The Pragmatics of the X+verb Structure in the Hebrew of Genesis:

The Linguistic Functions and Associated Effects and Meanings of Intra-clausal Fronted Constituents

Aaron Hornkohl - Hebrew University of Jerusalem

SOMMARIO

Il carattere pragmaticamente marcato degli ordini diversi da VSO in ebraico biblico viene esaminato sulla base della lingua del libro della Genesi. L'ipotesi che l'ebraico biblico abbia un ordine VSO basico, cioè neutro dal punto di vista pragmatico, viene sostenuta facendo riferimento a diversi criteri. Contestualmente viene ribadita l'importanza di studiare l'ebraico biblico tenendo conto di principi di carattere pragmatico e dell'analisi del discorso. L'anteposizione dei costituenti viene spiegata alla luce di due dimensioni pragmatiche: la struttura informativa, e la continuità (o discontinuità) della comunicazione o del discorso. La prima di queste dimensioni viene utilizzata per spiegare diversi tipi di anteposizione a carattere focale, la seconda per diversi tipi di anteposizione a carattere non focale, che viene studiata in maniera particolarmente circostanziata. Tra gli aspetti di quest'ultima che vengono presi in esame vi sono:
- il carattere pragmaticamente marcato del costituente anteposto riguarda solo questo, o la frase nel suo complesso?
- l'associazione tra la forma wayyiqtol e la sequenzialità e, dall'altro lato, tra la forma X+qatal e la mancanza di sequenzialità;
- diversi tipi di mancanza di sequenzialità;
- i significati e gli effetti diversi ma, a volte, in parte coincidenti che vengono associati alla struttura x+verbo.

1 The present work is taken from a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in “The Bible and Its World” at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, June 8, 2003.
Aaron Hornkohl

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE 3
THE CORPUS 5
LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY 6

SECTION 1: BASIC WORD ORDER IN BH

LINGUISTIC TYPOLOGY AND BH 7
THE ARGUMENTS FOR BASIC WORD ORDER 9
THE PRELIMINARY CASE FOR BASIC VSO WORD ORDER IN THE BH VERBAL CLAUSE 12
Overall Statistical Dominance of Relative V/S Word Order 12
Statistical Dominance with Particles 14
Pragmatic Markedness of Relative SV Word Order with Particles 16
Descriptive Simplicity 18
Preliminary Conclusion and Summary 20

SECTION 2: DISCOURSE ANALYSIS, PRAGMATICS, AND BH

DISCOURSE ANALYSIS 22
PRAGMATICS 24
PRAGMATICS AND BH WORD ORDER 26
TERMINOLOGY 32
THE INADEQUACY OF SYNTACTIC SUBJECT AND PREDICATE 33

SECTION 3: THE X+VERB STRUCTURE FOR FOCAL MARKING

FOCUS DEFINED 35
CASES OF FOCUS IN GENESIS 38
Focus for Contrast 38
Focus for Identification/Fill-in/Completion 39
Focus for Contrarexpected Information 40
Focus for General Reinforcement 40

SECTION 4: THE X+VERB STRUCTURE FOR NON-FOCAL MARKING

THE TWO BASIC TYPES OF NON-FOCAL X+VERB STRUCTURES 41
THE NON-FOCAL X+VERB STRUCTURE WITH MARKED FRONTED ELEMENT (X CONSTITUENT MARKED) 41
Excursus: Focus, Topic, and the Problem of Ambiguous Structures 48
THE NON-FOCAL X+VERB STRUCTURE WITH UNMARKED FRONTED ELEMENT (CLAUSE MARKED) 49
THE BH VERB SYSTEM AND THE CONCEPT OF DISCOURSE OR COMMUNICATIVE CONTINUITY 53
The Concepts of Foreground and Background: Applicational Problems 56
Communicative or Discourse Continuity, Word Order, and Verb Form 60
THE BASIC FUNCTION(S) OF THE X+VERB STRUCTURE 62
THE X+VERB STRUCTURE AND NON-SEQUENTIALITY 62
THE X+VERB STRUCTURE FOR PRAGMATIC DISCONTINUITY 66
Non-Storyline Information: Circumstantial, Parenthetical, Explanatory, Background, or Summary 67
Start of New Literary Unit (Episode or Paragraph) 68
Intra-Episode Scene Switching 70
Dramatic Slowing or Dramatic Pause 71
Discontinuities and Direct Speech: Change in tack/start of new theme 74
Restatement/Explanation/Detailing 75
Redirect of Discourse for Change in Theme (often after Rhetorical Question, Exclamation, Introduction, or Command) 76
THE X+VERB STRUCTURE AND PRAGMATIC DISCONTINUITY 77

SECTION 5: CONCLUSION

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH 79

BIBLIOGRAPHY 80
Introduction

Purpose

This MA thesis deals with the Biblical Hebrew (henceforth BH) construction that is here termed the X+verb structure. Against the neutral backdrop of a basic VSO word order in the BH verbal clause, those clauses having preposed constituents must be considered marked constructions. Arguments for basic (which is to say, pragmatically neutral) VSO word order in Biblical Hebrew constitute the subject matter of Section 1. As defined in this paper, the fronted X element may consist of any intra-clausal verbal argument (e.g., subject, direct object, indirect object, adverbial of manner, time, place, et cetera). Further, the verb in question must be either a qatal or yiqtol form. Finally, as defined here, the X+verb structure may be either syndetic or asyndetic (i.e. may appear either with or without a particle explicitly linking it to the preceding clause).

Students of BH have recognized and commented upon the particular characteristics of the X+verb structure since at least as early as the Middle Ages (note, e.g., the comments of Rashi (1040-1105 CE) on יָדָאָהוְ אֶדַּם תֵעַ אִוָּחַ וֹתּשְׁה in Gen 4.1; see below). The traditional grammars typically list certain meanings and effects associated with the X+verb structure (e.g., emphasis, circumstantial clause/parenthesis, the pluperfect tense). More recent scholarship has sought to establish the linguistic basis (or bases) for these meanings and effects, along

2 The term ‘word order’ is used in deference to the accepted norm in linguistic articles. It would, of course, be more accurate to speak of ‘constituent order’.

3 Thus, extra-clausal constituents that occur before the clause (a phenomenon known variously as casus pendens, nominative absolute, extraposition, Y-movement, left-dislocation, and theme) are excluded from the present study. It is important to note, however, that it is only due to limits of space that such clauses are excluded from the present discussion. Despite important pragmatic and generative differences, there are striking functional similarities between intra-clausal frontings and extra-clausal constituents occurring before the clause, both in BH and cross-linguistically. It is worth briefly mentioning those differences and similarities here. Pragmatically, extra-clausal constituents are rarely if ever focal, whereas this is common for intra-clausal fronted constituents. Generatively, there is a marked difference between how the two elements relate to the rest of the clause. Dik (1981:127-44) discusses the distinction between what he terms topic (i.e. a non-focal intra-clausal fronted element) and theme (i.e. an extra-clausal element occurring before the clause), the main point being that the former should be regarded as integral to the utterance, while the latter cannot be regarded as being part of the underlying predication. Topics and themes (to adopt, for the moment, Dik’s terminology) in BH are functionally similar, however, in that both can specially mark the entity about which an assertion is made or more specifically define the domain in which a given assertion holds true. This similarity extends to the theme created by the insertion of a resumptive pronoun. See Khan (1988) for a discussion of the function and various uses of extra-clausal constituents that occur before the clause. See Buth (1999) for an insightful discussion of themes created by the insertion of a resumptive pronoun in the BH verbless clause. It is worth noting that, despite the exclusion of such clauses from the present study, it is predicted that the theories proposed herein could be used effectively to explain them.

4 In other words, this paper does not examine verbless (e.g., nominal and participial) clauses, imperatival clauses (though yiqtol forms used as negative injunctions are included in the study), or conditional clauses. It is important to emphasize, however, that the decision to exclude such clause-types derives from concerns of space, not from the inadequacy of the theories proposed herein to account for similar word order phenomena in such clause-types. The pragmatics of word order variation in the verbless (i.e. nominal and participial) clause has already been capably dealt with by Buth (1999).

5 As a definition for verbal clause, this thesis basically follows Moshavi (2000:72): “We define the verbal clause as a syntactic unit containing a verbal form, e.g., בָּרָא ‘He arose.’”
with other effects associated with the structure. Many recent studies have been influenced by advances in modern linguistics, particularly in the areas of pragmatics and discourse analysis (or textlinguistics). Both fields are briefly introduced in Section 2, where their importance in understanding the X+verb structure in BH is also emphasized.

This paper unabashedly and gratefully builds on the foundation laid in previous scholarship, both that which concerns BH specifically and that of more general linguistic scope. Each study, whether the theories proposed therein are accepted here or not, has contributed to the defining of the theories proposed in this paper, the principle goal of which is to ascribe the various meanings and effects associated with the X+verb structure to recognized cross-linguistic phenomena. This goal requires, among other things, a critical assessment of some of the theories proposed by discourse analysts in relation to BH. It is also important to devote some space to certain, more traditional syntactic questions, such as, for example, the BH verbal system in general and the so-called waw-conversive forms more specifically. Also, an effort has been made to illustrate theoretical concepts with a large number of examples. Some of the essential points made in this thesis are summarized here:

(1) The rules of science demand that a given theory be as simple and general as possible. In light of this demand, an attempt is made here to unify the explanations for the various phenomena associated with the fronting of a constituent in the BH verbal clause. It is for this reason that the general term X+verb structure is employed, a construction including all types of fronted verbal arguments (i.e. not just the subject and/or object), both the qatal and yiqtol forms, and both syndetic and asyndetic clauses.

(2) The goal of providing a unified theory to account for the variety of meanings and effects associated with the X+verb structure should not, however, lead to an analysis in which distinct factors and processes are indiscriminately lumped together. In this work, two separate (though not entirely unrelated) pragmatic dimensions are considered with regard to their effects on word order. The first dimension, typically referred to by researchers as information structure, concerns the cognitive status of the information expressed in an utterance and the ways in which that information is represented at the surface-level. Of particular interest is the clausal constituent that the writer/speaker marks by fronting as containing the information which he or she considers most important or salient in the given context. This type of marked

---

6 A note on the use of the term ‘speaker’ in relation to direct speech in Genesis: the extent to which the representation of direct speech in the Bible accurately reflects (one of) the spoken idiom(s) of the day remains unclear. Segal (1927:11) held that BH was strictly a literary language, while the spoken Hebrew of the day more closely resembled Mishnaic Hebrew. See Rendsburg (1990:1-33) for an introductory discussion and relevant bibliography. See also Miller (1996:10-13). Of particular interest are specific features of BH; for example, was the waw-conversive employed in the common speech of the Biblical period or was it strictly literary? Inscriptional material may be of some use in answering this question, as there are many epigraphic sources that cannot properly be characterized as ‘literary’. Even here, however, the data are open to opposing interpretations. Interestingly, Blau (1977:a24) and Jouion-Muraoka (1996§111a, n. 3) view the apparent wqatal form ושלחתי in Arad letter 16:3-5 as an unconverted wq+qatal form (cf. Buth 2003:353), in spite of the former's opinion that the spoken language of the Biblical period employed the wq-conversive (1977a:23). Note also חנניהו and צוך in Arad 3:2-3, which is also taken as an unconverted form (Aharoni 1981:17; Ahituv 1992:58; see also Smith 1991:20). However, converted wqatal forms do appear among the Arad letters. Garr (1985:180) (see also Smith 1991:20) notes שלחתי (Arad 24:13; Aharoni 1981:46; Pardee 1982:59; Ahituv 1992:78; see also Smith 1991:20) and סלקה (Arad 24:14-15; Aharoni 1981:46; Pardee 1982:59; Ahituv 1992:78; see also Smith 1991:20). There are still many questions regarding the differences between the literary and spoken versions of ancient Hebrew. Note, in a related vein, the controversy among linguists over the linguistic value of written texts, as opposed to spoken ‘texts’, as summarized by Bodine (1987:42-4). For the sake of simplicity, the term ‘writer/speaker’ is employed here.
constituent is here termed focus. Focal frontings are discussed in detail in Section 3. The second pragmatic dimension, discourse or communicative continuity, relates specifically to the flow of the information expressed in a series of utterances and especially to reasons for interrupting that flow. Thus, the discussion in Section 4 centers on disruptions of discourse or communicative continuity. Also discussed in relation to continuity and discontinuity are several types of fronted elements that have traditionally been labeled topic. Finally, Section 4 includes a discussion on the link between discourse continuity and sequentiality.

(3) One of the most vexing issues in past studies of the X+verb structure in BH has been the sometimes uncritical application of linguistic concepts and terminology to the lingual data of the Bible, a practice which has all too often led to unnatural, theory-driven readings. Conceptual and terminological confusion plague the study of pragmatics and discourse analysis alike. Scholars often use a single term (e.g., topic) to refer to a multitude of phenomena or, vice versa, use a multitude of terms (e.g., topic, basis, topicalized constituent, pseudo-topic, contextualizing constituent) to refer to a single phenomenon. In every new study of the relevant issues the analyst must confront the decision of whether to redefine existing terminology, to develop new terminology, or to employ clumsy circumlocutions instead of shorter, but perhaps poorly understood, technical jargon. In this paper, the issue is sidestepped to some extent, the main distinction being made between focal frontings and non-focal frontings. Both functional categories are then sub-divided into their more specific effects. It is hoped that the terminology utilized in the taxonomy of functions and effects presented here will serve to clarify what has become something of a terminological nightmare.

(4) The analysis of some of the individual examples from BH in this thesis emphasizes the fact that a given non-focal X+verb structure can conceivably achieve more than one desired effect in a single clause. For example, an X+qatal structure may signal the beginning of a literary unit (episode or paragraph), a pluperfect flashback, and non-story-line, background information at the same time. The purpose of certain non-focal X+verb structures has been too narrowly defined in some past treatments. Here it is argued that the overall pragmatic discontinuity function of the non-focal X+verb structure is amenable to a variety of effects and meanings, even within the same clause (see Section 4). Specific effects and meanings are categorized according to whether the fronted element is itself marked or marks the entire clause and according to whether the effect derives from the natural (though indirect) association between non-sequentiality and discourse discontinuity or directly from discourse discontinuity.

(5) Finally, this paper attempts to describe the functions and effects of the X+verb construction without assuming that writers/speakers were obligated to use it. It is assumed here that writers/speakers of BH generally and unconsciously adhered to the pragmatic norms of their language, but that these pragmatic norms allowed for a certain amount of freedom to alternate between marked and unmarked constructions.

The Corpus

The statistical analysis regarding basic word order concentrates only on the book of Genesis (excluding chapter 49). Most, but not all, of the examples which follow also come from this
book. This being the case, all citations refer to Genesis unless otherwise stated. The advantages of choosing Genesis involve its length, the variety discourse-types it encompasses (including narrative and direct speech), and the number of previous studies of Genesis with which it was possible to interact. One disadvantage of working with the book of Genesis is the paucity of legal, hortatory, wisdom, and prophetic materials.

**Limitations of the Study**

Given the linguistically oriented research aims of this work, it has been necessary to relate to the book of Genesis in its present form. In other words, virtually no attempt has been made to relate to the literary sources from which the book of Genesis may have been composed. This should not be taken as an argument against the existence of such sources, but rather as the natural consequence of focusing on the Massoretic text as a linguistic artifact. Regarding those sections of text that are clearly composite in nature, it is assumed here (a) that the language of both original authors and subsequent editors was governed, at least to some extent, by the pragmatic principles discussed below and (b) that subsequent editors exercised enough freedom to compose a literary product whose language still reflected, despite reshaping, the pragmatic principles discussed below. It should also be noted that limitations of space preclude detailed discussion of each verse, including evaluation of existing translations, interpretations, and commentaries, and suggestions on exegesis and renderings. Regarding examples, the method adopted in this study provides multiple examples of a given phenomenon, even where some of the examples may be questionable, rather than only a few choice passages. It is hoped, however, that the present study may serve as a small part of a foundation for future work in these areas. Finally, it must be emphasized that the goal of this paper is not to propose a system that unambiguously defines the function, effect, and meaning of every fronted element dealt with here, but is rather to erect a framework within which reasonable discussion can take place. More important than the specific categorization of the individual examples listed are the general parameters suggested herein.
Section 1: Basic Word Order in BH

Linguistic Typology and BH

Linguists are generally agreed that most languages have a basic syntactic word order (Greenberg 1966:76; Siewierska 1988:1; Payne 1992a:1; Mithun 1992:58-9). This basic order is typically discussed in terms of the relative positions of the syntactic subject, verb, and object. The analyses presented in the present work rest on the assumption that the basic, unmarked relative word order of subject, verb, and object in the BH verbal clause is VSO. Most BH grammars assume such a word order, as do a number of recent studies. However, there have been a handful of scholars over the years who have questioned this view. For example, in his influential grammar, Joüon (1923:§155k) wrote “L’ordre des mots dans la proposition verbale … est normalement: Sujet – Verbe.” Greenberg (1965:§27.4) also sees SV word order as dominant, noting that order of subject and verb is flexible outside the waw-conversive clause, but that “normally the order is subject – verb.” In a more recent

7 Marianne Mithun’s article, often cited as the opposing view in discussions of basic syntactic word order, in no way contradicts the idea that BH has a basic syntactic word order. She deals with several American Indian languages which seem to differ from languages with syntactically based word orders at some basic, typological level. In these languages: all word orders seem to reflect pragmatic considerations (such as ‘newsworthiness’), pragmatic reordering of constituents is not highly marked, and the theme-rheme (i.e. given-new) informational order which so frequently results from pragmatic reordering in syntactically based languages is virtually reversed. Mithun does not, however, argue against the basic validity of syntactic word order typologies – “Pragmatically based languages do not provide strong evidence against most word order typologies” (59) – but rather proposes an additional, pragmatically-based typology which simply does not apply to BH.

8 Note, however, that several linguists place more emphasis on the relative positions of verb and object (see, e.g., Lehman 1973, as cited in Givón 1977:182). Cf. Givón (ibid). With regard to BH, there is no controversy regarding the basic (i.e. pragmatically neutral) relative order of verb and object. Sentences in which the object precedes the verb are clearly marked. For as Holmstedt (2002:127, n. 1) notes, “BH is unquestionably a head-complement (i.e., VO) language. The crux in BH studies is the placement of the subject and the verb with regard to each other.”

9 It is necessary to speak of “relative” word order, because, on the one hand, many verbs do not have an overt subject and, on the other, many verbs take no object. With specific regard to the pragmatically neutral position of the object, the VSO order only applies to objects expressed as full nominal clauses. For pronominal objects, the dominant word order is different. This difference can be explained pragmatically. There exists a ‘slot’ immediately following the verb (and before the subject, if one is overtly expressed) that is reserved for highly presupposed information. This slot is often filled by a preposition (or by the direct object marker פָּרָשַׁה) with attached pronominal suffix or by some other anaphoric deictic marker like שם (e.g., Gen 1:17 פָּרָשַׁה בָּשַׂם הָאֱלֹהִים, where שם refers to the sun, moon, and stars, highly presupposed information in the context, i.e. items mentioned in the immediately preceding verse). The difference in placement between nominal and pronominal objects is thus clearly explicable in terms of pragmatics. See van der Merwe, Naudé, and Kroze (1999:341) and Buth (2003:109). Givón (1977:190) links this phenomenon to “the general pragmatic principle that more topical old-information goes to the left [i.e. towards the head of the clause: AH].” Note also that the Language Independent Preferred Order of Constituents (or LIPOC) proposed by Dik (1981:191) predicts this very order: “If the position of a pronominal Obj is different from the position of a nominal Obj, then the former position will come before the latter in the structure of the clause.” I am indebted to Dr. Randall Buth for this last reference.


article, Gross (1999:30, n. 46) criticizes Muraoka’s revision of Joüon’s *Grammaire*, arguing that the former wrongly corrected the latter’s statement on basic word order from SV to VS. Likewise, DeCaen (1999:118, n. 22) delivers a harshly-worded attack on the validity of argumentation for basic VS word order in BH. Finally, in what is perhaps the fullest treatment to date of basic word order in BH, Robert Holmstedt devotes half a chapter of his doctoral dissertation to a critique of basic VS word order and to the support of basic SV word order.\(^{12}\) Relating to several recent word-order studies on BH\(^{13}\) he expresses surprise “that the presentation in each of these works focuses on discourse issues without supporting their assumption that BH is a Verb-Subject (VS) language. Yet, it is safe to assume that these authors would agree that an adequate understanding of ‘basic word order’ is necessary before addressing the pragmatic or discourse issues” (2002:127-8).\(^{14}\) Holmstedt is correct about the importance of basic word order. While it may difficult to prove basic word order in BH, any discussion of the function of pragmatically marked word order should at the very least rest on a reasonably well-founded assumption of what constitutes unmarked word order. It is appropriate, then, to dedicate some space to the justification of the view adopted in this study, namely that the BH verbal clause does indeed exhibit a basic VS word order.\(^{15}\)

One fundamental challenge in such an undertaking is that there exists no one accepted methodology for defining a given language’s typologically basic word order. However, some of the most frequently used arguments rely on the following criteria: basic sentence type, textual frequency, typological universals, descriptive simplicity, and pragmatic neutrality. It is admitted at the outset that none of these criteria is sufficient in and of itself to furnish incontrovertible proof of basic word order, particularly in a language where the data may be given to multiple explanations. As Holmstedt (2002:130-2) notes, the arguments are best considered collectively. Furthermore, while some may question Mithun’s conclusion, namely that there exist languages with no basic typological word order, her arguments, if nothing else, make it clear that there are languages that simply defy classification in terms of the usual arguments. As will be seen, however, BH should not be considered one of these ‘typologically marginal’ languages.

\(^{12}\) Van Wolde (1997) does not state what she considers to be the basic word order in BH. However, she does speak of the verb being “fronted” in the wayyiqtol construction. See also Schlesinger (1953) as cited by Muraoka (1985:29, n. 66).


\(^{14}\) Contrary to the claim made by Holmstedt, however, Jongeling (1991:106; see below), Rosenbaum (1997:217-224), and Moshavi (2000:87-8; see below) do indeed provide justification for the basic VS view adopted in their studies.

\(^{15}\) It is worth noting that some scholars cannot be properly numbered with either camp. For example, the view represented by Niccacci (1991) is simply incompatible with a discussion of basic word order in the verbal clause, because he classifies all verbal clauses beginning with subject or object as nominal clauses. According to this view, then, VSO word order is not a transformation of underlying SVO word order. Nor is SVO word order a transformation of underlying VSO word order. Rather, VSO word order is the necessary order for verbal clauses, with SVO the necessary word order for compound or complex nominal clauses. While such a view may seem to give a tidy picture of BH word order, and while it recognizes some of the functions that X+verb clauses have in common with verbless clauses, this artificial dichotomy between verb-initial verbal clauses and non-verb-initial verbal clauses actually prevents intelligent discussion of the functions of the various word orders which occur in such clauses, because it conceals the pragmatic process which generates the surface structure. See Gross (1999) for a detailed critique of this approach with special regard to the BH verbless clause.
The Arguments for Basic Word Order

The argument from *sentence type* defines basic word order as the order that obtains in the simple (i.e. not complex), main (i.e. not subordinate), declarative (i.e. not interrogative, imperative, or presentative), prototypically transitive clause, with full nouns for subject and object (Mallinson and Blake 1981:125; Siewierska 1988:8; DeCaen 1999:118, n. 22). This methodology, while at first glance attractive, is problematic for two reasons. First, it rather arbitrarily limits evidence to the types of sentences that language teachers have traditionally written on the blackboard, thereby forcing the exclusion of a wealth of potential evidence. The implicit assumption is that the ‘context-free’ clause necessarily exhibits basic word order. However, as Lambrecht (1987:215-6) has argued, some of the so-called ‘typical’ sentences used by linguists to illustrate their respective theories are not at all representative of real language use. For, as Buth (1999:88, n. 22) has noted: “there is no such thing as context-free language use. For, as Buth (1999:88, n. 22) has noted: “there is no such thing as context-free language use.” As will be shown, the evidence culled from a variety of different clause-types is indeed significant in establishing an empirically-based argument for basic word order for BH.

Second, the decision as to what constitutes a simple, main, declarative clause is not necessarily clear-cut in BH. Where in the Bible does one find such a clause? For example, both DeCaen and Holmstedt assume that a clause beginning with a *waw* form does not constitute a simple, main, declarative clause. While this may be the case, it does not necessarily follow that the dominant word order in the *waw* clause (i.e. VSO) represents a variation of basic word order.

According to the *textual frequency* argument, the basic word order of a language is the one which occurs most frequently in attested texts of the language. In the case of BH, VSO easily wins out according to this parameter. Siewierska (1988:8-14), however, cautions against assuming that the statistically dominant word order is necessarily identical to the basic (i.e. pragmatically neutral) word order. Furthermore, Muraoka (1985:28-30), DeCaen (1999:118, n. 22), and Holmstedt all stress the theoretical unreliability of the frequency criterion with specific regard to BH, given that the bulk of the verb-initial clauses in BH have *waw*-conversive verb forms, which, as a ‘rule’, occur in clause-initial position. Says Holmstedt (2002:133):

---

16 DeCaen (1999:118, n. 22) speaks explicitly of “the crucial assumption [italics mine: AH] that the statistically prevalent, narrative construction with *waw* is morphologically, syntactically and semantically marked.” Notably, DeCaen ignores considerations of pragmatics entirely. The question of the *waw* form’s markedness is dealt with below. For his part, Holmstedt believes that direct speech (rather than narrative) gives the best picture of real language use in BH and that studies of word order should thus be based on quoted material. His arguments are dealt with below.

17 However, evidence from both Biblical and extra-Biblical literature shows that users of BH and close cognate languages did not always follow the ‘rules.’ Technically speaking, there are at least four clause-types for which it can be argued that the *waw*-conversive verb is not clause-initial. First, there are clauses (though, admittedly, very few) in which an adverbial of time precedes the *waw*-conversive form. Examples are Gen 22.4 מִלְחָמָה וְיָשִׁלְחָֽהוּ, Ex 16.6-7וּרְאִיתֶם וּרְאִיתֶם וּרְאִיתֶם וּרְאִיתֶם, Isa 17.4וְיִשְׁתִּתֵּן וְיִשְׁתִּתֵּן וְיִשְׁתִּתֵּן וְיִשְׁתִּתֵּן, Hos 11.1וֶהֶם וֶהֶם וֶהֶם וֶהֶם, and Jer 51.61bוּרְאִיתֶם וּרְאִיתֶם וּרְאִיתֶם וּרְאִיתֶם. Second, there are clauses in which an adverbial of time including an infinitive construct precedes a *waw*-conversive form. Examples, which are fairly numerous, include Gen 28.6bוּרְאִיתֶם וּרְאִיתֶם וּרְאִיתֶם וּרְאִיתֶם and Jer 51.61bוּרְאִיתֶם וּרְאִיתֶם וּרְאִיתֶם וּרְאִיתֶם. It is worth noting here that this structure also occurs in Arad inscription no. 16, lns. 3-5 (though the ס and ה are unclear) (Ahituv 1992:250-1). لا نستنجد بِرَأْيِ السِّنَةِ الْمَعْدُونِيَّةِ النِّحَدِيَّةِ (cf. Jouon-Muraoka (1996§111a, n. 3) and Blau (1977:24), who take the apparent *wayyiqtol* form as a non-conversive structure). Third, there is the more common structure of *waw* (or *wayyiqtol*)+time adverbial+*waw*-conversive. Among the numerous examples are: Gen 38.28וּרְאִיתֶם וּרְאִיתֶם וּרְאִיתֶם וּרְאִיתֶם and Ex 33.22וּרְאִיתֶם וּרְאִיתֶם וּרְאִיתֶם וּרְאִיתֶם. Finally, there are the very rare structures represented by the *gen* (!) reading of Jer 38.2וּרְאִיתֶם וּרְאִיתֶם וּרְאִיתֶם וּרְאִיתֶם.
However, the overwhelming predominance of the ‘narrative verb’ form wayyiqtol, a verb form that exhibits unique morphological characteristics, should serve as a methodological red flag. For instance, out of the almost 5,500 clauses in the text of Genesis, there are over 2100 clauses with wayyiqtol that is almost 40 percent of the book!.. If non-V/S word order is impossible with the wayyiqtol, then it is methodologically precarious to use it when determining basic word order; the wayyiqtol clearly skews the data towards a V/S analysis.

Though it is indeed “methodologically precarious” to establish basic word order in BH on the sole basis of textual frequency – and according to DeCaen and Holmstedt, this is precisely what most scholars have done\textsuperscript{18} – it is just as problematic to decide \textit{a priori} that waw-conversive clauses must be excluded from consideration. For as Moshavi (2001:87-88) notes:

\textit{Eliminating waw-conversive clauses, however, merely begs the question: why do these clauses, and not others, have consecutive verb forms? It cannot be that the presence of the waw requires the consecutive form, since many clauses can be found which contain a waw and ordinary verb forms.}

Several scholars\textsuperscript{19} have argued convincingly that it is the word order of the clause that determines the verb form. If the verb is first in the clause, the verb takes the waw-consecutive form. If, on the other hand, any element, including a subject, adverbial phrase, or the negative particle \textit{nu}, precedes the verb, the verb takes the ordinary, non-consecutive form. Consecutive and non-consecutive forms are thus in complementary distribution, i.e., they occur in mutually exclusive syntactic environments, with the position of the verb conditioning the choice of verbal form. It makes no sense, therefore, to exclude consecutive verb forms from a study of word order: this will simply have the effect of eliminating the vast majority of clauses with normal word order from the data.

In other words, the Holmstedt-DeCaen-Muraoka argument against including waw-conversive clauses in a discussion of basic word order is valid only if it is first established that the BH verbal clause has a basic SVO word order. For if BH has a basic VSO word order, then the statistically prevalent VSO order of waw-conversive clauses does not “skew the data towards a VS analysis,” but rather reflects this underlying, basic word order. But this is the very issue under discussion. In summary, the essential question can be phrased as follows: Is it the prevalence of waw-conversive forms that causes the numerical dominance of VSO clauses or, conversely, is it the typological dominance of VSO word order (coupled with the ubiquitous waw conjunction) that produces so many clauses beginning with a waw-conversive verb? Since this question cannot be answered definitively on the sole basis of the criterion of textual frequency, it is necessary to turn to another argument.

