

Word Order in Biblical Hebrew Poetry: A Reassessment of the Concept of Focus

David J. Fuller*

1. Introduction

It is no understatement that the issue of Biblical Hebrew word order in prophetic and poetic texts is a difficult and foreboding one. Although the last two decades have seen a number of monographs published on BH word order, the difficulty of surveying these works is greatly diminished by their common theoretical background. Knud Lambrecht's *Information Structure and Sentence Form* (1994)¹⁾ proved immensely influential on the following generations of Hebrew grammarians interested in word order. This study will examine and compare the word-order proposals of Nicholas P. Lunn and Adina Moshavi, as they represent contrasting approaches to the terminology of topic and focus, but are still both very much bound to the same set of questions. Although Moshavi's corpus was restricted to narrative (specifically Genesis), her criteria for what constituted marked word is similar to that of Lunn, and thus the comparison of the two works is possible in every area except for Moshavi's deliberate lack of coverage of poetic parallelism. After conducting a critique of the linguistic viability of this topic/focus framework, this study will suggest a new way forward for understanding non-canonical word order in Hebrew poetry, using

* Ph.D. in Old Testament at McMaster Divinity College (2018), currently Managing Editor of MDC Press. davidjfuller89@gmail.com.

1) Knud Lambrecht, *Information Structure and Sentence Form: Topic, Focus, and the Mental Representations of Discourse Referents* (New York: Cambridge University, 1994).

discourse analysis in the framework of functional grammar. This new framework will be exemplified using passages from Habakkuk 1.²⁾

2. Lunn

It is particularly relevant to review the basic tenets of Lunn's *Word-Order Variation in Biblical Hebrew Poetry* (2006)³⁾, as it not only exemplifies the straightforward application of Lambrecht's framework for information structure, but also attempts to create a system capable of handling the intricacies and nuances of poetry, as compared to prose. Drawing from certain broad currents in functional grammar, he begins with the principle that some have called the given/new distinction, or that every sentence contains both a point of common reference for the speaker and hearer as well as a piece of information meant to be novel to the hearer.⁴⁾ He couples this with an emphasis on pragmatics, or the study of meaning and effect that goes beyond what can strictly be quantified grammatically. For Lunn's concrete analysis, his foundational categories are topic and focus. Topic is simply what a given sentence is about.⁵⁾ Topic is not to be correlated with a specific grammatical category, but is rather an interpretive notion. Multiple topics can appear, fade out, and re-appear throughout a discourse, and thus a given topic can be active, semi-active, or inactive in the mind of a given listener.

Focus is, following Lambrecht, defined as, "the semantic component of a pragmatically structured proposition whereby the assertion differs from the presupposition."⁶⁾ This relates to the idea of the given and the new; with some information presupposed as being established in the mind of the listener, the

2) While it may seem initially incongruous to mix studies of prose and poetry in this way, careful examination of the history of research shows that the criteria for markedness in these various studies is essentially continuous, except for the phenomenon of word-order variation that occurs in the secondary lines of poetic couplets. Since only occurrences of marked word order in primary lines (excluding secondary lines that echo the first line) are treated in the sample analysis from Habakkuk below, there is nothing inherent in this corpus that would render it invalid for critiquing Moshavi or other narrative-based studies of BH word order.

3) Nicholas P. Lunn, *Word-Order Variation in Biblical Hebrew Poetry: Differentiating Pragmatics and Poetics* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006).

4) *Ibid.*, 29.

5) *Ibid.*, 33.

6) *Ibid.*, 35.

speaker is able to assert something beyond this. Sentences can have three different kinds of focus: predicate focus, argument focus, or sentence focus.⁷⁾ In each case, the type of focus is directly dependent on the activation state of the topic at hand. Lunn illustrates how this plays out with the sentence “The children went to school.” He notes that the focus of a sentence can be clarified by identifying the implicit question behind the sentence.⁸⁾ If the implicit question is “What did the children do next?” there would be a predicate focus, as the “children” are already an activated topic and the new information would be what they did. As a predicate-focus sentence simply comments on a topic, Lambrecht (and Lunn) consider this focus structure to be unmarked, as it is by far the most common. Lunn illustrates argument focus with the implicit question of “Who went to school?” “The children went to school.” Here, it is already assumed that *x* went to school, and the sentence answers who that was. The “children” here are not a topic, but a focus expression, with the function of identifying. Finally, for sentence focus, Lunn uses the implicit question of “What happened?” “The children went to school.” Here, nothing is assumed about either the subject or the predicate, so the focus is on the whole sentence rather than just a component part. Sentence-focus thus functions to report an event. Significantly, the lexicogrammar of “The children went to school” is the same in all three of these cases, but its focus changes depending on the contextual presuppositions.⁹⁾

Illustrating these three types of focus in biblical Hebrew, Lunn asserts that predicate focus is often what is expressed in familiar narrative *wayyiqtol* clauses, but can even be the case when a constituent other than the subject is fronted before the verb, as the consideration of the activated topic is paramount.¹⁰⁾ His category of “dominant focal element” covers cases in which an element such as a direct object is fronted, but nonetheless is subsumed in an instance of predicate focus.¹¹⁾ Argument focus generally involves an element being fronted before the verb, such as in Judges 1:1-2, where the Israelites ask who will go up first, and YHWH responds, “Judah will go up,” with “Judah” occurring before the prefix form of עָלָה.¹²⁾ Lunn finds sentence-focus clauses in Hebrew to usually have a

7) Ibid., 36.

