International Journal of Linguistics and Translation Studies
Volume 7, Issue 3, 2026
Homepage: http://ijlts.org/index.php/ijlts/index
DOI: https://doi.org/10.36892/ijlts.v7i3.768

Word Order Variation and Focus Marking in Jordanian Arabic: A Syntax–Pragmatics Interface Study

Mohammad Habes Eid Al Khaza'lah*
Research Scholar in Linguistics, Department of Speech-Language Sciences, All India Institute of Speech and Hearing, University of Mysore, Mysuru-570006, Karnataka, India
Saddam H. M. Issa
Assistant Professor of Applied Linguistics, College of Education, Sciences and Arts, Hajjah University, Yemen
Dr Thirunavukkarasu Jayakumar**
Professor in Speech Sciences, Department of Speech-Language Sciences, All India Institute of Speech and Hearing, University of Mysore, Mysuru-570006, Karnataka, India

**Corresponding author. Email:* jayakumar@aiishmysore.in

How to cite:
Al Khaza'lah, M. H. E., Issa, S. H. M., & Jayakumar, T. (2026). Word Order Variation and Focus Marking in Jordanian Arabic: A Syntax–Pragmatics Interface Study. *International Journal of Linguistics and Translation Studies, 7(3).*143-155.https://doi.org/10.36892/ijlts.v7i3.768

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received: 20/06/2026
Accepted: 25/07/2026

Keywords:
Jordanian Arabic; word order; focus; topic; syntax-pragmatics interface; information structure; Arabic dialects

Abstract

This article examines the relationship between word order variation and focus marking in Jordanian Arabic (JA) from the perspective of the syntax-pragmatics interface. Drawing on a corpus of naturalistic conversations, semi-structured interviews, and written dialectal texts, the study investigates how JA speakers exploit subject-initial, verb-initial, fronted, dislocated, interrogative, and elliptical constructions to organize information and foreground salient discourse material. The analysis shows that JA word order is flexible but patterned: SVO clauses most frequently support topic-comment organization, verb-initial clauses foreground events or changes of state, left dislocation and topicalization activate or re-activate referents, and wh-fronting, contrastive particles, negation, repetition, and evaluative predicates mark several types of focus. Quantitative distributional evidence from 4,090 coded clauses supports the qualitative finding that word order choices are not merely grammatical alternatives but discourse-sensitive strategies. This study argues that focus marking in JA is multi-cued: it emerges through the interaction of constituent order, discourse particles, recoverable subjects, clitic resumption, and contextual contrast. These findings contribute to Arabic dialectology, information-structure theory, and applied work in translation, language teaching, and Arabic natural language processing. The theoretical framing is grounded in information-structure theory and cartographic approaches to the left periphery (Lambrecht, 1994; Rizzi, 1997), while the interpretation of JA word order follows previous work on Arabic dialectal syntax and information structure (Benmamoun, 2000; Jarrah, 2019).

1. Introduction

Word order is one of the most visible points at which grammar and discourse meet. In some languages, constituent order is relatively fixed and discourse meanings such as emphasis, contrast, or information focus are often carried by prosody, particles, or morphological devices. In Arabic, and particularly in spoken dialects, word order is more flexible and therefore becomes a central resource for organizing information. Jordanian Arabic (JA), as a Levantine Arabic variety, provides a useful case for examining how speakers use syntactic choices to manage what is already known, what is new, what is contrasted, and what is being evaluated in real interaction. This view is consistent with functional and pragmatic accounts of language in which grammar participates in organizing discourse meaning (Halliday, 1978; Levinson, 1983), and with Arabic syntactic studies that treat word order as a site of interaction between structure and discourse (Benmamoun, 2000; Aoun et al., 2010).

The present article is derived from a broader doctoral investigation of word order, focus, and topic in Jordanian Arabic. While the larger thesis examines both topic management and focus marking, the present paper concentrates specifically on word order variation as a focus-marking mechanism. Its central claim is that JA speakers do not shift word order randomly. Instead, they exploit different structural patterns to achieve discourse functions: maintaining a topic, foregrounding an event, correcting a presupposition, contrasting alternatives, or placing evaluative weight on a particular constituent. The distinction between accessible topics and focused information follows discourse-functional approaches to topic continuity and information packaging (Givón, 1983; Lambrecht, 1994).