\textsuperscript{18} DeCaen (1999:118, n. 22): “The naive and theoretically uninteresting sense of \textit{statistically prevalent} is the basis for the standard VSO account of Biblical Hebrew.” Holmstedt (2002:132-3): “Most modern treatments of BH word order have accepted the VS analysis, although the justification tends to be based upon the frequency criterion... VS order is statistically dominant throughout the Hebrew Bible.” It is of particular interest in this light to note that Muraoka (1985:29-30) posits basic VSO word order in BH on the basis of statistical dominance \textit{despite} his refusal to remove waw-conversive clauses from consideration.

\textsuperscript{19} Moshavi cites Bergsträsser (1962:§6c) and Blau (1993:§76).
The Pragmatics of the X+verb Structure in the Hebrew of Genesis

The argument from typological universals finds its basis in the influential work of Joseph Greenberg (1966), in which he propounded a total of 45 universals describing inflectional morphology and word order. Most of the universals take the form of implicational statements – “given \( x \) in a particular language, we always find \( y \)” – where the converse – “given \( y \), we always find \( x \)” – does not necessarily hold true. Both Jongeling (1991:106) and Longacre (1992:332) argue that BH is best seen as a basic VSO language from the perspective of Greenberg’s universals. In grouping BH with other “strongly VSO languages” Longacre notes: “not only are they verb first languages but they are (1) prepositional rather than postpositional; (2) item possessor (‘noun-genitive’) rather than possessor-item; and (3) head-attribute (‘noun adjective’) rather than attribute-noun.” DeCaen (1999:118, n. 22), responding specifically to Jongeling’s statistical-typological comparison of BH and Welsh, forcefully counters by noting (a) that VSO and SVO languages generally “pattern together along the major parameters;” (b) that the relevant typological universals are statistical, and as such, not necessarily indicative of basic word order (see above on textual frequency); and (c) that they are unidirectional, that is, “if \( x \), then \( y \),” but not necessarily “if \( y \), then \( x \).” In summary, then, the argument for basic word order from typological universals, while indicative of the fact that BH shares meaningful characteristics with languages whose basic word order is considered VSO, is by no means incontrovertible.

For some scholars, descriptive simplicity is the overriding concern in identifying basic word order. In other words, the basic word order is the one that permits the simplest overall syntactic description of a language (see Mithun 1992:15 for bibliography). Jongeling (1991:106) refers to this as “economy,” explaining:

> The question is now, whether it is more appropriate to describe the verb-initial sentence as the standard, describing the environment in which deviations from this standard occur or to take another sentence-type as a starting point, e.g. the SVO type, as is done by Joüon. Taking economy as a criterium a description starting from the VSO viewpoint is the most appropriate, because the SVO sentences are more easily described as deviations from a VSO order than the other way round.

Clearly, it is true of any scientific analysis that the theory capable of explaining the greatest number of data with the fewest exceptions has the highest level of validity.

According to the final argument, that of pragmatic neutrality, the basic word order is the pragmatically unmarked word order, i.e. the word order for which there is no functional explanation (Dik 1981:172; Mithun 1992:15). This argument is both the most compelling and the most complex for establishing basic word order in BH. It is the most compelling because it links the concept of basic word order to those of neutrality and pragmatic markedness. In BH this is decisive, as the vast majority of clause types with SVO order can be shown to be

---

20 It should be pointed out that Jongeling is aware of this fact: “In typical VSO and SVO languages the normal order of elements is: modifiers following modified expressions” (1991:106). Incidentally, Hawkins (1983:16) argues against SVO as a type indicator altogether, writing: “SVO is no longer a type indicator; that is, nothing correlates with SVO in a unique and principled way, according to our evidence. There are, of course, many languages with SVO, but there is no SVO-type.”

21 DeCaen (1999:118, n. 22) argues: “In other words, correlations with putative VSO Welsh along the parameters of noun-adjunctive or adjective-adverb, for example, are irrelevant in determining basic word order. The correlation only works the other way: if it can be established that a given language is VSO (in what sense?), then it is predicted that adjectives follow nouns, and so on.”

22 Within the theory of markedness, as developed by the Prague School of linguistic theory, a marked phonological, morphosyntactic, or syntactic element is a more specialized form than its unmarked counterpart. For a discussion on markedness in relation to language typology see Croft (1990:64-94). Van Wolde (1997) provides a useful discussion of markedness with specific regard to BH syntax.
marked, while such is not the case for the majority of clause types with VSO word order. It is the most complex, however, because it requires in-depth analysis of a large number of individual clauses in context. This is the purpose of Sections 3 and 4 below. The results of the analysis provide support for the validity of the view that BH is a language with a basic, which is to say pragmatically neutral, VSO word order.

The Preliminary Case for Basic VSO Word Order in the BH Verbal Clause

The purpose of this section is to present preliminary arguments which support the assumption of a basic VSO word order in BH. The four arguments adduced here deal with over-all statistical dominance, statistical dominance with preceding particles, the markedness of non-VSO word order with preceding function words, and descriptive simplicity. It is on the basis of these four preliminary arguments that further analysis of word order pragmatics against the neutral background of a basic VSO word order is done below in this thesis. That analysis itself, in turn, provides further, even stronger, evidence for a basic VSO word order in BH, in that it demonstrates a correlation between pragmatic markedness/functions and specific word orders.

Overall Statistical Dominance of Relative VS Word Order

The following chart gives the raw statistics for VS, SV and XV\textsuperscript{23} word orders in the book of Genesis, distinguishing between Narrative and Direct Speech.\textsuperscript{24}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Narrative</th>
<th>Direct Speech</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VS</td>
<td>SV (XSV or SXV)</td>
<td>XV (XVS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>966</td>
<td>116 (3)</td>
<td>86 (26)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are a total of 1108 (966 VS + 116 SV + 26 XVS) narrative verbal clauses with explicit subjects. 966 of these clauses, or approximately 87%, are verb-initial. Another 26 of them have a fronted X element but still exhibit relative VS word order. In total, then, 992, or just under 89.5% of narrative verbal clauses exhibit relative VSO word order. For direct speech, the raw statistics are much more balanced: 200 of a total of 365 (200 VS + 132 SV + 33 XVS) verbal clauses with explicit subjects, or about 54.8%, are verb-initial. Adding the 33 clauses with fronted X that also exhibit relative VS word order, there are 233 of 365, or approximately 64% of direct speech clauses with an explicit subject that exhibit relative VS word order. Overall, then, out of the 1473 verbal clauses with explicit subject, some 1225, or approximately 83.2%, exhibit relative VS word order.

At first glance, there is a clear numerical dominance of relative VS word order. However, several things should be noted. First, the dominance is much more marked in

\textsuperscript{23} X here refers to any intra-clausal constituent other than subject. Note that the SV column includes both XSV and SXV word order (in both of which the relative constituent order of subject and verb is SV) in the total, with the exact number given in parentheses. The XV column includes clauses both with and without an overt subject. The total number includes both, while the figure in parentheses represents the number of clauses with fronted X constituent and an overt subject (XVS).

\textsuperscript{24} These data include both main and subordinate clauses.
narrative than in direct speech. Second, if *waw*-conversive and modal (jussive and cohortative) *yiqtol* forms are excluded, then the numbers are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Narrative</th>
<th>Direct Speech</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VS</td>
<td>SV (XSV or SXV)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>101</td>
<td>116 (2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Without the *waw*-conversive and modal *yiqtol* forms, the picture changes drastically. The cases of relative VS word order (VS+XVS above) still outnumber those of relative SV word order 272 to 247, but the statistics are nearly balanced; neither table, thus, provides data sufficient in and of themselves to establish basic word order. The raw statistical evidence is ambiguous and open to more than one interpretation. The clause-initial nature of the *waw*-conversive forms may transform what would otherwise be basic SV word order into marked VS order or, conversely, VS may be the basic word order, with the numerous *waw*-conversive forms merely reflecting such and the SV (and XV) clauses marked.

In passing, it is also worth noting that overall XV word order is also more prevalent than SV word order, with the former outnumbering the latter both in direct speech and overall. See below for more on the evidence provided by XV clauses.

---

25 It is a well-known fact that clause-initial *yiqtol* forms and *we-yiqtol* forms are often (though not always) jussive or cohortative in force. They are identifiable as semantically modal on the grounds of (a) context, (b) morphology, (c) the choice of negative particle used, and (d) word-order. Niccacci (1990:76-7) correctly asserts the partial unreliability of morphology and the choice of negative particle as indicators of modality. Apocopated *יִיָּה*, *יַלְמִי*, and 3s *ḥîḍâl* forms often indicate the jussive, but not rigorously. The same holds true for the negative particles *לֹא* (indicative) and *אַל* (modal). However, Niccacci’s assertion with regard to clause-initial *yiqtol* (ibid.) “that indicative YIQTOL never comes first in the sentence,” is certainly too strong. Note, for example, יְקִימְ in Deut 19.3, יָבִיא in Deut 28.9, יְפֹקֵד in Isa 7.17. Of the 27 clause-initial *yiqtol* forms in the narrative portions of Genesis, only one is indicative: 17.13. The jussive/cohortative clauses are: 1.6, 9.26, 27 (יִהוּד), 16.5, 18.4, 19.20, 22.17, 24.60, 27.38, 29 (טוֹר), 30.3, 31.44, 33.9, 14, 41.33, 34 (though clearly indicative in form; note (a) the word order, (b) the context, and (c) the following *we-yiqtol* form יְפֹקֵד), 42.16, 20, 44.18, 33, 47.4, 19, 48.16. The *we-yiqtol* form has been illumined by a pair of recent studies: Fassberg (1991:76-82) and Maruoka (1997).
Statistical Dominance of Relative VS Word Order with Particles

Since the evidence from \textit{waw}-conversive clauses is open to opposing interpretations, it is useful to examine word order in those clause types in which \textit{waw}-conversive forms cannot occur, namely clauses headed by particles such as: 

- לֹא, לָכֵן, עַל-כֵּן, פֶּן, לְמַעַן, בַּעֲבוּר, טֶרֶם, בְּטֶרֶם, הִנֵּה-נָא, אִם, אָז, אַחַר, אַחֲרֵי, אֲשֶׁר, כִּי.

In the following tables, VS, SV, and XV clauses are separated into those occurring in narrative and those occurring in direct speech.\(^{26}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Particle</th>
<th>VS</th>
<th>SV</th>
<th>XV (XVS)</th>
<th>VS</th>
<th>SV (XSV or SXV)</th>
<th>XV (XVS)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>לא</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8(^{16})</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>14(^{15})</td>
<td>9(^{15})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>לאほן</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>יולא</td>
<td>2(^{5})</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1(^{16})</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>פֶּן</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5(^{16})</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>לְמַעַן</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>בַּעֲבוּר</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3(^{16})</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>רֶםטֶ</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4(^{16})</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>בְּטֶרֶם</td>
<td>4(^{4})</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5(^{16})</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>הֵן</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1(^{16})</td>
<td>3(^{16})</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{26}\) Once again, clauses with modal 	extit{yiqtol} forms in clause-initial position are excluded.

\(^{27}\) 2.5, 8.9, 13.6, 31.32, 34.19, 36.7, 40.23, 43.32, 45.1 (\textit{biš}), 45.3.

\(^{28}\) 16.1, 20.4, 24.16, 38.14, 42.8, 42.23, 47.26.

\(^{29}\) 2.20, 4.5, 9.23, 15.10, 30.42, 38.9, 42.4, 47.22.

\(^{30}\) 42.4.

\(^{31}\) 9.11 (\textit{biš}), 9.15, 11.7, 15.4, 17.5, 21.10, 24.5, 24.8, 24.39, 31.7, 35.10, 38.21, 38.22, 41.31, 41.36, 42.11, 42.38, 43.8, 44.22, 44.23, 49.10.

\(^{32}\) 8.22, 19.19, 21.26 (\textit{biš}) 23.6, 28.16, 31.32 (the subject in this clause is the rather strange construction 

\(^{33}\) 8.22, 23.6.

\(^{34}\) 9.4, 11.6, 24.8, 31.38, 31.39, 32.29, 40.15, 41.44, 47.19.

\(^{35}\) 11.6, 41.44.

\(^{36}\) 4.15.

\(^{37}\) 2.24, 10.9.

\(^{38}\) 42.21.

\(^{39}\) 19.19, 26.7, 38.11, 42.4, 45.11.

\(^{40}\) 27.25.

\(^{41}\) 27.4, 27.19, 27.31.

\(^{42}\) 2.5 (\textit{biš}), 24.15, 24.45.

\(^{43}\) 41.50.

\(^{44}\) 8.13, 16.2, 19.28, 38.29.

\(^{45}\) 19.19, 22.20, 37.7 (\textit{biš}), 48.11.

\(^{46}\) 27.36, 27.39.

\(^{47}\) 27.39.

\(^{48}\) 3.22.
The Pragmatics of the X+verb Structure in the Hebrew of Genesis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Narrative</th>
<th>Direct Speech</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>אִם</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>אָז</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>אַחַר</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>אַחֲרֵי</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>אֲשֶׁר</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>כָּאֲשֶׁר</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>כַּי</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTALS</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is readily apparent from the above table that relative VS word order is much more common than relative SV word order, and, more importantly, that this statistical dominance holds true even in those syntactic environments where it cannot be claimed that waw-conversive forms ‘force’ V/S word order. In narrative, 105 out of a total 118 clauses with an overt subject, or nearly 89%, exhibit relative VS word order. Likewise, in direct speech 102 of a total 122 clauses with an explicit subject, or 83.6%, exhibit relative VS word order. Overall, then, 207 out of a total 240 clauses where some particle prevents use of the waw-conversive, or 86.25%, exhibit relative VS word order. Note, further, that in narrative relative SV word order is statistically more prevalent than relative VS word order only with the particle טֶרֶם. This fact can also be explained in terms of pragmatic markedness (see below).

49 15.3, 27.37, 44.8.
50 13.16, 28.20, 32.9, 47.16, 47.18 (with בְּשֵׁם לִקְרֹא). 4.26 (the subject of this sentence is the infinitival clause יהוה בְּשֵׁם לִקְרֹא).
51 35.10. 7.9, 7.16, 12.4, 17.23, 21.4, 24.44, 24.47, 26.5, 27.27, 27.44, 28.4, 29.8, 30.29, 31.16 (יהוה), 33.5, 44.5, 44.16, 44.17, 48.9, 48.15, 49.30.
52 4.26 (the subject of this sentence is the infinitival clause יהוה בְּשֵׁם לִקְרֹא).
53 10.18, 33.7, 38.30.
54 23.19, 25.26, 45.15.
55 1.21, 2.3, 2.19, 3.1, 6.4, 6.22, 7.5, 9.24, 10.14, 11.5, 13.3, 16.15, 19.29, 21.2, 21.3, 21.25, 22.3, 22.9, 25.10, 25.12, 26.15, 26.18, 27.41, 30.38, 35.15, 35.27, 41.50, 45.27, 46.5, 46.18, 46.20, 46.25, 47.22, 49.28, 50.13. It is important to note, however, that while rare, both וַיָשָׁה S+V and וַיָשָׁה X+V word orders are possible. These orders are marked. See, for example, Lev 4.22, Job 3.23, Ps 13.1, 89.22, 144.8, 11, Isa 58.12, 66.13, and Zeph 2.3. Note especially the argument of Creason (1993:7-8) as cited in Rosenbaum (1997:224).
56 5.29, 9.2, 14.24, 17.21, 21.12, 24.44, 24.47, 26.5, 27.27, 27.44, 28.4, 29.8, 30.29, 31.16 (יהוה), 33.5, 44.5, 44.16, 44.17, 48.9, 48.15, 49.30.
57 7.9, 7.16, 12.4, 17.23, 21.4, 24.42, 24.52, 27.14, 27.30, 29.10, 30.25, 37.23, 40.22, 41.54, 43.17, 47.11.
58 20.13, 24.51.
59 5.24, 6.1, 6.12, 8.11, 13.6, 14.14, 20.18, 26.8, 27.1, 27.23, 28.6, 28.11, 31.22, 36.7, 38.14, 41.57, 42.5, 43.30, 47.20 (יהוה), 48.17, 50.15.
60 3.20, 31.32.
61 2.3, 10.25, 11.9, 21.31, 29.2, 34.7, 35.7, 37.4, 40.16, 43.25.
62 2.3, 10.25, 11.9, 21.31, 35.7, 37.4.
63 3.1, 4.25 (יהוה), 6.13, 12.12, 16.11, 19.13, 20.7, 21.17, 26.28, 27.20, 29.21, 29.32, 29.33, 30.13, 31.49, 32.18, 32.27, 33.11, 38.14, 41.51, 41.52, 44.15, 46.33, 47.15.
64 30.26, 43.5, 44.32.
65 2.17, 2.23, 3.19, 4.23, 4.24, 7.1, 9.6, 13.17, 15.13, 17.5, 19.2, 20.6, 21.12, 21.18, 21.30, 22.12, 24.4, 26.3, 26.22, 29.32, 31.6, 31.42, 32.11, 42.12, 43.10, 43.16, 44.27, 45.5, 46.3, 46.32, 49.6, 50.17.
66 2.23, 4.24, 15.13, 21.12, 29.32, 43.16, 44.27, 45.5.
In summary, the dominance of relative VS word order with particles that prevent use of the \textit{waw}-conversive forms must be seen as supporting a basic VS word order in BH.

**Pragmatic Markedness of Relative SV Word Order with Particles**

**Narrative**

While the statistical dominance of relative VS word order is remarkable, even more significant is the fact that the word order of most of the relative SV clauses with particles is readily explicable in terms of pragmatic marking. This is especially clear in BH narrative. Consider the following cases, in which SV word order occurs with the negative particle לֹא (the preposed subject in each example is given in boldface type; preceding context is included where necessary).

\[
\text{וַיָּבֹא} \text{אֱלֹהִים} \text{אֶל} - \text{אֲבִימֶלֶ} \text{בַּחֲלוֹם} \text{לָההַלָּי} \text{וַיֹּאמֶר} \text{לוֹ} \text{הִנְּ} \text{מֵת} \text{עַל} - \text{הָאִשָּׁה} \text{אֲשֶׁר} \text{לָקַחְתָּ} \text{וְהִוא} \text{בְּעֻלַת} \text{בָּעַל}: \\
\text{וַאֲבִימֶלֶ} \text{לֹא} \text{קָרַב} \text{אֵלֶיהָ} \text{וַיֹּאמַר} \text{אֲדֹנָי} \text{הֲגוֹי} \text{גַּם} - \text{צַדִּיק} \text{תַּהֲרֹג}:
\]

Here only summary explanations are given; see below for details. In Gen 16.1, the SV word order signals the beginning of a new literary unit. The fronted subject in 20.4 signals a retreat in story-time (i.e. the pluperfect). The fronted noun אִישׁ in 24.16 marks the clause as generally off the sequential line of events or, in other words, as circumstantial, descriptive, or explanatory. The same holds true for the fronted constituent הם in 42.23. Both the preposed element רָחֵל in 31.32 and רק אַדְמַת הַכֹּהֲנִים לְבַדָּם are specially marked as focal (i.e. the constituent marked as expressing the most salient piece of information in the clause). In both 38.14 and 42.8 pronouns are fronted for what is typically called contrastive topicalization (or double-difference contrast).

**Direct Speech**

Identifying the linguistic motivation, be it pragmatic or otherwise, for relative SV word order in direct speech is more difficult than it is in narrative. Be that as it may, pragmatic patterns are, nevertheless, discernible.

---


68 The marked nature of SV word order in narrative is nicely evidenced in the book of Jonah, where it occurs in 1.4 (לָה), 1.5, and 3.3. In 1.4a, the SV structure marks the beginning of a new scene. In 1.4b, it may mark a dramatic slowing of the events (see the section on dramatic pause below) or perhaps a shift in scene (e.g., “And as for the boat,...”). In 1.5 it marks an event anterior to those reported in the immediately preceding clause (and perhaps a change of scene). Finally, in 3.3 it provides an off-line parenthetical or circumstantial description of Nineveh (not a pluperfect description of how great Nineveh had been).
Again, the explanations here are brief; see below for details. The frontal subjects in 3.22, 4.15, 31.32, 43.5 appear to be topics, entities specially marked as the (new) subject of discussion. The SV word order in 19.19, 21.26a, 31.38, and perhaps 31.32 can be explained as a ‘thematic pause’, a general break in the continuity of discourse for the purpose of inserting an explanation or for changing ‘tack’. The preposed subjects in 21.26b, 31.52a-b, 38.23, and 47.19 are contrastive topics. Both in 35.10 and in 45.8 are focal. Only a few cases remained unexplained.

69 The subject of the verb הָיָה here is composed, rather peculiarly, of the prepositional phrase עַל-פָּרָא הַמַּצֵּבָה. One would have expected חָרָמָא הַמַּצֵּבָה, as in Gen 44.9-10, or perhaps עַל-פָּרָא הַמַּצֵּבָה, as in Ex 35.23.

70 The reasons for the relative SV word order in 8.22, 23.6, 28.16, 30.26, 39.8, and 44.32 are not entirely clear. However, it is worth noting that the language of one of the cases (8.22) is clearly poetic and, therefore, subject to aesthetic concerns with regard to word order. While it is true that word order variation in poetry can be pragmatically motivated, it is important to bear in mind that stylistic, rather than linguistic, issues may also be determinative in poetic environments. Regarding the other unexplained examples, it is interesting to note that three of the six cases (28.16, 30.26, and 39.8) involve the occurrence of an optional subject pronoun before the qatal form of the verb יָדַע. This also occurs in 20.6, 30.29, 31.6 and 44.27 (and frequently in the Hebrew of other Biblical books). Muraoka (1985:36) relates this phenomenon to the circumstantial clause: “It appears that in certain places the use of a special group of verbs – chiefly verbs of movement and knowledge – is responsible for the otherwise inexplicable fronting of the subject, and significantly the perfect tense exclusively used there can be understood in the sense of the Engl. perfect tense, which somehow relates these sentences to the nominal clause sentence type in the deep structure.” Elsewhere (ibid.53), however, Muraoka equivocates, arguing that the use of the pronoun in a phrases such as וְיָדַע לַעֲבָדִים, “may be viewed as motivated by the desire to call special attention of the addressed, esp. when the speaker requests something on the basis of the knowledge of the addressed or seeks his agreement.” A further possibility, not unrelated to Muraoka’s linking of this sort of phrase to the circumstantial or nominal clause, is that BH users may have inserted otherwise unnecessary subject pronouns on the basis of an analogy between the basically stative force of certain qatal forms (such as יָדַע here) and the subject+participle structure that more regularly indicates the present tense. Note the relatively frequent occurrence of subject pronouns with such stative qatal forms as יָדַע, יָדַע, הוֹדֵע, and so on. On the stative character of these verbs see Joüon-Muraoka (1996:112a).
Descriptive Simplicity

When one takes into account only the relative order of subjects and verbs, it may seem that the SV and VS theories have equal explanatory power. However, when XV clauses with overt subjects are considered the situation becomes clearer. Buth (1995:80-81) offers a sound argument. If BH had as a basic SV word order, he argues, then it would be reasonable to expect the fronting of an element X to lead to XSV word order. Conversely, if basic word order in BH were VS, then the fronting of an element X should lead to XVS word order. According to the statistics given above, there are some 69 clauses in Genesis that have both a fronted X and an overt subject. Of the 69 clauses 57 have XVS word order, while only three have XSV word order. This being the case, a theory positing basic SV word order for BH must account not only for the verb-initial predominance associated with waw-conservative forms and for the relative VS dominance of clauses in which various clause-initial particles prevent the use of the waw-conservative forms, but also for the statistical dominance of VS word order after fronted X constituents. It is certainly an embarrassment to a theory of basic SV word order that it is capable of predicting word order in clauses with fronted X constituents in only three of 69 cases in Genesis. It is descriptively simpler to posit basic VS word order, whereby the vast majority of clauses are explained as nothing more than the surface-level outworking of basic VS word order. See the example from Gen 19.27.

Inusband אברים וברק 19.27

71 Dik (1981:180) proposes the same strategy for identification of basic word order. He argues:

Notice that this treatment of Dutch constituent order comes down to the claim that the basic word order in the main clauses is Vf [= finite verb: AH] S O. But the initial Pi position and the rules determining which constituents must or may go to Pi make for a variety of actual orderings in the main clause. A situation such as that obtaining in Dutch is not at all uncommon in languages. In other words, quite a few apparent SVO languages can be reinterpreted as PVISO languages. A good criterium for whether such a reinterpretation is possible is the following: take some apparent SVO language and see what happens if some other constituent than the Subj is put in preverbal position. If, in that condition, the Subj itself appears in postverbal position, then the language can be reinterpreted as a PVISO language. If, on the other hand, the Subj remains in preverbal position as well, then the language is a ‘real’ SVO language, i.e., in terms of our approach, a PISVO language. Applying this criterium to Dutch and German shows that these languages can be reinterpreted as PVISO languages. English, on the other hand, comes out as a ‘real’ PISVO language, at least as far as the functional pattern for declarative main clauses and for subordinate clauses is concerned.

72 Gen 2.3, 2.23, 3.3, 4.24, 6.9, 7.11, 7.13, 7.20, 8.5, 8.14, 9.19, 10.5, 10.11, 10.25, 11.6, 11.9 (ha), 13.5, 14.5, 15.1, 15.13, 15.18, 17.12, 18.12, 21.6, 21.12, 21.31, 22.23, 24.50, 25.6, 25.10, 27.39, 29.32, 29.34, 30.20, 30.40, 31.8, 31.40, 31.42, 34.22, 35.7, 37.4, 39.19, 40.13, 40.19, 41.40, 42.44, 41.50, 41.54, 42.4, 42.36, 43.16, 44.27, 45.5, 46.34, 47.9, 48.20.

73 The cases of XSV word order are: Gen 6.20, 8.22, and 39.22. However, Gen 6.20 may be better considered a casus pendens construction; Gen 8.22 is highly poetic; and the subject pronoun in Gen 39.22 is highly marked (for focus; see below). The remaining nine cases (Gen 4.15, 14.10, 17.9, 23.6, 25.23 (ha), 31.29, 48.5, 48.6) exhibit SXV word order. The complexity of the individual cases that constitute this category make it difficult to draw conclusions regarding basic word order. If basic SV word order is posited, then it must be argued that X has been inserted between S and V. If basic VS word order is posited, then SXV word order entails a double fronting, which is the explanation adopted in the present work. To use Dik’s terminology (see note 70 above), BH would thus have a P1P2V-ISO word order in the verbal clause (where all constituents except the verb are optional).
With a basic VS word order, it is a one-step process to front X into a preverbal slot.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>X</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>Preverbal Slot</th>
<th>Conjunction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>בּבּכָּר</td>
<td>אָבְרָהָם</td>
<td>לְחַסְלִים</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>ו</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Deep Structure

Transformation #1

Surface Structure

With a basic SV word order, however, the transformation is a two-step process. To arrive at surface-level XSV word order, first the element X must be moved forward, then the S and V must switch places.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>X</th>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Pre-Subject Slot</th>
<th>Conjunction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>לְחַסְלִים</td>
<td>אָבְרָהָם</td>
<td>בּבָּכָּר</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>ו</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Deep Structure

Transformation #1

Transformation #2

Surface Structure

Notably, Holmstedt (2002:148) recognizes both the statistical dominance and the pragmatic neutrality of relative VS word order in the relative clause, with preceding “function words,” and after other fronted elements. The fact that he is forced to posit a fronting rule entirely devoid of pragmatic motivation only demonstrates the explanatory inadequacy of his explanation.

Holmstedt (2002:148) attempts to explain the neutrality in BH of VS word order in the relative clause, after function words, and after other proposed X elements in light of the Modern Hebrew phenomenon known as “triggered inversion.” Citing Glinert (1987:413-417), Doron (1996), and Shlonsky (1997), Holmstedt argues that Modern Hebrew exhibits a basic SV word order, but that a change from basic SV to basic VS is “triggered” by elements being placed before the subject and verb. Glinert argues that the inversion is motivated by a desire for “balance.” First of all, the comparison with Modern Hebrew fails to explain the statistical dominance and pragmatic neutrality of relative VS word order in the BH negative clauses. For unlike BH, where the unmarked word order in the negative clause is שָׁאָל+VS, in Modern Hebrew, it is S+שָׁאָל+V that is the more dominant (and evidently the pragmatically neutral) structure. Second, while the explanation of “triggered inversion” may suffice as a description of surface-level word order in different syntactic environments, it is entirely devoid of explanatory power. Givón (1976; see also the brief summary in Givón 1977:181-187) argues that the dominant SV word order in Modern Hebrew is the result of a typological drift from VS to SV motivated primarily by pragmatic factors. If Givón is correct, then the neutrality of clause-initial SV word order in Modern Hebrew constitutes an historical development, whereby the marked
But the most noticeable use of the perfect and waw consecutive [i.e. the qatal form with preceding waw conversive: AH], though
weqatal
made of the corresponding
Likewise, in unmarked clauses with a connecting waw, VSO order will obtain, but use will be
made of the corresponding waw-conversive forms: wayyiqtol+subject+object or weqatal+subject+object.75 Movement of any element before the verb virtually requires use of
the non-conversive forms.76

Preliminary Conclusion and Summary

While the above arguments cannot be said to furnish incontrovertible proof of the basic
VSO character of BH, they do nevertheless constitute sufficient grounds for the analysis of
BH that follows, an analysis founded on a basic VSO perspective.

It is worth pointing out at this point that a basic VSO word order entails certain norms
in BH. First of all, in unmarked clauses that are subordinate, negative, or simply asyndetic,
basic VSO word order will result in the use of qatal+subject+object or yiqtol+subject+object.
Likewise, in unmarked clauses with a connecting waw, VSO order will obtain, but use will be
made of the corresponding waw-conversive forms: wayyiqtol+subject+object or weqatal+subject+object.75 Movement of any element before the verb virtually requires use of
the non-conversive forms.76

SV word order has become grammaticalized as unmarked due to the commonness of marking the syntactic
subject as the pragmatic topic. The statistically dominant (and perhaps pragmatically neutral) SV word order
of Modern Hebrew is thus not at all indicative of basic SV word order in BH. On the contrary, it is probable
that the neutral VS word order that obtains in the protected environment of relative clauses, after fronted
constituents, and after function words in Modern Hebrew preserves the historically basic word order (see the
argument of Dik (1981:180) above). The preservation of ancient forms in protected environments is well-
known from Hebrew phonology, where, for example, the original - ending of feminine singular nouns is
preserved where it is protected by a pronominal suffix or by the governing noun in a construct relationship,
but lost in other environments. Note also the evidence of verbal agreement with conjoined subjects cited by
Doron (1992) as indicative of a differentiation in basic word order between BH and Modern Hebrew.