8) The remainder of this paragraph summarizes Ibid., 37-41.

9) Ibid., 41.

10) Ibid., 41-43.

11) Ibid., 43.

12) Ibid., 44.

noun phrase followed by a verb, as this is a common way to introduce a subject lacking precedent in the discourse, or report an event that receives little subsequent elaboration. Based on context, a given focus type can have a particular pragmatic purpose, such as contrasting, parallel, replacing, and so on, which can be marked with some of the Hebrew focus particles.¹³⁾

Lunn provides an initial survey of pragmatic markedness of items placed in the preverbal field using these focus categories. He analyses some exceptions, such as most adverbs, or when an independent pronoun is used with certain common verbs. In the case of many poetic B-lines (that is, the second line of a poetic couplet), Lunn's preferred explanation is "defamiliarisation" instead of markedness,¹⁴⁾ as he notes that a canonical A-line is just as likely to be followed by a non-canonical B-line as it is by a canonical one.¹⁵⁾

Lunn further explores how marked word-order functions in poetic parallelism. Frequently, whenever an A-line exhibits marked word order, the corresponding B-line will utilize the same marked word order. Lunn demonstrates this with clauses with fronting of the subjects, objects, and modifiers.¹⁶⁾ This also happens between the initial lines of consecutive bicola. In cases where the A-line has a focus particle, it is generally absent in the B-line, although the B-line may follow its word order otherwise.¹⁷⁾ Lunn also identifies some exceptions to his principle that a marked A-line will have a similarly marked B-line. Phrases of temporal or spatial setting in A-lines, since they are not considered marked, are not repeated in B-lines. The same is true of independent pronominal subjects.¹⁸⁾ Lunn devotes a final chapter to examining cases of parallelism that are anomalies within his criteria. For example, a defamiliarised line followed by a canonical line is often used to mark a discourse boundary,¹⁹⁾ a function that Lunn also assigns to two defamiliarised lines in parallel.²⁰⁾

13) *Ibid.*, 45-47.

14) *Ibid.*, 106. Lunn states "the variation manifested by such parallel cola is more suitably explained in terms of poetics, that is, the artistic creativity allowable in the poetic genre. This latter factor is quite distinct from that of pragmatic marking in producing word-order variation."

15) *Ibid.*, 61-94.

16) *Ibid.*, 132-150.

17) *Ibid.*, 138.

18) *Ibid.*, 151-155.

19) *Ibid.*, 161.

20) *Ibid.*, 176.

3. Moshavi

Moshavi is the ideal conversation partner for Lunn, as Moshavi's *Word Order in the Biblical Hebrew Finite Clause* (2010)²¹⁾ represents the most significant work on word order since Lunn, and also the most significant departure from Lambrecht's framework of topic and focus used by Lunn, Jean-Marc Heimerdinger, Katsuomi Shimasaki, and Sebastiaan Jonathan Floor. Although Moshavi retains the terminology of topic and focus, she applies these terms in a radically different way than does Lunn. She helpfully begins by providing her definition of markedness, as she states "Marked syntactic constructions have pragmatic meaning, that is, they encode aspects of meaning which are not semantic but concern the relation of an utterance to its context."²²⁾ She begins her study proper by defining her criteria for word-order markedness in biblical Hebrew and gathering statistical data from her chosen corpus, Genesis. She first notes the wide variety of constituents that can be preposed.²³⁾ Of course, for some elements, their position before the verb is required, and thus they are not considered preposed or marked. These include clausal adverbs, negative particles, and adjunct clauses such as conditionals. Other elements are preposed but not marked in the sense that they usually occupy the preverbal field, but are not considered marked there. These are interrogatives, and time and demonstrative adverbs. Specifically marked constructions (aside from preposing) identified by Moshavi include left-dislocation and the placing of a conjunction between a constituent and the rest of the clause.

Moshavi's concepts of focusing and topicalization are key, as she employs these terms very differently than Lunn. She states, "Focusing signals a relation between the clause and the context of the addressee's attention state, whereas topicalization signals a relation between the clause and the linguistic context that accompanies it."²⁴⁾ Therefore, unlike with Lunn, for Moshavi clauses either have focusing or topicalization, never both at the same time. Moshavi's

21) Adina Moshavi, *Word Order in the Biblical Hebrew Finite Clause*, LSAWS 4 (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2010).