The study is motivated by a gap in the literature. Much work on Arabic syntax has focused on Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) or on broad claims about Arabic word order. Spoken Jordanian Arabic, however, has its own discourse ecology. It operates in informal, socially embedded interaction where speakers rely on particles, ellipsis, clitic resumption, repetition, and contextual recoverability. A description based only on formal Arabic or constructed examples cannot fully explain how JA speakers actually mark focus in conversation. This gap is especially important because much Arabic syntactic work has focused on MSA or broader Arabic patterns, whereas Jordanian Arabic shows dialect-specific syntactic and pragmatic behavior (Fassi Fehri, 1993; Al-Momani, 2011; Al-Shawashreh, 2016; Jarrah, 2019).

Accordingly, this paper addresses the following questions: (1) What major word order patterns are used in JA to mark focus? (2) How do SVO, VSO, left dislocation, wh-fronting, and marked fronting differ in their focus functions? (3) What pragmatic conditions motivate focus-related word order shifts in natural JA discourse?

2. Theoretical Background

Information structure concerns the organization of linguistic material according to discourse status. A topic is the entity or proposition about which a clause says something; it is typically accessible, recoverable, or already present in the discourse. Focus is the component that introduces new, contrastive, corrective, emphatic, or otherwise discourse-salient information. In actual conversation, topic and focus are not always marked by a single grammatical feature. They are inferred from syntax, prosody, particles, discourse context, and the speaker's interactional goals. The definitions adopted here follow information-structure

theory, where topic and focus are interpreted through the relation between form, accessibility, and discourse function (Givón, 1983; Halliday, 1978; Lambrecht, 1994).

The syntax-pragmatics interface is especially relevant to Arabic dialects because constituent order is not simply a syntactic template. Arabic has historically been described in relation to VSO and SVO alternations, but spoken dialects display a wider range of configurations, including subject-initial clauses, verb-initial clauses, object fronting, left dislocation, right dislocation, null subjects, and verbless predications. These patterns often correspond to information-structural functions rather than to neutral grammatical variation. This position is supported by studies of Arabic word order and by cartographic accounts that place topic and focus in discourse-sensitive syntactic positions (Fassi Fehri, 1993; Benmamoun, 2000; Aoun et al., 2010; Rizzi, 1997).

In JA, SVO clauses commonly serve topic-comment organization. The subject appears clause-initially as the discourse anchor, while the predicate carries new or evaluative information. Verb-initial clauses, by contrast, often foreground events, procedures, or changes of state. Left-dislocated and topicalized constituents make referents prominent, especially when they are resumed by clitics. Wh-fronting marks the missing information as the focus of the question, while contrastive particles, negation, and repetition help mark corrective or contrastive focus. Previous research on Jordanian Arabic has similarly shown that left-peripheral and focus-related constructions cannot be explained by syntax alone (Jarrah, 2019; Jarrah & Abusalim, 2021).

The analysis therefore adopts a functional view of syntax: the same clause may be syntactically well formed in more than one order, but each order makes a different discourse contribution. This position is consistent with information-structure approaches that treat topic and focus as categories emerging from the interaction between grammar and communicative intent. Such a functional treatment of syntax is also compatible with systemic-functional and discourse-pragmatic approaches to language structure (Halliday, 1978; Levinson, 1983; Lambrecht, 1994).

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study uses a qualitative descriptive design supported by quantitative frequency counts. The qualitative component identifies the discourse functions associated with different word order patterns, while the quantitative component provides distributional evidence for the relative frequency of those patterns. This mixed orientation is suitable for a syntax-pragmatics study because focus marking cannot be understood through form alone; each structure must be interpreted in relation to its discourse environment. The design follows qualitative applied-linguistic research principles in which discourse interpretation can be supported by descriptive frequency counts (Creswell, 2014; Dörnyei, 2007).

