Biblical Hebrew:
A formal perspective on
the left periphery

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We argue that Biblical Hebrew (BH) clause structure is consistently verb-second at the level of TopicP, which appears above Tense but below other C heads. A wide range of constructions and apparent exceptions to verb-second order can be explained in a principled way, depending on which other functional heads are present in the clause. We argue for a richly articulated clause structure, including T, Top, Σ, Polarity, Force, and a discourse-related &P whose specifier can host a so-called hanging topic. Apparent V1 and V3 clauses can arise when the verb moves to a head above Top, when the constituent in the TP specifier is a null subject pro, or when functional projections above TopP host other phrases in their specifiers, or when some combination of these three conditions holds.

1 Introduction

We argue in this paper that, under standard assumptions of current generative syntactic theory, Biblical Hebrew (BH) clause structure is consistently verb-medial, and that apparent deviations from this pattern follow straightforwardly from the interactions among the various functional heads in the clausal spine. In particular, we will show that the different surface word orders can be accounted for in a principled way on the assumption that the verb undergoes syntactic movement from its merge position in the verb phrase to higher functional heads. The verb’s surface position thus depends on which functional heads are present, and what elements those heads contain.

1.1 Central claim

We will argue that the articulated structure of the BH clause is as shown in (1). In the spirit of Rizzi (1997), we adopt as our starting point the notion that the CP is richly articulated (Rizzi, 2004; Belletti, 2004). However, with Benincà (2001, 2004), Benincà & Poletto (2004) and Poletto (2000), we assume that recursion of individual functional projections is not possible, and in particular that there can be only one TopP.

The BH data, as we will show, require more projections than those given in Benincà’s (2004) “detailed map of the periphery.” There are two innovations in (1). First, we argue for two particular projections: a PolarityP or ΣP (Laka, 1990; Culicover, 1992; Koizumi, 1995; Zanuttini, 1991, 1997; Rizzi, 2001; etc.) between Force and Topic, and a second projection, provisionally labelled &P, appearing below Σ and encoding there is/there is not.

Second, above ForceP, we propose a ConjunctionP (&P) whose specifier hosts—among other things—the so-called casus pendens or hanging topic (HT). Assuming that Force determines the outer clausal phase, the position of the HT outside ForceP explains why it, unlike other topics, requires pronominal resumption inside the clause.
The paper is organized as follows. First, we argue that BH is a true and symmetrical verb-second (V2) language with null subject pronouns (Biberauer et al., 2010; Camacho, 2013; Holmstedt, 2013), similar in this respect to medieval Romance languages such as Old French (OF). We argue, in light of OF, that in BH, Force and Topic are separate projections. We then compare surface verb-first (V1) and verb-third (V3) word orders in BH and OF, distinguishing between syntactic topicalization and HT. We then explore what BH can add to our understanding of the left periphery more generally. We show that the syntactic and semantic complexity of BH rhetorical questions provides evidence for $\Sigma$ between Force and Topic, and argue that $\Sigma$ can bear the feature [RHETORICAL] (adapting Han, 1998, 2002; Romero & Han, 2003, 2004). This permits a distinction between two sorts of particles: true illocutionary-force items occupying $\text{Force}^0$ and true polarity items occupying $\Sigma^0$. In addition, we show that the existential particles yēš ‘there is’ and $\hat{\epsilon}$n ‘there isn’t’ head a projection below $\Sigma P$, which we provisionally label ExistentialP ($\exists P$). Finally, we focus on the HT, concluding that it is one of several elements that appear in [spec,&P] above ForceP.

1.3 Theoretical context and assumptions

Our point of departure is the analysis of BH verbal morphosyntax and semantics outlined in DeCaen (1995, 1999a). That analysis is articulated within the framework of Government-Binding theory (Chomsky 1981 and many other works). Here we take an approach consistent with the more recent Minimalist Program (Chomsky, 1993, 1995, 2000, among others).

DeCaen (1995, 1999a) analyzes the BH verb as a complex syntactic object consisting of an acategorial root and a bundle of syntactic features. The structured bundle is assembled by the operation of verb movement. This realizational approach to BH verbal morphology is articulated here in a Distributed Morphology framework (Halle & Marantz, 1993, 1994; Matushansky & Marantz, 2013; see

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1 Jones (2015) argues that, in at least some non-biblical texts from Hellenistic Period Hebrew, the basic word order is Verb-Subject.