22) *Ibid.*, 1.

23) *Ibid.*, 64-85.

24) *Ibid.*, 90.

approach to focusing does involve presupposed topics in the memory of the listener, but she attempts to make it more objective by setting predicate focus as the default for non-preposed clauses, and lets constituent focus be indicated by preposed elements.²⁵⁾ Moshavi understands topicalization to function as a discourse-connective device which “indicates a contextual relation between the preposed constituent and another element in the immediately preceding [or following] context,”²⁶⁾ which she classifies with categories for different kinds of discourse relations.

In her chapter on focused clauses, Moshavi notes that the preposed constituent can be a subject, complement, or adjunct. A proposition will be made active in the surrounding context, and the preposed constituent fills in a gap of some kind. An example Moshavi provides is from Genesis 9:5, where, after $\text{וְאָדָם אֶת־דַּמְּכֶם}$ (“But for you own life-blood I will require a reckoning”) the next clause, $\text{מִיַּד כָּל־חַיָּה אֶדְרֹשְׁנוּ}$ (“Of every beast I will require it”) has as its focus כָּל־חַיָּה (“every beast”) as the activated proposition is “I will require your life-blood of *x*.”²⁷⁾ Moshavi uses a system of four types of focusing: identificational, descriptive, substitutive, and additive.²⁸⁾ In identificational focusing, the focus supplies an unknown element.²⁹⁾ Moshavi’s example is from Genesis 34:27-28, where the sons of Jacob are said to plunder a city due to the dishonoring of Dinah. In verse 28, the verse starts with the direct object marker with a list of the things they took. Descriptive focusing “presents an alternate or more explicit description for the already identified variable.”³⁰⁾ In other words, the focused element provides additional specification for something that has already been mentioned. Substitutive focusing uses the focused element to replace something else, such as in Genesis 35:10, where God says $\text{לֹא־יִקְרָא שְׁמֶךָ עוֹד יִקְרָא בִּי אִם־יִשְׂרָאֵל יִהְיֶה שְׁמֶךָ}$ (“...your name will no longer be called Jacob. Rather, *Israel* will be your name.”)³¹⁾ Additive focusing supplies something in combination with what previously existed.³²⁾ Moshavi cites Genesis 35:12

25) *Ibid.*, 90-91.

26) *Ibid.*, 101.

27) *Ibid.*, 124.

28) *Ibid.*, 127.

29) *Ibid.*, 128-130.

30) *Ibid.*, 130-131.

31) *Ibid.*, 131-133.

32) *Ibid.*, 133-135.

וְאֶת־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נָתַתִּי לְאַבְרָהָם וְלְיִצְחָק לְךָ אֶתְנֶנָּה וְלְיִרְעָד אֶחָרִיד אֶתֶּן אֶת־הָאָרֶץ
 (“The land that I gave to Abraham and Isaac I give to you. And *to your offspring after you* I give the land.”)

Moshavi’s chapter on topicalization first notes that the preposed element can be a subject, complement, or adjunct.³³⁾ The preposed element will have a closely located counterpart that it is being compared to in some way, and it may be backward-linking or forward-linking. She uses a system of five major categories of different kinds of topicalization. For opposition,³⁴⁾ she points to Genesis 4:2, where Abel is introduced following a וַיְהִי, but Cain comes first in his clause and precedes the suffix form of הָיָה. The preposed element can be considered to be opposed to an element in the previous clause even if the clauses do not have parallel structures, such as when a less-to-greater argument is taking place. Moshavi’s second type of topicalization is similarity,³⁵⁾ in which the speaker establishes a link between two items even if the contents of the clauses vary, such as in Genesis 46:4, אֲנֹכִי אֵרֵד עִמָּךְ מִצְרַיִם וְאֲנֹכִי אֶעֱלֶךָ גַּם־עִלָּה (“I will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up”), where the 1cs independent pronoun is the first element of each clause. Her third category is addition, which can include the use of the *gam* particle.³⁶⁾ Fourth, she groups elaboration, summary, and paraphrase together as types of speech acts that express a meaning along the lines of “that is to say,” although this is not linked to a particular syntactic realization in Hebrew.³⁷⁾ Finally, temporal succession links elements with temporal adjuncts.³⁸⁾ Significantly, Moshavi admits that topicalization relations are heavily interpretive. She states, “The specific coherence relation between the linked segments is not specified by topicalization. By examining the segments in the light of the linked items, the addressee infers the intended relation between the clauses.”³⁹⁾

While admittedly Moshavi’s model was only based on narrative and the direct discourse therein, her categories were much more closely tied to the surface grammar of the text than those of Lunn. Her categories of focusing involve cases

33) Ibid., 144.

34) Ibid., 155-159.

35) Ibid., 160-161.

36) Ibid., 161-162.

37) Ibid., 162-163.

38) Ibid., 163-165.