The clause was selected as the main unit of analysis. Each clause was coded according to its basic word order or construction type, its topic and focus function, and its relevant discourse-pragmatic features. The analysis paid special attention to whether a given word order pattern was used to introduce information, contrast alternatives, correct a prior assumption, foreground an event, express evaluation, or maintain continuity with a preceding topic. Clause-

level coding is appropriate because the clause is a central domain where syntactic order and information status interact (Lambrecht, 1994; Rizzi, 1997).

3.2 Participants and Data Sources

The corpus was based on data from 25 native speakers of Jordanian Arabic selected to represent variation in gender, age, education, and regional background. Participants included young adults, middle-aged speakers, and older adults, with educational backgrounds ranging from secondary schooling to postgraduate training. Both urban and rural backgrounds were represented to capture possible sociolinguistic variation in spoken JA. This sampling strategy follows qualitative research practice, where the aim is analytical depth and variation rather than statistical representativeness (Creswell, 2014; Dörnyei, 2007).

Data were collected from three complementary sources: naturalistic conversations, semi-structured interviews, and written dialectal texts. Naturalistic conversations were recorded in informal everyday settings such as homes, cafés, and social gatherings. Semi-structured interviews were guided by open prompts designed to elicit narratives, opinions, contrastive statements, hypothetical constructions, and extended explanations. Written dialectal texts included informal Jordanian Arabic materials such as social-media discourse and dialogue-like written data. Combining spontaneous conversations, interviews, and written dialectal material strengthens ecological validity and allows discourse-sensitive constructions to be observed across modalities (Creswell, 2014; Dörnyei, 2007).

Table 1. Corpus distribution by modality

Modality	Number of clauses	Percentage
Naturalistic conversations	2,140	52.3%
Semi-structured interviews	1,320	32.2%
Written dialectal texts	630	15.5%
Total	4,090	100%

3.3 Coding Procedure

All spoken data were transcribed in Arabic script and accompanied, where needed, by transliteration, gloss, English translation, and linguistic annotation. The coding scheme distinguished SVO, VSO, OVS/OSV, SOV, left dislocation, right dislocation, wh-fronting, null-subject clauses, verbless clauses, and elliptical structures. Topic categories included given topic, topic shift, contrastive topic, left-dislocated topic, and right-dislocated topic. Focus categories included informational focus, contrastive focus, emphatic focus, corrective focus, and exhaustive focus. The categories were informed by prior analyses of Arabic syntax, information structure, and the left periphery (Benmamoun, 2000; Lambrecht, 1994; Rizzi, 1997; Jarrah, 2019).

Reliability was enhanced by re-coding approximately 20% of the corpus after a two-week interval. The purpose of the second coding was to check consistency in identifying word order types, topic and focus constructions, and pragmatic functions. Frequency counts were then calculated for each construction type and examined across the three modalities. The quantitative analysis is descriptive rather than inferential; its purpose is to reveal tendencies within the corpus rather than to generalize statistically to the entire JA-speaking population.

Recoding and frequency comparison were used as reliability checks within a qualitative descriptive design (Creswell, 2014; Dörnyei, 2007).

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Overall Distribution of Word Order Patterns

The corpus shows that word order variation in JA is systematic and functionally motivated. SVO clauses represent the most frequent pattern, but their frequency should not be interpreted as a simple replacement of VSO. Rather, SVO often functions as a topic-comment strategy. VSO and other verb-initial constructions remain important for event foregrounding, while fronted and dislocated structures serve focus and topic-related discourse functions. This distribution supports previous claims that Arabic dialectal word order must be interpreted through both grammatical structure and discourse function (Benmamoun, 2000; Al-Qahtani, 2016; Jarrah, 2019).