2 Languages with null-subject pronouns are often referred to as “pro-drop” languages (Jaeggli & Safir, 1989).

3 By Old French (OF), we mean the form of French from the mid-9th century to roughly the mid-14th century.

In short, the sole generative system is the syntax, and it manipulates formal syntactic features only. Vocabulary items are hierarchical bundles of features assembled by the syntactic operation Merge and Move, and are realized at Spell-Out.

2 V2 word order

From its superficial syntactic patterns, BH seems to be a typological outlier, exhibiting V1, V2 and V3 order in matrix clauses. However, its underlying syntactic properties are obscured by a rare combination of syntactic phenomena—rare, but by no means unattested. Indeed, in all relevant respects, the same system is instantiated in OF (Adams, 1987; Bauer, 1995; Mathieu, 2006, 2013; Roberts, 1993; Vance, 1997; Yang, 2000; among others).

2.1 Basic word order

To begin with, the basic surface word order4 in both OF and BH is verb-medial or verb-second (V2). The finite verb appears as the second constituent, immediately following a single constituent interpreted as the “aboutness” topic of the sentence (Neeleman et all, 2009).5 We assume standardly that this preverbal constituent undergoes syntactic movement from its merge position to the beginning of the sentence, hence the term fronting or topicalization. Just as in the Germanic V2 languages, such fronting does not trigger pausal or comma intonation, and carries no particular emphatic or contrastive meaning.6

Moreover, both OF and BH are true and symmetrical V2 systems. True V2 languages have a purely syntactic V2 pattern, in which obligatory movement of both the verb and the constituent that comes to precede it are triggered by strong syntactic features. This contrasts with looser V2 systems such as that of Old English, in which verb movement and topic fronting are motivated by information structure (Bech & Salvesen, 2014) rather than by purely syntactic requirements. By symmetrical, we mean that the V2 phenomenon is found in both main and subordinate clauses, in contrast to the asymmetrical system in German, e.g., where the V2 pattern holds in main clauses but not in subordinate clauses.

2.2 Topicalization

The examples in (2) and (3) are both independent, stylistically neutral clauses, in which the finite verb is both indicative and transitive, the subject is definite, agentive and animate, and the object is a definite semantic patient. Both therefore ought to exhibit basic word order. Crucially here, the preverbal constituent (shown in boldface) is not the grammatical subject. In both sentences the subject (underlined) follows the finite verb.

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4 The term “basic” is used pre-theoretically here, and has no explicit status in the theory we are using. One definition of “basic word order” is the following:

Within the context of typological studies the term “basic order” is typically identified with the order that occurs in stylistically neutral, independent, indicative clauses with full noun phrase (NP) participants, where the subject is definite, agentive and human, the object is a definite semantic patient, and the verb represents an action, not a state or an event (Siewierska, 1988: §1.1.1., p. 8).

5 The aboutness topic is not to be confused with the (focussed) fronted element in English sentences like (i).

(i) She’ll eat shrimp, but clams she won’t touch.

6 Dead languages can still graphically mark comma intonation—and sentence intonation, for that matter. As Mathieu (2013) notes, Old French tends to use the comma to mark comma intonation. In Biblical Hebrew, the canonical Tiberian reading of the biblical texts provides two guides to prosodic phrasing: phonological variants determined by different types of prosodic phrases (“contextual” vs. minor and major pause); and the so-called accent system that provides an exhaustive prosodic parse to guide liturgical chanting. See Dresher (1994).
Afterwards Lancelot.NOM DET=gird.on.PRS.IND.3MSG Lancelot.OMG DET=sword.OBL
‘Then Lancelot girded him with the sword.’ (Queste 160c.10)\\(^7\)

As a first approximation, then, the BH clause must have at least the structure in (4).\\(^9\)

In (4), the grammatical subject ‘êlôhîm appears in [spec,IP], having moved to check a strong D feature on Infl. If the subject is not topicalized, it remains in [spec,IP]. The topic bôrê?šît bearing the syntactic feature [TOPIC] moves to [spec,CP] (den Besten, 1983) to check a strong [TOPIC] feature on C. The acategorical root √BR² is attracted by strong features in v, Infl, and C to the position immediately following the topic, crucially above the overt subject; and this complex syntactic object is eventually spelled out as bôrê. (In the tree diagrams throughout, we spell out the full verb form only in the position in which it is pronounced.)

\\(^7\)Unless indicated otherwise, the Old French examples here are taken from the edition of Queste del saint Graal (The Quest of the Holy Grail) by Marchello-Nizia (2013). The citation 160c.10 refers to folio 160c, line 10. The glossing here and throughout follows the Leipzig standard (Max Planck Institute 2008). The English translation of Queste employed here is that of Comfort (2000).