39) Ibid., 165.

where the preposed element fills in a gap in the information supplied in the preceding discourse, while her types of topicalization deal with relations that are created between linked elements in cases of fronted constructions. As compared to Lunn, much of the guesswork has been removed. One no longer needs to engage in as much speculation regarding what topics have been activated, or even where the focus is placed in a clause. Moshavi's categories are also more directly applicable; Lunn's application section is somewhat confusing because it spends little time directly deciding when a particular clause with marked word order has a particular type of focus structure, leaving much of the explicit framework of the book curiously in the background.

4. Critique

A number of weaknesses exist with the above frameworks, particularly that of Lunn. A notable difficulty lies in the fact that he has adopted a framework originally designed for spoken English and applied it to an ancient written text. Not only are the various pitch and accent cues associated with spoken dialogue absent in a purely graphic representation of language, but the general intuitions that can be made about common knowledge and cultural context rapidly disappear as well. Particularly when it comes to the concept of a topic being "activated," it is not at all obvious how we could know what topics would have been automatically active and available for reference in the mind of the original reader of a given biblical text, nor is it in any way clear how we could decide how long a given topic can be considered "activated" in a discourse without it being referenced.

It is here that it is helpful to reference Heimerdinger's *Topic, Focus, and Foreground in Ancient Hebrew Narratives* (1999)⁴⁰, as it exemplifies an earnest effort to address and rectify this shortcoming. Working through the example of Genesis 22, he decides that the first verse **וַיְהִי אַחֲרֵי הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה וַיִּחַלְּלֵהֶם יְהוָה אֱת־אַבְרָהָם** ("After these things, God tested Abraham") is a title that

40) Jean-Marc Heimerdinger, *Topic, Focus and Foreground in Ancient Hebrew Narratives*, JSOTSup 295 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999). Although Heimerdinger precedes Lunn, his "cumulative referential density" represents an attempt to quantify the presence of topics in a text that exceeds Lunn's method in rigor, if not in helpful results.

discloses the main topic of the story. As he steps through the story, he uses Russell S. Tomlin’s “cumulative referential density” to track the relative importance of the various secondary topics present, which he describes as follows: “The text examined is divided into paragraph units and the topical entities are identified in each clause. For every clause, the number of references to the entity at a given point of the paragraph is worked out. This number is divided by the number of clauses up to that point in the paragraph. A ranking of each topical entity in each clause is established as well as a global ranking of all the entities.”⁴¹⁾ He additionally notes that topics that are mostly in the position of subject tend to be more central, while topics that are mostly in the object or adjunct positions more marginal to the discourse.⁴²⁾ However, he does not have a clearly quantified way to merge the results of his referential density and clausal positioning investigations.

Heimerdinger is similarly ambiguous in the area of topical activation. He states:

A referent (participant) may be removed from discourse for a while, remaining unmentioned, and reintroduced subsequently. The referential gap may be more or less important. Measured in clauses, it may vary from one clause to thirty or more. When a referent is removed from discourse, its state of activation changes from active to semi-active (accessible). Cognitively, the referent remains in the hearer's consciousness but is not directly focused on.⁴³⁾

His criteria is ultimately cognitive, not grammatical, as this notion of topical activation continually comes back to the idea of a mental model being constructed in the mind of the listener. So even with this expanded set of criteria, topical activation is still hazy.

Moving on to Lunn’s concept of focus, it is suggestive to note that earlier linguists did not even view focus as a clause-level phenomenon. While Heimerdinger, who views focus in a way similar to Lunn, tips his hat to an early article of M. A. K. Halliday’s as being informative for the concept of focus,

41) Ibid., 108.

42) Ibid., 126.

43) Ibid., 155.

careful attention to Halliday's treatment casts doubt upon the viability of the present usage of "focus" terminology. In Halliday's 1967 essay, "Notes on Transitivity and Theme in English: Part 2,"⁴⁴⁾ he articulates what was at that time his understanding of the Theme system complex, or what he now calls the textual metafunction, which deals with self-structuring capacity of language, as distinct from its reality-portraying and social-projection functions. His first concept under the Theme rubric he called the "information unit," which, in spoken English, is up to the choice of emphasis on the part of the speaker. He states, "information structure is realized phonologically by 'tonality,' the distribution of the text into tone groups."⁴⁵⁾ He then provides a number of example of how an information unit can be either smaller or larger than one clause. Information units are the basis for focus, as he further elaborates:

At the same time the information unit is the point of origin for further options regarding the status of its components: for the selection of points of information focus which indicate what new information is being contributed. The distribution into information units thus determines how many points of information focus are to be accommodated, and specifies the possible limits within which each may be locate.⁴⁶⁾

In his explicit discussion of information focus, he once again strictly relies upon phonological criteria: "Each information unit has either one primary point of information focus or one primary followed by one secondary. The choice is again realized in the phonological structure, by the assignment of the tonic (tonic nucleus) in the tone group."⁴⁷⁾ In his discussion of what focus accomplishes, he is quite comparable to Lunn, as he states, "Information focus reflects the speaker's decision as to where the main burden of the message lies ... Information focus is one kind of emphasis, that whereby the speaker marks out a part (which may be the whole) of a message block as that which he wishes to be interpreted as informative. What is focal is 'new' information."⁴⁸⁾ Therefore,

44) M. A. K. Halliday, "Notes on Transitivity and Theme in English: Part 2", *Journal of Linguistics* 3 (1967), 199-244.