Moshavi (2000:88, n. 29) lists six exceptions to this rule from Genesis: 15.6 יִשְׂפְּטוּ, 21.25 בָּשָׂם, 31.7 יַנָּהַה, 34.5 שָׁפְטוּ, 37.3 שָׁפְטוּ, and 38.5 שָׁפְטוּ. She considers these forms simple waw+qatal forms rather than waw-
conversive weqatal forms, but provides no discussion of the issue. It is true that modern translations and
commentators (e.g. Speiser 1962) tend to shy away from an imperfective rendering of the weqatal forms in
these verses (and others: 28.6 שָׁפְטוּ), as do some linguists (e.g., Longacre 1994:58ff.), on the grounds that they
are not preceded by clearly imperfective yiqtol forms or other indications of imperfectivity. This is due, at least
in part, to a superficial understanding of the imperfectivity expressed by the weqatal form. The issue of
problematic weqatal forms has long been the subject of controversy and merits further study. It is worth citing
here the foundational principles laid down long ago by Driver (1892:§120):

The answer to such objections will be found in the manner in which the perfect and the waw thus appears. In the first place, it does
do not occur promiscuously: it is not intermingled with the construction with 71 in equal proportions, but is commonly found thickly
sprinkled over detached areas (e.g. 1 Sa. 7, 16). Now when a writer abandons a construction which he employs in nine cases out
of ten in favour of another, and that, too, under the peculiar circumstances just described, it is, at least, reasonable to infer that he
means something by the change. In the second place, our knowledge that the perfect with waw consecutive follows the imperfect as a
frequentative, coupled with the analogy presented by its use in the last § [i.e., §119, where Driver refers to the future force of the
weqatal form without a preceding yiqtol: AH], raises the suspicion that it may possibly have the same value even when no
imperfect precedes. This suspicion is strengthened by the fact that it is constantly found in company with a bare imperfect, even
though not actually preceded by it. In the passage from Exodus, for example, וַיְסַפְּפוּ is immediately followed by וַיַּחֲרִישׁ and
וַיְהַיִּשְׁפְּפוּ: if, then, these verbs are frequentative (as they clearly are), it is reasonable to infer that וַיְסַפְּפוּ is so too. It is inconceivable
that in a multitude of passages the change from 71 to the perfect and waw (in itself a striking variation) should take place
concurrently with another change, that, viz. from the perfect (which, as we know from § 85, is the regular alternative for 71) to the

20 (54)
Much has been written on exactly how the imperfect, without the existence of some common cause accounting for both: but the reason why the imperfect is chosen is patent, it must, therefore, have been the same reason which determined the choice of the perfect and waw. Having once vindicated for this idiom a frequentative force, we shall not hesitate to adopt it in cases where no imperfect follows to precipitate our decision. And the change of tone in Jer. 6, 17 יָשְׁרְגֹנַן is a final confirmation of the justice of our reasoning.

It is at least worth considering the possibility that the questionable forms in Genesis (and elsewhere) are imperfective in force (either habitual/frequentative or in-process). Note that GKC (1910) is certain that two of the six supposed exceptions, 31.7 (§112h), 37.3 (§112h), are imperfectives and open to the possibility that three more can be read as such: 15.6 (§112ss), 21.25 (§112rr), 34.5 (§112s) (they take הָיָה in 38.5 as a corruption of אָכַל on the basis of the LXX). Driver, too, thinks 34.5 והיהה and 37.3 היה “probably” imperfective (noting the similarity between the latter and 1Sam 2.19) (§133, n. 1), with 31.7 והיה “possibly” such (§132, n. 2). Buth (2003:359-360) argues that ambiguous weqatal forms should generally be taken as wayyiqtol forms. Environments where they may be read as simple wayyiqtol forms include (a) poetry, (b) hendiadys (e.g. הנהו לָא, Jer 22.15), and (c) Late Biblical Hebrew. Buth notes, however, that even in these environments, the wayyiqtol-weqatal form was employed: (a) poetry and (b) hendiadys – Isa 19.5 בִּכְנָה הָכִי and שָׁתָה, (c) Late Biblical Hebrew – Ecc 2.24, 3.13 והיהו כִּי. Cf. Bergsträsser (1962§9b-k), who argues that the apparent weqatal forms in Gen 15.6, 28.6, 31.7, and 34.5 are textual corruptions in which either a weqatal form should be read or the way of the apparent wayqatal should be erased.

The origin of the wayyiqtol form is clear. There were actually two yiqtol forms in use, one long and one short. The short form, which had both past and modal force, appears as a past-tense form in BH almost exclusively with the imperfect, without the addition of the waw. It is not enough to explain how the conversive forms arose alongside the simple forms. It is necessary to account for their specific synchronic functions in BH must be viewed as incomplete (Goldfajn 1998:28-30). Joüon-Muraoka (1996:§117b, n. 1) notes that the use of weqatal forms should generally be taken as wayyiqtol forms. The origin of the wayyiqtol form was employed: (a) poetry and (b) hendiadys – Isa 19.5 בִּכְנָה הָכִי and שָׁתָה, (c) Late Biblical Hebrew – Ecc 2.24, 3.13 והיהו כִּי. Cf. Bergsträsser (1962§9b-k), who argues that the apparent weqatal forms in Gen 15.6, 28.6, 31.7, and 34.5 are textual corruptions in which either a weqatal form should be read or the way of the apparent wayqatal should be erased.

76 Much has been written on exactly how the waywconversive forms and the origin of the wayyiqtol form are second and third person forms (with approximately half of these occurrences of such forms belies an explanation based on textual corruption). The first person singular and plural forms very frequently utilize the long yiqtol forms, but so too do a number of second and third person forms, especially those which are יִשָּׁר and נָהו. For example, nearly half of the approximately 100 examples of non-apocopated יִשָּׁר wayyiqtol forms are second and third person forms (with approximately half of these occurring in the books of Kings, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel). The fact that a portion of these latter have been explained on phonological grounds (occurring before guttural letters) in no way contradicts the hypothesis that for certain writers/speakers the two yiqtol forms had merged and that, therefore, the way of the wayyiqtol form develop?
Much of the remainder of this thesis is devoted to the identification of pragmatic functions associated with non-VSO word order and to the classification and description of the specific meanings and effects of such clauses. It is not enough simply to recognize basic and marked word order; it is incumbent upon the analyst to explain why a given change in word order (and, consequently, verb form) takes place. If the attempt to characterize non-VSO clauses as marked and VSO clauses as unmarked is successful, this in itself will constitute one further argument for VSO as the basic, unmarked word order in BH.

Section 2: Discourse Analysis, Pragmatics, and BH

It is necessary at this point to lay out a few of the basic linguistic assumptions underlying the present analysis. The two main purposes of this section are (a) to give a general introduction to discourse analysis and pragmatics and (b) to justify their application in the linguistic analysis of BH. A preliminary point is in order: BH scholars have long argued on the basis of the principles of discourse analysis and pragmatics without, however, so terming their arguments. The concept of emphasis, the relation between sequentiality and causality, arguments involving the psychology of the speaker, even text-critical and source-critical studies of the Biblical text—such pursuits have all involved forays into the fields that are today known as discourse analysis and pragmatics. It is clear that any valid treatment of BH based explicitly on discourse analysis and pragmatics must also take into account the findings of research performed along more traditional lines.

Discourse Analysis

The eminent linguist Noam Chomsky (1980:225) has written: “Linguistic knowledge, of course, extends beyond the level of the sentence. We know how to construct discourses of various sorts, and there are no doubt principles governing discourse structures.”

However, as Meltzer (1995) and Prince (1998) note, there still remains not a little disagreement over whether discourse analysis is primarily a linguistic or literary (i.e. stylistic) domain of inquiry. Note, however, Heimerdinger’s (1999:11) critique of the distinction made between linguistic and stylistic evidence in Longacre’s (1989) study of the Joseph cycle:

When one turns from the findings of the literary approach to Longacre’s analysis and results, the question which inevitably arises is how it is that none of the devices identified by literary critics are captured by Longacre’s text-linguistic analysis….One could surmise that this refusal to examine all aspects of language is a deliberate choice: the ‘literary’ devices could be regarded as belonging to the domain of stylistics and not linguistics. Such a dichotomy, however, has proven not to be valid. Linguists have found that even everyday stories told in conversation display much of the sophistication attributed to artistic prose and that the so-called ‘literary’ devices are not merely aesthetic or ornamental but perform very distinctive linguistic or pragmatic functions. The very specificity of literary language is being re-examined….Even if one accepts that literary discourse has specific features, from a discourse point of view, stylistic or rhetorical evidence is no different from any other kind of linguistic evidence.
discourse-levels. The study of such high-level grammatical rules is known variously as discourse analysis, textlinguistics, discourse criticism, and, in Hebrew, as הבשח. Some of the most useful, albeit problematic, discourse concepts to be applied to BH are the gestalt concepts of foreground and background (along with the various other terms used by scholars to denote something similar: online/offline, mainline/secondary line, et cetera). Certain conceptual and terminological problems in the application of the foreground/background dichotomy to BH are discussed below.

It is also assumed that insights gained from discourse studies on other languages may help to illuminate heretofore obscure phenomena in BH. As Bodine (1987; 1995:10) has noted, there are obvious benefits to broadening the philologically-oriented perspective of traditional Comparative Semitics to include more linguistically-oriented studies of phenomena that occur both in BH and in languages of other language groups. For example, discourse linguists have noted various apparently cross-linguistic tendencies dealing with information packaging and organization which may shed light on certain as yet unexplained phenomena in BH.

Unfortunately, though it is widely recognized that any full analysis of BH syntax must look beyond the level of the individual clause to the level of larger pieces of discourse, for a number of reasons, discourse analytical studies have, as yet, exercised only limited influence on mainstream Biblical scholarship and Semitic studies. One reason for this is the relative infancy of discourse analysis, especially with regard to BH. Another is the seeming inability of discourse analysts to delimit the domain and goals of their studies. In their 1981 introduction to textlinguistics De Beaugrande and Dressler could write: “The picture that emerges from these works is diffuse and diversified, because there was no established methodology that would apply to texts in any way comparable to the unified approaches for conventional linguistic objects like the sentence” (14). Finally, it must be admitted that a

---

78 Robert Bergen (1984:vi) presents this assumption more technically: “Surface-structurally marked macrolinguistic features (that is, grammatico-lexical features above the clause level – including sentences, paragraphs, and higher levels) exist in all languages.”

79 Semitists often lament the lack of linguistic methodology in Semitic Studies. Note the especially severe critique of Schramm (1970:258): After citing the 19th century complaint of William Wright (1890), “Besides the results of Indo-European philology, those as yet attained by Semitic grammarians seem scant and dwarfish….It was reserved for men of our own day to take a decided step in advance. Thanks to the studies of a Gesenius and an Ewald, a Roediger and an Olhausen, a Dillman and a Noekele, the Comparative Grammar of the Semitic Languages is at last beginning to assume the proportions of a science…..” Schramm adds (260) that “Wright’s complaint of ninety years ago still stands, but his hopes for new breakthroughs would be more valid today than in his own time. Until recently, the terms linguist and Semitist were almost mutually exclusive.” See also Polotsky’s (1964:100) lament: “The greatest calamity that has befallen Hebrew is that in the divorce of Semitic studies from theology, Hebrew was assigned to the latter.”

80 Importantly, Bodine (1987) also notes the potential benefit that linguists can receive from philologists.

81 Note, for example, Waltke and O’Connor’s judgment as to the inadequacy of the conventional division of BH linguistics into the study of sounds (phonetics and phonology), word formation (morphology), and clause formation (syntax): “This tripartite division, though traditional, is not ideal either from a linguist’s point of view or a Semitist’s. Only study of larger chunks allows us to explain, for example, aspects of time reference and narration or rhetorical functions (e.g., linguistic expressions of subservience or sarcasm)” (1990:49).

82 Take, for example, the decision of Waltke and O’Connor (1990:53-55) to follow “the more traditional path” in their grammar despite the admission that it is “not ideal” (see previous note).

83 This is due, at least in part, to the fact that scholars of so many different fields are interested in the results of discourse analytical studies. As Prince (1998:448) notes, “it is hard to imagine a full account of human cognition, development, language, behavior, culture, interaction, creativity, pathology, or simulation that does not attend to discourse.” Lowery (1995) touches on various theoretical approaches as they pertain to BH grammar.
few well-known discourse studies of BH, due to their superficial treatment of the data, their cursory use of the wealth of BH studies done along more traditional lines, and their uncritical and often rigid application of certain discourse principles, have earned the entire field something of a tarnished reputation (for an example, see the discussions below on the notions of foreground and background, sequentiality, and their relationship to the wayyiqtol form and simple verb forms in BH).

Still, however, researchers sensitive to issues of discourse continue to make contributions to the study of BH in relation to a variety of domains of inquiry: the BH verbal system, the pragmatics of marked word order, the function of extra-clausal elements (see, e.g., Blau 1977b), the strategies of participant reference, the use of discourse particles (see van der Merwe 1994:23-38), the dating of Biblical texts (Rabin 1982), and even the authentication of purportedly ancient inscriptions (Qimron 1998:182-3).

Pragmatics

It is also taken as an axiom here that any full linguistic description of BH (or any other language, for that matter) must analyze data according to the traditional grammatical categories of morphology, semantics, and syntax coupled with the less traditional category of pragmatics. Morphology (the study of word formation) and semantics (the study of word and clause meaning) have long been part of the study of BH. Syntax (the study of clause formation), though not a new field of linguistic study, has, according to several scholars, been relatively neglected in relation to BH. As the most recent grammatical discipline to have its principles applied to BH, pragmatics requires at least some explanation. First, while both semantics and pragmatics deal with meaning, according to Leech (1983:6) it is best to view them as separate, but complementary, levels. He usefully compares semantics and pragmatics as follows: if semantics answers questions of the form ‘What does X mean?’, then pragmatics answers questions of the form ‘What did you mean by X?’ Pragmatics, then,

---

84 For example, problems with Longacre’s notions of foreground and background (see especially his 1989 book on the Joseph cycle) as applied to BH are discussed below. Niccacci’s monograph (1990) presents a system which is incapable of distinguishing between the various functional types of fronted elements. More recently, Heimerdinger’s study (1999) attempts to account for all fronted elements on the basis of information structure (focus and/or the (re)activation of referents), denying any link whatsoever between the wayyiqtol form and sequentiality.

85 Though, perhaps due to the religious nature of the Biblical text, semantic analysis of BH has often been performed according to principles that would be unacceptable in the analysis of another language. Note the concise description of the ‘state of the art’ by Rabin (1970:315): “Although the Biblical corpus would seem to offer to the semanticist a field of work comparable to Latin and Greek, no discipline of Hebrew semantics exists which could be compared with the work done in those languages. One reason is no doubt the overestimation of etymology as a key to meaning, another the pre-occupation with the theological meaning of Hebrew words and tendency to search for ‘basic’ meanings with religious implications.” For detailed critiques and discussions of the application of semantic analysis to BH see Barr (1961) and Silva (1983).

86 Indicative of the lateness with which scholars began systematic analysis of BH syntax is the fact that Rabin (308-16) treats phonology, morphology, lexicography, semantics, but not syntax in his 1970 essay on current trends in BH linguistics. See also Ullendorff (1970:265), Kutscher (1982:85-6), Bodine (1992), Lowery (1995:105ff), and van der Merwe (1997). Waltke and O’Connor’s (1990) An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax, while a veritable goldmine of references (with the exception of research written in Hebrew) and examples, does not, even according to the authors’ own stated goal – “The aim of this volume is not novelty” (x) – break new ground.
The Pragmatics of the X+verb Structure in the Hebrew of Genesis

deals with the non-semantic meaning expressed by an utterance. A pragmatic approach to linguistic analysis thus presupposes three types of information communicated by a clause: syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic. Dik (1980:3) defines each of these as follows:

1. Syntactic functions specify the perspective from which the “state of affairs” is presented in the linguistic expression.
2. Semantic functions specify the roles which the referents of the terms involved play within the “state of affairs” designated by the predication in which they occur.
3. Pragmatic functions specify the informational status of the constituents within the wider communicative setting in which they are used.

The syntactic functions of Subject and Object along with the semantic roles of Agent, Goal, and Recipient, enable the grammatical differentiation of linguistic expressions that express the same predication, such as in this example from Dik (1981:18):

(1) John (AgSubj) gave the book (GoObj) to Bill (Rec).
(2) John (AgSubj) gave Bill (RecObj) the book (Go).
(3) The book (GoSubj) was given to Bill (Rec) by John (Ag).
(4) Bill (RecSubj) was given the book (Go) by John (Ag).

But a grammatical description limited to the syntax and semantics of an utterance does not necessarily capture all of the information communicated by the utterance. Take for example the isolated sentence:

(5) John gave this old book to a girl in the library.

The same sentence can be made to express more information without changing its essential structure (boldface type represents sentence stress):

(6) John gave this old book to a girl in the library.
(7) John gave this old book to a girl in the library.
(8) John gave this old book to a girl in the library.
(9) John gave this old book to a girl in the library.

In each of the sentences (6) through (10), the stress on the word in boldface type communicates information that is not communicated in sentence (5). In each case, the information would seem to be contrastive, e.g., John (not Bill) gave this old book to a girl in the library. Says Dik (1981:127): “Since not all the sentences…are synonymous in the sense of providing precisely the same information to the Addressee, their differences cannot be regarded as a matter of free or stylistic variation.” The pattern is describable according to cognitive factors whose influence on the surface-structure of the utterance is predictable. The difference between sentence (5) and sentences (6) though (10) and, in fact, among sentences (6) through (10), properly constitutes an area of linguistic (and not just stylistic) inquiry. However, it is noteworthy that the surface-level marking related to cognitive status is

---

87 Lyons (1981:139-40) characterizes semantics as dealing with lexical, sentence, and grammatical meaning. Pragmatics, on the other hand, he links to utterance meaning. “The meaning of an utterance includes, but is not exhausted by, the meaning of the sentence that is uttered. The rest of the meaning is contributed by a variety of factors that may be referred to, loosely, as contextual…[T]he notion of sentence-meaning is arguably dependent, both logically and methodologically, upon the notion of utterance-meaning, so that one cannot give a full account of sentence-meaning without relating sentences, in principle, to their possible contexts of utterance.”
not describable in terms of the grammatical categories of syntax and semantics alone. The need for a pragmatic dimension is clear.

Pragmatics takes into account both the linguistic and extra-linguistic context of an utterance. According to Yule (1985:98) the linguistic context (also called co-text) of a word is “the set of other words used in the same phrase or sentence.” Brown and Yule (1983:46) note, however, that co-text includes much more than the words of the immediate phrase or sentence; all of the previous discourse affects how a given clause will be understood. And clauses whose interpretation is affected by previous discourse are not limited to those with obvious deictic reference to aforementioned elements. Brown and Yule (1983:46) argue that “any sentence other than the first in a fragment of discourse, will have the whole of its interpretation forcibly constrained by the preceding text, not just those phrases which obviously and specifically refer to the preceding text, like the aforementioned.” Yule (1985:99) exemplifies the importance of co-text with reference to the English homonym bank.

How do we usually know which meaning is intended in a particular sentence? We usually do so on the basis of linguistic context. If the word bank is used in a sentence together with words like steep or overgrown, we have no problem deciding which type of ‘bank’ is meant. By the same token, when we hear someone say that he has to “get to the bank to cash a check”, we know from the linguistic context which type of bank is intended.

88 Biblical scholars often make use of co-text to interpret difficult words or homonyms. Take, for example, the case of תְּרֹעֵם in Ps 2.9. Most modern translations interpret this form to mean ‘shatter them’, from the root רע, but the NIV, in agreement with the LXX and the Vulgate, renders it ‘rule over them’, reflecting the root יְרֵע. While the isolated consonantal form is ambiguous, both the vocalization and the linguistic context of the following half-line, תְּנַפְּצֵם יוֹצֵר כִּכְלִי support the former interpretation. See, e.g., Delitzsch (1867:96), Dahood (1965:13), and Craigie (1983:64); cf. Briggs and Briggs (1906:16).

Pragmatics is also concerned with the use or function of utterances in their extra-linguistic context. The importance of extra-linguistic context in the interpretation of clausal meaning can be illustrated by the following example from Heimerdinger (1999:35-36). The information expressed by the sentence “The light is on in the sitting room” is different depending on who says it, to whom, and in what situation: husband to wife after returning from a restaurant at 11:30 at night (worry), father to son (rebuke or order), Hercule Poirot at the scene of a burglary (explanation). The importance of situational context also helps to explain why the expected response to the question “Do you happen to know the time?” is not the normal yes or no answer to an interrogative, but the fulfillment of a request.

Finally, in a pragmatic approach to language the communicative process is necessarily viewed as something more than just the encoding of information into lexical symbols and the subsequent decoding of those symbols. Rather, pragmatics recognizes that successful communication requires a substantial reliance on context (both linguistic and extra-linguistic) and inferencing.


Pragmatics and BH Word Order

The need for a pragmatically sensitive approach to the issue of BH word order variation arises, not surprisingly, from the inadequacy of traditional grammatical approaches that limit
The Pragmatics of the X+verb Structure in the Hebrew of Genesis

Consider, for example, the differences between the following (hypothetical) BH sentences.

1. את יהוה ויתן - לאברהם הארץ
2. את נתן ויהוה - לאברהם הארץ
3. את יהוה נתן ולאברהם - הארצ
4. ואת - לאברהם יהוה נתן הארצ
5. ואת יהוה נתן לאברהם הארצ

Each sentence expresses the same basic syntactic and semantic meaning, and yet each can also be used within a specific co-text and/or context to communicate meaning that goes beyond the level of syntax and semantics. First, from the perspective of syntax, there is no difference in the five clauses: each is syndetic (joined to the preceding clause by the conjunction ו), each has an overt subject יהוה, each has a past/perfective form of the qal verb נתן, each has the direct object את - הארץ and the indirect object לאברהם. The clauses are, thus, syntactically indistinguishable.

With regard to semantics, the situation is somewhat more complex. First, many scholars would probably argue that the fronted objects in sentences (3) thru (5) (and perhaps the fronted subject in (2)) have been preposed for the sake of emphasis. However, it is noteworthy that emphasis is not a semantic role. This fact alone is sufficient to demonstrate the inadequacy of a purely semantic approach to distinguishing the information communicated by clauses (1) – (5). Second, with specific regard to sentences (1) and (2), it is undoubtedly possible to describe the difference between wayyiqtol and we+subject+qatal in terms of semantics in some cases. Specifically, the wayyiqtol form is known to be associated with sequentiarity and the we+subject+qatal formation with non-sequentiarity, or, more specifically, anteriority, that relationship between actions or events which in English is conveyed by the past-perfect. However, it is essential to understand this relationship between form and meaning as indirect. That there exists a meaningful correlation between wayyiqtol forms and sequentiarity, on the one hand, and between subject+qatal forms and the past-perfect, on the other, seems clear. However, the correlation is not one-hundred percent in either relationship. Though the wayyiqtol form generally relates sequential events, it does not always do so. Likewise, SV word order does not always express anteriority. Consider, for example, Gen 31.33-34:

לָבָן בְּאֹהֶל יַעֲקֹב וּבְאֹהֶל לֵאָה וּבְאֹהֶל שְׁתֵּי הָאֲמָהֹת (1)
ולא מָצָא (2)
וַיֵּצֵא מֵאֹהֶל לֵאָה (3)
וַיָּבֹא בְּאֹהֶל רָחֵל (4)
אֶת רָחֵל לָקְחָה - הַתְּרֵפִים (5)
הַגָּמָל בְּכַר וְתָשִׂמֵם (6)
וַתֵּשֶׁב עֲלֵיהֶם (7)
לָבָן אֶתוְיַמֵּשׁ - כָּל - הָאֹהֶל (8)
מָצָא וְלֹא : (9)

For a fuller explanation of why scholars have turned to pragmatic and discourse analytical approaches to solve problems of BH grammar see van der Merwe (1997).

See also Goldfajn (1998:45-6).

The idea that SV word order with the qatal form conveys anteriority was recognized at least as early as Rashi (1040-1105 CE) on Gen 4.1 (see below). Driver (1892:22) notes that the qatal form can have pluperfect meaning and also explicitly connects the pluperfect with subject+qatal word order: “The impf. with ·... is, in the first place, certainly not the usual idiom chosen by Hebrew writers for the purpose of expressing a plupf.: their usual habit, when they wish to do this, is to interpose the subject between the conjunction and the verb, which then lapses into the perfect…” (1892:§76). Likewise, GKC (1910) links both the qatal form (§106f) and SV word order (§142a-b) to anteriority. See also Bergsträsser (1918-29:§6d), as cited in Moshavi (2000:29, n. 70). Kutscher (1982:44) writes: “The past perfect, for example, is indicated in the following way by the subject preceding the predicate, e.g., היא נמקה ‘and Rachel had taken’ (Gen. 31, 34).’ See also Williams (1967:§162(3), 572(4)), Zevit (1997).
Wayyiqtol forms (1), (3)-(4), and (8) depict sequential events on the main story-line. The same is true for the לֹא+qatal forms (2) and (9). Even the two wayyiqtol clauses (6) and (7) relate sequential events relative to the preceding verb form. That the SV word order with qatal in (5) denotes a retreat in story-time is clear from the context. Rachel could not have hid her father’s idols after he had already entered her tent to look for them. In this case, then, the difference between VS and SV clauses can accurately be described in semantics terms. However, even here the situation is not as simple as it may at first seem. First of all, in relation to the chronology of the narrative line of events the two wayyiqtol forms (6) and (7) have exactly the same past-perfect force as the preceding qatal form (in English and several other European languages). They express sequential actions with respect to the subject+qatal form in (5), but past-perfect actions with respect to the main story-line. Traditionally, it was argued on this basis that the wayyiqtol form induced meaning from the preceding (often qatal) form. That this view is overly simplistic is clear, however, from the very next clause (8), where a wayyiqtol form does not induce the past-perfect force of the preceding verbs. Only the change in subject, coupled with the context, allows the reader to understand the wayyiqtol form וַיְמשֶׁשׁ in (8) as a return to the sequential narrative.

Furthermore, wayyiqtol forms are often used to recount events which are in no way sequential. For example, Buth (1995:86) notes the non-sequentiality of the wayyiqtol forms in Jon 1.16-2.1:

Jon 1.16-2.1

Considering what was involved in performing a sacrifice, it is highly unlikely that sailors could have done it on a boat. Says Buth:

The sacrifice of the sailors took a bit of time and appears to have followed the calming of the sea. The appointing of the big fish could have take place before or during the time of sacrifice, perhaps during the storm itself. In English we might mark the ambiguous temporal relationship between the sailors’ actions and the Lord’s appointment with “meanwhile” if we were concerned with temporal precision, i.e., “Meanwhile, the LORD (had) appointed a big fish.” The Hebrew storyteller recounts the appointing of the big fish as though it were the next event in the story, but we must not assume that absolute sequentiality was intended.

In other words, that the author of Jonah conceived of the appointment of the great fish to swallow Jonah as subsequent to the sacrifice and vow-taking of the sailors is almost unthinkable, and this despite the fact that he has chosen to report all the events with the wayyiqtol form.

93 Incidentally, because the wayyiqtol form cannot occur with the negative לֹא, Longacre (1989:76-7, chart on 81, 82), basing himself on Grimes (1975), argues that negative clauses are, by definition, non-events, which, therefore, cannot be part of the main story-line. As support, he cites Gen 45.1-2, 40.23 and 40.24, in each of which, Longacre argues, the negated action is merely a paraphrase of the action reported in the following wayyiqtol form. Longacre is, however, sensitive to the distinction between these “negative antonym paraphrase” clauses and other, more significant negations, which he terms “momentous negations” (see Longacre 1989:81 (chart), n. b and 82). Elsewhere (1994:68), for instance, he explicitly comments: “Certainly in Biblical Hebrew (and possibly in all languages) there are momentous negations which move a story forward. Gen 8.12 is an example of this: וְלֹא שׁוּ בִּיָסְפָה עוֹד אֵלָיו.…” It could be argued that the failure of the dove to return to Noah is significant in moving the story forward…” The negation מָצָאְו לֹא, used twice in the present passage (Gen 31.33, 34), should also be thought of as reporting significant, story-line events.
Buth (1995:87) notes another, more extreme, example of the mismatch between the wayyiqtol form and sequentiality in Jdg 11.1:

\[ \text{וַיֶּחֶרֶץ וֹאִיָּהָ עַל הָעָרִים} \]

Jdg 11.1

Buth argues that the clause “is certainly a temporal back-reference since a warrior’s birth happens before he becomes a warrior.” Clearly, the wayyiqtol form cannot be said to ‘mark’ sequential events.94

Moreover, X+qatal structures, for their part, do not unambiguously mark non-sequential events. Take, for instance, Jonah 1.1-4:

\[ \text{וַיְהִי בִּבְרַכֵנִי שָׁאָל יְהוָה אֵל סַעַר} \]

Jon 1.1-4

The wayyiqtol forms (1)-(6) and (8) all narrate sequential events, but so, too, do the two subject+qatal structures in (7) and (10): וַיַּמָּשְׁבֵּה יְהוָה סָפָר הַגְּדוֹלָה and וַיְהִי חוּפָס רֹאשׁ נֻגְּד לָבָן. The SV word order in these two clauses cannot be said to mark anteriority.

So too, the fronted subject in Gen 31.47 has nothing to do with anteriority.

Finally, Rashi’s explanation of וַיִּכְּרַע לְאֶחְלָלָה מִלַּיְבָה in Gen 4.1, which he explicitly links to word order – כִּי בֵּרֶב קוֹדֶשׁ עַמָּי עַל עִטָּבֶת כֹּה אָמָּר כָּל הַהָרָה הֶלְבָדָה; אשֶם כִּי בֵּרֶב קוֹדֶשׁ עַמָּי עַל עִטָּבֶת כֹּה אָמָּר כָּל הַהָרָה הֶלְבָדָה – is, at the very least, suspect (see below).