\\(^8\)The Hebrew text follows the Leningrad codex and its Tiberian vocalization, a standard version sufficient for our purposes here (but see Khan, 1987, 1996). Where the word stress does not fall on the final syllable, an acute accent is added for clarity. The systematic post-vocalic spirantization of stops is omitted. The translation provided is the New International Version or NIV (1978).

\\(^9\)We assume that like the CP and IP domains, the verb phrase domain is quite richly articulated. In addition, we assume that interpretable features are privative, and that both their inventory and how they map to syntactic projections may vary from language to language (Cowper, 2005, 2010; Cowper & Hall, 2013, 2015). We assume that features are bundled on Comp and Infl, unless there is syntactic evidence that a given feature projects independently.
2.3 Null subject pronouns and V1 word order

The syntactic structure becomes less transparent when the phonologically null subject pronoun (pro) is added to the mix. Both BH (Holmstedt, 2013) and OF have rich inflectional paradigms that permit subject pronouns to be phonologically null (Jaeggli & Safir, 1989). Since the topic position is not prosodically prominent, there is no reason that pro cannot bear the feature [TOPIC] and move to [spec,CP] to check the strong [TOPIC] feature of C.\textsuperscript{10} If it does, then the V2 syntactic structure is expected to surface with V1 word order; and indeed this is what we find.

Consider first the OF minimal pair in (5)-(6). In (5), the mandatory topic il, which in this case is also the grammatical subject, appears immediately before the verb. When the subject pronoun is phonologically null, as in the parallel construction in (6), the word order is superficially V1.

(5) il ne=nos=en=chaut
    NOM.3MSG NEG=1PL=OBL=matter.PRS.IND.3SG
    ‘we do not care.’ (Queste 171c.32)

(6) pro ne=vos=chaut fet ele
    3MSG NEG=2PL=matter.PRS.IND.3SG do.PRS.IND.3SG NOM.3FSG
    ‘“Never mind,” she said.’ (Queste 190d.40)

The same thing happens in BH, thereby increasing the frequency of apparent V1 clauses. In part, therefore, it is understandable that BH is often thought to have basic VSO order (van der Merwe et al., 1999: §46.1, p. 336). The coordinated clauses in (7) have identical syntactic structures containing a past indicative verb-form; but when the personal pronoun is phonologically null, as in the second and third conjuncts, surface V1 order arises. However, a superficially V1 clause like (7b) still has the syntactic structure given in (8).

(7) a. hûˀ hē-sîr ʾet=hab-bām-ʾōt
    3MSG CAUS-remove.PST.IND.3MSG ACC=DET high.place-FPL
    ‘He removed the high places,’

   b. wə-pro šîbbar ʾet=ham-maṣṣēb-ʾōt
       and-3MSG smash.PST.IND.3MSG ACC=DET sacred.stone-FPL
       ‘smashed the sacred stones,’

   c. wə-pro kārat ʾet=hāʾāšērā
       and-3MSG cut.down.PST.IND.3MSG ACC=DET Asherah
       ‘and cut down the Asherah poles.’ (2 Kings 18:4)

\textsuperscript{10} Essentially, we are claiming that BH allows what Huang (1984) calls a \textit{zero topic}, also termed \textit{topic drop} (Sigurðsson, 2011; van Gelderen, 2013). These topics are non-contrastive, discourse-old elements (including subject pro in null-subject languages).
Another logical possibility is that the absence of an overt topic simply means that there is no topicalization or “zero-topicalization” in the clause (DeCaen, 1995: 237). Under such an account, topicalization would be driven by pragmatics or stylistics (cf. e.g., Mathieu, 2006, 2013). However, there are several reasons to reject this approach. First, a zero-topicalization account requires abandoning the stronger claim that BH clauses syntax are syntactically V2 across the board, and failing to capture the obvious parallelism in (5)-(7). Even worse, under such an approach, the almost perfect correlation between zero-topicalization and the lack of an overt subject would be a complete coincidence. On balance, then, we abandon the zero-topicalization approach, and take the view that BH syntax is consistently V2 with possible fronting of pro.