45) *Ibid.*, 200.

46) *Ibid.*, 202.

47) *Ibid.*, 203.

48) *Ibid.*, 204.

this concept of focus, which for Halliday was certainly quantifiable in its phonological realization in English, is dubious in its value for Lunn’s application to written language, and to an ancient language at that.

Consultation of more recent practitioners of functional grammar only reinforces these concerns. Christopher S. Butler, in the second volume of his *Structure and Function: A Guide to Three Major Structural-Functional Theories* (2003)⁴⁹⁾, summarizes the discussion surrounding information structure, and finds that some (chiefly, J. L. Mackenzie and M. E. Keizer)⁵⁰⁾ recommend that the idea of topic should simply be abandoned in modern English, as it is simply not “consistently applicable.”⁵¹⁾ Likewise, Butler documents that the concept of focus is driven by pragmatics in a top down fashion, that is, it starts with categories of meaning and then tries to explain their syntactic realizations, rather than trying to start with the syntactic evidence itself.⁵²⁾ While starting with pragmatics may be feasible with modern English, where we generally have all the outside contextual information to discern what is intended, a different approach may be preferable for ancient languages. Moshavi shows some signs of movement in this direction in her types of topicalization and focusing, but her categories are still largely based around intuitive interpretation.⁵³⁾

49) Christopher S. Butler, *Structure and Function: A Guide to Three Major Structural-Functional Theories: Part 2: From Clause to Discourse and Beyond*, SLCS 64 (Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2003).

50) J. L. Mackenzie and M. E. Keizer, “On Assigning Pragmatic Functions in English”, *Pragmatics* 1 (1991), 169-215.

51) Christopher S. Butler, *Structure and Function: A Guide to Three Major Structural-Functional Theories: Part 2: From Clause to Discourse and Beyond*, 86.

52) *Ibid.*, 97.

53) Due to the common reliance on Lunn, the above critiques are also applicable to the similar studies of Sebastiaan Jonathan Floor, “From Information Structure, Topic and Focus, to Theme in Biblical Hebrew Narrative”, Ph.D. Dissertation (University of Stellenbosch, 2004) and Katsuomi Shimasaki, *Focus Structure in Biblical Hebrew: A Study of Word Order and Information Structure* (Bethesda: CDL, 2002). An exception would be the Chomskyan/generativist approach of Robert Holmstedt, “Word Order and Information Structure in Ruth and Jonah: A Generative-Typological Analysis”, *JSS* 54 (2009), 111-139 and Robert Holmstedt, “Word Order in the Book of Proverbs”, R. L. Troxel, D. R. Magary, and K. G. Friebel, eds., *Seeking out the Wisdom of the Ancients: Essays Offered to Honor Michael V. Fox on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 135-154.

5. Criteria

Before making some preliminary outlines towards a new approach to word order in Biblical Hebrew poetry, some basic criteria should be identified. Since the major shortcoming of the previous works was often a focus on pragmatics instead of syntax, I propose that the analysis must work in a bottom-up rather than a top-down fashion. In other words, instead of starting with interpretive categories that are not clearly tied to linguistic realization, I would propose starting with syntactic forms, isolating a minimal core meaning for these forms, and reflecting on interpretation only with this framework established. Next, this framework will ideally be able to explain the implications of word-order variation at the discourse level. In other words, what difference is effected by these choices in the big picture of the meanings expressed in the text as a whole? In order to effectively quantify syntactical structures at a level above that of the isolated clause, I will utilize the functional grammar of Halliday,⁵⁴⁾ specifically his concepts of cohesion and field. Cohesion analysis tracks chains of references to entities throughout a discourse. It will allow for the accurate tracking of a preposed entity in the entirety of the discourse.⁵⁵⁾ Field analysis looks at the “big picture” of the subjects, verbs, objects, and circumstantials throughout a discourse, and can formulate a profile of what a given participant is doing, and which participants are doing what types of actions.⁵⁶⁾ Succinctly put, the procedure will consist of identifying clauses with “marked” word order (based on Lunn’s criteria) and then exploring the possible connections between the fronted element (or other key parts of the clause) and connected entities in the rest of the discourse to discern a possible structural reason for the fronting.

54) M. A. K. Halliday, *Halliday’s Introduction to Functional Grammar*, 4th ed. (New York: Routledge, 2014).