There simply is no one-to-one correspondence between form and precise temporal semantic value. Both forms generally mark the past, but the wayyiqtol form with its concomitant VS word order cannot be said to unambiguously ‘mark’ semantically sequential events; likewise, the subject+qatal structure does not unambiguously ‘mark’ the past-perfect tense. Of course, one may be tempted to argue that there is no definite linguistic difference at all between the two forms, that the structures in question simply constitute two ways of conveying the same basic information, and that the choice between verb form and word order is purely stylistic. For example, some scholars appeal to the notion of chiasmus, thereby attempting to account for the interchange of wayyiqtol and subject+qatal structures on the grounds of aesthetics. While such a view should be entertained as a genuine possibility, surely it must be left as an explanation of last resort and applied only when all other avenues of explanation have been exhausted. The rules of scientific inquiry demand that an objective explanation be sought. It would be bad linguistics to attribute a given phenomenon to the personal stylistic preferences of the BH writers without first having tried all reasonable linguistic explanations of the phenomenon.

In summary, it seems clear that the BH verbal clause expresses more than just syntactic and semantic information, that there exists a further pragmatic level of information as well,

---

94 Note, for example, the following wayyiqtol forms from Genesis which do not mark sequential actions with respect to the event reported in the immediately preceding clause(s): 24.30, 25.34, 30.27, 35.19.
and that word-order variation is one of the principle means of communicating this information. Furthermore, because sentences that are indistinguishable in terms of syntax and semantics nevertheless communicate different information, word order variation cannot be attributed a priori to style. Driver’s words regarding the use of the wayyiqtol form are applicable to the difference between VS wayyiqtol and X+qatal as well: “Now when a writer abandons a construction which he employs in nine cases out of ten in favour of another… it is, at least, reasonable to infer that he means something by the change.”

Sensitivity to pragmatic considerations can also aid in the identification and categorization of different sorts of X+verb constructions. Scholars and linguists dealing with BH have struggled to provide a unified explanation for the great number of SV and XV clauses in the Bible. In this sense, as was noted above, they have long been engaged in discourse analysis and pragmatics, though they may not have labeled their studies such. The connection between X+qatal and anteriority has already been mentioned. As was said above, that the X+qatal form does not uniformly ‘mark’ the past-perfect is clear. Hence the need for alternative explanations, perhaps the most popular of which has been emphasis. Thus Driver (1892:§76, n. 1) in regard to the order subject+qatal: “It will be understood that the pf. in this position does not always bear a plupf. signification: it is often so placed simply for the purpose of giving emphasis to the subject.” In some of the older grammars, the syntactic nature of the clause-initial element did not matter; clause-initial verbs were considered just as ‘emphatic’ as clause-initial subjects and objects. Such, incidentally, was the explanation for the dominance of VS word order in BH. 95 More in line with the concepts of modern linguistics and language typology, Muraoka (1985:30) rightly abandons the idea that clause-initial verbs receive some sort of ‘natural’ emphasis:

We basically accept the widely held view that the relative order of S and V in the Hebrew verbal clauses is normally V-S. In this arrangement neither S nor V receives special emphasis. …[W]e are not interested in discussing the theory that this order is normal because action is the most important piece of information to be conveyed by this sentence type called verbal clause. In other words, by saying that V-S is the normal word-order we do not mean that it is logically or intrinsically so, but simply statistically. 96

That all clause-initial non-verbal elements are in some way emphasized remains, however, a basic principle for many scholars. In his introductory grammar, for example, Kelley (1992:87) gives VS as the “normal” word order in Hebrew verbal clauses, noting that a different word order is used “to emphasize the part of speech that is placed first.” The non-VS examples he lists include preverbal subjects, objects, and an adverbial of place. Niccacci (1990:28) also views preverbal elements as bearing ‘emphasis.’97 Ross (2001:§54.2) claims that “Prominence may be given to another part of the sentence if it is placed before the

95 See, for example, Davidson (1901:§105), “In the verbal sent. the idea expressed by the verb is the emphatic element, and in ordinary calm discourse the order is - pred., subj.”, and GKC (1910:§142, p. 455) “In the verbal-clause proper the principal emphasis rests upon the action which proceeds from (or is experienced by) the subject, and accordingly the verb naturally precedes.”

96 Muraoka quotes Jespersen (1924:147): “But it should always be remembered that word-order in actual language is not exclusively determined by psychological reasons, but is often purely conventional and determined by idiomatic rules peculiar to the language in question and independent of the will of the individual speaker.”

97 “It can accordingly be stated that the typical feature of the CNC [= Compound Noun Clause: AH] is to have the finite verb in second position within the clause. Its function is to emphasize the element ‘x’ which precedes the finite verb (subject, object or circumstance of the act).” See also Greenberg (1965:§27.5-7).
verb,” but also warns that “other reasons for the rearrangement of the word order (such as poetic parallelism and balance) must also be considered.”

While classifying preverbal constituents as ‘emphasized’ may be popular in introductory grammars, many recent scholars have criticized the term as both vague and subjective. Muraoka (1985:i) sees use of the term ‘emphasis’ as problematic, noting that it is often used “without much thought being given to precisely what is meant by the term, nor, more importantly, to the question why the writer or the speaker possibly felt the need for an emphatic form or construction.” Buth (1999:95-6, n. 40) concurs: “One does not need to read much text before discovering that emphasis is a misleading nomenclature for fronted constituents, yet a reader cannot just throw up hands in despair and treat word order functions as unrecoverable.” Moshavi (2000:11) observes: “Without a precise definition of the concept of emphasis, it can be hard to tell if the initial element in an inverted clause is really emphasized, or if we perceive the emphasis only because that element is placed first.” Bandstra (1991:113) contends that “we need a more refined and linguistically grounded approach in order to give definition to what easily remains just a psychological notion.”

Consider the following examples from Jdg 1.1b-2a (see also 20.18) and Gen 4.4b-5a:

Jdg 1.1b-2a
יַעֲלֶה מִי לֵאמֹר בַּיהוה יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּנֵי וַיִּשְׁאֲלוּ יְהוֹשֻעַ מוֹת אַחֲרֵי וַיְהִי - אֶל לָּנוּ הַכְּנַעֲנִי בּוֹ לְהִלָּחֶם בַּתְּחִלָה: יהוה יַעֲלֶהִיְהוּדָהוַיֹּאמֶר

Gen 4.4b-5a
אֶל יהוה וַיִּשַׁע - וְאֶל הֶבֶל - מִנְחַתוֹ: וְאֶל - וְאֶל קַיִן - שָׁעָה הוא

It is likely that both the fronted subject יְהוּדָה in Jdg 1.2a and the fronted object -וְאֶל בּוֹ in Gen 4.5a should receive some sort of vocal emphasis when read. However, this explains nothing as to the precise function of each fronted element within its specific context and co-text. In other words, while the label ‘emphasis’ may describe how an element ought to be read, it offers no explanation as to why it ought to be read that way. Furthermore, the label ‘emphasis’ is inadequate to capture the difference in function between the two fronted elements. The clause-initial יְהוּדָה in Jdg 1.2a is the answer to a question of identification. It is marked by fronting as the salient or most important information of the clause within this specific context and co-text. In other words, while the label ‘emphasis’ may describe how an element ought to be read, it offers no explanation as to why it ought to be read that way. Furthermore, the label ‘emphasis’ is inadequate to capture the difference in function between the two fronted elements. The clause-initial יְהוּדָה in Jdg 1.2a is the answer to a question of identification. It is marked by fronting as the salient or most important information of the clause within this specific context and co-text, i.e. the one piece of information not presupposed by the question. The clause-initial -וְאֶל בּוֹ in Gen 4.5a, on the other hand, cannot be characterized as providing the most salient or important information; its contents are presupposed by what comes before (the reader knows that both brothers have brought an offering). In this clause, the most important or salient information is represented not by the fronted element, but by the negation of the verb שָׁעָה, which serves as the point of contrast relative to which the two brothers and their respective offerings are compared. Said in another way, the main point of the entire clause is not Cain and his offering, but how the LORD responded to it. While it is not wrong to argue that both fronted elements are in some sense ‘emphatic’, in that each can plausibly be read with some form of sentence stress, neither is it very helpful. More precise terminology is needed.

Finally, consider the very first example discussed by Niccacci (1990:23), from Gen 3.13b וַיִּשַּׁאָה נָחָשׁ. Niccacci views the fronted subject here as emphatic, translating with the cleft-sentence “It is the serpent who tricked me.” While this reading is possible, it is nevertheless unlikely. Holmstedt (2002:139, n. 19) correctly observes that the salient information in the clause וַיִּשַּׁאָה נָחָשׁ is provided not by the subject, but by the verb. The snake is presupposed; its deception of the woman is not.98

98 Niccacci is likely (and understandably) influenced by the focal word order of the immediately preceding verse, Gen 3.12, where the man projects his guilt on the woman with the words . In this clause, the ‘resumptive’ pronoun הוא is clearly focal. The fronted נָחָשׁ in Gen 3.13, on
Terminology

The terminological situation related to both discourse analysis and pragmatics is plagued by confusion. This confusion frustrates not only those BH scholars who seek to apply discourse and pragmatic concepts to BH, but also the very discourse linguists who promulgate the terminology. Many articles on discourse analysis begin with a complaint of the terminological problem, followed by an apology in which the linguist laments either having to add new terminology or having to redefine existing terminology. The main issue is how best to refer to the different pragmatic roles of an utterance. Different sets of terms have been proposed: subject-predicate,99 foundation-core (Malthesius 1948 [1939]:234), theme-rheme (Firbas 1964; Halliday 1967), topic-comment (Li and Thompson 1976; Comrie 1989:3.3), given-new (Halliday 1967), topic-focus (Dik 1981), presupposition-focus (Lambrecht 1995; Prince 1998), et cetera. Compounding the problem of this profusion in terms is the promiscuousness and inconsistency with which they have been used. Researchers often employ a variety of terms to refer to a single phenomenon, or vice-versa, employ a single term to refer to a variety of different phenomena. The problem is due in part to differing linguistic theories, in part to the real complexities of the issues under discussion, and in part to the diverse research goals of the linguists engaged in pragmatic analysis. The problem is so vexing, that Levinson, in his well-known textbook on pragmatics (1983:x), entirely avoids the issue of topic and comment, arguably one of the most central issues in pragmatics, complaining: “Terminological profusion and confusion, and underlying conceptual vagueness, plague the relevant literature.

---

99 Garvin (1963:503, n. 11) comments on the conceptual evolution from the 19th-century concepts of “psychological subject” and “psychological predicate” to the 20th-century Prague School terms “theme” and “rheme.” Gundel (1977:13) explains how the terms subject and predicate evolved from essentially pragmatic concepts into surface level syntactic categories:

It has been a fundamental principle of grammar since the time of Plato and Aristotle that sentences are divided into two major categories – a subject and a predicate.

The system of categorial propositions of Aristotelian logic recognized four basic forms of statement making formulae.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{A.} & \quad \text{All } x \text{ is } y \\
\text{E.} & \quad \text{No } x \text{ is } y \\
\text{I.} & \quad \text{Some } x \text{ is } y \\
\text{O.} & \quad \text{Some } x \text{ is not } y
\end{align*}
\]

where variables \( x \) and \( y \) are referred to as terms. Type A also includes singular statements like (1) and type E: the negation of such statements.

(1) Socrates is a man

In any given sentence exemplifying one of these formulae the first term is called the subject and the second term the predicate. Thus, it may be said that as originally conceived by the ancient philosophers the terms subject and predicate referred roughly to that part of the sentence which names what the statement is about (the subject) and that part of the sentence which says something about it (the predicate).

These notions, which were first defined on the basis of simple categorical statements like (1), were adopted in traditional grammar and generalized to sentences of more complex form where they became associated with surface grammatical categories and foundations.
The Pragmatics of the X+verb Structure in the Hebrew of Genesis

to a point where little may be salvageable.” Though lack of space precludes an attempt to sort out problems that even a noted textbook avoids, a few words are nevertheless in order.

The Inadequacy of Syntactic Subject and Predicate

A traditional grammatical approach relates to clauses in terms of subject and predicate, where these terms are generally said to refer to syntactic components. For example, in the isolated sentence He broke the window, He is the subject, the entity about which an assertion is made, and broke the window, comprised of a verb and a direct object, is the predicate, the assertion made about the subject. However, sentences are very seldom uttered in isolation. Consider the same sentence as a reply to the following questions (where italicized letters indicate marked sentence stress).

(a) What did he do? He broke the window.
(b) What did he break? He broke the window.
(c) Who broke the window? He broke the window.

As was noted long ago, the definition of what a given clause is “about” is often context-dependent. For example, only in the informational proposition represented by the question and response in (a) does the syntactic subject express the entity about which an assertion is made and the syntactic predicate express that assertion. In contrast, the proposition expressed by the question and the response in (b) can be usefully reworded as follows:

(d) The thing that he broke was the window.

Another definition that is frequently given is that the subject is what you talk about, and the predicate is what is said about this subject. This is true about many, perhaps most sentences, though the man in the street would probably be inclined to say that it does not help him very much, for in such a sentence as “John promised Mary a gold ring” he would say that there are four things of which something is said, and which might therefore all of them be said to be “subjects,” namely (1) John, (2) a promise, (3) Mary and (4) a ring. This popular definition, according to which subject is identified with subject-matter or topic, is really unsatisfactory….

It is also clear that identification of the topic or subject-matter of a sentence such as John promised Mary a gold ring is highly dependent on both the preceding and ensuing discourse. For example, reconsider the topic of this sentence given the following potential preceding clauses:

(a) The students were all incorrigible romantics. John promised Mary a gold ring.
(b) All the men adored Mary. John promised Mary a gold ring.
(c) There are many ways to seduce a woman. John promised Mary a gold ring.
(d) Men are always offering women useless baubles. John promised Mary a gold ring.

The respective discourse topics given each of the potential preceding clauses may be construed as: (a) the students, (b) Mary, (c) methods of seduction, and (d) useless baubles.

The ensuing discourse is also important for the identification of discourse topic, because an item can be fronted as topic for a large span of discourse or for one clause only. For example, if the sentence I like pizza with olives, but anchovies I detest is followed by the sentence I also like mushrooms, the clause but anchovies I hate may be said to have a fronted clausal (contrastive) topic, but the overall discourse topic may be something like pizza toppings that I like. If, however, the same sentence I like pizza with olives, but anchovies I detest is followed by something like They’re too salty or some other reference to the anchovies, then it is reasonable to argue that anchovies has become the discourse topic.

For a discussion on how such questions and answers represent abstract propositions see Lambrecht (1995:209-10).
Rewritten in this way it becomes clear that the entity in response (b) about which an assertion is made is not the syntactic subject *he*, but the heretofore unidentified *thing that he broke*. Moreover, the specific assertion made about that entity in response (b) is limited to the direct object *the window*. In other words, while at the level of the isolated clause the syntactic subject and predicate seem to constitute, respectively, the entity about which an assertion is made and the assertion made about that entity, given the specific context of response (b) (i.e. the question for which it provides the answer), the marked sentence stress indicates that a distinction must be made between the syntactic subject and the *topic* (i.e. the entity about which an assertion is made), on the one hand, and between the syntactic predicate and the *focus* (i.e. the marked assertion made about the topic), on the other. There is thus a need for an analytical approach that takes into account the potential distinction between syntactic subject and predicate, on the one hand, and pragmatic topic and focus, on the other.

Notice that the propositions expressed by the questions and responses in (a) and (c) respectively can also be reworded so as to make the asserted material clear:

(e) The thing that he did was (to) break the window.
(f) The person who broke the window was *he*.

The specific assertion made in (f) provides incontrovertible evidence that the syntactic subject of response (c) above does not coincide with the topic, but with the focus.

The relationship between sentence (a) and (e) is also of interest. In these two clauses, the assertions are equal. This is important, because it shows that in the unmarked clause the syntactic subject normally coincides with the entity about which an assertion is made and the syntactic predicate with the assertion made about that entity. Only in certain specific

---

102 Traditionally, the assertion made about a *topic* has been referred to as the *comment*. For reasons to be explained in the next section, a distinction is made here between a clause’s syntactic predicate and its informational assertion only if the latter is marked. The relationship between the terms *predicate*, *comment*, and *focus* is thus as follows: the *predicate* is the syntactic component of a clause made up of the verb and its complements and adjuncts; the *comment* is the informational content of the predicate in the unmarked clause, i.e. where the syntactic predicate is coterminous with the informational assertion; the *focus* is that element, be it the subject, predicate, or only part of the predicate, specially marked as the most important informational element.

103 On the unmarked nature of *topic-focus* constructions Lambrecht (1995:296) notes: “The status of the predicate as the unmarked focus domain correlates with the status of the topic-comment structure as the unmarked pragmatic articulation.” According to Lambrecht (ibid), there are two clause types that constitute exceptions to this norm: event-reporting and presentational clauses. Neither type of clause can be characterized as having a *topic* about which an assertion is made. The event-reporting clause has no overt *topic*. Rather, the entire clause constitutes an assertion made in relation to a topic not explicitly mentioned in the utterance. This can be illustrated with the following example (adapted from Lambrecht 1995:307-8):

Why didn’t she come to work today?
(a) She’s ill.
(b) Her husband died.

In response (a) she continues as discourse topic and the unmarked focus rests on the predicate. In (b), however, given the minimal context provided by the question, there is no continuation of discourse topic. Her *husband* is brought up ‘out of nowhere’, as it were. Further, by rewording the proposition expressed by the combination of the question and response in (b) as *She didn’t come to work today because her husband died*, it becomes clear that the assertion made in (b) is composed of the entire clause and not merely a part. For this reason, Lambrecht refers to this sort of clause as *sentence-focus*.

In a presentational clause, on the other hand, a *topical* entity is introduced, but no real assertion is made about it. Lambrecht (39) explains: “This construction is called ‘presentational’ because its communicative function is not to predicate a property of a given entity but to introduce a new entity into discourse.” Lambrecht (ibid) also notes that languages typically allow only certain, usually intransitive, verbs, like *be* and *come*, in presentational clauses.
contexts (such as responses (b) and (c) above) is marking (here by means of sentence stress) necessary to indicate that the syntactic subject does not coincide with the topic (i.e., the entity about which the assertion is made) and that the syntactic predicate (or part of it) does not coincide with the focus (i.e., the marked assertion made about the topic). With specific regard to narrative, where topic- and event-continuity are assumed (see below), the implicit question answered by the unmarked clause can be thought of either as What did he (she, it, they, etc.) do next? (where topic continuity is assumed; see below) or, more simply, as What happened next?

On the basis of these sentences, then, it is clear that the traditional grammatical categories of subject and predicate, with their historic link to the syntactic categories of subjects, verbs, direct objects, and the like, are inadequate for the description of the information structure of certain clauses in context. While it is important to be able to describe the syntactic similarity between responses (a) through (c) – all having the same or similar subjects (he) and predicates (broke the window) – and, therefore, to preserve the notions of syntactic subject and predicate, it must also be possible to describe the differences between responses (a) through (c), with particular reference to the stressed and non-stressed elements in each clause. The burning question is, however, exactly how best to refer to such elements.

Section 3: The X+verb Structure for Focal Marking

Focus Defined

Traditionally, the concept of focus has been given either of two meanings, one broad and one narrow. On the one hand, according to the broad definition, focus refers to the informational assertion made by a clause. According to the narrow definition, on the other hand, focus refers to the part of the clause specially marked as communicating information that is contrastive, contra-expected, or identificational (i.e., ‘fill-in’, completive) in relation to assumed information. For the purposes of this paper, neither definition is satisfactory; the broad definition is too inclusive, the narrow too restrictive. Here, the term focus is used to refer to a surface-level clausal element (rather than its informational referent) that is specially marked by X+verb word order as bearing the most important or salient information in the clause. It is necessary to discuss this definition of focus in contrast to the broad and narrow definitions given above.

The broad definition of focus is too inclusive for two reasons. First, it deals primarily with the cognitive status of the information (i.e. the propositional assertion) of a clause, rather than with the surface-level manifestation of that cognitive status. For the purposes of this paper, focus is discussed only as a surface-level manifestation expressed in the X+verb

---

104 E.g., Lambrecht (1995:206): “If we assume – as I do – that focus has to do with the conveying of new information, all sentences must have a focus.”

105 It is recognized, however, that there are other ways to mark elements as focal; for example, by using sentence stress, special particles (e.g., only, even), and/or a special structure. Many times, more than one strategy is used, as in the English sentence It’s Rachel that I love, where a special structure (known as a cleft-sentence) and sentence stress combine to mark the direct object Rachel as salient.
structure. Second, focus, according to the broad definition, includes both marked assertive material (where the syntactic predicate and the informational assertion do not coincide) and unmarked assertive material (where the syntactic predicate carries the informational assertion). For the purposes of the present work focal elements are considered marked by definition. In other words, the term focus is employed only to describe surface-level manifestations of cases where the informational assertion of a given utterance is not coterminous with the syntactic predicate (and is expressed as the X-element in an X+verb structure). In practice, this means that the category of focal elements is limited to syntactic subjects and pieces of the syntactic predicate (be they complements or adjuncts). Seen from the opposite perspective, the term focus is not employed in connection with the unmarked clause, i.e. refers neither to its syntactic predicate nor to the informational content expressed by the predicate, because, as was stated above, in the unmarked verbal clause the syntactic predicate coincides with the informational assertion.

As for the narrow definition of focus given above: it is too restrictive because it links the concept of focus directly to specific types of information, leaving little or no room for the choice of the writer/speaker. It must be emphasized, on the contrary, that the decision of whether or not to mark an item as focal is up to the writer/speaker, though it is important to understand that the ‘choices’ or ‘decisions’ involved are routinely made unconsciously, in instinctive agreement with the pragmatic ‘rules’ of a given language. The information expressed in a focal element may ‘fill in’, identify, complete, contrast, or express contraexpected information in relation to assumed information. In all of these cases, it therefore adds information that can accurately be described as ‘new’. However, the category

106 Following Buth (1999:81): “Focus refers to a specially signaled constituent for highlighting salient information of a clause.” He (ibid., n. 7) explains further: “This relates to the Praguan rhyme material in a theme-rheme dichotomy, or to comment material in the topic-comment dichotomy, though Focus is limited to specially marked rhemic material. Focus does not equal rhyme; Focus usually only marks a part of the rhyme.”

107 The definition of focus employed in this paper thus differs from that of Lambrecht (1995:206), who argues that all clauses have a focus. This difference arises first of all from the fact that for Lambrecht focus characterizes a specific status of information (which has traditionally been called rhyme or comment), while in the present work focus refers only to an optional, surface-level manifestation expressed in the X+verb structure. It seems clear both that every clause includes an informational assertion (except for Lambrecht’s presentational clause, see above) and that in the unmarked clause this informational assertion is coterminous with the syntactic predicate. Consequently, for the purposes of dealing with the functions of the X+verb structure it is necessary to differentiate between syntactic predicate and pragmatic assertion only (a) when the two do not coincide and (b) when this lack of coincidence is marked by the fronting of the salient constituent. Focus as defined here is thus similar to Lambrecht’s argument focus (the only difference being that Lambrecht’s argument focus is identifiable as focal in terms of sentence stress as well as word order variation, while in this paper, for reasons to be discussed below, focus only refers to clausal constituents marked as focal by word order).

The second reason that the definition of focus employed here differs from that of Lambrecht involves that author’s specific interest in the relationship between prosodic marking (i.e. accentuation) and the different types of focus structures he discusses. It is clear that in all types of clauses there is some sort of prosodic movement. Even in the unmarked predicate-focus structure the predicate is in some sense ‘marked’ as focal by accentuation. This differs from the situation in BH for at least two reasons. First, the Massoretic accentual system is more indicative of syntactic breaks than of pragmatic stress. See Buth (1999:84, n. 12) and Shimasaki (2002:57-8 and n. 5) for a summary discussion of the relationship between the Massoretic accent system and pragmatic marking and some relevant bibliography. Second, whereas prosodic accentuation, which obtains in every spoken clause, always bears some relationship to the information status of the pragmatic assertion, the correlation between the fronted element of the X+verb structure and the informational assertion is far from 100%, simply because most informational assertions coincide with unmarked clausal predicates. Since the present work deals only with the X+verb structure, it seems reasonable, again, to limit the definition of focal elements to include only those clausal constituents marked by word order as non-coincidental with the syntactic predicate.
of focal elements must not be limited to constituents that fill in knowledge gaps with new information. A writer/speaker can conceivably choose to mark as especially salient any verbal argument, be it new or presupposed. Such a definition may make focus seem subjective, detached, as it were, from any specific cognitive status of information. However, the reality is that writers/speakers at times choose to mark cognitively presupposed information as especially salient. A linguistic theory should be capable of accounting for this.

It is easiest to show the relationship between X+verb word order and focus in cases of BH WH-identification questions, where the missing information requested in the question is often (though not always) fronted in the answer. Consider the following examples from BH. In each example specific information is solicited by a question word (with the question word obligatorily fronted). The most important or salient information in each answer is conveyed by the element which has been pragmatically marked as focal by fronting. Note the variety of the fronted elements: subject, prepositional adverbial of place, purpose, direct object (both the relevant question word and the focused element in each example are in boldface type).

108 Consider Buth's (1999:81) description of the different sorts of information that can be signaled as salient in a focus construction: “This information may be contrastive. It may be contraexpected, that is, the speaker/writer assumes his or her audience may be expecting something different and so marks it for Focus. It may also be new information that is specially marked to fill in, or to complete, assumed missing information. It may also be old information that needs special reinforcement, through repetition” [italics mine: AH]. Similarly, note the definition of focus provided by Shim asaki (2002:42): “Focus is not a property or a prominent piece of information, such as ‘new information,’ ‘assertion,’ or ‘comment,’ which are often equated with focus. To ‘focus’ is to mark an item as a prominent piece of information....” That presupposed, old information can be marked as focal is clear from the following real-life Italian statement recently made by the present writer's wife to their son: Ti lascio giocare fuori se stai buono buonino. Ma buono buonino devi stare (= I'll let you play outside if you are good). But goody good you must be). The constituent buono buonino (= goody good) had just been mentioned as a precondition for being allowed to stay outside. It therefore constitutes old information. It was nevertheless fronted as focal in the very next clause. A potential BH example of presupposed information that is nevertheless marked as focal comes from Gen 1.27:

אֲשֶׁר לְעַל יְוָיָם מְאָר הָאֲנָשִׁים כָּל בָּרָא אֶת אֶלֹהִים אִשָּׁתָם בֶּן בָּרָא שָׁמַעְנוּ. Here, it would appear that the element יומֵאַיִן has been fronted for purposes of saliency even though it has just been mentioned twice in the preceding context (in vv. 26 and 27a). Note the similar wording and word order in Gen 5.1 and 9.6. The focus here reinforces an important point. For a useful introductory discussion of focus see Dooley and Levinsohn (2001:61-7).

109 As in many other languages, the fronting of question words is virtually required in BH. Cf., however, the word order of the verbless interrogative הֲキング in Ex 16.7-8. The position of question words is often explained as being related to focal fronting. However, because interrogatives beginning with a WH-question word can conceivably have another focal constituent, e.g., What did you do?, it would seem that the focus associated with question-word positioning has been, at least to some extent, grammaticalized.
Most focal frontings do not, however, answer explicit questions. Rather, they provide information specially marked by the writer/speaker as particularly salient given the context. The information expressed in a constituent fronted for focus answers, as it were, the implicit question that the writer/speaker assumes needs to be answered.

**Cases of Focus in Genesis**

The following lists present examples of cases in Genesis where the \(X+\text{verb}\) structure is used to signal a focal element. Cases are categorized according to the following headings: *Focus for Contrast, Focus for Fill-in/Completion/Identification, Focus for Contraexpected Information, and Focus for General Reinforcement.*\(^{110}\) It is important to note that while most of the instances are clearly focal and while in most of the cases the type of focus in question can be labeled according to the abovementioned categories, there is room for disagreement. One of the qualities of a valid linguistic theory is that it does not unambiguously assign meanings and functions to ambiguous forms, but rather provides a framework within which intelligent discussion of multiple interpretations of ambiguous data can take place. This is especially important in the case of linguistic analysis of BH, a dead language accessible only through written texts of a later period.

**Focus for Contrast**

When the \(X+\text{verb}\) structure is employed to express *contrastive focus* (or *single-difference contrast*\(^{111}\)), the fronted element is marked as the salient point of contrast in relation to other entities of the same set that are involved in the same (or similar) action. The contrast may be between two or more entities. With the addition of the particle \(כָּרַ\) or \(אַ\) the contrast can be made more restrictive. Note that when two (or more) entities are explicitly mentioned in adjoining clauses, normally only the second (and third, \textit{et cetera}) element is (are) fronted for focus.

The \(X+\text{verb}\) structure for contrastive focus must not be confused with the \(X+\text{verb}\) structure for *contrastive topicalization.* In the former, entities of a common set are compared with respect to the same or similar actions, with the entities themselves constituting the salient point of contrast. In the latter, entities of a common set are compared with respect to different or opposite actions, with the action or something related to it the salient point of contrast. Compare the following example of contrastive topicalization from Ruth 1.14b with the instances of contrastive focus from the narrative portions of Genesis below.

---

\(^{110}\) Chafe (1976:33-8) links focus to the concept of *contrastiveness,* because it is always possible to insert a phrase like “and no other” into a clause with a focalized element. For example, the implicit contrast in the answer to the question \(מִי-בְּאַמְתְּחֹתֵינוּ-כַּסְפֵּנוּ-שָׂם\) in Gen 43.22 can be demonstrated by the insertion of \(אַחֵר\) וְלֹא: \(אֱלֹהֵיכֶם-אֲבִיכֶם-וֵאֱלֹהֵי-אַחֵר\) וְלֹא בְּאַמְתְּחֹתֵיכֶם מַטְמוֹן לָכֶם נָתַן. The categories specified in the present work, only one of which is explicitly labeled “Focus for Contrast,” in no way contradict Chafe’s theory. While all types of focus may logically involve some sort of contrast, the contrast referred to in the category here labeled “Focus for Contrast” is much more specific. In these environments, it is argued, the contrast is made between two (or more) contextually identifiable entities. See Muraoka (1985:54).