2.4 Symmetrical V2 and topic phrase

The structure shown in (8) must be further articulated in order to account for embedded V2 clauses, in which the topic appears between an overt complementizer and the finite verb-form, while the verb agrees with a following overt subject, as in the OF example in (9). The topic cannot be in [spec,CP], since it follows the complementizer. Nor can it occupy [spec,IP], which is occupied by the postverbal subject. Rather, it must be the specifier of an intermediate projection whose head bears a strong [TOPIC] feature, and the finite verb must be in the head of this same projection. We claim that this strong [TOPIC] feature is also what drives the V2 system in BH.

(9) que de ceste requeste ne=lor=faudr-a il ja
that of this request NEG=3PL.DAT=fail.FUT.IND-3SG NOM.3MSG already
‘that he would not fail to perform this request [for them].’ (Queste 160c.2)

In the BH example in (10), the analytic verb-form provides clear evidence that the IP must also be articulated, as is the case in the Romance and Germanic languages. We assume (Bjorkman, 2011; Cowper, 2005, 2010) that auxiliary verbs are inserted as a last resort to permit the spellout of otherwise stranded inflectional features. Here, the semantically null BH auxiliary √HYH realizes the otherwise stranded tense feature [PAST] (DeCaen, 1999a). This auxiliary follows the topic and precedes the overt subject, which in turn precedes the active participle bearing the aspectual feature [INTERVAL]. At a minimum, the projections in the BH CP-IP system must be those in (11): Force > Topic > Finite > Event.
2.5 Excursus on the BH auxiliary √HYH

As noted above, we assume that interpretable features are privative, and that they are spelled out post-syntactically (Cowper, 2005, 2010). Dependency relations can be represented in tree form as in (12). Since the vocabulary items that spell out these features may be underspecified, surface polysemy is expected. In this light, consider the simplified dependency structure in (12).

(12)  

FINITE  
  
  PAST  
  DEIXIS  
  MODALITY

FINITE has purely syntactic content, licensing structural nominative case and agreement. DEIXIS anchors the clause to the deictic centre of the utterance (usually utterance time). MODALITY operates on DEIXIS, and encodes necessity or possibility (must, shall, will/would, can/could, may/might). PAST signals back-shifting or temporal precedence relative to the deictic centre; in the absence of this feature, the interpretation is NONPAST.

The three vocabulary items of the BH finite verbal system are listed in (13), in the order in which they are inserted, and the resulting paradigm of the auxiliary √HYH is tabulated in (14), adapting DeCaen
The analysis proposed here captures the tripartite distinction among the nonpast realizations of the auxiliary, and the polysemy of the past form follows directly. Notice crucially that when there are no features to be spelled out, no auxiliary is needed and a verbless clause surfaces, just as in Russian, for example.

\[ \begin{align*}
\text{hāyā} & \Leftrightarrow \text{PAST} \\
yihyeh & \Leftrightarrow \text{MODALITY} \\
yəhî & \Leftrightarrow \text{DEIXIS}
\end{align*} \]

\[
\begin{array}{|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
\text{[PAST]} & \text{[MODALITY]} & \text{[DEIXIS]} & \text{} \\
\hline
\text{Ø} & \text{is} & & \\
\text{+} & \text{+} & \text{yihyeh} & \text{will be} \\
\text{+} & \text{+} & \text{yəhî/yəhî} & \text{be} \\
\text{+} & & \text{hāyā} & \text{was} \\
\text{+} & \text{+} & & \text{would be} \\
\text{+} & & & \text{were} \\
\hline
\end{array}
\]

3 V1 word order

3.1 Verb-movement and V1 order

We have argued that some apparently V1 BH clauses are actually V2 clauses with a pro in initial position. There are, however, some true V1 constructions, in both OF and BH, in which the verb has unambiguously moved past an overt non-subject topic. In all such cases, we claim, the finite verb has moved past Top to Force in order to realize interpretable formal features.

In (15), the OF verb has moved to Force to check a strong [QUESTION] ([Q]) feature—as auxiliary verbs do in English—producing the familiar V1 word order; whereas in (16), it is the strong [IRREALIS] counterfactual that is being checked by subjunctive forms.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{(15)} & \quad \text{vendr-oiz vos avec moi a la cort} \\
& \quad \text{come.FUT.IND.-2PL 2PL.NOM with 1SG.OBL to DET court} \\
& \quad \text{mon seignor le roi Artus?} \\
& \quad \text{my.OBL lord.OBL DET.OBL king.OBL Arthur.OBL?} \\
& \quad \text{‘Fair sire, will you come with me to my lord King Arthur’s court?’ (Queste 160c.14)}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{(16)} & \quad \text{Fust i li reis, n=i oüssum damage} \\
& \quad \text{be.FUT.SUBJ.3MSG LOC DET.NOM king.NOM NEG=LOC have.PRS.SUBJ.1PL damage.OBL} \\
& \quad \text{‘Si le roi était là, nous ne subirons aucun dommage’ (La chanson de Roland 1102)}^{11} \\
& \quad \text{‘Were the king here, we would suffer no harm.’}
\end{align*}
\]