55) M. A. K. Halliday and Ruqaiya Hasan, *Language, Context, and Text: Aspects of Language in a Social-Semiotic Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1989), 82. Halliday and Hasan define the role of cohesion in the larger task of creating “meaning” in texts as follows: “Cohesion expresses the continuity that exists between one part of the text and another . . . The continuity that is provided by cohesion consists, in the most general terms, in expressing at each stage in the discourse the points of contact with what has gone before.” M. A. K. Halliday and Ruqaiya Hasan, *Cohesion in English* (London: Longman, 1976), 299.

56) M. A. K. Halliday, *Halliday’s Introduction to Functional Grammar*, 220-224.

6. Sample Analysis

In order to explore what this new paradigm can accomplish for studies of word order in BH poetry, some select examples will be worked through, drawn from Habakkuk 1. The full passage of Habakkuk 1:6-11 will be given in a chart in the appendix to clarify the clause divisions that are assumed throughout the analysis. This particular pericope in Habakkuk was chosen because it is generally accepted that Habakkuk 1:5-11 constitutes a self-contained speech that responds to 1:2-4,⁵⁷⁾ and since Habakkuk 1:5 does not contain any instances of marked word order, or any features that connect cohesively to other clauses in 1:6-11,⁵⁸⁾ it has been eliminated from the analysis. The analysis only addresses clauses that contain clear instances of marked word order. Additionally, while the Hallidayan concepts of cohesion and field (see above) are employed to make sense of the pragmatic function of the various occurrences of marked word order throughout, this study does not attempt to accomplish a full “discourse analysis” of the passage,⁵⁹⁾ but rather a selective probing into the elements highlighted by non-canonical word order constructions. As such, this analysis cannot itself arrive at the “meaning” of Habakkuk 1:6-11 as a whole, nor can it establish the precise role played by word-order analysis within the larger Hallidayan discourse analysis paradigm.

To start with a relatively clear example, consider the case of Habakkuk 1:7a (אִי וְיָרֵא הוּא), my translation being “Terrible and dreadful [is] he.” This construction places two adjectives before the subject of the clause. Regarding the fronted constituents, neither the adjective אִי or the participle form of יָרֵא have direct lexical parallels elsewhere in the book. However, the subject of the

57) O. Palmer Robertson, *The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 136-155. Although some would disagree with this perspective and instead view 1:5-11 as a quotation of an earlier oracle that the prophet is unhappy with, even within this framework 1:5-11 is still treated as an independent section. For further discussion see Russell Mack, *Neo-Assyrian Prophecy and the Hebrew Bible: Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, PHSC 14 (Piscataway: Gorgias, 2011), 245-246.

58) The main clausal subjects in Hab 1:5 are the audience (the subject of the masculine plural imperatives) and the work that YHWH is accomplishing.

59) For an approach to a comprehensive discourse analysis of Habakkuk, see David J. Fuller, “Enigmatic Enemies and the Development of Faith: A Discourse Analysis of Habakkuk”, Ph.D. Dissertation (McMaster Divinity College, 2018).

clause, the 3ms independent pronoun referring to the Chaldean (either the king or the entity collectively), is first introduced in the previous verse, where YHWH states that he is raising the Chaldean (כִּי־הִנְנִי מִקִּים אֶת־הַכַּשְׂדִּים), who is then further described with an extended noun phrase. From 1:6 onwards to the end of the section in 1:11, the Chaldean occurs in every clause with only three exceptions. Also, for the most part, the subjects of all the clauses from 1:7 through 1:11 are either the Chaldean or his horses or his horsemen. Therefore, although the Chaldean is first mentioned as the object of YHWH's action in 1:6, 1:7 is the first place that he is the subject of the clause, which introduces a stretch of text in which he and his associated parties repeatedly exercise power over other constituents. Additionally, the fronted adjectives can be compared to the pair of adjectives used to describe him in 1:6 (הַמָּר וְהַנְּמָהֵר) "bitter and impetuous." This fronting of two adjectives in 1:7 thus creates a connection to the initial introduction of the Chaldean in the previous verse, and serves to introduce the exposition of the Chaldean's dangerous behavior in the ensuing section, while drawing attention to his negative attributes.

The very next clause, 1:7b contains a double-fronted construction (מִמֶּנּוּ מוֹשָׁפֵטוֹ וּשְׂאוֹתוֹ יֵצֵא) "from him, his justice and his authority will go out" as a preposition with a pronominal suffix as well as the subject occur before the verb. The cohesion of the Chaldean participant has already been discussed. Nothing else in this section corresponds to something going out of him, nor are his justice or authority mentioned again, although other participants under his control are featured. However, the verb in this clause (יֵצֵא), a verb of motion, is cohesive with a number of the other verbs describing the Chaldean's actions through 1:11: "crossing" (1:6); "gallop," "come," "fly" (1:8); "come" (1:9); "passes on" (1:11). Although it does connect to the earlier occurrence in 1:6, there it was merely a descriptor of the grammatical object of the clause. Here it is the main finite verb, occurring at the beginning of a section that includes a number of further occurrences of this kind of action. In this context, the two clauses in 1:7 appear to be functioning as a kind of introduction to the rest of the section through 1:11. 1:7a serves as a kind of summary statement about the Chaldean, drawing attention to his negative qualities, and 1:7b extends 1:7a by introducing a central action, the emergence of his unique justice and authority.