\(^{111}\) See Dooley and Levinsohn (2001:71).
112 In this example the subjects are part of the same set, i.e. those fleeing, and the verbs are the same. The focal point of contrast is the destination of flight. It is often the case when two constituents appear before the verb that the second is focal.

113 The reader may be inclined to wonder about the marked status of the pronoun בְּרָאָם in this object+subject+וַיִּהְיוּ construction. That this pronoun does not simply constitute an unmarked part of the syntactic structure is clear (a) from the fact that Joseph is unambiguously presupposed as subject here (i.e. the explicit subject pronoun is not needed for disambiguation of subject) and (b) from examples like 2Ki 17.32-33, where it is clear that the structure in question does not require an overt subject. The difference between use of the yiqtol and use of the וַיִּהְיוּ construction to indicate past, imperfective (i.e. habitual or durative) action is debatable. Some may be inclined to explain the latter as a Mishnaism in Biblical Hebrew, perhaps even as an indication of a late date of composition. Rendsberg (1990:146), on the other hand, argues that they are functional correspondents of separate dialects: yiqtol (literary), וַיִּהְיוּ construction to indicate past, imperfective (i.e. habitual or durative) action is debatable. Some may be inclined to explain the latter as a Mishnaism in Biblical Hebrew, perhaps even as an indication of a late date of composition. Rendsberg (1990:146), on the other hand, argues that they are functional correspondents of separate dialects: yiqtol (literary), וַיִּהְיוּ construction to indicate past, imperfective (i.e. habitual or durative) action is debatable. Some may be inclined to explain the latter as a Mishnaism in Biblical Hebrew, perhaps even as an indication of a late date of composition. Rendsberg (1990:146), on the other hand, argues that they are functional correspondents of separate dialects: yiqtol (literary), וַיִּהְיוּ construction to indicate past, imperfective (i.e. habitual or durative) action is debatable. Some may be inclined to explain the latter as a Mishnaism in Biblical Hebrew, perhaps even as an indication of a late date of composition. Rendsberg (1990:146), on the other hand, argues that they are functional correspondents of separate dialects: yiqtol (literary), וַיִּהְיוּ construction to indicate past, imperfective (i.e. habitual or durative) action is debatable. Some may be inclined to explain the latter as a Mishnaism in Biblical Hebrew, perhaps even as an indication of a late date of composition. Rendsberg (1990:146), on the other hand, argues that they are functional correspondents of separate dialects: yiqtol (literary), וַיִּהְיוּ construction to indicate past, imperfective (i.e. habitual or durative) action is debatable. Some may be inclined to explain the latter as a Mishnaism in Biblical Hebrew, perhaps even as an indication of a late date of composition. Rendsberg (1990:146), on the other hand, argues that they are functional correspondents of separate dialects: yiqtol (literary), וַיִּהְיוּ construction to indicate past, imperfective (i.e. habitual or durative) action is debatable. Some may be inclined to explain the latter as a Mishnaism in Biblical Hebrew, perhaps even as an indication of a late date of composition. Rendsberg (1990:146), on the other hand, argues that they are functional correspondents of separate dialects: yiqtol (literary), וַיִּהְיוּ construction to indicate past, imperfective (i.e. habitual or durative) action is debatable. Some may be inclined to explain the latter as a Mishnaism in Biblical Hebrew, perhaps even as an indication of a late date of composition. Rendsberg (1990:146), on the other hand, argues that they are functional correspondents of separate dialects: yiqtol (literary), וַיִּהְיוּ construction to indicate past, imperfective (i.e. habitual or durative) action is debatable. Some may be inclined to explain the latter as a Mishnaism in Biblical Hebrew, perhaps even as an indication of a late date of composition. Rendsberg (1990:146), on the other hand, argues that they are functional correspondents of separate dialects: yiqtol (literary), וַיִּהְיוּ construction to indicate past, imperfective (i.e. habitual or durative) action is debatable. Some may be inclined to explain the latter as a Mishnaism in Biblical Hebrew, perhaps even as an indication of a late date of composition. Rendsberg (1990:146), on the other hand, argues that they are functional correspondents of separate dialects: yiqtol (literary), וַיִּהְיוּ construction to indicate past, imperfective (i.e. habitual or durative) action is debatable. Some may be inclined to explain the latter as a Mishnaism in Biblical Hebrew, perhaps even as an indication of a late date of composition. Rendsberg (1990:146), on the other hand, argues that they are functional correspondents of separate dialects: yiqtol (lit
Focus for Contraexpected Information

A subtype of the X+verb structure for contrastive focus, the X+verb structure for contraexpected information, contrasts the information expressed in a fronted constituent not with another entity in the text, but with a more general expectation. The particle מִצְאָ בִּ (‘also’, ‘even’) often serves to reinforce the surprise.

Focus for General Reinforcement

Identification of an X+verb structure as generally reinforcing is somewhat subjective. With no objective link to cognitive status, examples must remain tentative and arguable. For some scholars, the lack of an objectively verifiable definition constitutes grounds for exclusion of such examples from consideration. However, many language ‘rules’ are optional, employed by speakers and writers subjectively. If a full linguistic account of a language must relate to these optional rules – and it is taken as an axiom here that this is, indeed, the case – then it must allow for form-function-meaning relationships that defy unambiguous definition.

The above examples constitute the twenty instances of focal fronting in the narrative portions of the book of Genesis. It should be noted, however, that focal fronting is much more common in direct speech, with approximately 130 instances. Concerns of space preclude a discussion, though it is hoped that a list of suggested focal frontings from the direct speech of Genesis may serve as a springboard for future studies.114

114 Proposed focal frontings in the direct speech of Genesis: 2.23, 3.14 (b?), 15, 16, 17, 18, 19 (b?); 4.12, 15, 24, 6.14, 16 (quart), 19 (b?), 20, 9.5 (b?), 6, 13, 25, 12.7, 13.17, 14.23, 15.13, 16, 18, 16.12, 17.5, 6 (rare double fronting with focus first), 12, 16 (quart), 20, 18.12, 19.2, 20.5, 6 (b?), 9, 21.6, 12, 18, 22.12, 16, 23.9, 11, 24.4, 7, 14 (ter), 19, 44, 46 (b?), 50, 26.3, 27.33, 37 (b?), 39, 40, 29.32 (but see below), 30.8, 16, 31.1, 6, 8 (b?), 39 (b?), 39 (b?), 12, 11, 17, 20, 34.10, 15, 22, 35.10, 11 (b?), 12, 37.32 (?), 38.22 (note the use of מְלָכָה here for even), 28, 39.19, 40.8, 41.11, 12, 15, 16, 25, 28, 40 (ter), 44 (?), 42.9, 12, 15, 19, 29, 33, 36 (b?), 37 (b?), 43.9 (b?), 45, 22, 44.27, 45.5, 8, 46.3, 32, 34, 47.4, 9, 48.5, 6 (b?), 19 (b?), 20, 17.
The Pragmatics of the X+verb Structure in the Hebrew of Genesis

Section 4: The X+verb Structure for Non-Focal Marking

The Two Basic Types of Non-Focal X+verb Structures

According to what has been said thus far, all focal elements are marked. However, the converse claim, namely that all marked elements are focal, is by no means true. In fact, most fronted elements in the BH of Genesis are not focal. This flies in the face of the theory popular in certain introductory BH grammars, namely that preposed elements are universally ‘emphatic’. However, even when the non-focal nature of many fronted elements is admitted, there still remains the further challenge of explaining the meaning and effect of each fronting. This is problematic in BH because the writer/speaker could prepose a constituent both to specially mark the preposed constituent itself and to mark the clause as a whole. Further, within both categories of frontings (i.e. those in which the fronted element itself is marked and those in which the sentence as a whole is marked) there are several different varieties, each with its own specific use. Finally, the various effects and meanings sometimes seem to overlap – even within a single example. A given X+verb structure can evidently serve more than one purpose in a given context. This section deals first with non-focal frontings in which the fronted element itself is marked and second with non-focal frontings in which the preposed element marks the entire clause.

The Non-Focal X+verb Structure with Marked Fronted Element (X-Constituent Marked)

Consider, again, the following two clauses from Gen 4.4b-5a:

As was already stated, in Gen 4.5a the marked element does not coincide with the salient piece of information in the clause. The key informational difference between the clauses in vv. 4b and 5a is communicated by the negative ַלֹא. Yet, the constituent ַלֹא is indeed in marked position and would likely receive some sort of sentence stress when read by a sensitive reader. How to explain this marking? Linguists have traditionally referred to a non-focal marked element such as this with the term topic, with the process of non-focal fronting termed topicalization. The reason for this is that speakers of many languages often front verbal arguments they want to mark as the new (or reactivated) subject-matter (or topic) of discussion. Gen 17 contains several examples of this.

115 Cf. Shimasaki (2002:42, 56), who appears to claim that the clause-initial position in BH is unambiguously marked for focus.

116 Note, however, that many linguists differentiate between topic, i.e. the entity (fronted or not) about which an informational assertion is made, and topicalization, i.e. the process whereby a non-topical entity is fronted (as if it were a marked topic). See, e.g., Foley and Van Valin (1985) and Prince (1998).
In all of the above an element is marked by fronting as the new topic of discussion. In two of the cases (vv. 4 and 15), the fronted element is extra-clausal,\(^{117}\) while in the other three a subject pronoun,\(^{118}\) an indirect object, and a direct object are fronted as the new (or reactivated) topic of discussion. Note that most modern English translations render the fronted elements in vv. 4, 9, 15, and 20 with a construction such as “and as for…”\(^{119}\) The Modern Israeli Hebrew equivalent is ... והוא או or ... בניו ... מנהל ... ל. Some clear examples follow (preceding context included where necessary).

In all of these cases, an identifiable referent (animate or otherwise) is explicitly marked as the discourse topic.\(^{121}\) Note that גם in Gen 6.16 is identifiable not because it has already been mentioned, but because it is a presupposed part of the ark (contrary to the other fronted elements, whose presence, given their focal marking, is evidently not taken for granted). The construction of Biblical genealogies often takes advantage of this packaging strategy, as has been observed by both Givón (1977) and Bailey (1998:19-21). Givón (1977:202-3) notes Gen 10.21-25:

In all of these cases, an identifiable referent (animate or otherwise) is explicitly marked as the discourse topic. Note that גם in Gen 6.16 is identifiable not because it has already been mentioned, but because it is a presupposed part of the ark (contrary to the other fronted elements, whose presence, given their focal marking, is evidently not taken for granted).

The construction of Biblical genealogies often takes advantage of this packaging strategy, as has been observed by both Givón (1977) and Bailey (1998:19-21). Givón (1977:202-3) notes Gen 10.21-25:

117 Khan (1988:78-9) categorizes these two extra-clausal examples under the general heading “Signaling the boundaries of spans of discourse” and under the more specific headings “Span onset” and “Beginning of speech or poem.” The constituent קְצָה בְּשָׁלוֹם שֵׁם (preceding context included where necessary) is grammatically acceptable, but see GCK §119u on the ל with carries the sense of “about, in regards to” and the word order in 1Ki 10.23 and Isa 36.9.

118 The subject pronoun הוא in Gen 17.9 is theoretically ambiguous with regard to its status as intra-clausal or extra-clausal. If it is considered intra-clausal, then the post-verbal THEME must be considered an extra-clausal afterthought or tail.

119 The fronting in v. 21, on the other hand, they correctly render differently. My covenant here is fronted not merely as a new (or reactivated) topic of discussion, but as a contrastive topic (see below).

120 Moshavi (2000:22, n. 50) views the two X+verb structures as indicative of new paragraphs. This may constitute an example where the X+verb construction serves double-duty. That a change in subject matter should coincide with the beginning of a new paragraph or episode seems altogether reasonable. A given X+verb structure can serve more than one purpose in a given setting.

121 The term discourse topic is rather slippery. For some, it constitutes the general theme of a section, perhaps even the moral or point, while for others it is the referent about which the writer/speaker makes a series of assertions (see Dooley and Levinsohn 2001:69-70). It is often contrasted with sentence topic, the entity marked by the writer/speaker as what the sentence is about, regardless of the surrounding discourse. The problem is that it is very difficult to tell what a sentence is about without its context (see above). With specific regard to BH the marked sentence topic often matches the discourse topic. But see below for cases where this is not true.
Givón argues:

The topic is shifted in each line…, but in the first and fourth line the topic is the dative-benefactive of the passive, while in the second and third line it is the grammatical subject of the active (of the same verb). This again underscores the fact that the use of the ANTERIOR aspect (and later the PARTICIPLE) for topic-switching is oriented toward the TOPIC rather than strictly speaking the grammatical subject.

As another example, Bailey (1998:19-20) cites Gen 4.18:

He explains:

What is…interesting about Genesis 4.18 is that, even though the events obviously occur sequentially in real life and we might have expected the wayyiqtol form to have been used, the narrator has nevertheless chosen to relate the clauses to each other topically, that is by means of clause-initial topics. A genealogy like this is essentially a description of a series of topics (fathers). What is topical is not the sequence but rather fatherhood. Such a genealogy is thus a descriptive discourse, not a story with a plot.

It is also interesting to note that the explanations of both Givón and Bailey relate X+verb word order to a disruption in the expected narrative flow of discourse. In the case of Gen 4.18, Irad’s birth is evidently part of the basically sequential narrative framework, while the births of Mehiya’el/Mehuya’el, Metusha’el, and Lemech are presented almost parenthetically. Notice that the sequential narrative proper ends with a wayyiqtol form for which the subject is a prominent referent (Enoch) and begins anew in v. 19 with a wayyiqtol for which the subject is a prominent referent (Lemech).

Note, however, that the mere introduction or reintroduction of a referent into narrative does not require fronting. Likewise, the mere switching within narrative from one syntactic subject to another does not necessitate fronting (cf. Williams 1967:§572). Fronting for a change in discourse topic (i.e. subject matter) is common in direct discourse. However, change of participant in narrative does not normally constitute grounds for

122 In labeling the qatal verb form the ‘anterior aspect’ Givón overemphasizes the relationship between the form and anteriority. It is worth noting that Givón at least realizes the inappropriateness of terming the qatal in Gen 10.21-25 ‘anterior’, as he identifies the passage as one of “the very few where it seems that the PERFECT is used in a non-anterior capacity, i.e., to advance the narrative in the actual order of events (though with the topic switching)” (203).

123 Further examples of genealogies with X+verb word order in Genesis can be found in: 10.8, 13, 15, 26, 11.12, 14, 27 (x2?), 22.23, 25.3 (biu), 19. For a genealogy in narrative style (i.e. that employs the wayyiqtol form) see Gen 5.1-32. The genealogy of Shem in 11.10-26 deserves special mention. The verb forms and word order employed in vv. 10-15 suit the temporal progression and backtracking. For example, in vv. 10-12, the wayyiqtol forms report sequential events, while the fronting of in v. 12 signals a retreat in story-time, as is clear from the arithmetic (Shem lived 500 years after the birth of Arpachsad, but Arpachsad fathered Shelakh when the former was just 35). From v. 16 to 26, however, the reporting technique is very different. The X+qatal form is not used at all. Rather the wayyiqtol form is uniformly employed for sequential events as well as events that cannot be sequential (again, according to the arithmetic of the passage). The correlation between verbal form and sequentiality is discussed in detail below. Suffice it to say for the present that this correlation is indirect.

124 Williams’ examples are from Gen 14.18 (see below) and from Gen 27.6 (explained below as a discontinuity to mark a shift in the spatio-temporal setting).
fronting, even if the participant must be reactivated after a long absence. For example, in Gen 4.25 Adam is reintroduced after an absence of 24 verses, not as the marked subject of a subject+qatal structure, but as the unmarked subject of a wayyiqtol form. Similarly, in Gen 19.27 Abraham, who has not been mentioned for 27 verses, is reintroduced without being fronted. Participant switching in narrative apparently is accompanied by fronting only if there is a concomitant break in continuity related to sequence (which entails comparison, contrast, or more general parallelization; see below), scene, theme, or literary structure, i.e. if the writer feels that a break in the normal, expected progress of events must be explicitly signaled (cf. Givón 1977:200-211) (see below).

In two related types of topicalization an element that is not the topic of the greater span of discourse is fronted so that a brief assertion can be made about it. The fronted element is thus marked as the temporary discourse topic, as a sort of sentential reference point with special anaphoric relationship to an already active referent. In the first type, an entity, typically an adverbial of time, place, or source, is fronted (here in a qatal form). Further frontings of this type occur in Gen 2.10 which is almost identical to Dik's definition of thematic element.

Consider the following examples:

In none of the above does the fronted element introduce a new discourse topic within the greater discourse. Neither do the fronted elements constitute the marked salient point of information, i.e. the focus, in their respective clauses. On the level of the overall discourse, a non-topical referent is marked as temporary topic for a brief assertion, where the main informational assertion is carried, in unmarked fashion, by the syntactic predicate. The established discourse topic of the larger span of text then continues in each example. On the level of the individual sentence, the fronted elements in these examples establish secondary centers of attention (the primary center of attention being reserved for the assertion made by the predicate), signposts, as it were, to guide the reader/hearer to correctly link the assertion to the specific temporal, geographical, or relational domain in which it holds true.

---

125 Note that this definition of topic is almost identical to Dik’s definition of theme (see Dik 1981:127-44).

126 Blau (1977b:6) explains a similar, albeit hypothetical, clause differently. On the basis of Gen 41.17b, Blau constructs the following clause minus the presentative element: "Psychologically, however, ba-halom in 'my dream' is the subject, as it is the term known from the context, Pharaoh’s dream being the theme of the whole chapter; accordingly, the rest of the sentence, exhibiting novelty, serves as the psychological predicate."

127 See Foley and Van Valin (1984:124-34) and Prince (1998:458-9) for further discussion and bibliography. It is worth noting here that Buth's term contextualizing constituent is an especially apt nomenclature for this sort of fronting (see below). Further frontings of this type occur in Gen 2.10 (with a thematic element of time), Gen 4.25 (subject+qatal) which is subject-qatal, Gen 19.27 (subject-qatal), Gen 2.3 (subject-qatal) which is subject-qatal form. Similarly, in Gen 19.27 Abraham, who has not been mentioned for 27 verses, is reintroduced without being fronted. Participant switching in narrative apparently is accompanied by fronting only if there is a concomitant break in continuity related to sequence (which entails comparison, contrast, or more general parallelization; see below), scene, theme, or literary structure, i.e. if the writer feels that a break in the normal, expected progress of events must be explicitly signaled (cf. Givón 1977:200-211) (see below).
The second type, which is very common in BH, is known in the linguistic literature as fronting for contrastive topicalization (see, e.g., Chafe 1976:49ff). Consider:

ינקבה אלהים לאו יתוכלשׁ אל מהם קם ישמאל

Note that in each of the cases, two already active entities belonging to a common set are compared or contrasted, with the predicate in each clause providing the salient point of contrast. Contrastive topicalization thus differs from contrastive focus (see above) in that the former involves a contrast of entities where the salient information is not the topics themselves, but rather the actions, whereas the latter involves a contrast of entities (usually with regard to one event), where the entities themselves constitute the salient point of contrast.¹²⁰

It should be noted, however, that in BH not all examples of what is traditionally termed contrastive topicalization are actually used to contrast entities, i.e. to highlight the difference between the entities. The purpose of the structure is often simply more generally to desequentialize events that would otherwise seem chronologically sequential (see the discussion on the X+verb structure and non-squentiality below).¹³⁰ It is thus clear that the fronting of an element often involves marking of more than just the fronted element itself. In the following cases from narrative, comparison or contrast of the fronted constituents is not the point. Rather, the entire clause is marked in order to generally parallelize referents or detail events that would otherwise seem chronologically sequential.

128 Some may be inclined to explain the fronting of the direct object יתא in terms of contrastive topicalization, but there is another, better alternative worthy of consideration. In most examples of contrastive topicalization in BH only the second item is fronted, with the first left to be expressed in verb-first word order. The preservation of verb-first word order is probably due to the desire to maintain communicative or discourse continuity (on this concept see below). Consequently, where both the first and the second contrastive entities are fronted, it may be desirable to explain the first as a disruption in communicative or discourse continuity for some purpose other than contrast. In Gen 41.13, the reason would seem to be restatement or detailing, the cupbearer interrupts the progress of his story to elaborate on the more general statement which precedes.

129 Other examples of contrastive topicalization in Genesis are: (Narrative) 1.5 ינקב אֲלֵהִים לֹא יִדְרֹשוּ אֲלֵיהֶם נֶפֶשׁ כָּרָה שָׁם

130 Muraoka (1985:54) thus speaks of two types of contrast: antithesis, in which the contrast is clear, and juxtaposition, in which the contrast is due more to desequentialization than to comparison.
Note that the contrasted or paralleled entities can number more than two, as in 36.4-5 (Ada, Basmat, Obolivama), and 45.22-23 (Joseph's brothers, Benjamin, Jacob) above.

Also note the similar use of the X+verb structure to generally 'parallelize' or juxtapose related referrers and events in direct speech.

Finally, note that the common 'set' to which entities must belong is not necessarily predictable, as in Gen 33.17 above (Jacob and his livestock, as elements of the set entities for which Jacob built/made a dwelling/shelter) and the following.

Here the elements we and our land are both part of the set things that will die.

131 The force of the desequentialization is also applicable to modal verbs.

132 The first fronted constituent in this verse is likely not for the purpose of contrastive topicalization. Here it seems rather that the fronted רַחֲבַת marks a general thematic shift in Jacob's discourse (see below).

133 The fronting of 네번째 here is to mark a discontinuity (see below) for the purpose of detailing what has just been said. Note that the clause 네번째 is nothing more than a more detailed restatement of what has been stated (see below).

134 네번째 is here fronted to mark a discontinuity for the purpose of changing theme (see below).
It is worth mentioning here that this use of discontinuity for purposes of contrast, comparison, or general parallelization is likely the best explanation for the rather unusual X+qatal structure in Gen 14.18.

The rather abrupt introduction of Melchizedek here is portrayed as generally parallel to the actions of the king of Sodom in the preceding verse. This reading is supported by the fact that both referents are part of the set kings (who meet Abraham after the battle) and by the fact that both are either coming or bringing something out to Abraham (with the actions of both reported in a form of the root יִצְא). Note that this explanation still leaves the passage something of an anomaly, in that Melchizedek was not active or known before this verse (unless, that is, it is simply assumed that readers of the story were already familiar with him).135

To summarize, a writer/speaker of BH could front an element in order to mark it as the subject matter for what follows, be it a paragraph or a one-line statement. This happens when a writer/speaker fronts an element to mark it as the new (or reactivated) topic of discourse, when he fronts a non-topical item in the greater span of discourse as the temporary topic for a brief assertion, and when he fronts an already active topic to compare or contrast it with another already active topic or to generally desequentialize events related to two (or more) already active entities that belong to the same set. The comparison, contrast, or parallelization of the entities need not necessarily be done in immediately adjacent clauses.

The construction of many genealogies apparently takes advantage of the X+qatal structure. In the cases of both genealogies and contrastive topicalization, the X+verb structure also marks the entire clause as off the sequential storyline.

---

135 Heimerdinger (1999:146-7) gives a different, though less satisfying, explanation for this X+qatal structure. Basing himself on Lambrecht (1994:39-43, 177-181) (see n. 89 above), he deems this clause to be “presentational.” According to Lambrecht’s model, presentational clauses fall under the category of sentence focus. In this type of clause, no informational assertion is made about the subject (and would-be topic), because, according to Lambrecht’s model, introduction of a brand-new referent and comment about that referent should not occur in the same clause. While it would seem that Lambrecht’s theory is generally correct, as introduction of new referents normally precedes a report of their actions, the abrupt introduction of Melchizedek is probably best understood as a simple exception to this norm and not as evidence that the X+qatal structure can be used specifically to introduce new referents within a continuous narrative. First of all, Lambrecht (ibid:39) notes that presentational clauses typically employ only a restricted number of intransitive verbs, such as be and come. It is worth noting that here in Gen 14.18, the verb employed is the transitive verb לְהוֹצִיא. There exists no special BH nuance to the verb to bring out whereby it is especially presentational. Second, whereas no real assertion is made in an actual presentational sentence such as There’s Charlie or Here comes the cat, an assertion certainly is made about Melchizedek in Gen 14.18. Finally, Lambrecht (ibid:178) argues merely that presentational clauses are preferred over “syntactically well-formed sentences…in which an inactive topic referent appears directly as the subject NP of the sentence,” as in Gen 14.18. Interestingly, this abrupt introduction devoid of detail may have served to fuel later interpretations regarding Melchizedek, such as, for example, the one found in the New Testament at Heb 7.3: “He is without father or mother or genealogy, and has neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God, he continues a priest for ever.”
Excursus: Focus, Topic, and the Problem of Ambiguous Structures

It is sometimes easier to illustrate the differences between focal and non-focal frontings than it is to explain them. Consider this pair of examples, the first with a fronting for contrastive focus, the second with a fronting for contrastive topicalization:

Gen 35.10

There is an important difference between the two X+verb structures here, though both clearly express contrast. In Gen 35.10, Jacob’s new name, Israel, is fronted to contrast it with his old name, Jacob. Here the fronted element Israel is the salient point of contrast, while the change in verbs (will be called vs. will be) is insignificant. In Ruth 1.14 there is also a contrast, but, importantly, the focal point of the contrast is the action in each sentence. In other words, the fronting of Ruth is to signal contrast between the actions of Ruth and Orpah. To summarize: in a focal fronting, a constituent is fronted as the salient piece of information, while in a topical fronting, a constituent is fronted without becoming the salient piece of information.

Unfortunately, not all frontings are so easy to interpret. Due to the nature of analyzing linguistic phenomena accessible only via written documents, ambiguous structures, that is X+verb constructions that have more than one possible interpretation, are inevitable. Even with the most stringent of definitions and the best arguments, analysis must remain, at least to some extent, subjective and uncertain. To illustrate, consider the five cases in Genesis in which the adverb עַתָּה is fronted in a כִּי clause:

In example (1), עַתָּה ‘now’ may be plausibly read as either focal or non-focal. The story of the עַקְדוּת is introduced in Gen 22.1 as a test of Abraham. According to a simple reading, the test is necessary because God is uncertain of the extent of Abraham’s loyalty. In v. 12 Abraham is about to slay Isaac when he is told to stop. Having seen Abraham’s willingness, God is now sure of Abraham’s devotion. Abraham’s success in passing the test thus marks the exact point where God discovers or knows for certain that Abraham is indeed a God-fearer. The word now is thus marked as focal: “for now I know (= have discovered) that you are a God-fearer.” Alternatively, however, the word עַתָּה may be seen as a non-focal fronting, with the verb (l) know the most salient or important information being contrasted, as it were, with God’s previous level of knowledge. If interpreted this way, God’s present

136 The fact that the adverbial עַתָּה nearly always appears in preverbal position in no way contradicts the assertion that its positioning is pragmatically motivated. It is possible that word-order movement associated with marking has been grammaticalized to the point that writers/speakers were virtually compelled to put it before the clause.
The Pragmatics of the X+verb Structure in the Hebrew of Genesis

certainty of Abraham’s loyalty is implicitly contrasted with a previous lack of certainty (e.g. “[Prior to this test I thought you were a God-fearer, but] now I know it”).

Example (2) is less ambiguous. Here the main point seems to be the explanation of the place name רְחֹבוֹת. As such, the verb הִרְחִיב is probably best seen as the most salient piece of information. The adverbial עַתָּה is, thus, best seen as a non-focal fronting implicitly comparing now, when God has made space, to before, when God had not.

Example (3) is more complex and perhaps ambiguous. Is the adverb עַתָּה the salient piece of information or is it the verb יֶאֱהָבַנִי? Does the sentence say “for now (as opposed to before) my husband will love me” or “for now my husband will love (as opposed to hate) me”? The recognition of pragmatic functions does not clarify every ambiguity. It does, however, provide concepts and terms with which arguments in support of alternative interpretations can be constructed and discussed.

The final two examples are related, in that the wording עַתָּה כִּי is likely formulaic, often coming at the onset of the apodosis of a conditional clause. This seems clear from other examples in the Bible, as well as from the fronted adverb רֵיקָם in Gen 31.42, which is clearly the marked point of saliency in the clause. Though עַתָּה here probably constitutes part of a semi-fixed formula, it is nevertheless worth noting that its use generally conforms to that of the non-focal frontings described and exemplified above. It is fronted to point from the condition expressed in the protasis to the actual ‘would-be’ effect in the present.

The Non-Focal X+verb Structure with Unmarked Fronted Element (Clause Marked)

Though the terms topic and topicalization may fit the examples of non-focal frontings presented in the preceding section, this terminology is highly problematic for several reasons. First, the term topic is used by scholars for many different things. For some, the term is no more than a synonym for the sentential subject, the entity about which an assertion is made (where the assertion is often referred to as the comment). For others, it is the starting-point element of the sentence, no matter what syntactic or informational role that element may have. For still others, it is the overall topic of conversation, text, or discourse, no matter what the subject or predicate of the individual clause might be.

137 Either way, the sticky theological question of why an omniscient God would need to test Abraham in the first place, a question which led the writer of Jubilees to vocalize ידעתי as a causative (see Kugel 1998:302 and n. 5), remains unresolved. Clearly, the point of the story is Abraham’s faithfulness, not God’s characteristic omniscience.

138 Similarly, the fronted pronoun רָאָן in Gen 3.20b’s כָּל אֵם הָיְתָה הִוא כִּי - חָי is likely not focal, given that the most salient information, the explanation of the name חַוָּה, is found in the predicate. The appearance of רָאָן here may be related (a) to the fact that one is more likely to find overt subjects with third person verbal forms and (b) to the restricted uses of post-verbal pronouns (see Muraoka (1985:62-4)).

139 See also: Num 22.29, 1Sam 14.30, and Job 8.6 (and possibly Num 22.33). The BH use of now as part of the opening formula of a conditional apodosis may be comparable to the use of then in the same environment in English: “If you hadn’t called me, then I would not have known.” It is questionable whether the adverbial now has any semantic value (see the modern translations). However, it is worth noting that in all the examples except Job 8.6, the content of the particular apodosis in question refers to the present.