Similarly in (17), the BH verb has moved to Force to realize a strong [VOLITIVE] feature (here with a jussive meaning). As in OF, there is a morphological distinction between indicative and subjunctive. Here the BH subjunctive forms yāʾēr and yāʾēm, in initial position in volitive clauses, contrast with their indicative counterparts yāʾir and yāʾīm in second position in declarative clauses. The structure is given in (18).

\[\text{Bonnard & Régnier (1989: §121.8, p. 189).}\]
3.2 Excursus on Niccacci’s “Neglected point of Biblical Hebrew syntax”

The morphological, syntactic and semantic contrasts that have been illustrated here are what Niccacci calls the “neglected point of [Biblical] Hebrew syntax” (Niccacci, 1986, 1987, 1990, 1991). He notes that there are three ways to distinguish indicative from subjunctive forms in BH: distinctive morphology (see §2.5 above; however, most verb forms do not make the distinction), larger context (not always reliable), and finally word order. Specifically, his “neglected point” is that verbs in the simple future (nonpast indicative) always appear in second position (V2)—in his terms, X-YIQTOL—whereas verbs in the morphologically distinctive subjunctive appear in first position (V1)—for him, YIQTOL.

The account proposed here explains this generalization, attributing both true V1 order and subjunctive morphology to the same marked feature of the volitive Force head. In contrast, the traditional VSO analysis implies that the word order in (17) is unmarked, and that to get the simple future reading, some XP must be preposed in a marked operation. In addition, by failing to distinguish true V1 clauses such as those in (17) from what we claim are V2 clauses with pro in topic position—such as those in (7b,c) above—the traditional VSO account requires the implausible assumption that sometimes but not always, converting “a sentence from an unmarked [VSO] to a marked construction [XVO] does not affect the semantic content of the sentence” (Moshavi, 2010: 1).
3.3 Narrative inversion and V1

Both OF and BH have special V1 narrative or event-reporting constructions, of the form and then verbed. Sometimes called “narrative inversion”, this construction is also found in a variety of Germanic languages, past and present (Petrova & Rinke, 2014: n. 6, pp. 272f). Consider the contrast in OF between (19) and (20). In (19), the topic slot is occupied by the adverb einsint ‘then’, and the verb dura follows in second position as expected.12 In (20), however, the conjunction et ‘and’ is followed immediately by the finite verb ala. Since an overt subject follows the verb (inversion), and since, therefore, pro is not possible as a covert preverbal constituent, the verb must have moved to Force to realize some feature: call it [THEN].13

(19) Einsint dur-a cil asau-z bien V. jor-z then last-PST.IND.3SG that assault-NOM.SG well five day-PL.OBL
‘Thereafter the assault lasted five days.’

(20) et=al-a chasun-s a son heberiage. and.THEHN=go-PST.IND.3SG everybody-NOM.SG to his harbourage.OBL
‘And everybody went to his harbourage.’
(Petrova & Rinke, 2014: Villehardouin 146, 10, (1d), p. 272)

BH is also characterized by V1 narrative tenses, a fact that has given rise to many accounts of basic BH word order as VSO based on relative frequencies in narrative (most recently Moshavi, 2010). The striking difference between OF and BH narrative inversion is that in BH, narrative inversion employs subjunctive verb-forms in what is known as “modal coordination” (Palmer, 1986, 2001). This construction is found in every major language family in Africa: Bantu (Swahili, Zulu), Niger-Congo (Fula, Yoruba), Afroasiatic (Late Egyptian/Coptic), Nilo-Saharan (Maasai) (DeCaen 1999b, 2001).

The BH counterpart of (19) is given in (21). Here, the adverb ʾāz ‘then’ is followed by the nonpast subjunctive in second position as expected. As in the OF example in (20), the BH conjunction is somehow related to verb movement to Force (22). A rare example without the conjunction is given in (23). Note that in (22), the order is Verb > Topic > Subject, which demonstrates that in the narrative inversion construction, the verb moves to a position higher than where it appears in ordinary, topic-initial clauses. The structure of (22) is given in (24).