The next clause with non-canonical word order is the fourth clause of 1:8,

which, rendered woodenly, is, “and his horsemen, from afar they will come” (וּפָרְשָׁיו מִרְחוֹק יָבֹאוּ). This places both the subject and a prepositional phrase before the finite verb. Once again, the patterns of cohesion are instructive for determining the function of this shift. The first element of the clause, the horsemen of the Chaldean, has only been mentioned once previously, in the previous clause “his horsemen gallop” (וּפָשָׁוּ פָּרְשָׁיו). The horsemen will further occur in two of the next three clauses. The verb of this clause (come, from בּוֹא) connects cohesively with the verb from the previous clause (gallop, from פּוֹשׁ), as well as the next clause (fly, from עוֹף). The unique element in this clause is the prepositional phrase “from afar” (מִרְחוֹק). This supplies and highlights an element that was completely lacking in the previous clause, the location they come from. It is interesting to note that by Lunn’s standards, this line would not be considered to be marked because it is a poetic B-line, in which non-canonical word order is expected for stylistic reasons. However, here it is reasonable to derive that in this chain of references to the motion of the horsemen, that this particular piece of information is highlighted. Furthermore, a connection can be drawn with the previous locative מִן-preposition in 1:7b, where the fronted constituent clarified that the Chaldean’s justice and authority would proceed from himself. Now, a fronted constituent explains where the Chaldean’s horsemen come from.

The first clause of 1:9 is initially difficult to explain, as it seems to be a topical jump from the surrounding clauses: כָּל־הֵם לְחַמַּס יָבֹאוּ (“All of him for violence will come”). Here the subject and an adverbial prepositional phrase precede the finite verb. The subject, the 3ms Chaldean, has not been the subject of a clause since 1:7a, although he has been present in most of the clauses in the capacity of being the possessor of the subject of the clause. He will shortly become the subject of a clause in 1:10a and 1:10c. The key to understanding the discourse function of this fronting is in the cohesion of the verb “come” (יָבֹאוּ). This connects to the “his horsemen from afar will come” back in 1:8, which was the clause after the introduction of the horsemen as a subject. Here, “all of him for violence will come,” is only one clause removed from the re-introduction of the Chaldean himself as the clausal subject in the last clause of 1:9. This displaced usage of the fronting of the subject and the verb יָבֹאוּ serves to mark off these sub-sections in the discourse.

A final cluster of examples at the beginning of 1:10 provides a unique challenge. וְהוּא בַּמְּלָכִים יִתְקַלֵּס וְרִזְזִים מִשְׂחָק לוֹ הוּא לְכָל-מִבְצָר יִשְׂחָק (“And he, at kings he scoffs. And princes are a joke to him. He, at every fortress he laughs”). As has been previously seen, the 3ms Chaldean was just the subject of the first and third clauses of 1:9, and before that, 1:7. After this cluster in 1:10, he is the subject of every clause through the end of v. 11. As noted in the previous section, the marked word order in 1:9 seems to precipitate the imminent subject switch to the Chaldean. Significant for unpacking the word order in 1:10 is the patterns of cohesion associated with the verbal actions. Note the last clause of 1:9: “And he amasses captives like sand” (וַיֵּאֱסֹף כַּחֹל שָׁבִי). Here the Chaldean exercises action over another party. This kind of action is mirrored in the two final clauses of 1:10, “And he piles up earth. And he captures it.” However, the first three clauses of 1:10 constitute an excursus from this pattern of the Chaldean moving other entities around. Instead, these three deal with his state of mockery towards royal institutions. Notice the identical word orders in 1:10a and 1:10c: the subject (he), a prepositional phrase indicating the direction of his derision (at kings, or at every fortress), and the verb in the final position (he scoffs, he laughs). The middle clause is verbless, containing the subject (rulers), predicate nominative (joke), and prepositional phrase (to him, the Chaldean). The marked word order in the first three clauses of 1:10 block out this excursus from the Chaldean relocating other parties, to the Chaldean laughing at other parties.

7. Conclusion

This study has argued that previous approaches to word order in Biblical Hebrew and Biblical Hebrew poetry are difficult to make use of, as they rely on categories that are overly subjective and that require information far beyond what can be clearly determined from the text. Furthermore, the linguistic frameworks on which they are based are themselves outmoded and largely abandoned within linguistics proper. As a way forward, this study has proposed discourse-based approach to clauses with fronted constituents. By examining the patterns of cohesion between the elements of a given clause and its surrounding

context, it is possible to determine the relationship of both the fronted constituent and the clause as a whole with the larger discourse. In the corpus examined in the present study, the analysis disclosed that marked word-order constructions played a significant structural role in the surrounding discourse. Frequently, these constructions served to introduce a subject or action, or created a kind of prominence to set aside an excursus in the middle of another discussion. While this investigation does not necessarily lead immediately to simple explanations, it does have the advantage of beginning with the clearest possible data regarding the function of this clause in the surrounding text. Thus, rather than imposing artificial categories of meaning, it gathers the data and then formulates suppositions about possible structural or semantic intent. With the systematic study of a larger corpus of examples, it may be possible to collect a list of common syntactic patterns related to marked word order in its discourse context and derive categories of function from these forms.