Table 2. Frequency distribution of word order and construction types

Word order / construction type	Frequency	Percentage
SVO / subject-initial topic-comment clauses	1,780	43.5%
VSO / verb-initial clauses	710	17.4%
Verbless topic-comment clauses	520	12.7%
Left dislocation / topicalization	350	8.6%
Wh-fronting / interrogative focus	310	7.6%
Null-subject clauses	260	6.4%
Object fronting / marked OVS or OSV structures	95	2.3%
Right dislocation / afterthought structures	65	1.6%
Total	4,090	100%

Table 3. Distribution of patterns across data sources

Pattern	Naturalistic conversations	Semi-structured interviews	Written dialectal texts	Total
SVO / topic-comment	830	590	360	1,780
VSO / verb-initial	360	245	105	710

Verbless clauses	270	175	75	520
Left dislocation / topicalization	220	100	30	350
Wh-fronting / interrogative focus	180	105	25	310
Null-subject clauses	160	70	30	260
Object fronting / marked OVS or OSV	65	25	5	95
Right dislocation / afterthought	55	10	0	65
Total	2,140	1,320	630	4,090

4.2 SVO and Informational or Evaluative Focus

SVO is the dominant pattern in the corpus. In many cases, the subject introduces or maintains an accessible referent, while the predicate provides new, descriptive, or evaluative information. This makes SVO central to topic-comment organization. However, SVO can also support focus when the predicate contains the informationally salient material or when the whole predication expresses an evaluative stance. This interpretation corresponds to discourse-functional accounts of topic continuity and focus placement (Givón, 1983; Lambrecht, 1994).

The following example from an educational-administrative context illustrates this function. The named subject provides the discourse anchor, while the predicate carries the new and institutionally relevant information.

Example 1. رامي صار مغير شعبتين

Transliteration: Rami ṣaar mġayyar šuʕbatein

Translation: "Rami has changed two classes."

Analytical relevance: SVO / FOC-INF / TOP-G. The subject Rami is identifiable in the discourse, while the predicate introduces the focused institutional change.

The example demonstrates that subject-initial order is not merely a neutral syntactic choice. It helps the speaker keep the referent active while placing informational pressure on the predicate. In other cases, SVO predicates carry overt evaluation, as when a speaker describes a person or situation negatively. Thus, SVO supports both informational focus and evaluative focus depending on the lexical and interactional context. Thus, subject-initial order is best treated as a discourse-organizing option rather than a purely neutral syntactic default (Levinson, 1983; Lambrecht, 1994).

4.3 Verb-Initial Structures and Event Focus

Verb-initial clauses constitute the second major pattern in the corpus. Their main discourse function is event foregrounding. Instead of beginning with an actor or topic, the speaker starts with a verbal predicate that presents an occurrence, action, change of state, or

institutional process as salient. This pattern is particularly common in narratives, complaints, and descriptions of unfolding events. The productivity of verb-initial clauses in JA is consistent with wider descriptions of Arabic VSO/SVO alternation (Fassi Fehri, 1993; Aoun et al., 2010).

Verb-initial clauses therefore do not simply reflect an older or more formal Arabic order. In spoken JA, they remain productive because they allow the event itself to occupy the primary attention position. This is especially clear in contexts where the speaker is less concerned with who performed the action than with the fact that the action or change occurred. In information-structural terms, the initial verb helps make the event itself the most salient part of the utterance (Lambrecht, 1994; Jarrah, 2019).

Example 2. صار كل شعبة مغيرينها ثلاث مرات

Transliteration: ṣaar kul šuʕbah mġayyriinhaa ṯalaṯ marrāt

Translation: "Each class has been changed three times."

Analytical relevance: VSO / FOC-CON / COM. The verb-initial construction foregrounds repeated change and supports complaint through quantitative emphasis.

In this example, focus falls on the repeated process of change. The clause begins with ṣaar, placing the event frame before the affected nominal expression. The construction contributes to the complaint sequence by presenting the institutional problem as an event pattern rather than as an isolated action by a named individual.