(21) ʾāz ya-qhēl šālōmōh ʾet=ziqnē yiśrāʾēl THEN 3-summon.NPST.SBJV.MSG Solomon ACC=elders.GEN Israel
‘Then King Solomon summoned into his presence the elders of Israel.’ (1 Kings 8:1)

(22) wa-yi-q-qāhāl-ū ʾel=ham-mélek šālōmōh and-THEN-3-MID-came.together.NPST.SBJV-MPL to=DET-king Solomon
kol=ʾīš yiśrāʾēl all.GEN=man.GEN Israel
‘All the men of Israel came together to King Solomon.’ (1 Kings 8:2)

(23) ya-ṣṣēb gebūl-ōt ṣamm-īm 3-set.up.NPST.SBJV.MSG boundaries-FPL.GEN people.MPL
‘he set up boundaries for the peoples.’ (Deuteronomy 32: 8)

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12 See further Petrova & Rinke (2014: 15b, 18a; 22b [adom “then”]).
13 See further Petrova & Rinke (2014: 6b, 13b, 15a, 16c, 18b, 19b).
We have presented thus far an outline of BH syntax as a true and symmetric V2 system similar in many respects to OF. We argued that surface V1 clauses result from either or both of (a) the presence of a pro in topic position, or (b) verb movement past the topic to spell out phonologically null features of a higher functional category. Another set of possible counterexamples still needs to be addressed: V3 constructions (Kaiser, 2000, cited in Mathieu, 2013). In this section, we examine the V3 construction known as casus pendens in BH studies, and hanging topic (HT) generally.

4.1 Hanging topics and V3

It has often been noted that constituents before the finite verb do not all have equal status. Some have been moved out of the verb phrase because of their topicality—what we have been calling topicalization. Some constituents, however, have no position within the clause from which they could have been moved: they are “hanging topics” (HT), or in traditional terms, casus pendens.\textsuperscript{15} Consider the Italian example from Benincà (2001: 43) described in (25).

\begin{enumerate}
\item[(25)] Mario, gli amici gli hanno fatto un brutto scherzo
\item Mario, the friends him have made a nasty trick
\item ‘Mario, his friends have [played] him a nasty trick.’
\end{enumerate}

In (25), the DP Mario is set off by comma intonation, and unlike a garden-variety topic, it is resumed by an obligatory pronoun. These are hallmarks of a HT. Benincà (2001: 43) describes the HT construction as follows:

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{15} This phenomenon is also called “nominative absolute” (Waltke & O’Connor, 1990: p. 692).
\end{itemize}
With HT we have on the left just a DP in all cases, without any preposition. The resumptive clitic expressing the type of argument is obligatory: it only agrees with the HT in number and gender, not in Case. The copy of the HT can be also a tonic pronoun or an epithet.

How would such a construction look in a V2 system such as those of OF and BH? We predict that it could be characterized by V3 order. Consider first the OF examples in (26)-(27). In (26), the HT li quens Rollant is resumed by the overt subject pronoun il.

(26) Li=quens Rollant, il est mult irascut
DET.NOM=COUNT.NOM Rollant.NOM 3MSG.NOM is.NPST.IND.3SG very angry
‘The count Rollant, he is very angry.’ (La Chanson de Roland 777)

In (27) it is the grammatical object that appears as the HT, resumed by an object clitic pronoun. What is remarkable here is that the HT bears non-nominative or oblique case [OBL], crucially not nominative case [NOM] as in (26). This distinction cannot be made in English or Italian, but because case-marking is mandatory in OF, the case agreement in (27) between the HT and the resumptive pronoun is transparent.

(27) le=cumandement Deu jó l=oí
DET.OBL=commandment.OBL God.OBL 1SG 3SG.OBL=heard.PST.IND.1ST
‘God’s will, I heard it.’ (Leroux de Lincy, 1841: 1.15, p. 55)

Parallel examples from BH are given in (28)-(29). In (28), as in (26), the HT is resumed by an overt subject pronoun. In (29), as in (27), a grammatical object is the HT, and it is resumed by an object clitic. As in OF, the HT exhibits case agreement with the resumptive pronoun. The same case contrast is noted by Holmstedt (2014: 120).16

(28) hā-ʾiš ʾāšer nî-mšă ẖag-gēḇī ẖā-yād-ō
DET-man that MID-found.PAST.3MSG DET-cup in-hand-3MSG
hū yihyeh =llī ʿēbed
3MSG 3-be.NPST.MSG to.1SG slave
‘Only the man who was found to have the cup will become my slave.’ (Genesis 44:17)

(29) ṣet=kol=hā-ʾāreṣ ʾāšer=ʾattā rōʾeh la-kā ṣe-ṭṭan-ĕn-nā
ACC=all=DET-land that=2MSG see.PTC.MSG to-2MSG 1SG-give.NPST.IND-3FSG
‘All the land that you see I will give to you.’ (Genesis 13:15)

4.2 Excursus on the typology of HT

This picture of the case-marking of the HT and its relation to the resumptive pronoun is significantly oversimplified. The following considerations mark out a possible research program in BH syntax and information structure, extending the work of Holmstedt (2009, 2014).