<Keywords>

Hebrew linguistics, word order, functional grammar, Habakkuk, cognitive linguistics.

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<Appendix> Clausal Breakdown of Habakkuk 1:6-11

Table 1. Clause numbers, Hebrew text, and translation of Hab 1:6-11

1:6.1	כִּי־הִנְנִי מִקִּים אֶת־הַכַּשְׁדִּים הַגּוֹי הַמֵּר וְהַנְּמָהָר הַהוֹלֵךְ לְמִרְחַב־אָרֶץ לְרִשֵׁת מִשְׁכָּנֹת לֹא־לוֹ	For behold me raising up the Chaldeans, The bitter, impetuous nation, [the one] crossing wide spaces of the earth to seize homes not his own.
1:7.1	אִים וְנוֹרָא הוּא	Terrible and dreadful [is] he
1:7.2	מִמֶּנּוּ מִשְׁפָּטוֹ וּשְׂאֵתוֹ יֵצֵא	from him his justice and his authority will go out
1:8.1	וְקָלוּ מִנְּמָרִים סוּסָיו	His horses are swifter than leopards
1:8.2	וְחָדָו מִזְּאֵבֵי עָרֶב	They are fleeter than wolves of the evening
1:8.3	וּפָשׁוּ פָּרָשָׁיו	His horsemen gallop
1:8.4	וּפָרָשָׁיו מִרְחֹק יָבֹאוּ	his horsemen come from afar
1:8.5	יַעֲפוּ כְּנֶשֶׁר חָשׁ לֶאֱכֹל	They fly like an eagle rushing to eat,
1:9.1	כֻּלּוֹ לְחֶמֶס יָבֹא	All of him comes for violence.
1:9.2	מִגִּמַּת פְּנֵיהֶם קְדִימָה	The multitude of their faces is forward
1:9.3	וַיֵּאסֶף כַּחֹל שָׁבִי	And he amasses captives [sing form] like sand.
1:10.1	וְהוּא בְּמַלְכִים יַחְקֵלֵם	And He, at kings he scoffs
1:10.2	וּרְזִנִּים מִשְׁחָק לוֹ	And princes are a joke to him
1:10.3	הוּא לְכָל־מִבְצָר יִשְׁחָק	He, at every fortress he laughs
1:10.4	וַיַּצְבֵּר עָפָר	And he piles up earth
1:10.5	וַיִּלְכְּדָהּ	And he captures it.
1:11.1	אֲזַי חָלַף רוּחַ	Then he passes on [like] wind,
1:11.2	וַיַּעֲבֵר	And he transgresses
1:11.3	וַאֲשֶׁם זֶה כָּחוֹ לֵאלֹהָיו	and he incurs guilt [this one who] [ascribes] his strength to his god.

<Abstract>

**Word Order in Biblical Hebrew Poetry:
A Reassessment of the Concept of Focus**

David J. Fuller
(McMaster Divinity College)

It is no understatement that the issue of Biblical Hebrew word order in prophetic and poetic texts is a difficult and foreboding one. Although the last two decades have seen a number of monographs published on BH word order, the difficulty of surveying these works is greatly diminished by their common theoretical background. Lambrecht's *Information Structure and Sentence Form* (1994) proved immensely influential on the following generations of Hebrew grammarians interested in word order, as its terminology and approach was the backbone of the studies of Heimerdinger (1999) and Shimasaki (2002). Other studies, such as those of Floor (2004), Moshavi (2010), and Holmstedt (2005) similarly utilize a broadly cognitive framework. The most pertinent study for poetics is Lunn's *Word-Order Variation in Biblical Hebrew Poetry* (2006). For Lunn, a sentence can have its main focus on the predicate, the argument, or the whole sentence. To ascertain the focus of a sentence, Lunn differentiates asserted and presupposed knowledge, and asks whether or not the topic at hand has already been activated in the discourse. The chief difficulty with duplicating his analysis is that these decisions are, for him, made on intuitive rather than concrete linguistic grounds. Additionally, they require utilizing information from a discourse as a whole, rather than the order of components in the individual clause. It is the intention of this study to utilize the methodology of discourse analysis within the framework of functional grammar to develop a rigorous set of criteria for determining activated topics within a discourse. This framework will allow for a more reliable means of determining occurrences of marked and unmarked word order within Biblical Hebrew poetry.