4.4 Wh-Fronting and Interrogative Focus

Wh-fronting is one of the clearest focus-marking strategies in JA. The wh-element appears in a structurally prominent position and identifies the missing or contested information. In natural conversation, such questions are often not purely information-seeking. They may also express challenge, evaluation, surprise, or contrastive stance. Thus, interrogative focus is frequently interactional rather than merely semantic. The interpretation of wh-fronting as focus-sensitive follows both pragmatic accounts of interrogatives and Arabic left-peripheral analyses (Levinson, 1983; Rizzi, 1997; Jarrah & Abusalim, 2021).

The following example shows how a wh-question marks a focused gap while simultaneously functioning as a pragmatic challenge.

Example 3. شو بده رامي؟

Transliteration: šū biddoh Rami

Translation: "What does Rami want?"

Analytical relevance: Question structure / FOC-CON. The fronted wh-element marks the requested information as focus, while the utterance carries a contrastive and evaluative stance.

The question does not simply ask for unknown information; it questions the reasonableness of Rami's behavior. This illustrates the need to analyze focus within the interactional sequence. The wh-word provides the syntactic focus position, but the pragmatic force arises from the preceding complaint context and shared institutional knowledge. This confirms that the meaning of focus depends on the interaction between syntactic position and conversational inference (Levinson, 1983; Lambrecht, 1994).

4.5 Left Dislocation, Topicalization, and Focused Predication

Left dislocation and topicalization are important mechanisms in JA because they allow speakers to place a referent at the left edge of the clause and then comment on it. In many cases, the fronted constituent is resumed by a clitic, making the discourse referent grammatically visible. Although left dislocation is primarily topic-related, it also interacts with focus because the comment following the dislocated topic often carries contrastive, corrective, or evaluative focus. This analysis follows cartographic accounts in which the left periphery contains discourse-related positions for topicalized and focalized constituents (Rizzi, 1997, 2004; Cinque & Rizzi, 2010).

This structure is especially useful when speakers re-activate a referent, shift attention to a new discourse object, or signal that the upcoming predication should be interpreted in relation to a highlighted constituent. The fronted phrase establishes the frame; the following predicate carries the focused contribution. Comparable uses of fronting and resumptive strategies have been discussed in Arabic dialect syntax and in Jordanian Arabic specifically (Benmamoun, 2000; Jarrah & Abusalim, 2021).

Example 4. هاي الشغلة لازم تنساها

Transliteration: hāy iš-šaġle lāzim tinsā-hā

Translation: "This matter, you must forget it."

Analytical relevance: Left-dislocated topic with resumptive pronoun. The fronted phrase activates the referent, while the following modal predicate carries directive focus.

The clitic -hā in tinsā-hā resumes the fronted referent, creating a strong link between the left-peripheral topic and the focused directive. This pattern supports the view that the left edge of the JA clause is a discourse-sensitive domain where topic activation and focus interpretation interact. The pattern supports the view that the left edge of the JA clause is a discourse-sensitive domain where topic activation and focus interpretation interact (Rizzi, 1997; Jarrah & Abusalim, 2021).

4.6 Contrastive and Corrective Focus

Contrastive focus occurs when one element is selected against a set of alternatives. Corrective focus occurs when the speaker rejects, adjusts, or repairs a prior assumption. In JA, both types are marked through a combination of constituent order, particles, negation, repetition, and interactional context. Word order is important, but it is rarely the only cue. These focus types correspond to established distinctions in information-structure theory and in Arabic-specific analyses of focus-sensitive constructions (Lambrecht, 1994; Benmamoun, 2000; Jarrah, 2019).

Particles such as bas 'only/but', lā 'no', and hassa 'now' often help identify the focused element. Negation can create a contrastive field by excluding one proposition and highlighting another. Repetition and repair may also intensify focus, especially in spontaneous conversation. The role of particles and contextual cues shows that focus in JA is multi-cued rather than purely positional (Levinson, 1983; Lambrecht, 1994; Al-Qahtani, 2016).

Example 5. هسا بس يدخل أرقام ما في كلمات

Transliteration: hassa bas yidxul arqām mā fī kalimāt

Translation: "Now he only enters numbers; there are no words."