First, consider the relation between the HT and the resumptive pronoun. The minimal pairs in German (30)-(31) and Dutch (32)-(33) reveal the importance of the nature and position of the resumptive pronoun. Both (31) and (33) are markedly contrastive, employing the distals den and die in Topic position; whereas (30) and (32) are examples of non-contrastive hanging topics resumed by pronouns.

(30) Den Hans, jeder mag ihn.
DET.MSG.ACC Hans everyone likes.3SG 3MSG.ACC
‘Hans, everyone likes him.’ (German, adapting Frey, 2004: (2), p. 205)

However, unlike the obligatory case-marking of Old French, prepositional case-marking in Biblical Hebrew is neither mandatory nor consistent; see Waltke & O’Connor, 1990: §10.3.b.)
DET.MSG.ACC Hans DET.MSG.ACC likes.3SG everyone
‘Hans, everyone likes.’ (German, adapting Frey, 2004: (1), p. 204)

(32) Die jongen, ik ken ’m niet.
DET.SG boy 1SG.NOM know.3SG 3MSG.ACC NEG
‘That boy, I don’t know him.’ (Dutch, adapting De Vries, 2009: (5a))

(33) Die jongen, die ken ik niet.
DET.SG boy DET.SG know.3SG 1SG.NOM NEG
‘That boy, I don’t know.’ (Dutch, adapting De Vries, 2009: (6a))

Second, note the German minimal pair in (34)-(35). The unmarked structure is (34): the case-marking of the HT agrees with that of the resumptive pronoun. In (35) and (36), the HT bears default nominative case, which does not agree with the resumptive pronoun, in the case of (35), or with the object nominal in (36). Nolda (2004) argues that these are syntactically distinct, especially with respect to binding (cf. Frey, 2004; De Vries, 2009).

DET.MSG.ACC Hans DET.MSG.ACC know.PRS.IND-1SG 1SG since long.DAT
‘Hans I’ve known for a long time.’ (adapting Nolda, 2004: (1))

(35) Der Hans, den kenne ich seit langem.
DET.MSG.NOM Hans DET.MSG.ACC know.PRS.IND-1SG 1SG since long.DAT
‘As for Hans, I’ve known him for a long time.’ (adapting Nolda, 2004: (3))

(36) Der Hans, ich kenne diesen Kerl seit langem.
DET.MSG.NOM Hans 1SG know.PRS.IND-1SG DIST.MSG.ACC guy since long.DAT
‘Hans—I’ve known this guy for a long time.’ (adapting Nolda, 2004: (2))

Given that in BH, the HT only optionally agrees in case with the resumptive pronoun, the question is to what extent HT constructions are similarly contrastive syntactically, especially with respect to topicalization; and whether semantic and pragmatic considerations are consistent with biblical exegesis of various passages. This question is left for future work.

4.3 The position of hanging topics in the clause

One might suppose that, since in ordinary topicalization, the topic element appears below Force, the HT might occupy [spec,ForceP]. However, this can be shown to be incorrect. There are constructions in which a HT co-occurs with a wh-word, and the HT invariably precedes the wh-word, as shown in (37) and (38). In the OF example in (37), the wh-word qui is assumed to occupy [spec,ForceP]. The HT vostre terre is thus higher in the clause periphery. Similarly in the BH example in (38), the presence of the wh-word mah in [spec,ForceP] suggests that the HT ʿahārōn must also be higher in the structure.