140 Lambrecht (1994:13-15) gives a useful example of how the syntactic subject of a clause may differ from the discourse topic of the context in which the clause is uttered:

At a bus stop, the departure of a cramped bus is delayed because a woman loaded down with shopping bags is boarding very slowly. Turning to the impatient passengers in the bus, the woman utters the following sentence with an apologetic smile: My car broke down…. We can understand the communicative function of the woman’s utterance only if we understand its relevance in the situation in the bus. The point of the woman’s remark is to explain her behavior in the bus, not to tell her audience about the
Second, while the term topic may accurately describe the role of the fronted constituents in some of the examples above (where they do, indeed, specially mark the entity that is being talked about), there are other types of non-focal frontings for which the term topic is a poor fit. For instance, Buth (1994:217) gives the following example from English:

(1) In the early evening the wolf howled.
(2) The wolf howled in the early evening.

He explains:

Pragmatically, ‘in the early evening’ is marked in example (1), it is not what the event is ‘about’ but serves to relate the clause to its context. In example (2) the time reference is not marked and is part of the salient information to be communicated…. ‘Topic’ sounds like what a sentence or paragraph is about. Yet many ‘Topics’ are not what the sentence is about, they only orient the sentence to the context. Example (1) is ‘about’ the wolf while ‘in the evening’ provides a frame of reference for the text.

This point is of the utmost importance for the analysis of fronted elements in BH. For as the reader is no doubt aware, there are many fronted constituents in BH that are neither focal nor topical, i.e. that constitute neither the point of marked saliency in the utterance nor the marked sentential or discourse entity about which an assertion is made. As a further example, consider Gen 1.1:

\begin{verbatim}
בראשית קנאה אלוהים את השמים ואת הארץ
\end{verbatim}

The underlying word order is \begin{verbatim}בראשית\end{verbatim} functioning as neither focus (that there was a beginning to God’s creative act can be taken as presupposed information) nor topic (neither the clause nor the overall discourse is ‘about’ a beginning).

---

141 For an instructive comparison of two basic sorts of non-focal frontings from the perspective English and Chinese, see Chafe (1976:49-51).

142 The form \begin{verbatim}בראשית\end{verbatim} has been the source of some controversy. Modern translations normally render it as if it were pointed \begin{verbatim}בראשית\end{verbatim} “in the beginning,” a form which does not occur in the Bible, but which may be reflected in ancient transliterations, such as the Hexapla of Origin and the Samaritan Pentateuch (see the note in BHS). On the basis of the four occurrences of the form \begin{verbatim}בראשית\end{verbatim} in Jeremiah (26.1, 27.1, 28.1, 49.34) and on general usage of the word \begin{verbatim}רֵאשׁ\end{verbatim}, more than one scholar has argued that the form in Gen 1.1 should also be considered a construct form. Gen 1.1-2 would thus constitute a dependent clause, “When God began to create…and when the earth was formless and void…” (see Speiser (1962:12-13) for a summary of the linguistic, cosmological, and theological arguments). However, it is worth noting that the form \begin{verbatim}רֵאשׁ\end{verbatim} also occurs as an absolute form (e.g., Lev 2.12, Deut 33.21, Isa 46.10). Also, non-construct terms referring to ‘the beginning’ occur without the definite article as in \begin{verbatim}בראשית\end{verbatim} (Isa 40.21, 41.4, et cetera). Buth (1992:146-7) comments on the possibility of multiple meanings for the verse in question. Buth (personal communication) suggests taking \begin{verbatim}בראשית\end{verbatim} here as an adverbial: “In beginning/as a beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” According to this reading, Gen 1.1 functions as a summary, abstract, or heading for what follows. Gen 1.2 functions as a circumstantial description. Whichever of these two latter readings is preferred it is clear (a) that there is no evidence in Gen 1.1 for the traditional \begin{verbatim}creatio ex nihilo\end{verbatim} argument so often associated with it and (b) that the first event in the story is reported in v. 3’s \begin{verbatim}וַיֹּאמֶר\end{verbatim}.
Similarly, while elements preposed for the purpose of denoting anteriority sometimes also signal a shift in discourse topics, as in Jonah 1.5a,

Jonah 1.5

וַיִּירְאוּ הַמַּלָּחִים וַיִּזְעֲקוּ אִישׁ אֶל-אֱלֹהָיו וַיָּטִלוּ אֶת הַכֵּלִים אֲשֶׁר בָּאֳנִיָּה אֶל-הַיָּם לְהָקֵל מֵעֲלֵיהֶם אֵלְיוֹנָה יָרַד-הַסְּפִינָה יַרְכְּתֵי:

where the shift in time and scene also involves a shift from the sailors as discourse topic to Jonah as discourse topic, this need not be the case. In Gen 31.19, there is a clear example of temporal back-tracking, but Laban in no way becomes the discourse topic. Besides, as was already stated, the mere switching of subjects within narrative can be done without a fronting.

31.19

וַיִּנְהַג אֶת כָּל מִקְנֵהוּ וְאֶת כָּל רְכֻשוֹ אֲשֶׁר רָכַשׁ מִקְנֵה קִנְיָנוֹ אֲשֶׁר רָכַשׁ בְּפַדַּן אֲרָם לָבוֹא אֶל יִצְחָק אָבִיו אַרְצָה כְּנָעַן הָלַוְלָבָן אֶת לִגְזֹז צֹאנוֹ וַתִּגְנֹב רָחֵל אֶת הַתְּרָפִים אֲשֶׁר לְאָבִיהָ:

It is also interesting to consider, in this light, the aforementioned fronting of הָאָדָם in Gen 4.1. Whether or not this fronting denotes anteriority (see below), Buth (1994:221-2) has correctly observed that the man is certainly not the discourse topic of the ensuing verses. “The fronted Subject … ‘Adam’ is not mentioned in any of the following clauses, even…when Eve has a second child. ‘Adam’ is not a ‘larger Subject/Topic’ for a span of clauses. ‘Adam’ is marked as a P1 Contextualizing Constituent143 in spite of the fact that Eve continues on as Subject for the next five clauses.”

One final problem with the equation of non-focal fronting and topic concerns the nature of the marking involved. In a true topical fronting, as in a focal fronting, a writer/speaker preposes an element in order to specifically mark that element. However, several linguists, including a few who study BH, have noted that writers/speakers often front elements in order to mark the clause as a whole rather than the fronted constituent.145

That non-focal fronted elements are not necessarily topical (i.e. do not necessarily constitute the entity about which an assertion is made) has been noted by several linguists. Beneš (1962:6) termed this type of non-focal, non-topical fronted element basis, explaining: “By basis we here understand the sentence opening which, serving as a point of departure for the communication, is directly linked to the context, produces the [communicative] tension (expectation), and points the communication in a previously determined direction.”146 Chafe (1976:50-1), relating to the functional difference between fronted elements in English and Chinese, notes that Chinese “topics” “do not fit precisely the characterization that a topic is ‘what the sentence is about’…. Typically, it would seem, the [Chinese] topic [i.e. non-focal fronting] sets a spatial, temporal, or individual framework within which the main predication holds.” Foley and Van Valin (1984:124) also distinguish between non-focal elements that are

---

143 Buth’s cover term for non-focal fronted elements.

144 Adam is not mentioned until v. 25.

145 See Myhill (1995:95ff) and Buth (1994a; 1995:89-90). Buth (1995:89) notes an important genre-based difference. Frontings involving actual topics are common in “expository non-narrative discourse where information is logically structured hierarchically” (as in the examples from Gen 17 above), while frontings in which the fronted element is non-topical and in which the clause as a whole is marked by the fronting are very common in narrative.

146 As translated by Garvin (1963:508).
fronted as topics and non-focal elements that are fronted as non-topics. Finally, Payne (1995:451), who refers to the entity about which an assertion is made as ‘foundation’, attacks the problem from the opposite direction, arguing: “But most certainly the foundation for a mental representation need not correspond to the literally initial element in some clause.”

In a brief, but insightful article, Levinsohn (1990) recognizes the existence in BH of non-focal fronted elements that do not, however, constitute the entity about which an assertion is made. More importantly, he also proposes a unified theory according to which all non-focal frontings can be related. Unfortunately, Levinsohn’s terminology remains somewhat confusing. He begins by calling all non-focal fronted elements bases, per Beneš, but later introduces the term sentence topic for the entity about which an assertion is made and the term topicalized element for the non-focal fronted element about which no assertion is made. More recently, Buth (1994a, 1995) has recognized the distinction in BH between non-focal fronted elements about which an assertion is made and non-focal fronted elements about which no assertion is made (i.e. between fronted elements which themselves bear special marking and fronted elements which mark the clause as a whole), proposing that all non-focal fronted elements be given the general label contextualizing constituent. The works of Levinsohn and Buth are foundational for a valid linguistic understanding of the non-focal X+verb structure in BH, in that both explain all non-focal frontings in terms of an overarching theory based on communicative or discourse continuity and discontinuity (see the section on the BH verbal system below).

For the purposes of the present work, any fronting in which the preposed constituent is not in focus is, for lack of a more original nomenclature, termed a non-focal fronting. A few words of explanation are in order. First, just as focus is distinct from predicate, so non-focal fronting is distinct from subject. The syntactic subject may be preposed in BH, but so may any other verbal argument. Non-focal frontings can either mark the fronted element, the clause as a whole, or both. Those types of non-focal frontings in which the fronted element itself is marked have already been discussed above. Before turning to the variety of meanings and effects associated with non-focal frontings in which the entire clause is marked, it is necessary

147 Confusingly, however, Foley and Van Valin term the non-focal element fronted for non-topical reasons topic and the non-focal element fronted as sentence topic pivot.

148 Citing the words of Gernsbacher (1990), Gernsbacher and Hargreaves (1992), and Creider (1975), Payne (1995:451) explains: “I do not believe it is too far afield to see Gernsbacher’s experimentally-validated ‘foundation’ of a mental representation as roughly what the Functional Sentence Perspective school and Creider himself were getting at in talking about the ‘theme’ or ‘topic’ of a discourse section. I suggest that whatever a comprehender takes as the foundation for a mental structure can linguistically be referred to as the thematic concept or referent of that structure – this is the concept onto which other information is mapped.”

149 The logic of such terminology lies in the fact that non-focal fronted elements about which the sentence makes no assertion are fronted as if they were marked topics (i.e. as if they were sentential elements marked as the entity about which an assertion is made).

150 Buth had already noted the existence of non-focal frontings that are also non-topical (i.e. that do not constitute the entity about which an assertion is made) in his 1987 doctoral dissertation. There he referred to these frontings as pseudo-topics. Buth has since adopted the term contextualizing constituent. The advantage of the new terminology lies in the fact that, unlike topic, it is both devoid of preconceived meaning and general enough to cover the variety of usages of the X+verb structure. Buth (1994a) is acutely aware of the problem of imbuing terms which already have multiple connotations with more nuanced, technical meaning (e.g. topic). Unfortunately, however, contextualizing constituent has been accepted neither in the general linguistic literature nor in linguistic literature dealing specifically with BH.

151 See also Myhill (1995:103, 133-4).
to pause for a brief discussion of the BH verbal system in relation to the concepts of communicative or discourse continuity and discontinuity.

The BH Verb System and the Concept of Discourse or Communicative Continuity

How many students of Hebrew have asked about the purpose of having a waw-hahippuk verb system? The traditional answer, that it is a “nice way to continue marking the tense-aspect of the verb,” is intuitively found to be suspect. Why bother having two ways to mark the same tense-aspect? An answer based on historical development is only partially satisfying. Such an answer explains where the forms came from, but it does not explain why the language continued to use both forms and why it continued to do that for over a thousand years. (Buth 1995:85-6)

Buth’s remarks merit some elaboration. First of all, he speaks of BH verbs as marking both tense and aspect. While it is not the purpose of the present work to discuss this issue in any depth, it is worth pausing to summarize briefly the historical progression of the debate regarding the semantic value of the BH verb. Until the 1800s the BH verb forms were generally thought to mark tense, the time of an event relative to the time of the utterance made about the event. This was in line with the tense system of Mishnaic Hebrew. During the 1800s, however, the tense theory fell into disfavor among a number of prominent Hebraists. This was due in part to certain uses of the BH verb in poetry (e.g., use of seemingly opposing tenses in parallel poetic hemistiches, use of the so-called ‘prophetic perfect’, use of the so-called ‘preccative perfect’), in part to the fact that the yiqtol (and weqatal) form can designate both past (imperfective) and non-past action (i.e. present gnomic and future), depending on the context, in part to a misunderstanding of the waw-conversive forms (whereby, the shortened yiqtol of the wayyiqtol (and jussive) was understood to be identical to the longer yiqtol which appears without the waw-conversive), and in part due to studies in cognate languages, where, it was argued, the verb forms do not mark tense. On these grounds, the tense theory was rejected, in favor of a theory based on aspect (according to which actions are viewed as complete/whole or incomplete/in-process).

The aspectual theory remains dominant, at least insofar as the terminology used in introductory grammars is concerned. It is also important to note that many scholars who have accepted an aspectual basis to the BH verb system appear to have embraced a very extreme version, whereby the ancient Semites have been thought of as a people who did not perceive reality in spheres of past, present, and future. In other words, not only has it been thought that the BH verb marks aspect fundamentally, but also that the BH verb does not mark tense at all.

However, not every Hebraist adopts such an extreme aspectual theory. According to McFall, (1982:15) Gesenius never abandoned a basic tense theory. Jouon (§111b-c) intentionally mixed tense and aspect in his terminology, an approach that Muraoka did nothing to alter in his revision and translation.152 Blake (1951:2) emphasized the temporal character of the West Semitic verbal forms. Importantly, several recent scholars have argued for a more balanced view of the BH verb. Blau (1970; 1971; 1976; 1977a),153 Rainey

---

152 “[W]e shall use, for want of better terms, the common and disparate terms perfect and future... Hebrew temporal forms express at the same time tenses and moods of action. As in our languages, they mainly express tenses, namely the past, the future, and the present; but they often express them in a less complete way than in our languages because they also express certain moods of action, or aspects.”

153 Blau makes valid points with respect to verb meaning in both prose and poetry.
This re-recognition of tense marking in the BH verb is due at least in part to the realization that argumentation for the tense/aspect/mood signification of the separate verb forms should not be overly dependent on their uses and semantic values in poetry. For, as Ben-Hayim (1977:77, n. 24), Qimron (1981:i), Buth (1986:31-2), Smith (1991:3), and Hatav (2001:67) argue, analysis of verbal semantics should take into account genre differences. Poetic works, where aesthetic concerns often override the norms of grammar, should not serve as the representative base texts for grammatical description in any language. Certain features of BH poetry seem more representative of BH’s linguistic ancestor(s) than of BH itself (e.g., use of the shortened *yiqtol* form without the *waw* doubled prefix for the preterite, e.g., בָּשַׁם instead of בָּשָׁם, as in Ugaritic; the remains of case endings (e.g., בָּשָׁם in Num 23.18); the predominance of asyndetic clauses; et cetera). In the present work, the four finite verbal forms are labeled according to their Hebrew pronunciation (e.g., *qatal*, *yiqtol*, *wayyiqtol*, *weqatal*), while their semantic denotation is referred to as tense/aspect, with *qatal* and *wayyiqtol* denoting past/perfective tense/aspect and *yiqtol* and *weqatal* denoting the present-future or past/imperfective tense/aspect.

---

154 Rainey (1990:408-409), whose arguments relate to Northwest Semitic languages in general, is adamant:

> In the present context, it remains to state the obvious fact that the behavior of the suffix verbal forms in the ḫ-Amarna letters, as in the Hebrew Bible, is in flat contradiction to the prevailing theory that the basic meaning of the Suffix Conjugation is completed action. So we reject outright the use of the term “Perfect” for this conjugation pattern. It is irrelevant, inaccurate, and misleading. Our acceptance of the term “Imperfect” should in no way be construed as acquiescence to the common view that the ancient Semitic verbal systems were based on the expression of “aspect” rather than tense. The ancient Semites knew when to sow their fields and to milk their cows; their own language was quite adequate to explain these things to their sons. The idea that the Semites only viewed verbal action as completed or incomplete is a European conceit. It has no basis in fact.

155 Buth’s arguments have the best linguistic grounding. His discussion of aspect with regard to the BH verbal system shows clearly why a purely aspectual theory is a poor solution to the problem of the BH verb. Buth argues that the BH verb marks tense, aspect, and mood in that order. That is, tense is more basic than aspect, and aspect more basic than mood. At the risk of oversimplifying the issue, the reasons can be summarized as follows. *Qatal* and *wayyiqtol* are mostly past and perfective (Buth explains poetic exceptions as instances where aesthetic concerns win out over grammar). *Yiqtol* and *weqatal* are either future or past-imperfective. When *yiqtol* and *weqatal* are in a past context, the future tense feature is “masked.” However, when they are not in a past context, they mark future tense with no reference at all to aspect (cf. Kelley 1992:130; Kelley’s examples, all *yiqtol* forms used together with the adverb ‘*תִּרְדָּשׁ*’ (next), are not clearly imperfective in nature; the fact that ‘forever’ refers to a period of time that never ends does not mean that a speaker cannot envision the act of ‘ruling forever’ as a whole, perfective event). That both tense and aspect are more basic than mood seems clear from the fact that modal marking in BH is marked (albeit inconsistently) by (a) the short *yiqtol*, (b) the negative נא, and (c) verb-first word order (with the *yiqtol* form).

156 Smith (1991:1-6) provides a useful overview of the tense-aspect question as it relates specifically to the *waw*-conversive. He divides scholarship on the issue into four chronological phases, in the last of which, notably, the BH verbal forms are treated as indicative primarily of tense. See also the bibliography given in Rabín (1970:311-2, n. 40). Goldfajn (1998:46-52) usefully employs Reichenbach’s (1947) theory on *reference time* to deal with several uses of the verb forms that have been considered evidence for BH’s basically aspectual nature. Zevit (1998) also accepts a basic tense explanation for the BH verb system.

157 This conviction echoes the opinion of Elias Levita (1468-1549), who, according to McFall (1982:10-1), was the first to employ the terminology תִּרְדָּשׁ תִּרְדָּשׁ (= *waw*-conversive): “And know that the custom in the writings is to speak a language [peculiar to it, thus] a past action in place of a future one, and a future action in place of a past one. This is [found] for the most part in the prophetic writings, but very seldom in the historical books.”

Second, Buth argues that any real explanation of the complementary use of the *waw*-conversive and non-*waw*-conversive forms in BH must move beyond an explanation of their history and development to an explanation of their use within the Classical BH system. While the diachronic question is important in its own right, and while the answer to that question may have bearing on how the various verbal forms functioned in BH, the fundamental questions remain synchronic: What is the relationship between the BH verbal forms? Why did writers of BH continue to employ them? How do the various verb forms function as a system? 159

That the conversive forms do not merely induce the tense/aspect of a preceding verb form is clear from examples where they ‘continue’ from circumstantial, participial, and verbless clauses, and from where they are employed to begin individual stories and even books (see Buth 1992:98-100). Also, while it seems clear that the *waw*-conversive forms were employed in verb-initial sentences, with the non-*waw*-conversive forms relegated to sentences which could not begin with the *waw*-conversive, this is merely a result, not an explanation. The fundamental question is: how do verb form and word order function together?

It is worth noting that Rabin could write as late as 1970:

*Biblical Hebrew possesses two sets of two tenses each, 1. wayyiqtol/weqatal mainly in clause-initial position, and 2. qatal/yiqtol in non-initial position, but also initial to speech or paragraph….It is in the matter of the two apparently parallel series with their curious inversion of items that Hebrew is different, though there may be some similarity with Ugaritic. We still lack any synchronic study which would help us to decide whether the choice of series 1 or 2 depends mechanically upon a word order governed by factors that have nothing to do with tense meaning, or whether perhaps the tenses of series 2 have a meaning difference which led the Hebrew speaker to adopt a word order in which they, rather than series 1, could be employed in some cases. (313-4)*

See also Goldfajn (1998:28-30).
The Concepts of Foreground and Background: Applicational Problems

Potentially useful concepts have come from the field of discourse analysis, where texts are often discussed in terms of the distinction between foreground and background (or on-line/off-line, main-line/secondary, narration/comment). Hopper sums up the chief properties of foreground and backgrounds as follows (chart adapted from Hopper 1979:216):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FOREGROUND</th>
<th>BACKGROUND</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Chronological sequencing</td>
<td>• Simultaneity or chronological overlapping of situation C with event A and/or B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• View of events as a whole, whose completion is a necessary prerequisite to a subsequent event</td>
<td>• View of a situation or happening whose completion is not a necessary prerequisite to a subsequent happening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Identity of subject within each discrete episode</td>
<td>• Frequent changes in subject</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Unmarked distribution of focus in clause, with presupposition of subject and assertion in verb and its immediate complements (or other unmarked focus)</td>
<td>• Marked distribution of focus, e.g., subject focus, instrument focus, focus on sentence adverbial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Human topics</td>
<td>• Variety of topics, including natural phenomena</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Dynamic, kinetic events</td>
<td>• Stasis, descriptive situations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Foregrounding. Event indispensable to narrative</td>
<td>• Backgrounding. State or situation necessary for understanding motives, attitudes, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Reals</td>
<td>• Irreals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

He also notes that languages often have specific structures which are employed to signal foreground and background material respectively.

Not surprisingly, however, when it comes to BH, there has been not a little controversy over the application of the concepts of foreground and background to the linguistic data. Here, for the sake of simplicity, the discussion will touch only on BH narrative. Longacre argues that the wayyiqtol form constitutes the foregrounding structure in BH narrative, with all other structures (including, but not limited to, the X+qatal structure) contributing supportive material. He speaks of the wayyiqtol form as expressing “sequential actions in the past” and as “punctiliar” (1992:178). Elsewhere he explains (1989:65): “I have assumed, then, that the storyline or the backbone of a discourse in Biblical Hebrew is conveyed by use of clauses that begin with a waw-consecutive verb.” Referring to the wayyiqtol form as the preterite, Longacre continues (ibid.:65): “A chain of (necessarily verb-initial) clauses that contains preterites is the backbone of any Old Testament story; all other clause types contribute various kinds of supportive, descriptive, and depictive materials.” Longacre’s ideas thus generally reflect the distinction between foreground (or narration) and background (or comment) made by Hopper.

However, Heimerdinger (1999:76) rejects Longacre’s equation of wayyiqtol and foreground/on-line/mainline. First, he criticizes Longacre for failing to provide an adequate definition of foreground. Heimerdinger then attempts to formulate such a definition himself, basing on Longacre’s works. While the end result may or may not be exactly what Longacre
intended, it at least demonstrates the problem of loose terminology. Longacre (1990:6) argues that “Sentences whose main verbs are storyline should be dominant sentences in the constituent structure of the paragraph and other sentences whose main verbs rank lower should be ancillary.”

The problematic rigidity of Longacre’s equation of non-sequentiality, on the one hand, with lack of event significance, on the other, is clear from the following example. In Gen 37.11, it seems clear that the X+qatal structure of the second clause interrupts the temporal progression of the story merely to compare (or mark as parallel) the reactions of Joseph’s brothers and father. In other words, temporal continuity is broken in order that the two events can be linked in a non-sequential relationship. However, Longacre (1989:77-8) reads much more into the grammar, arguing: “we see clearly how the narrator uses a perfect to put an action off the storyline when it is not an action of the same rank and importance to the story as the action indicated by a preterite [i.e. wayyiqtol form] on the storyline proves to be.” That such an interpretation of the grammar is clearly theory-driven and that it forces an unnatural significance into the grammatical structures is clear from a comparison with a similarly structured passage from Ruth 1.14b:

Here there is no doubt that Ruth’s clinging to No’omi, which is reported in an X+qatal structure, is more important for the story-line than Orpah’s kissing her, which is reported with the wayyiqtol. Obviously, there is no one-to-one correspondence between verbal structure and event significance.

Likewise, Heimerdinger (1999:77) levels the charge that “By associating unilaterally wayyiqtol clauses with the two notions of storyline and foreground, Longacre blurs the specificity of storyline.” For Heimerdinger, storyline and foreground are separate. Storyline relates to the sequential events of a story, while foreground relates to its most important events and non-events, its point, and meaning. He argues that events recounted using the

160 It is worth noting here that Levinsohn (1990:27-8) (followed by Bailey and Levinsohn (1992:200-2)) also understand Longacre’s use of foreground and background in terms of the relative significance of the action reported by the verb.

161 As cited in Heimerdinger (1999:76).

162 Longacre (1989:78) goes on to explain:

In the total sweep and development of the story the brothers’ jealousy is much more tied into the plot structure than the father’s meditating as to what the dream might mean. The story moves along because the brothers are jealous of him and sell him into Egypt regardless of the father’s attitude. So, interestingly enough, the verb that refers to the father’s attitude is off-the-line and is reported by a preposed noun (which emphasizes the father as opposed to the brothers) and a verb in the perfect.

163 The same argument holds true for many X+verb structures in which an item is fronted in order to break the temporal flow. Cf. e.g. Gen 1.5 and Gen 1.8. The naming of the light is certainly no more important than the naming of the darkness.

164 See Heimerdinger (1999:75-6):

This exclusive reliance on the wayyiqtol clauses to identify the gist of a story is flawed. By claiming that the meaning, or theme or gist of a story can be extracted from the backbone constructions with verbs in the preterite (wayyiqtol in Old Hebrew), Longacre excludes all other kinds of material which are often essential to the general meaning of a story. Not only does he ignore totally the important role played by dialogue which are so abundant in Old Hebrew stories, but he also reduces a story to its action. However, evaluative elements and comments made by the storyteller may be central to the meaning of a story. Such material is often found in what Longacre would view as background material. Additionally, it is important that the distinction between storyline and theme or gist of a story should be maintained. The tracking of events and the processing of wayyiqtol clauses result at best in a summary of the action of the story but can in no way be taken as providing its meaning which should at least also include the notion of point of the story.

It is doubtful, however, that the retelling of a story based exclusively on wayyiqtol forms would suffice even to summarize its actions. Note that such a strategy would leave out Ruth’s clinging to her mother-in-law in Ruth 1.14, an event reported in an X+qatal structure.
wayyiqtol forms are not unambiguously marked as more important or dominant than other actions or non-actions of a story.

As an example, consider the rather obscure introduction to Abraham’s rescue of Lot in Gen 14.

The general lack of wayyiqtol forms in vv. 1-4 correlates well with Longacre’s association of non-wayyiqtol forms and off-line material, in that the information here is introductory to the main story. However, against Longacre’s theory, it must be noted that the wayyiqtol forms in Gen 14.5-7 also report introductory, which is to say background information. Vv. 1-3 actions or non-actions of a story.

Thus, as with the notions of topic and focus, at least part of the controversy regarding foreground and background is terminological in nature. The terms foreground/on-line/mainline imply importance (or, according to Longacre, “dominance”), while the terms background/off-line/secondary imply less importance or even insignificance, as if the narrative could have been related without the off-line material. Of course, as Heimerdinger makes clear, this is not the case – events reported using the wayyiqtol form are not uniformly significant to the unfolding or meaning of a story; conversely, actions and non-actions significant to the development and meaning of a story are often reported in clauses that do not begin with the wayyiqtol.

Heimerdinger also takes up the question of the problematic link between the wayyiqtol form and chronological progression. The works of several recent scholars (Longacre 1992:178; Hatav 1997; 2001; Goldfajn 1998:71-2; Zevit 1998) basically support the traditional position that the wayyiqtol form marks semantically sequential events. Heimerdinger rejects this notion. He lists (1999:3-84) a number of examples in which, indeed, the wayyiqtol form cannot be said to mark sequential events. Consider the following examples, in all of which, Heimerdinger argues that the wayyiqtol forms in boldface type essentially repeat events which have already been reported and, therefore, cannot be said to move the story forward.

It should be noted that other scholars, within both general linguistics and BH studies, have commented on the problematic nature of the foreground/background distinction. See Moshavi (2000:23-26) for a brief discussion and bibliography. It is also worth mentioning that Hopper’s description of background material is not so rigid as Longacre’s application of it to BH. Note, in particular, his characterization: “Backgrounding. State or situation necessary for understanding motives, attitudes, etc.” [italics mine: AH] (see chart above).
There, thus, exists an impasse: how to account for a verb form that correlates highly, though imperfectly, with real-world actions that are temporally sequential? On the one hand, to define the wayyiqtol in terms of semantic sequentiality requires that one ignore a number of examples. On the other hand, given the high correlation between the wayyiqtol form and semantically sequential events, it seems unwarranted to deny any connection whatsoever (as, in fact, Heimerdinger does). Likewise, the correlation between the X+verb structure and temporal progression is indirect. The X+verb structure often marks a break in temporal progression, but not always.

While it is true that the wayyiqtol cannot be said actually to mark sequential events (in that a minority of the events depicted with wayyiqtol are non-sequential and/or non-punctiliar/incomplete), the wayyiqtol nevertheless enjoys a pragmatic relationship, albeit indirect, with sequentiality. Likewise, while the X+qatal structure cannot be said exclusively to mark breaks in temporal progression, there certainly exists a link between temporal breaks and the X+qatal structure. Like most discourse linguists, Buth (1995) employs the problematic term foreground for the narrative portions reported with the wayyiqtol form. Importantly, however, he defines it not on the basis of semantics or syntax (he recognizes that the correlation between the wayyiqtol form and sequentiality is less than 100% and that wayyiqtol forms need not follow dominant qatal forms), but on the basis of pragmatics. Here it is worth quoting Buth (ibid.:86-7) at length:

The foreground of a narrative is usually defined to be the sequential chain of completed events. This is a strictly semantic definition of foreground. However, a problem arises when one tries to match that definition with a particular structure, form, or lexeme of a language.

In Hebrew the obvious candidate for foreground is the waw-hahippuk verb. Certainly, most of the sequential, completed events in a narrative are encoded in the waw-hahippuk verb forms. But what do we do about the waw-hahippuk’s that are not sequential or complete? Studies that relate the waw-hahippuk verbs with sequentiality can only give a percentage of clauses that fit the definition….

If foreground is limited to an objective definition in the semantic field of grammar, then one must say that the waw-hahippuk is sometimes foreground and sometimes not. It is sometimes sequential and sometimes not….

