relatively fixed order of the TL and be able to convey the speaker's intention effectively. To reproduce the emphasis placed on the pre-posed subject in the SL, the translator may have to insert a pronoun that co-refers to its pre-posed subject, see, for instance, (4a). This insertion, according to El-Imam (2020:5) is intended to 'affirm the link between the action and the subject and remove any doubts concerning the performer of the action'. In cases where the speaker intends to deny that the action has been carried out by anyone other than the subject, the translator may need to approximate that pragmatic intention by using a cleft structure, see (6) and (7b), for example. This linguistic mechanism is most applicable in situations where the speaker associates himself with the context of the situation. In other words, when the speaker refers to himself as the pre-posed

subject, the speaker does not only intend to affirm the link between himself and the action but also denies the involvement of anybody else in carrying out the action.

As far as pre-posed objects are concerned, “the translator may need to use cleft structures to move the object from its normal position into a different place to give it more emphasis” (Larson 1998:441). As an alternative, the translator may resort to OSV as a marked order to render Arabic pre-posed objects into English appropriately. While cleft structures and co-referential pronouns can compensate for the relatively fixed order of English, there are some SL instances that require the translator to use lexical additions or even explanations within brackets and footnotes to convey the pragmatic message of the speaker. The circumstantial structures introduced in (8a, 8b, 9a, 9b) are good evidence that the English translations of the two structures make no difference in meaning between the Arabic SVO and VSO patterns occurring after the circumstantial *waw* in the source text. In other words, the two English translations do not draw the reader’s attention to the fact that doubt about the realization of the event is more emphatically conveyed in (8a) and (9a) and less emphatically conveyed in (8b) and (9b). The translator’s job, therefore, is to render the pragmatic message that (the speaker thinks of the event he is referring to in SVO as a realizable event, while less realizable in VSO). This subtle difference is not reflected in the English translations provided because of the limited range of English syntactic structures. Due to the tension between the requirements of the syntax and those of the communicative function in English, the translator would have to apply lexical addition to the body of the translation or in brackets to manage the pragmatic purpose. This case of translation is an indication that transferring grammatical properties of two languages belonging to different origins is tricky and requires therefore profound knowledge of the socio-pragmatic perspective that underpins the SL linguistic theory.

Dealing with non-affirmative structures, however, is straightforward since the translation of this type requires no actual or potential context of the situation. The meaning depends purely on the linguistic context. The translator is required to grasp the SL grammatical rules to account for the semantic considerations of having the non-affirmative particle immediately before the verb or the subject. When this particle occurs before the focused subject, it usually requires a cleft structure to mark the structure as contrastive in translation, as in (10b) and (12a), to deny that someone other than the subject has carried out the action.

The study is useful for understanding Arabic utterances and sentences from pragmatic and semantic perspectives. Adequate training in Arabic sentence analysis would be of special significance to translation trainees as it gives an insight into how to resolve any potential challenges in translating SL discourse into English through the application of available linguistic devices. Such training is also a way of having trainees reflect on their understanding of the fundamental linguistic principles that play a central role in delivering meaning in terms of their importance from the speaker’s perspective. Training courses on this issue also provide an opportunity for the trainees to reconsider the rationale behind the violation of textual expectations in English. For example, they might be tempted to think beyond the aesthetic purposes of the foregrounding, which Carter (2004) highlights as a linguistic device for drawing the reader’s attention to the way the sentence is being said, not to what is being said.

9 Conclusion

The paper outlined the functional view of Arabic grammar/meaning primarily in VSO and SVO types of word order to demonstrate that VSO, which is presumably the default order, has the potential of being pragmatically interpreted just like SVO in the context of a speech situation, real or presupposed, as indicated earlier in the situations of their uses. The paper also shows that pragmatics and grammar are not independent of each other, simply because pragmatics operates on the basis of grammar: the grammatical structure represents the order of meanings in the speaker's mind and the order of words represents the order of the meanings in the speaker's mind. The Arabic theory of grammar nevertheless distinguishes between utterance meaning, which requires a speech situation and relevance to the hearer to be pragmatically interpreted, and sentence meaning (non-affirmative structures) which requires only semantic interpretation. In the former, the addressee receives the pre-posed element with doubt and denial as something to consider for an appropriate interpretation of the message. In the latter, sentence meaning is conceived of as informative in nature.

The linguistic argumentation according to the Arabic theory of *Nazm*, as shown above, treats the concept of focus and presupposition in a way that does not accord with the modern linguistics approach. Focus, in this theory, as Al-Jurjani observes is not necessarily related to the new information in the utterance. It just intends to affirm elements of information to determine the word order. While presupposed information represents the old or given information, what is asserted in the utterance is not necessarily new. Neither focus nor assertion necessarily relates to the new information. Thus, the given/new division is not of special significance to the Arabic theory of meaning due to the case marking system that allows the Arabic word order to be flexible in line with the communicative requirements of the situation.

Finally, the paper discussed the implications of the study for translation with the aim of presenting the possible challenges that translators may encounter in translating Arabic VSO and SVO structures into English.

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