Analytical relevance: Contrastive focus. The particle bas restricts the focused alternative to numbers and contrasts it with the excluded category words.

Example 6. لا على العربي الإسلامي كويس صح

Transliteration: lā ʕala il-ʕarabī il-islāmī kwēyis ṣaḥ

Translation: "No, the Arab Islamic [Bank] is good, right?"

Analytical relevance: Corrective focus. The marker lā rejects or corrects a previous assumption and shifts focus to the corrected referent.

These examples show that focus in JA is multi-cued. The syntax creates a domain for interpretation, but particles and discourse context determine whether the focus is informational, contrastive, emphatic, or corrective. This multi-cue system is one reason why JA word order cannot be analyzed through constituent sequence alone. This conclusion is consistent with interactional and pragmatic approaches to meaning, where discourse context contributes directly to interpretation (Halliday, 1978; Levinson, 1983; Lambrecht, 1994).

4.7 Verbless Clauses and Evaluative Focus

Verbless clauses are frequent in evaluative contexts. They often consist of a topic followed by an adjectival, nominal, or evaluative predicate. Because these clauses are compact, they are useful for expressing stance directly and efficiently. The topic is usually a situation, person, or abstract entity, while the predicate carries evaluative focus. Such constructions are expected in Arabic, where non-verbal predication is grammatically productive and pragmatically important (Fassi Fehri, 1993; Aoun et al., 2010).

In spoken JA, such constructions appear in complaints, judgments, social commentary, and emotional assessments. Their frequency in the corpus indicates that focus marking is not limited to verbal clauses. Non-verbal predication also participates in information structure by presenting an accessible topic and attaching a focused evaluation to it. This supports the view that focus should be analyzed as a discourse contribution rather than as a single syntactic form (Halliday, 1978; Lambrecht, 1994).

Example 7. الوضع بده ناس تشتغل صح

Transliteration: il-waḍʕ biddoh nās tištaġel ṣaḥ

Translation: "The situation requires people who work properly."

Analytical relevance: SVO/general evaluation. The topic il-waḍʕ anchors the clause, while the predicate expresses a focused evaluative requirement.

Although this example contains a verbal element inside the predicate, the overall structure behaves like an evaluative topic-comment clause. The discourse function is not primarily to report an event but to evaluate a state of affairs and prescribe what is needed.

4.8 Null Subjects and Discourse Recoverability

Null-subject clauses reveal another important aspect of the focus system. JA allows subjects to be omitted when their reference is recoverable from the discourse. When the topic is already active, speakers do not need to repeat it. This omission allows the predicate or event to receive greater attention. Null subjects therefore support discourse economy and may indirectly contribute to focus by reducing topical material. The relationship between

recoverability, topic continuity, and reduced expression has long been emphasized in discourse-functional approaches (Givón, 1983; Lambrecht, 1994).

The significance of null subjects lies in their interaction with topic continuity. A clause may appear verb-initial at the surface, but the omitted subject is pragmatically recoverable. In such cases, the visible predicate carries the focus, while the subject remains part of the discourse background. This distinction is crucial for Arabic dialects because surface order may underrepresent the discourse status of omitted constituents (Benmamoun, 2000; Jarrah, 2019).

Example 8. ما سجل هسا

Transliteration: mā sajjal hassa

Translation: "He has not registered now."

Analytical relevance: Null subject / discourse recoverability. The subject is omitted because it is contextually known, allowing the negated predicate to carry the focus.

This pattern confirms that focus marking must be analyzed relative to what is overt and what is recoverable. An omitted topic may still guide interpretation even though it is not syntactically pronounced. The finding supports discourse-based accounts of topic continuity and information packaging (Givón, 1983; Lambrecht, 1994).

5. General Discussion

The findings support the claim that JA operates as a discourse-sensitive word order system. The high frequency of SVO confirms that subject-initial organization is central in contemporary spoken JA, but SVO does not simply express neutral grammatical order. It often encodes topic continuity, while the predicate supplies informational or evaluative focus. VSO and verb-initial clauses remain important because they foreground events and changes of state. Left dislocation and topicalization highlight referents and prepare them for focused predication. Wh-fronting and contrastive/corrective particles provide more explicit focus-marking strategies. Overall, these findings extend earlier analyses of Arabic word order and Jordanian Arabic information structure (Benmamoun, 2000; Al-Momani, 2011; Al-Shawashreh, 2016; Jarrah, 2019).