If we define foreground as a pragmatic function, instead of semantically, we get around the impasse of non-sequential events being encoded with a “sequential-foregrounding” structure. The advantages of this redefinition are that it corresponds with real language data and allows more objective mapping between surface structures and their functions. The disadvantage is that the definition of foreground becomes “subjective” and is not able to be measured by comparison to a referential world. We would not be able to point to an event in a narrative and say categorically, based only on the referential nature of the event itself, that it is or is not a foregrounded event. We must look and see how the author structured and encoded the event and then, after looking at the surface structures of the language, we can say that it is or is not foreground. The advantages of including foreground as a pragmatic function

166 Cf. Hatav (2001:68-9), who, on the basis of a statistical study, argues that the wayyiqtol does mark sequentiality. Hatav’s statistics, however, are misleading. Out of a total 1951 wayyiqtol clauses where sequentiality can be measured, she finds that 1834 (or 94%) of them are sequential. It is important to note, though, that she excludes 494 (or 20% of the original 2445) clauses because "רציפות היא ננתן клämpfe טוא וReleased" ("It was not possible to determine whether they are sequential."). It is thus evident that the wayyiqtol is often employed for events which are not clearly sequential. When the 117 cases where, according to Hatav, it is clear that the wayyiqtol is used to recount non-sequential events are added to the 494 cases where the wayyiqtol is used to report events which are not clearly sequential, it becomes clear that a total of 611 (or 25%) of the 2445 wayyiqtol forms studied report events which cannot be considered unambiguously sequential. There is clearly a correlation between the wayyiqtol and sequentiality, but it is indirect.
greatly outweigh the disadvantage. In fact, the disadvantage is only an artificial constraint. If languages develop structures that are subjectively used, then we must make room for that in our grammar. Nothing else would be scientific.

In summary, though Buth still employs the problematic term *foreground*, he defines it in such a way as to (a) eliminate the problem of imperfect correlation between the *wayyiqtol* form and complete,\(^{167}\) sequential actions; and (b) avoid the problem that Heimerdinger sees in Longacre’s equation of foreground and important or significant events. While Buth’s definitions show the relationship between form and reality to be subjective, in that the speaker chooses (probably unconsciously) what to mark as foreground and background,\(^{168}\) it permits an objective correlation between syntactic structure and pragmatic function.

Later, in the same article, Buth (ibid:97) links narrative foreground to the broader notion of *discourse continuity* originally developed by Givón. The basic concept is that all texts/discourses exhibit some sort of internal continuity. For if a text did not exhibit such continuity, it would be no more than a random collection of clauses.\(^{169}\) Givón (1983:7-8) observes that there are “broadly, three major aspects of discourse continuity which are displayed in or mediated through the thematic paragraph, and which in turn receive structural/grammatical/syntactic expression within the clause.” The three types of discourse continuity described by Givón are:

(a) thematic continuity
(b) action continuity
(c) topic continuity

In other words, clauses within a given text (narrative or otherwise) are arranged so as to either establish/preserve or break continuity with respect to general theme, actions and events, and/or topics.\(^{170}\)

**Communicative or Discourse Continuity, Word Order, and Verb Form**

With the concept of communicative\(^{171}\) or discourse continuity in mind, the pragmatic function of the *wayyiqtol* form in narrative becomes clear. As is common knowledge, real-time events take place either sequentially or non-sequentially. The relationship between two non-sequential events can range from total disconnection to complete overlap. However, the reporting of overlapping events is problematic in narrative, because one of the constraints of

---

\(^{167}\) That the *wayyiqtol* form can be used to mark incomplete actions is clear, for example, from the repetition of רָבָּה in Ruth 1.6 and Ruth 1.22. It is clear that Ruth cannot have completed the act of returning that is narrated in v. 6 if she is still doing it in v. 22 (this example comes from Buth 1986:94).

\(^{168}\) Cf. Levinsohn (1990:26) who agrees that the writer makes a pragmatic decision, but who views the decision as relating primarily to perception, not to (perhaps unconscious) pragmatic packaging: “The constituent order of Hebrew reflects the relationship which the writer actually perceived” (see below).

\(^{169}\) From whence arises the problem of trying to determine if and how certain portions of the book of the legal sections of the Torah, the Psalms, and Proverbs are arranged thematically.

\(^{170}\) See the excellent introduction to issues of thematic continuity in Dooley and Levinsohn (2001:37-42).

\(^{171}\) Givón does not use the term ‘communicative continuity’. It is suggested here as a more transparent alternative to ‘discourse continuity’. This continuity is pragmatic, in that the writer/speaker packages a given utterance in a form to achieve a specific communicative function.
communication, be it oral or written, is that events can only be reported one after the other. This is known as the linearity constraint. Narratives are usually written in such a way that the events narrated are reported chronologically. In other words, the narrative structure simulates or iconically symbolizes the actual sequence of events. This is the standard and expected arrangement for narrated events and, as such, also the unmarked arrangement. And it is this fact that explains why there exists a meaningful, though indirect, correlation between the wayyiqtol form and sequentiality. It also explains why the wayyiqtol form should be defined as the pragmatically unmarked form for narrative.

To summarize: a given span of text/discourse exhibits pragmatic continuity by definition; in narrative, there quite naturally exists a high correlation between continuity and sequentiality; the wayyiqtol form is the form used to signal (i.e. establish and preserve) continuity; it is thus routinely employed to depict sequential actions; as the form associated with standard narrative continuity, it is unmarked in narrative.

From the perspective of continuity, it is also easier to explain why the correlation between the wayyiqtol form and sequential actions is less than 100%. While real-life events can happen sequentially, they often overlap. However, events which occur simultaneously in real life cannot be reported simultaneously in narrative. The storyteller must choose between depicting the events with an unmarked structure, as if they were sequential, and depicting them with a marked structure, by which the non-sequentiality of the events is unambiguously communicated. Levinsohn (1990:26) (followed by Bailey and Levinsohn (1992:195-6)) argues that this pragmatic decision is based on the perception of the writer: “discernment of continuity or discontinuity, in any particular instance, is a pragmatic decision of the WRITER. Frequently, two events could in theory be presented as being in a relationship of continuity or of discontinuity. The constituent order of Hebrew reflects the relationship which the writer actually perceived.” However, in some cases the decision clearly has less to do with perception than it has to do with simple choice (perhaps unconscious) of expression. For example, consider again the wayyiqtol form וַיּוֹלֶד in the third clause of Jdg 11.1.

It would be ridiculous to argue that the writer of Jdg 11.1 actually perceived the birth of Jephthah as subsequent to his becoming a warrior.

---

172 The relation between narrated events is actually somewhat more specialized, as Givón (1983:8) explains: “Action continuity pertains primarily to temporal sequentiality within thematic paragraph, but also to temporal adjacency therein. Most commonly, within a thematic paragraph actions are given primarily in the natural sequential order in which they actually occurred, and most commonly there is small if any temporal gap – or pause – between one action and the next.” See Heimerding (1999:48-51) for a useful discussion on the temporal dimension of narratives.

173 It is for this reason that DeCaen’s argument that the “wayyiqtol is morphologically, syntactically and semantically marked” (see n. 11 above) is irrelevant to the question of basic word order. He fails to take into account the crucial fact that the wayyiqtol form is the pragmatically unmarked form in narrative and, as such, indicative of unmarked, which is to say basic, word order.

174 Except in the rare case of the literary pun. For example, it can theoretically be argued that the clause She walked into a bar reports two events at the same time (depending on the meaning of the word bar). Practically, however, because the human mind always attempts to disambiguate, the message received at any given time is only one, not two.

175 See also Moshavi (2000:295): “By including both normal and inverted clauses in the study, we were able to show that the speaker is never obligated to choose inverted word order; in fact, most non-sequential…clauses do not have inverted word order.”
It is hypothesized here that the concept of communicative or discourse continuity is also applicable to non-narrative discourse, to direct speech, for example, though more research is needed. Here, at least with regard to future (including imperatives and jussives) and past-imperfective events, unmarked continuity is upheld by the \textit{weqatal} verb form, with discontinuity being signaled by, among others, the \textit{X+yiqtol} structure (see below).\footnote{See Myhill (1995) for one of the few studies that deals with non-narrative texts from the perspective of discourse continuity and discontinuity. Longacre (1989) discusses expository texts, but does not make use of the concepts of \textit{discourse continuity} and \textit{discontinuity}. See also: Niccacci (1990:73-109), Longacre (1992:181-9), and Rosenbaum (1997).}

If the VS \textit{waw}-conversive forms establish and preserve the expected communicative or discourse continuity inherent in text, then it stands to reason that the XV non-\textit{waw}-conversive forms break or disrupt continuity. And since continuity is inherent to texts, only these continuity-disrupting forms can be said to be pragmatically marked. The broad notion of discontinuity is also especially useful as an explanation general enough to account for the variety of literary effects associated with XV word order. Nearly all non-focal frontings can be explained in terms of meanings and literary effects associated with a single syntactic structure (\textit{X+verb}) that has a single pragmatic function (discontinuity).

\textbf{The Basic Function(s) of the \textit{X+verb} Structure}

Most studies of the \textit{X+verb} structure in BH conceive of the structure in one of two ways. On the one hand, there is the approach that concentrates on explaining the markedness of the fronted element. On the other hand, there is the approach that concentrates on relating the \textit{X+verb} structure to non-sequentiality. Studies that utilize the first approach assume that something inherent in the fronted clausal element itself or in the referent to which it refers has led the writer/speaker to place it before the verb. This is certainly applicable when items are fronted for purposes of focus and topicalization (where the latter refers to the fronting or real topics; see above). However, as has been shown, items can also be fronted in order to mark the entire clause.

Studies employing the second approach are very productive in BH, as the \textit{X+verb} structure often seems to indicate a disruption in the chronological progression of the story. However, it is argued here that just as denoting sequentiality is not the basic function of the \textit{waw}-conversive forms, so too, the denotation of non-sequentiality is not the basic function of the \textit{X+verb} structure.

Both approaches, thus, perceive real uses of the \textit{X+verb} structure, but neither captures its functional basis. The argument made here is that all non-focal functions of the \textit{X+verb} structure should be viewed as effects related to disruptions in the pragmatic concept of \textit{communicative or discourse continuity}.

\textbf{The \textit{X+verb} Structure and Non-Sequentiality}

As has already been noted above with regard to Gen 4.1, the notion of anteriority has long been associated with the \textit{X+qatal} structure. As early as Rashi (1040-1105 CE), this word order was seen as evidence of the temporal priority of the action reported by a \textit{qatal} verb.
form in relation to the immediately preceding events (usually reported in the *wayyiqtol* form).\(^{177}\) Traditional examples from Genesis are given here:

In most of the examples – 20.4, 31.19, 31.25, 31.34, 39.1, and 48.10 – the anteriority of the action expressed by the X+*gatal* structure is logically necessary given the chain of events. For example, in Gen 31.34, Rachel must have hidden the idols before Laban enters the tent to search for them. Such logically necessary anteriority does not, however, hold true for all of the examples. For instance, given the distances involved, Isaac’s arrival at Beer Lahai Ro’i need not necessarily have taken place before Rebecca’s departure from Aram in 24.62. Likewise, in 34.7, there is no reason to assume that Jacob’s sons must have arrived before Shechem’s father Hamor left to speak with Jacob. These last two cases furnish support for a more general understanding of the X+*gatal* structure.

Unfortunately, scholars sometimes rather rigidly assume the anterior value of a given X+*gatal* structure. For example, Ljunberg (2001:349-52) views the fronting in Ruth 1.14 as indicative of anteriority. Consider:

\[\text{The Pragmatics of the X+verb Structure in the Hebrew of Genesis}\]

177 Cf. Zevit (1998:7), who, in his remarks on Rashi’s interpretation of Gen 4.1, inexplicably states that “Rashi did not provide reasons for his observations.” On the contrary, as Moshavi (2000:27-8, n. 66) has observed, Rashi explicitly notes the word order of עַדְנָה יְהוָה, comparing it with עַדְנָה יְהוָהוֹ, \(=\ “for if he had written עַדְנָה יְהוָה, it would have sounded as if he had children after he had been expelled”\). While Rashi was likely motivated by more than just the syntax here, he was nevertheless, contrary to the opinion of Zevit, aware of a link between the subject+*gatal* structure and anteriority. It is worth noting that Zevit (ibid.:22-32) incorrectly classifies as anterior a number of examples of the X+*gatal* structure that should rather be considered contrastive topicalizations, general parallelizations, or the beginnings of a new sections. His interpretation of such passages as Gen 3.1, 4.2, 4.3-4, 14.17-19, 19.23-24, 26.25-26, 27.5-6, and 31.47 is rigidly theory-driven. This is clear from his comments (24) on מִקְנֵהוּ כְּנָעַן מְאֹד, where he states, “Moses did not ascend the mountain prior to the arrival of the Israelites at Sinai...The construction creates a split screen image: Moses ascending the mountain as the Israelites set up camp.”

178 Note Driver (1892:§76, n. 2): “In Gen 20.4...could not have been used on account of the negative: but even here it may be noticed that the same order of the words is observed.”

179 The two frontings in this verse seem to have two different purposes. The first fronting seems to mark anteriority. “Laban overtook Jacob. Jacob had/was already camped on the mountain.” The second fronting, \(\text{בָּא אֶל רָכַשׁ אֶחָיו, וַיִּקַּח} \) is to compare/contrast/parallelize his camping with that of Jacob.

180 Because of the stative nature of the verb בָּא this clause may also be considered *circumstantial*: “Jacob’s eyes were heavy” rather than “Jacob’s eyes had become heavy.” The functional difference, however, is minimal.
Ljunberg argues that “the translation ‘but Ruth had clung to her’...is therefore preferred, to the ‘Ruth clung’ (NIV) rendering.” Ljunberg is correct in noting that the intended effect here is non-sequentiality, in that the writer did not want simply to relate Orpah’s kissing and Ruth’s clinging in the same way that he would relate the sequential events of the story, as in the hypothetical

וַתִּשַּׁק עָרְפָּה לַחֲמוֹתָהּ וַתִּדְבַּק רוּבָּהּ ת

However, Ljunberg’s interpretation of non-sequentiality is simplistic. He evidently views the subject+qatal word order as uniformly indicative of anteriority. Of course, such a view is superficial and inaccurate. The point of the fronting here is not to indicate that Ruth had already clung to No’omi when Orpah kissed her. Neither is it to indicate that Ruth’s clinging and Orpah’s kissing were exactly simultaneous. The point here is simply to contrast Ruth and Orpah with regard to their actions: kissing and clinging. The subject+qatal structure indeed indicates non-sequentiality – not a specific indication of anteriority or simultaneity, but a general departure from the standard, expected, and unmarked sequential relation of events of the narrative for the purpose of contrast. The precise chronological relationship of the events reported is not at issue here. Thus, the concept of non-sequentiality should be understood as being divided into three categories: anteriorty, simultaneity, and general parallelization.182

Another version of non-sequentiality is simultaneity. Below are the few examples from Genesis where the X+qatal structure may report an action or state that is truly simultaneous with the preceding event or state.

183 Notice, however, that in two of the cases, the X+qatal structure follows a participle, while in another the qatal form is the verb היה. It would thus seem, from the albeit meager number of examples from Genesis, that the X+qatal structure alone is insufficient to unambiguously signal simultaneity.

It is important to note at this point that the term ‘simultaneous’ is sometimes employed rather loosely. The claim made here is that the presentation of truly simultaneous events in the Bible with the X+verb is rather rare. More often two events are presented as generally parallel, but not necessarily simultaneous. Many times, the parallel events occur in separate

181 Watters (2002:350-3), in his grammar on Kham, a Tibeto-Burman language of west-central Nepal, notes the important correlation between foreground forms, sequentiality, and predictability, on the one hand, and between background forms, non-sequentiality, and unexpectedness, on the other. See below, with reference to dramatic pause.

182 Note that Hopper’s comments on background (1979:215) allow for different levels of specificity with regard to non-sequentiality: “This is another typical feature of backgrounding: Because the sequentiality constraint is lifted, backgrounded clauses may be located at any point along the time axis or indeed may not be located on the time axis at all. Consequently, the relationships among backgrounded clauses are often quite loose.”

183 It is with some hesitancy that this X+qatal structure is categorized as denoting simultaneity. The desequentialization involved may be more general or the second clause may constitute a more detailed explanation of the first.

184 Here, also, it is questionable whether the X+qatal structure marks simultaneity. A wayyiqtol structure following the participial construction Lebenך עמי would also likely have been understood as communicating simultaneity.

185 But see below, the section on dramatic pause.

186 It is more common to utilize a participial construction.
The Pragmatics of the X+verb Structure in the Hebrew of Genesis

places with separate casts of characters. Structures marking discourse discontinuities are often employed to signal changes both in the temporal and spatial setting and in the cast of characters associated with the new scenery. Furthermore, it is often the case that the non-sequentiality in question is very general in nature, nothing more than a removal of an event from the normal temporal progression of the narrative or spoken discourse. Consider, for example, Gen 18.6-7, where the fronted הַבָּקָר signals neither anteriority nor simultaneity.

וְאֶל הַבָּקָר אָבָרָהִם הָאֹהֱלָה אֶל-שָּׂרָה וַיֹּאמֶר מַהֲרִי שְׁלשׁ סְאִים קֶמַח לַשְׁי וּעֲשִׂי עֻגוֹת: 18.6-7

Here it would seem that the events are indeed reported chronologically. First of all, that the fronted element reports an event simultaneous with the preceding event(s) is impossible, because Abraham cannot have been running to two separate places at the same time. Second, though possible, it seems wholly unnecessary to argue that Abraham’s running to the herd occurred prior to his hurrying to Sarah. The events here have been more generally ‘desequentialized’, in such a way that the events are related one to another in a general non-sequential manner, not as X and then Y, but as X and also Y. It is likely that the desequentialization here is at least partially intended to slow down the actions of the story in order to express the length of time it took to prepare the meal in question.

Another type of X+qatal structure that is often mistakenly characterized as reporting simultaneous events is what has already been related to above as the X+verb structure for contrastive topicalization. For example, consider Gen 4.3-5.

וַיְהִי מִקֵּץ יָמִים וַיָּבֵא קַיִּין מִפְּרִי הָאֲדָמָה מִנְחָה לַיהוָה: וְהֶבֶל הֵבִיא גַם-הוּא מִבְּכֹרוֹת צֹאנוֹ וּמֵחֶלְבֵהֶן וַיִּשַּׁע יְהוָה אֶל-הֶבֶל אֶל-מִנְחָתוֹ: וְאֶל-וְאֶל קַיִּין-מִנְחָתוֹ מְאֹד לְקַיִּין וַיִּחַר שָׁעָה: 4.3-5

Talmon (1978:11-2) argues that the respective sacrifices of Cain and Abel reported in Gen 4.3-5 are simultaneous: “The Hebrew text puts into relief the synchronicity of the two events, which possibly occurred in different locations, by reporting them in the yqtl – qtl pattern.” While it is true that the two sacrifices should not be viewed as sequential, they can be identified as basically simultaneous not on the basis of the X+qatal structures used, but on the basis of the temporal specification ויִהְיֶה מִקֵּץ יָמִים explicitly provided in the verse, without which the temporal relationship between the two events in question would be ambiguous. The X+qatal structures interrupt the normal sequential progression of the narrative in order to signal the contrast between two events that are chronologically and thematically related (see the section above on contrastive topicalization).¹⁸⁷ That semantic sequentiality and non-sequentiality (i.e. anteriority and simultaneity) should not be taken as the basic concepts being communicated, respectively, by the wayyiqtol and X+qatal structures is also evident from what Muraoka (1985:34) terms use of the X+qatal structure for the purpose of “avoidance of the Waw cons.”¹⁸⁸ Consider, for example, Jdg 9.43-4:

¹⁸⁷ See also the fronted element לְאַבְרָם in Gen 12.16. It is very unlikely that the taking of Sarah in v. 15 is precisely simultaneous with the good treatment Abraham receives in v. 16. The former action certainly happened before the latter, in which case there is temporal progression.

¹⁸⁸ See also GKC (1910§142b) and Jouon (1923§118d). It is also worth noting here that there appear to be X+verb structures that have little or no relation to the pragmatic aspects of focus or discontinuity. First, there is the common word order pronominal subject+וַיַּעֲשֵׂה (see above). Second, there is the word order pronominal subject+verb common in oath taking; see GKC (1910§135), Jouon-Muraoka (1996§146a3).
Muraoka argues that v. 44 is nothing more than “an expansion of what has been briefly summed up in the preceding” verse. If this is so, then two things are clear. First, as has already been claimed, non-sequentiality divides into more than just anterior and simultaneous events. The verbal forms \( \text{וַיַּכֵּם} \) in v. 43 and \( \text{וַיַּכּוּם} \) in v. 44 cannot be said to report simultaneous events, in that they report the same event, with the former a general summary and the latter a more explicit detailing.

The examples provided above demonstrate that the \( X+\text{verb} \) structure can be used to express both very specific types of non-sequentiality – anteriority and simultaneity – and also more general types. In these more general temporal interruptions, the chronological progression of a narrative is stopped to signal nothing more than a lack of sequentiality. This lack of sequentiality is then interpretable, based on the context, as contrastive or merely paralleling. Significantly, the \( X+\text{verb} \) construction for contrastive topic takes advantage of this stoppage in chronological progress to contrast, compare, or more generally parallelize the actions of entities that belong to a common set.

The \( X+\text{verb} \) Structure for Pragmatic Discontinuity

The approach which views the fronted element of a non-focal \( X+\text{verb} \) structure as especially worthy of marking can account for topical frontings. The approach which views fronted elements as indicative of breaks in the sequential progress of the events of a story can account for cases where the \( X+\text{verb} \) structure signals anteriority, simultaneity, and more general types of non-sequentiality. Is it possible to unify these seemingly diverse functions of the \( X+\text{verb} \) structure? Further, is it possible to provide a unified theory of function for the \( X+\text{verb} \) structure that accounts for effects that are related neither to markedeness of the fronted element nor to non-sequentiality, such as those described below? The claim made here, in the footsteps of Levinsohn (1990), Bailey and Levinsohn (1992), Myhill (1995), and, in particular, Buth (1994a, 1995), is that the \( X+\text{verb} \) structure has a more general pragmatic function, namely that of signaling discontinuity in discourse. This discontinuity can occur in different genres and can be used for diverse literary effects and meanings, including but not limited to marking fronted elements as topics and marking the events of entire clauses as non-sequential.

---

189 Incidentally, this is one of the limitations of Moshavi’s (2000) study of the correlation between the \( X+\text{qatal} \) structure and simultaneity. Given her definition of simultaneity (182) it is impossible to distinguish between actual, real-world simultaneity (e.g. \( \text{אֶלֶל} \) לָשֵׁא הָאָדָם \( \text{בָּרָא} \) אֱלֹהִים in Gen 38.25, where the \( X+\text{qatal} \) structure \( \text{לָשֵׁא} \) \( \text{בָּרָא} \) (probably) marks one event as contemporaneous with another event which has already been reported) and the mere repetition or rephrasing of a single action (e.g. \( \text{אֶלֶל} \) לָשֵׁא \( \text{בָּרָא} \) אֱלֹהִים in Gen 1.27, where the \( X+\text{qatal} \) structure \( \text{לָשֵׁא} \) \( \text{בָּרָא} \) cannot be said to signal real-time simultaneity with the action in the of the previous clause, because the verb in each clause reports the same action). Many of the 88 cases of \( X+\text{qatal} \) clauses that Moshavi characterizes as simultaneous (299-329) are questionable on these grounds.

190 See especially Buth (1995:89-90, 97-100).
Non-Storyline Information: Circumstantial, Parenthetical, Explanatory, Background, or Summary

Muraoka (1985:33) characterizes the circumstantial clause as follows: “When the flow of a narrative is interrupted to add an explicative, parenthetical clause or a clause which represents an accompanying action, then the ordinary Waw cons. construction is abandoned by making the subject precede its verbal predicate.” What is noteworthy from the perspective of the present work is the compatibility of Muraoka’s words regarding the interruption of narrative flow caused by the X+qatal structure and the concept of discontinuity. All of the following constitute circumstantial clauses according to Muraoka’s definition.

It would also seem that the X+verb structure can be used to indicate circumstantial information in direct speech.

Similar to the circumstantial or parenthetical use of the X+verb structure is its use to indicate a title or abstract of what is to follow.

In both of the above clauses an X+qatal structure is employed to mark the action as off the narratival event-line. In other words, a discontinuity structure is used to introduce the general theme, while the succeeding wawqatal clauses provide the specifics.

193 See, among others, GKC (1910:§142d, §156a), Ewald (1879:§306c), Müller (1882:§131, §151), Davidson (1901:§137), Blau (1976:§106.1), Lambdin (1971:§132), and Muraoka (1985:33-4).

194 Note that the X+qatal structure can also serve to relate circumstantial information.

195 The constituent יבנה would seem to be in apposition to מָנוּךְ as an explanatory gloss. For example, see the translation by Speiser (1962:48): “Noah was in his six hundredth year when the Flood came—waters upon the earth.”

196 The form יִנָּה is, of course, ambiguous. It could be either a participle or a qatal form. Here it is taken as a qatal form on the basis of ינָה in the following verse. Either way, discontinuity is achieved.

197 This fact is particularly important for proper understanding and translation of Gen 1.1. The Hebrew here does not support the well-known create ex nihilo tradition. Gen 1.1 gives the general theme of Gen 1.1-2.4.
The discontinuous force of the X+verb structure can also serve to indicate that a given clause is a summary of what has been related in the preceding clauses. Consider:

בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא כָּרַת יְהֹוָה אֶת אַבְרָם בְּרִית לֵאמֹר לְזַרְעֲנֵּךְ נָתַתִּי אֶת הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת מִנְּהַר מִצְרַיִם עַד הַנָּהָר הַגָּדֹל נְהַר פְּרָת.

Incidentally, the connection between X+verb word order and off-line or background material is also the explanation for constituent order with the word טֶרֶם. In the statistical analysis given in section 1, SV word order outnumbered other word orders with this particle. In Genesis, טֶרֶם is preceded by its subject in four out of four cases. In the Bible as a whole, this is true in seven of eight cases. The reason seems transparent: טֶרֶם-clauses are generally marked as discontinuities because they signal retreats in story-time, background descriptions of events that have yet to take place. The one example in the Bible where the subject comes after טֶרֶם is the second case in 1Sam 3.7. Here, the first טֶרֶם-clause with subject+טֶרֶם+verb word order breaks continuity; there is, consequently, no need for the second טֶרֶם-clause to do so.

Start of New Literary Unit (Episode or Paragraph)

Several scholars argue that the X+qatal structure can be used to indicate unit/episode/paragraph borders. It is this effect, contrary to Rashi’s claim of anteriority, that Bailey and Levinsohn (1992:196-7) employ to explain the fronting of וְהָאָדָם in Gen 4.1. This seems reasonable, as there is no logical necessity to assume any specific temporal connection between the expulsion from Eden and the sexual encounter of the first couple. Bailey and Levinsohn claim that it is not at all uncommon for new episodes to begin with the fronting of a constituent. As Moshavi (2000:19-23) notes, however, scholars are not necessarily agreed on whether the fronted element must be a subject (according to the examples below, fronted non-subjects may signal the beginning of a new literary unit). Also, Lambdin argues that the X+qatal structure can also mark the end of a section. Finally, Moshavi (ibid.:22, n. 50) notes the important correlation between the X+qatal structure and

Gen 1.2 tells what the condition of the earth was before the creation. Gen 1.3ff detail the creation process (see above).

196 Again, however, the explicit marking of a summary statement with the X+verb structure is optional. Heimerdinger (1999:91) correctly observes that the wayyiqtol clause את עֵשָׂו וַיִּבֶז—the murder of the firstborn—in Gen 25.34 also expresses an evaluative summary.

197 Gen 2.5 (בָּא), 24.15, 24.45.

198 S+וְ+V: Gen 2.5 (בָּא), 24.15, 24.45, Josh 2.8, 1Sam 3.3, 1Sam 3.7a. V+וְ+S: 1Sam 3.7b.

199 Thus, the difference between טֶרֶם and לֹא is that the former is more specific than the latter, with the former employed where what will certainly happen has not happened yet and the latter employed where the event may (e.g. Gen 2.5b) or may not happen (e.g. Gen 20.4a) or has happened (e.g. Gen 20.6). Evidently, subordinate clauses automatically entail a certain level of communicative or discourse discontinuity, so that a variation in word order is not necessary to indicate anteriority.


201 See also Moshavi (2000:19).

202 Theoretically, the event narrated here need not even be the first encounter, but merely the one that led to the first childbirth. But see Zevit (1998:7).
the traditional Jewish system for textual division that divides פרישת סמה into פרישות מ hôתס (= open and closed parish). She lists Gen 4.1, 15.1, 21.1, and 39.1 as coinciding with a פרישת at the head of a new episode and Gen 3.16, 17, 203 10.15, 11.12, 11.14, 204 and 46.28 as places where the X+qatal structure coincides with a פרישת at the start of a new paragraph.

The following chart lists cases from Genesis where it is argued that the X+verb construction signals a new literary unit (e.g. paragraph or episode). Massoretic indications of פרישות סמה and הפרשות מ hôתס have been included where appropriate.

203 Gen 10.15, 11.12, and 11.14 are all parts of genealogies. They are dealt with above in the section on frontings for topic.

204 Gen 3.16 and 17 are dealt with above in the section on frontings for topic.

205 The fronting of הפרשות מ hôתס in Gen 3.1 is a good example of how the various effects of the X+qatal structure complement one another. First, the clause is clearly what scholars have traditionally termed a circumstantial clause. It is descriptive, supportive, preliminary to the ensuing action. Second, the clause begins a new literary unit. Note that the syntax (X+verb word order), the pragmatics (discontinuity), and the semantics (descriptive, ‘to be’-clause) make this clause a prototypical episode-initial sentence.

