

Telugu is a Dravidian language spoken in South India. It is a subject-object-verb language, as exemplified in (1). It is also traditionally analyzed as a *wh*-in-situ language in which *wh*-phrases do not undergo any movement (e.g., Bruening, 2007; Subba Rao, 2012) as shown in (2). However, Jayaseelan (2001; 2008) and Balusu (2016) suggest Telugu has partial *wh*-movement to an IP-internal Focus position. Jayaseelan (2001)'s primary evidence is that Telugu allows questions where a *wh*-subject surfaces just before the final verb as in (4) as well as allowing the *wh*-subject to remain in situ (3).

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|-----|---|-----|---|
| (1) | Durga aratipandu thinindhi.
Durga banana ate _(Fem)
Durga ate a banana. | (2) | Durga amei thinindhi?
Durga what ate _(FEM) ?
What did Durga eat? |
| (3) | Evaru aratipandulu thinaru?
Who bananas ate _(PLU) ?
Who ate bananas? | (4) | Aratipandulu evaru thinaru?
Bananas who ate _(PLU) ?
Who ate bananas? |

Telugu and other Dravidian languages allow fronting of topicalized items in declarative sentences (Davis, 2005). Thus, it is possible that (3) is the “standard” construction for questions and (4) is only possible when the object is topicalized, resulting in an OSV word order. This study investigates factors that affect Telugu speakers’ word order preferences in declaratives and *wh*-questions. By manipulating whether the object (i.e., bananas) was topicalized by context, we investigated whether topicalization affects the choice participants make. If participants allow OSV questions (4) only in topicalized contexts, that would support a topicalization analysis. If on the other hand, participants allow OSV questions like (4) regardless of context, this would support Jayaseelan’s partial *wh*-movement analysis.

METHODS. Seventeen adults (10 female) between the ages of 32 and 58 participated. All were born in South India and spoke Telugu as their first and dominant language. The experimental task was a paired forced-choice judgment/production task in which participants read brief stories and then chose whether they thought an SOV or OVS word order construction best fit the context created by the story. After they chose either the SOV or OVS option, they said their choice aloud. Participants were tested individually by a research assistant who was fluent in Telugu. The FindingFive.com experimental platform was used to present stimuli and to record participants’ choices and spoken responses.

STIMULI. The experiment had a 2 (declarative/question) x 2 (SOV/OSV) x 2 (+/- “topicalized” scenario) within-subjects design. Half of the trials were declarative sentences and half were subject questions. Participants chose between SOV word order (e.g., “Durga banana eats.” or “Who banana eats?”) and OSV word order (“Banana Durga eats.” or “Banana who eats?”). In the half of the trials with “topicalized” stories, the object (e.g., bananas) was explicitly mentioned in the story and carried some import, and in the other half, the object was not mentioned in the story. There were 8 verbs, and for each verb there was a topicalized and non-topicalized story for each of the production types (declarative/question) for a total of 32 trials. Although each story was somewhat different, across conditions, they were similar in length and varied minimally between scenario types. See an example story in Appendix A.

RESULTS. Collapsing across declaratives and questions, participants preferred the object-fronted option more often after topicalized scenario than after non-topicalized scenarios (56.1% vs. 38.6%, respectively). Surprisingly, participants preferred the object-fronted option (i.e., the OSV option) almost 3 times as often for questions than declaratives (69.1% and 24.6%,

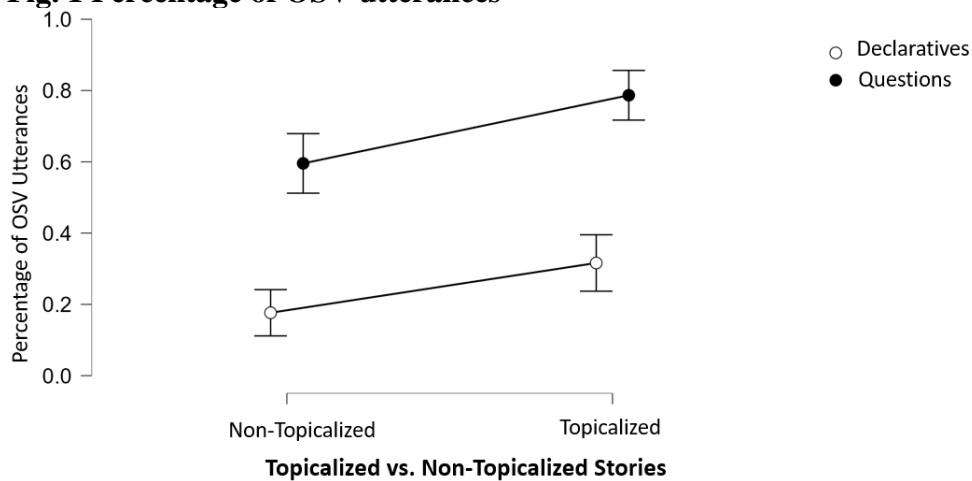
respectively). A 2 (+/--topicalized scenario) x 2 (question/declarative) Bayesian ANOVA of object fronting with participant as a random variable revealed that the best model included main effects of topicalization (BF for inclusion = 1251) and question/declarative (BF for inclusion > 10⁺³⁰), with no interaction between the two factors (BF for inclusion < 1).

Individual subject analyses revealed that 15 of the 17 participants chose the object-fronted option more often after topicalized scenarios than non-topicalized scenarios, and two participants were equally likely to choose the object-fronted option after topicalized and non-topicalized scenarios. Critically, *all* 17 of the 17 participants preferred the object-fronting option more often with questions than declaratives as seen in Figure 1.

DISCUSSION/SUMMARY. Our results suggest that our topicalized scenarios supported object fronting in both declarative and questions. However, regardless of context, Telugu speakers prefer subject questions with OSV word order rather than leaving the *wh*-phrase in situ. We will argue that our results provide support for Jayaseelan’s analysis that Telugu allows partial *wh*-movement to an IP-internal Focus position by adding empirical data from native speakers, collected via experiment.

References: [1] Balusu, Rahul. "Sluicing in Dravidian: Tracing the source." *Formal Approaches to South Asian Languages* (2016). [2] Subbarao, Karumuri V. 2012. *South asian languages: A syntactic typology*. Cambridge University Press. [3] Jayaseelan, Karattuparambil A. 2001. *Questions and question-word incorporating quantifiers in Malayalam*. *Syntax* 4:63–93.

Fig. 1 Percentage of OSV utterances



Appendix A: Sample Stories (Non-topicalized and Topicalized) eliciting questions. English translations provided for clarity, but all stories and choices were presented in Telugu.

Non-Topicalized Scenario:

Nidhi’s mother is packing food bags for Nidhi and her friends, Shravani and Spoorthi, who are going on a day trip. The mother isn’t sure what fruits to pack and asks Nidhi. Then the mother asks what? (A)Who bananas eats? (B) Bananas who eats?

Topicalized Scenario:

Scenario: Neha’s father is serving fruit at a party for his daughter and her friends, Pujita and Devi. He remembers one of them is allergic to bananas but forgot who. Then, the father asks what? (A)Who bananas eats? (B) Bananas who eats?