A major conclusion of the analysis is that focus in JA is not expressed by one grammatical mechanism. It is produced by the interaction of word order, discourse particles, clitics, negation, repetition, null subjects, and contextual inference. For this reason, a purely syntactic account would be incomplete. The same construction may perform different functions depending on whether the referent is already known, whether the speaker is correcting someone, whether alternatives are being contrasted, or whether the utterance forms part of a complaint or evaluation. This supports an interface-based account that combines syntactic position with discourse function (Rizzi, 1997, 2004; Lambrecht, 1994; Jarrah & Abusalim, 2021).

The data also show that natural conversation is essential for studying Arabic dialect syntax. Many focus-related phenomena, such as repair, repetition, null subjects, discourse markers, and evaluative particles, appear most clearly in spoken interaction. Written dialectal texts are useful, but they contain fewer repairs and more stabilized clause structures. Naturalistic speech therefore provides a richer environment for observing how speakers manage attention in real time. The reliance on natural conversation also follows methodological

arguments for studying language in authentic discourse settings (Creswell, 2014; Dörnyei, 2007).

The findings have implications beyond descriptive linguistics. In Arabic language teaching, learners of JA need exposure to real dialogues showing how order changes according to discourse function. In translation, fronted or dislocated constituents should not be translated mechanically; their contrastive or evaluative force must be preserved. In computational linguistics, Arabic dialect models must account for flexible word order, null subjects, discourse markers, and focus particles if they are to parse and interpret spoken JA accurately. These implications are especially relevant because Arabic NLP resources have historically been stronger for standard Arabic than for dialectal varieties (Habash, 2010; Al-Wer & de Jong, 2017).

6. Conclusion

This paper investigated word order variation and focus marking in Jordanian Arabic using a corpus-based descriptive approach. The analysis showed that JA word order is flexible but not random. Different constructions correspond to different discourse functions: SVO supports topic-comment organization and informational or evaluative focus; verb-initial clauses foreground events; left dislocation and topicalization activate prominent referents; wh-fronting marks interrogative focus; contrastive and corrective focus are expressed through particles, negation, repetition, and context; and null subjects support topic continuity while allowing predicates to carry attention. These findings are consistent with information-structure theory and previous research on Arabic dialectal syntax (Benmamoun, 2000; Lambrecht, 1994; Jarrah, 2019).

The study therefore rejects the view that word order variation in JA is merely optional syntactic rearrangement. Instead, it demonstrates that speakers manipulate constituent order to guide the hearer's attention, maintain coherence, express stance, and mark focus. The paper contributes to the study of Arabic dialects by providing evidence from natural discourse and by showing that the syntax-pragmatics interface is central to understanding JA clause structure. The contribution is therefore directly connected to current work on the syntax-pragmatics interface and left-peripheral focus in Arabic (Rizzi, 1997; Jarrah & Abusalim, 2021).

Future research may expand the corpus to include larger regional and social samples, examine the role of prosody in focus marking, and compare JA with other Levantine dialects. Further work on annotated spoken corpora would also be valuable for computational applications and for more precise modeling of Arabic dialect information structure. Comparative and computational extensions would also respond to the need for richer resources for Arabic dialects (Habash, 2010; Al-Wer & de Jong, 2017).

References

Al-Ani, S. (2002). Arabic phonology and dialectal variation. In K. Versteegh et al. (Eds.), Encyclopedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics. Brill.

Al-Momani, I. (2011). The syntax of Jordanian Arabic: A study of selected constructions. Journal of Arabic Linguistics, 48, 45–69.

Al-Qahtani, D. (2016). Word order variation and information structure in Arabic dialects. Linguistic Research, 33(2), 211–235.