206 These two X+qatal structures are also discussed above as examples of frontings for topicalization.

207 The well-known case of Gen 39.1 is much discussed in the commentaries. What is interesting from the standpoint of composition is that the X+qatal discontinuity structure represented by קיסר והיד only makes sense because of the intervening chapter 38 on Judah and Tamar. For without that chapter, there would be no need for the fronting, as chapter 37 already ends with an X+qatal structure denoting the antiquity of Joseph’s being sold into slavery in Egypt.
Now, several related points are in order with specific regard to direct discourse. As was demonstrated in section 1, VSO word order is statistically dominant not only in syntactic environments where the wayyiqtol form is employed when “the SAME basic storyline is being developed, and no sudden change or discontinuity in the spatio-temporal setting or in the cast of participants is indicated. Rather, modifications are made to the EXISTING scene or cast.” Conversely, the waw-conversive form signals discontinuity, often so that the writer can make changes in the spatio-temporal setting or in the cast on stage. Consider the following examples:

The case of in Gen 46.28 is particularly interesting, because of the ramifications for both discourse analysis and source criticism. The genealogical portion of vv. 6-27 is generally considered an insertion of P. However, exactly how vv. 1-5 and 28ff connect is disputed. One thing seems clear, whether the fronting represented by is from the hand of a later editor or original to a source, its placement just after the interruption of the genealogical insertion reveals a sensitivity to the discontinuous force of the structure on the part of the editor (given the absence of an overt subject, it seems more likely that the phrase in question was integral to an original source). In its present position, the structure would seem to constitute a contrastive topic for the sake of general deserialization or parallelization.

This statistical situation is likely also related to the propensity for fronting the topic of discourse at the beginning of a speech (see below).
In all of the examples given here the X+qatal structure is used to signal a switch in scene. This switch may or may not be tied to specific sequential order, as in the cases of marking anteriority and simultaneity.

**Dramatic Slowing or Dramatic Pause**

Some cases of non-focal fronting defy categorization according to the labels presented above. Elements are preposed and discontinuity is achieved, but the literary effects are evidently neither for change in spatio-temporal setting, nor for bringing up a new sentential or discourse topic, nor for comparing, contrasting, or presenting as parallel actions or events relating to two (or more) topics, nor for inserting an explanation or parenthetical point. Why should a writer employ a structure signaling discourse discontinuity when no form of spatio-temporal, topical, or thematic continuity must be interrupted? The answer may lie in the writer’s desire to “slow down” the reader at particularly important moments in the discourse. Longacre (1983:25-38) notes several cross-linguistic features associated with narrative peak. One of these involves grammatical “turbulence”:

Routine features of the event-line may be distorted or phased out at Peak. Thus, the characteristic event-line tense/aspect may be substituted for by another tense/aspect. Alternatively, the characteristic tense/aspect of the main line of a discourse may be extended to unexpected uses at Peak. Particles which elsewhere mark rather faithfully the event-line of a story may suddenly be absent. Routine participant reference may be disturbed. (Longacre 1983:25)

Similarly, Sperber and Wilson (1986:196) argue that when an apparently inappropriate construction is used, the writer must have expected to achieve some additional contextual effects not obtainable from using the equivalent unmarked construction.

Several scholars have applied these ideas to the BH verb system and, in particular, to the X+verb construction. First, Buth (1983:64) mentions what he terms “dramatic pause” as a possible solution to the repetition of subject+qatal structures in Est 7.6-10:

210 This constitutes a change of scene, because Jacob and Esau are in separate locations in the camp. Jacob has just left his father’s presence when Esau returns from the field to prepare his game.
Buth (1995:91) explains this piling up of subject+qatal discontinuity structures, which are, however, used to recount sequential events, with the following words: “The most credible explanation of this is that the author has pragmatically suspended the marking of foregrounding-continuity in the story in order to hold the audience’s attention at a dramatic peak.” He also cites two more passages where he argues constituents have been fronted for purposes of dramatic pause: the first is Gen 19.23-5:

Buth (1994a:226-7) observes:

The first three clauses ... do not use the verb initial narrative tense structure of Hebrew even though they are all sequential in the narrative about Lot and Sodom. The pragmatic Contextualization [i.e. X+qatal] structures, implying non-sequentiality, tell the audience that a 'pause' in the development of the story is taking place. But the semantics of the events make it clear that positive temporal progression is taking place. This mismatch of form and function becomes reasonable when we consider that this point in the story may have been a dramatic climax for the author. That can explain the triple use of Contextualization [i.e. X+qatal] structures here. To use a metaphor from cinema, this is a 'slow motion' technique for dramatic effect.

The second example of dramatic pause that Buth notes is in Gen 44.3:

Buth (1995:93) comments:

The chain of “backgrounded” clauses prolongs the setting for an unusual length. More importantly, there are three sequential events, including the speech frame: “Joseph said.” Again, we need to invoke a dramatic pause intended by the author. This passage is different from Esther [6:6-10], though, because the events do not describe the climax or peak events themselves. They open the scene and set the stage for the dramatic confrontation at the height of the Joseph story, where Joseph reveals himself to his brothers. This is another example where the grammar is directly affected, inverted as it were, by very high level considerations of literary structure.... In order to mark a special point of tension in the story, the author of Genesis marks the clauses as “background-discontinuity” by using subjects as contextualizing constituents.213

211 Two of the qatal forms in this passage (ךָ in v. 7 and קָ in v. 8) are morphologically indistinguishable from their respective participial forms, with another qatal form (ךָ in v. 6) distinguishable only in terms of its vocalization (qatal form rather than qamatz for the participial form). Buth (1995:92) comments: “Several of the verbs are ambiguous morphologically as to whether they are participles or suffix verbs. It would be interesting to see whether or not the ratio of ambiguous forms to unambiguous forms turns up significantly more often in background clauses than in foreground clauses. Morphologies and word-formation in languages sometimes mirror such functional compatibility.”

212 Regarding the asyndetic subject+qatal structure of יָצָא ... בָּא, Buth (1995:92) notes: “When one of the clauses was used circumstantially, ‘and’ was not used so as not to mimic the chain of dramatic pause ‘backgrounds.’”

213 Buth notes elsewhere (2003:75, n. 16) that in the following clause from Jonah 1.4 the X+qatal structure also serves to signal dramatic pause: לְהִשָּׁבֵר ... וְהָאֳנִית הֲבָרָה.
Interestingly, Levinsohn (1990:28) (followed by Bailey and Levinsohn (1992:202-4)) propose a very similar effect of the X+qatal structure to deal with some of the very same passages.214 Levinsohn states: “When topicalization [i.e. non-focal fronting] is found in an apparently inappropriate context (viz. in the absence of a discontinuity), the purpose will be to achieve additional effects. In the case of Hebrew, I argue that the intended effect of such ‘redundant’ topicalization is highlighting.” Bailey and Levinsohn (1992) see the final (av)+X+qatal form in the Genesis passages cited by Buth (19.23-5; 44.3-4) and in the following two passages as “clearly highlighted, foreground information”:

וַיֹּאמֶר בֶּן-גַּדֹּר לָאָשֶׁר אֲשֶׁר אָשָׁם עַד עָבַר בַּיָּתָהּ.

וַיִּשְׂרֵף לֵאמֹר לִיהוּדָה כָּרַת אֵשׁ לִמְצֹא פֶּתַח

does this fronting also signal highlighting? And what of the fronted כָּרַת in the very next verse? Notwithstanding such doubts, the theory whereby “turbulent grammar” is associated with narrative peaks appears to enjoy cross-linguistic support.216 Furthermore, the

214 Levinsohn (1990) and Bailey and Levinsohn (1992) evidently reached their conclusion independently of Buth (1987), as he is not cited in their bibliographies.

215 Buth (personal communication) notes, however, that in Gen 38.25, the X+qatal verb form was not necessary to mark simultaneity, as the synchronicity coincidence of Tamar’s being taken out and her sending is established by the use of a participle for the former action. Even with a wayyiqtol form, simultaneity would have been achieved: לאֹה הוֹצִיאוּהָ בַּסַּנְוֵרִים (see, e.g., 1Ki 13.25 פֶּתַח). Since the X+qatal structure is superfluous for the marking of simultaneity, it may very well mark a dramatic slowing or pause.

216 For example, Watters (2002:350-3) argues that one of the major functions of the unmarked narrative verb form in Kham is to mark temporal progression. The marked, nominalized form, on the other hand, signals various types of background material. However, he also notes what he terms “nominalizations on the timeline” (353): [A] major problem lies in the unexpected occurrence of the marked nominalized form in contexts where it would not be predicted by the notions of backgrounding or stage-setting. Specifically, the nominalized form occurs also (under certain conditions) with events which are clearly “on the time-line” — not backgrounded material, but part of the narrative backbone. What then is the communicative function of the form in these contexts? can that function be shown to have coherence with the other functions marked by the same form? My working hypothesis will be that the condition under which the nominalized form is triggered when it is on the time-line is one of unpredictability, and that, indeed, unpredictability does have coherence with the notion of discontinuity. What is continuous is predictable, and what is not predictable has that characteristic only because it is in some way discontinuous with the preceding context.
grammatical “turbulence” represented by the use of otherwise inexplicable X+qatal structures in certain BH passages is difficult to explain in terms of temporal, spatial, topical, or thematic discontinuity. The designation of these passages as narrative peaks must always, of course, remain subjective. Nevertheless, the concept of dramatic slowing or dramatic pause, with its potential link to discourse discontinuity, certainly merits further study, both as regards language in general and BH more specifically.

Discontinuities and Direct Speech: Change in tack/start of new theme

Statistically speaking, one is much more apt to find non-VSO word order in direct speech than in narrative. There appear to be two reasons for this, one applicable to the use of non-VSO word order at the onset of direct speech, the other to use of non-VSO word order in continuation of direct speech. First of all, there exists a marked dominance of non-VSO word order at the beginning of direct speech (i.e. after a form of the verb אמר or other speech verbs). Note the statistical situation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VS</th>
<th>SV</th>
<th>XV(S)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Only 16 times does VS word order occur at the onset of direct speech, while SV or XV word order occurs some 50 times (22 SV + 28 XV). This is likely motivated by two factors: (a) the propensity for fronting the topic of conversation at the beginning of discourse and (b) the fact that new discourse units often begin with X+verb structures.220 In this regard, it is interesting to note that eight of the 16 VS clauses that occur at the onset of direct speech in Genesis do not, in fact, begin new discourse units. The cases of VS word order in Gen 30.6, 11, 18, 20, and 23 occur in one-line name explanations; the basic discourse, however, continues. The VS word order in 27.35 comes as part of a two-line reply in the middle of discourse – again, topic continuity is maintained. Finally, the VS word order in each of 31.1 and 38.24 conveys reported speech – no new discourse is begun. It is also worth noting that the SV word order in five of the 23 SV clauses exhibit subject pronouns. Two of these (30.29 and 44.27) occur with the qatal form of the verb ידע (see above) and three (21.24, 38.17, 47.30) as part of an oath.221 Regarding the 28 XV cases, in 22 the fronted element appears to be focal.222

And as for the continuation of direct speech: Longacre (1995:333) is probably correct when he states that “the exigencies of repartee presumably make for departures from the standard word order at many places.” Spontaneity, cognitive constraints involving limitations of memory, interruptions or even the mere possibility of being interrupted, and other

---

217 Gen 27.35, 30.6, 11, 18, 20, 23, 31.1, 38.24, 39.17, 42.28, 30, 43.3, 7, 45.9, 16, 50.25.
218 Gen 3.13, 5.29, 14.23, 17.9, 19.9, 31, 21.24, 22.8, 24.40, 26.11, 30.29, 37.20, 38.17, 28, 44.27, 46.31, 47.1, 47.5, 30, 48.3, 50.5, 16.
219 Gen 2.16, 3.2, 10, 12.7, 15.18, 17.17, 18.12, 21.6, 22.14, 16, 24.7, 19, 50, 29.34, 35, 30.8, 16, 31.8 (ḥáy), 32.5, 20, 39.19, 40.8, 41.15, 42.36, 37, 46.34, 47.4, 48.20.
220 But see Qimron’s (1998) argument regarding the backgrounded nature of non-VS word order at the onset of direct speech.
221 See Muraoka (1985:54).
222 12.7, 15.8, 18.12, 21.6, 24.7, 19, 50, 29.34 (ḥáy), 35 (ḥáy), 30.8, 16, 31.8 (ḥáy), 32.5, 20, 40.8 (ḥáy), 15 (ḥáy), 42.36, 37, 46.34, 47.4, 48.20.
external factors likely all make direct speech – be it conversation or monologue – much more likely to exhibit the sort of discontinuities expressed by the X+verb structure than narrative.\textsuperscript{223} Khan (1988:82) notes “change in theme” as one of the functions associated with extra-clausal elements. Something similar may be happening with X+verb structures in the middle of direct speech, though it may be better to describe this effect more generally. In direct speech, as in narrative, the X+verb structure often seems to mark something less than a formal unit break. At times, it would appear that the discontinuity function of the X+verb structure is employed simply to mark a ‘thematic pause’, ‘shift’, or ‘change in tack’ in a person’s speech, even when there is no external interruption.\textsuperscript{224} This pause can be used to explain, detail, or restate what has just been said. It can also be used to separate between various types of discourse (for example, it is often used to redirect discourse after a rhetorical question, exclamation, or introduction). In essence, the discontinuity marks the beginning of a new discourse. While the hypothesis remains somewhat tentative, and while analysis and categorization of each example is difficult, the X+verb structure in each of the following examples appear to convey a sort of discontinuity related to rhetorical concerns. In some of the examples, note that the discontinuity involved is both confirmed and reinforced by the absence of a conjunctive \textit{waw}.\textsuperscript{225}

\textbf{Restatement/Explanation/Detailing}

\begin{itemize}
\item The Pragmatics of the X+verb Structure in the Hebrew of Genesis
\item External factors likely make direct speech – be it conversation or monologue – much more likely to exhibit discontinuities expressed by the X+verb structure than narrative.
\item Khan (1988:82) notes “change in theme” as one of the functions associated with extra-clausal elements.
\item Something similar may be happening with X+verb structures in the middle of direct speech, though it may be better to describe this effect more generally.
\item In direct speech, as in narrative, the X+verb structure often seems to mark something less than a formal unit break.
\item At times, it would appear that the discontinuity function of the X+verb structure is employed simply to mark a ‘thematic pause’, ‘shift’, or ‘change in tack’ in a person’s speech, even when there is no external interruption.
\item This pause can be used to explain, detail, or restate what has just been said. It can also be used to separate between various types of discourse.
\item While the hypothesis remains somewhat tentative, and while analysis and categorization of each example is difficult, the X+verb structure in each of the following examples appear to convey a sort of discontinuity related to rhetorical concerns.
\item In some of the examples, note that the discontinuity involved is both confirmed and reinforced by the absence of a conjunctive \textit{waw}.\textsuperscript{225}
\end{itemize}
Redirection of Discourse for Change in Theme (often after Rhetorical Question, Exclamation, Introduction, or Command)

There are two separate fronted elements here: the subject of הבכשך and the adverbial of time. Normally when two items are fronted, the second is focal. This case constitutes an exception.
The Pragmatics of the X+verb Structure in the Hebrew of Genesis

The X+verb Structure and Pragmatic Discontinuity

The various literary effects of the non-focal X+verb structure surveyed above include the marking of various types of topical elements (discourse topic, temporary sentential topic, contrastive topic), specific types of non-sequentiality (anteriority and simultaneity), general non-sequentiality (desequentialization of otherwise sequential actions, contrastive topicalization), non-story-line information, intra-episode scene shifting, new literary units (episode or paragraph), dramatic pause, and general redirections in direct speech.

Several summary points are in order. First of all, as was noted by Lambdin (1971:§132), the various effects of the X+verb structure often overlap. An X+qatal structure may mark a unit border, an off-line descriptive lead-in, and an anterior event at the same time (e.g. Gen 39.1ıklל). It is often unnecessary, nay, counterproductive to define the effects of a given structure too strictly.

Second, all of the various functions of the non-focal X+verb structure discussed here are explicable in terms of the overarching concept of pragmatic continuity. The function of the X+verb structure is to signal pragmatic discontinuity. However, that discontinuity can be employed to achieve various literary effects. Elements that are fronted as topics disrupt the unmarked flow of discourse in order to mark a change in subject matter, to reorient attention in order to delimit the domain in which a given assertion holds true, or to compare previously activated topics. Elements that are fronted for the purpose of breaking chronological sequence take advantage of the cross-linguistic link between pragmatic continuity and temporal sequence. Effects related to neither of these two principles (e.g., marking of off-line material (parenthesis, abstract/title/heading, summary), of new literary units, and of dramatic slowing or pause) can be explained only as deriving directly from breaks in the standard, expected, and unmarked communicative or discourse continuity which makes a text a text.

228 “Semantic distinctions among disjunctive clauses are difficult to define because of overlapping.”

229 Others have used similar terminology: Lambdin (1971:162-5) terms all we+non-verb clauses disjunctive. Levinsohn (1990) and Bailey and Levinsohn (1992) describe the X+qatal structure in terms of discontinuity. Myhill (1995:133) explains:

A number of verb-initial functions are related to the concept of continuity. In narratives about the past, this involves the idea that the unmarked expectation is that each clause will advance the reference time by reporting the next thing which happened in the story; when this expectation is met, the unmarked verb-initial order is used, while when the temporal sequencing pattern is broken, non-verb-initial order is used. In discussions about the future, we can suggest that the unmarked expectation is that there will be general cooperation; cooperative future events are associated with verb-initial word order, while non-cooperative future events are associated with non-verb-initial order.

In an article in which he attempts to explain the BH verbal forms on the basis of pragmatics, Baayan (1995) speaks of temporal and locational linkage. He describes the pragmatic function of the qatal form in narrative as follows: “By means of the qatal form, the speaker tells the hearer that the event or state denoted by the verb cannot be tightly linked to the hearer’s discourse representation, given the speaker’s assessment of their common ground” (246). The pragmatic function of the wayyiqtol form he describes in these terms: “The wayyiqtol is the narrative tense of the language. It allows the hearer to relax into a less demanding communicative speech mode, its disfocal value signaling that the hearer’s immediate communicative reaction is not called for” (256). He also notes that ‘loose linkage’ is not the same as background (272). See also van Wolde (1997:39) and Watters (2002:350-3). Interestingly, Smith (1991:14, n. 3) comments on the functional contrast between BH converted and unconverted forms in light of the apparent functional contrast between Ugaritic prefix forms and the Ugaritic *qatala, arguing that the latter ‘signals a disjunction in the narrative.” Smith goes on to cite examples (see also the bibliography he gives) where the Ugaritic *qatala form signals the beginning of a new literary section, a switch in scene, background information, a narrative highpoint, and the closure of a section. Smith deals only with the verb forms and not with related order of other clausal constituents.
Also, no study of the pragmatics of the $X+\text{verb}$ structure in BH can ignore the relationship between word order phenomena and the BH verb forms. That relationship can be schematicized as follows (adapted from Buth 1992:104 and Buth 1995:99):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pragmatic Continuity</th>
<th>Past – Perfective – Realis</th>
<th>Pragmatic Discontinuity</th>
<th>Non-Past/Future – Imperfective – Irrealis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>wayyiqtol</td>
<td>(we)$X+\text{qatal}$</td>
<td>(we)$X+\text{yiqtol}$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The functions associated with the $X+\text{verb}$ structures for focal and non-focal marking explain why BH users maintained a system with two semantically and syntactically equivalent verbal forms for each tense/aspect dimension.

Finally, it should be re-emphasized that the (probably unconscious) authorial choice of whether a given event is reported by a continuity structure (i.e., a *waw*-conversive form) or by a discontinuity structure (e.g., an $X+\text{verb}$ structure) is closely related to, but not determined by, actual sequence of real-world events. A writer could choose what to mark explicitly and what to leave unmarked.

Section 5: Conclusion

In Section 1 arguments in support of a basic, which is to say neutral, VSO word order for BH were adduced. These arguments were based on the overall frequency of the relevant word orders (both including and excluding the *waw*-conversive forms), on their frequency in clauses with particles that prevent the use of the *waw*-conversive forms, on the markedness of fronted subjects in sentences with such particles, and on descriptive simplicity. The markedness of the focal and non-focal fronted elements listed in Sections 3 and 4 lend support to the view that the BH of Genesis indeed exhibits a basic VSO word order.

Section 2 included a brief introduction to discourse analysis and pragmatics. The need for an approach to BH sensitive to discourse analytical and pragmatic principles is evident in light of the fact that the informational differences between clauses distinguished only by word order is often predictable, yet inexplicable in terms of syntax and semantics. Discourse analytical and pragmatic principles also aid in the differentiation among the various functions, meanings, and effects of fronted elements.

In Sections 3 and 4, two distinct types of $X+\text{verb}$ structures were discussed. Section 3 dealt with the $X+\text{verb}$ structure in which the fronted $X$ constituent is marked for focus. Focus was defined as the surface-level constituent marked (in this study, by fronting) as containing the most important or salient piece of information in the given context. Focal types were further divided into those identifying/filling-in/completing, contrasting, providing contraexpected information, and generally reinforcing.
Section 4 dealt with non-focal X+verb structures. These were sub-divided into those where the fronted element is itself marked and those in which the fronted element marks the entire clause. Part of the discussion was devoted to the BH verbal system, to the concept of communicative or discourse continuity (and discontinuity), and to the link between continuity and sequentiality (and between discontinuity and non-sequentiality). It was noted that certain effects of the X+verb structure derive from the link between discontinuity and non-sequentiality – where the non-sequentiality in question can express either a specific or general chronological relationship between events – while others appear to derive directly from discontinuity.

Limitations of the Study and Suggestions for Further Research

Several types of clauses were excluded from the present study: interrogative clauses, imperative clauses, nominal/participial (verbless) clauses, conditional clauses (except for those with עַתָּה כִּי in the apodosis), and clauses with pre-clausal elements. Any full account of the pragmatics of word order in BH should deal with these types of clauses. As was stated in the introduction, the exclusion of these clause types was due to limitations of space. It is predicted that the approach presented herein would, with minor modification, account for word order variation in those clause types as well. Also, the present study did not examine at all the issue of neutral and marked word order after the verb (other than noting the post-verbal “slot” for highly presupposed information). Further, no differentiation was made among the various types of non-subject fronted elements; complements and adjuncts were rather indiscriminately lumped together. Moreover, with specific regard to fronted subject pronouns, only tentative proposals could be made. This was due, at least in part, to the necessity of ignoring almost completely the issue of participant reference. Additionally, little attention was paid to the pragmatic functions of special particles (e.g., קרַ, מָגַג, אַ, et cetera). Furthermore, as was stated in the introduction, Genesis includes much narrative and direct speech, but little in the way of legal, hortatory, wisdom, and prophetic texts. Also, the single large section of poetry in Genesis was intentionally excluded from the analysis. A fuller examination of word order should endeavor to uncover pragmatic principles of variation in constituent order in these genres as well. Finally, due to concerns of space, relatively little could be said about the possible import the linguistic observations made here might have for exegesis and translation. In this sense, the present study may be subject to the charge leveled by Heimerdinger (1999:13) against “many of the modern linguistic analyses of Old Hebrew texts,” namely that “Overall, these studies might be characterized as abundant in formal analyses but somewhat skimpy on meaning.” If such a description accurately characterizes the present study, then it can only be hoped that it may at least serve as part of a more solid foundation for future studies which will provide more immediately meaningful insights.230

230 Then again, however, the purpose of a linguistic analysis, as opposed to a literary or textual study, is to describe language. Whether discourse analysis should be a primarily linguistic or literary domain of inquiry must remain the topic of another study.
Ahituv = איחיתע, שמיואם


Hatav = חטב, גליה. תשנ"ט-2000. תנועת הזמן בסיפור המקראי, בתוך בלשנות עברית, מס' 47, עמ' 52-63.


Aharoni, Y. 1981 Arad Inscriptions; In cooperation with Joseph Naveh (The Israel Exploration Society, Jerusalem)


Bergen, Robert D. 1984 Verb Structure Profiles of the Narrative Framework of the Pentateuch (unpublished manuscript)

Bergsträsser, Gotthelf 1819-29 Hebräische Grammatik (Vogel, Leipzig) (reprint Georg Olms Verlag, Hildesheim, 1962)
### Blau, Joshua


1977b  *An Adverbial Construction in Hebrew and Arabic: Sentence Adverbials in Fronted Position Separated from the Rest of the Sentence* (The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, Proceedings, vol. VI, no. 1) (The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, Jerusalem)


### Bodine, Walter R.


### Briggs, C.A. and E.G. Briggs


### Brown, Gillian and George Yule


### Buth, Randall


1992  “The Hebrew Verb in Current Discussions,” in *Journal of Translation and Textlinguistics* vol. 5, no 2, pp. 91-105


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Title and Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aaron Hornkohl</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Davidson, A.B.</td>
<td>1901</td>
<td><em>Hebrew Syntax</em> (Clark, Edinburgh)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1981</td>
<td><em>Functional Grammar</em> (Foris Publications, Dordrecht, Holland and Cinnaminson, USA)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Pragmatics of the X+verb Structure in the Hebrew of Genesis

Driver, S.R.  
1892  

Ewald, Heinrich  
1879  

Foley, William A. and Robert D. Van Valin, Jr.  
1984  
_Functional Syntax and Universal Grammar_ (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge)

1985  

Garr, W. R.  
1985  
_Dialect-Geography of Syria-Palestine, 1000-586 B. C. E._ (University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania)

Garvin, Paul L.  
1963  

Gernsbacher, Morton  
1990  
_Language Comprehension as Structure Building_ (Erlbaum, Hillsdale, New Jersey)

Gernsbacher, Morton and David Hargreaves  
1992  

Givón, Talmy  
1976  

1977  

1983  

GKC = Gesenius, Kautzsch, Cowley  
1910  

Glinert, Lewis  
1994  
_The Grammar of Modern Hebrew_ (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge)

Goldfrajn, Tal  
1998  
_Word Order and Time in Biblical Hebrew Narrative_ (Clarendon Press, Oxford)

Greenberg, Joseph  
1966  

1965  
_Introduction to Hebrew_ (Prentice-Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey)

Grimes, Joseph  
1975  
_The Thread of Discourse_ (Mouton, The Hague)
Aaron Hornkohl

Gross, Walter

Gundel, Jeanette K.
1977 Role of Topic and Comment in Linguistic Theory (Indiana University Linguistics Club)

Hatav, Galia

Hawkins, John A.

Heimerdinger, Jean Mark

Holmstedt, Robert
2002 The Relative Clause in Biblical Hebrew: A Linguistic Analysis (unpublished doctoral dissertation at the University of Wisconsin, Madison)

Hopper, Paul

Jespersen, Otto
1924 The Philosophy of Grammar (London, 1924)

Jongeling, K.

Joüon, Paul
1923 Grammaire de l’Hébreu biblique (Pontifical Biblical Institute, Rome)

Joüon, Paul and Takamitsu Muraoka

Kelley, Page H.

Khan, Geoffrey

Kugel, James L.

Kutscher, Eduard Yechezkel
The Pragmatics of the X+verb Structure in the Hebrew of Genesis

Lambrecht, Knud

Leech, Geoffrey N.

Lehman, W.
1973 “A Structural Principle of Language and Its Implications,” in Language 49, pp. 47-66

Levinsohn, Stephen H.
1990 “Unmarked and Marked Instances of Topicalization in Hebrew,” in Work papers of the Summer Institute of Linguistics (University of North Dakota), 34.21-33

Levinson, Stephen C.

Li, Charles N. and Sandra Thompson

Ljunberg, Bo-Krister

Longacre, Robert E.
1983 A Grammar of Discourse (Plenum, New York, New York)
1990 Story Line Concerns and Word Order Typology in East and West Africa (University of California Press, Los Angeles, California)

Lowery, Kirk E.

Lyons, John

Mallinson, Graham and Barry J. Blake

Meltzer, Tova

85 (119)
Aaron Hornkohl

Miller, Cynthia

Mithun, Marianne

Moshavi, Adina

Müller, August
1894 Outlines of Hebrew Syntax (trans. and ed. J. Robertson) (James Maclehose & Sons, Glasgow)

Muraoka, Takamitsu

Myhill, John
1995 “Non-emphatic Fronting in Biblical Hebrew,” Theoretical Linguistics vol. 21, no. 2/3

Niccacci, Alviero

Pardee, Dennis
1982 Handbook of Ancient Hebrew Letters (Scholars Press, Chico, California)

Payne, Doris L.

Polotsky, H. J.

Prince, Ellen

Rainey, Anson F.
1990 “The Prefix Conjugation Patterns of Early Northwest Semitic,” in Lingering Over Words, eds. Abush, et al. (Scholars Press, Atlanta, Georgia), pp. 407-20

Rabin, Chaim

86 (120)
The Pragmatics of the X+verb Structure in the Hebrew of Genesis


Reichenbach, H. 1947 Elements of Symbolic Logic (MacMillan, New York)


Rosenbaum, Michael 1997 Word-Order Variation in Isaiah 40-55 (Studia Semitica Neerlandica) (Van Gorcum, Assen)

Ross, Allen P. 2001 Introducing Biblical Hebrew (Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, Michigan)


Siewierska, Anna 1988 Word Order Rules (Croon Helm linguistics series) (Croon Helm Ltd./Methuen, Inc., New York)

Silva, Moises 1983 Biblical Words and Their Meaning: An Introduction to Lexical Semantics (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan)


Smith, Mark S. 1991 The Origins and Development of the Waw-Consecutive: Northwest Semitic Evidence from Ugarit to Qumran (Harvard Semitic Studies) (Scholars Press, Atlanta, Georgia)


87 (121)
Sperber, Dan and Deirdre Wilson

Talmon, Shemaryahu

Ullendorff, Edward

van der Merwe, Christo H.J.
1991  “The Function of Word Order in Old Hebrew—with Special Reference to Cases where a Syntagmeme Precedes a Verb in Joshua,” in *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 17, pp. 129-44

van der Merwe, Christo H.J., Jackie A. Naudé, and Jan H. Kroeze
1999  *A Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar* (Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield)

van Seters, John
1992  *Prologue to History: The Yahwist as Historian in Genesis* (Westminster/John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky)

van Wolde, Ellen

Waltke, Bruce K., and Michael O’Connor
1990  *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Eisenbrauns, Winona Lake, Indiana)

Watters, David

Williams, Ronald J.
1967  *Hebrew Syntax, An Outline* (University of Toronto Press, Toronto)

Wright, William
1890  *Lectures on the Comparative Grammar of the Semitic Languages* (Cambridge, 1990)

Yule, George

Zevit, Ziony
1998  *The Anterior Construction in Classical Hebrew* (The Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series no. 59) (Scholars Press, Atlanta, Georgia)