Al-Shawashreh, E. (2016). Aspects of word order and agreement in Jordanian Arabic. Newcastle University doctoral dissertation.

Alshraah, S. M., Issa, S. H., Migdadi, H. F., & Nishat, A. S. (2024). Enhancing pedagogical strategies for multilingual classrooms in foreign language education: Training lecturers for linguistic diversity and language variation. Journal of Language Teaching and Research, 15(2), 654-663.

Alshraah, S. M., ALawawdeh, N., Issa, S. H., & Alshatnawi, E. F. (2024). Digital initiative, literacy and gender equality: Empowering education and language for sustainable development. J. Adv. Humanit, 5(2), 83-103.

Al-Wer, E., & de Jong, R. (2017). Dialects of Arabic. In C. Lucas & S. Manfredi (Eds.), Arabic and contact-induced change. Language Science Press.

Aoun, J., Benmamoun, E., & Choueiri, L. (2010). The syntax of Arabic. Cambridge University Press.

Bani-Yasin, R., & Owens, J. (1987). The phonology of a northern Jordanian Arabic dialect. Zeitschrift für Arabische Linguistik, 17, 22–47.

Bassiouney, R. (2009). Arabic sociolinguistics. Edinburgh University Press.

Benmamoun, E. (2000). The feature structure of functional categories: A comparative study of Arabic dialects. Oxford University Press.

Chomsky, N. (1965). Aspects of the theory of syntax. MIT Press.

Cinque, G., & Rizzi, L. (2010). The cartography of syntactic structures. In B. Heine & H. Narrog (Eds.), The Oxford handbook of linguistic analysis. Oxford University Press.

Comrie, B. (1989). Language universals and linguistic typology (2nd ed.). University of Chicago Press.

Creswell, J. W. (2014). Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches (4th ed.). Sage.

Dörnyei, Z. (2007). Research methods in applied linguistics. Oxford University Press.

Fassi Fehri, A. (1993). Issues in the structure of Arabic clauses and words. Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Givón, T. (1983). Topic continuity in discourse: A quantitative cross-language study. John Benjamins.

Habash, N. (2010). Introduction to Arabic natural language processing. Morgan & Claypool.

Halliday, M. A. K. (1978). Language as social semiotic. Edward Arnold.

Issa, S. H., Dorgham, R., Alshraah, S. M., bin Juwair, A. A., & Aldaghri, A. A. (2025). Investigating the Morphosyntactic Errors of Saudi EFL Students. Theory and Practice in Language Studies, 15(3), 755-762.

Issa, S. H., Awadh, F. H., & Ahmed, H. R. (2022). The role of proficiency level in the speed of lexical activation. Cogent Arts & Humanities, 9(1), 1999613.

Issa, S. H., Hasan, G., & Al Herz, J. (2024, May). AI based SSS for Educations System. In 2024 4th International Conference on Advance Computing and Innovative Technologies in Engineering (ICACITE) (pp. 1456-1460). IEEE.

Issa, S. H., Aldakhil, F. A., BinJwair, A. A., & Kariem, N. (2025). Delving into bilingual dialogue: The realm of code switching and mixing in Arabic-English societies. Journal of Language Teaching and Research, 16(3), 768-779.

Jarrah, M. (2019). Information structure and word order in Jordanian Arabic. Lingua, 220, 1–23.

Jarrah, M., & Abusalim, N. (2021). Focus and left periphery in Jordanian Arabic. Journal of Semitic Studies, 66(2), 451–480.

Lambrecht, K. (1994). Information structure and sentence form. Cambridge University Press.

Levinson, S. C. (1983). Pragmatics. Cambridge University Press.

Rizzi, L. (1997). The fine structure of the left periphery. In L. Haegeman (Ed.), Elements of grammar. Kluwer.

Rizzi, L. (2004). Locality and left periphery. In A. Belletti (Ed.), Structures and beyond. Oxford University Press.

Saad, G. (2005). Arabic dialectology and Levantine Arabic. Journal of Semitic Studies, 50(1), 77–102.