(37) OF
Vostre terre, qui desfandr-a?
your land who defend.FUT.IND-3SG
‘Who will defend your land?’ (Kunstmann, 2009: 1617)

(38) BH
wa-ʿahārōn mah=ḥūʾ ki t-allīn-ū ʿāl-ʿāyw
and-Aaron what=3MSG that 2-grumble.NPST.IND-MPL against-3MSG
‘Who is Aaron that you should grumble against him?’ (Numbers 16:11)

We therefore analyze (38) as in (39), positing some functional projection XP above ForceP. The clause here is verbless, since neither [PAST] nor [DEIXIS/MODALITY] is spelled out overtly (see (14)
above). The projection hosting the HT been called DiscourseP (Benincà, 2001) and FrameP (Benincà, 2004). A second possibility, shown in (40), is the adjunction analysis put forward by Holmstedt (2014), or it could be that the HT occupies a second specifier of ForceP, with the moved wh-phrase tucking in below it (Richards, 2001), giving a structure very similar to (40). The choice between (39), on the one hand, and either version of (40), on the other, depends on whether there can be shown to be a distinct functional head between the HT and the wh-word in [spec,ForceP]. We return to this problem in §6 below.

(39)

(40)

5 Overt complementizers in the root clause

The account presented so far, while capturing some significant generalizations about word order in BH, is not yet complete. For example, we have not yet given sufficient attention to subordinate clauses, although we used the tentative analysis of subordination to leverage an account of preposed items in the matrix clause. Thus we have not nailed down exactly where all phrasal constituents are in the left periphery. In the following sections, classes of BH peripheral particles that appear in a fixed order are employed as landmarks to construct a more detailed map of the left periphery.

5.1 Overt particles of illocutionary force

BH and OF differ in how they form polar (yes/no) questions. As was shown above in (11), the OF finite verb moves past the topic to Force to realize the syntactic feature [QUESTION] or [Q]. In contrast, BH, like many other languages, employs a sentence-peripheral, polar-question particle (Dryer 2013a, 2013b). This is the clause-initial particle ḥā, syntactically comparable to Polish czy, Russian ли, and Modern French est-ce que (Bailey 2013, Soare 2007).

The polar-question particle sheds useful light on the syntax of the BH left periphery. First, ḥā is an overt complementizer encoding a particular illocutionary force, which we implement as spelling out the feature [Q] in the Force head. The particle ḥā can therefore be used to diagnose the syntactic position of other elements in the sequence. Moreover, when the question particle appears, the finite verb does not move to Force as it does in OF polar questions. We thus expect to find V2 order in BH polar questions. With an overt Force head and the obligatory movement of the finite verb to the Topic head, the structure of the left periphery becomes more visible. In addition, by providing an explicit realization of Force, the overt ḥā is of great help in parsing clauses with verb-third (V3) order.

There are other BH illocutionary-force particles, though they occur less frequently. The demonstrative or ‘presentative’ exclamative variants himēh and ḡēn (the traditional ‘lo!’ or ‘behold!’) “introduce exclamations of immediacy and fuller exclamations of perception, cause, circumstance, etc.” (Waltke & O’Connor, 1990: §40.2.1a). There is also an irrealis/optative marker lū, expressing meanings like ‘if only!’ or ‘would that’.
5.2 Force > subject > verb

At a bare minimum, the subject moves past the finite verb to [spec,FinP] in (41)-(43). The position of the complementizer (in boldface) before the subject tells us that the subject is below Force. The clause is not VSO; rather, from sentences like (41), one would conclude that the basic BH word order is SVO.

(41) ha-ʔaḥ-ē-k-em yā-bō-ū l-am-milḥāmā
Q- brother-MPL-2-MPL 3-go.NPST.IND-MPL to-DET-war
wa-ʔatt-em t-ēšāb-ū pōh
and-2-MPL 2-stay.NPST.IND-MPL here
‘Are your brothers to go to war while you stay here?’ (Numbers 32:6)

(42) hinnēḥ ʔānāš-īm bā-ū hēnā hal-lāyālā
lo! man-MPL come.PST.IND-3MPL here DET-night
‘Look! Some of the Israelites have come here tonight.’ (Joshua 2:2)

(43) lū yišmāʾēl yi-ḥyeḥ lapānē-k-ā
IRR Ishmael 3-live.NPST.IND.MSG before-2-MSG
‘If only Ishmael might live under your blessing.’ (Genesis 17:18)

5.3 Force > topic > verb > subject

When a non-subject constituent is the topic, the verb precedes the subject, as expected. A single constituent (square-bracketed) now appears between the overt complementizer and the finite verb, as shown in (44)-(46). Basic word order in BH is therefore not SVO, as (41)-(43) suggest, but rather V2, as discussed earlier.

(44) hā- [min=hā-ʔēš ʔāšer lā-biṭī ʔākol=mimmēn-n-ū] ʔākāl-t-ā pro
Q- from=DET-tree that to-NEG eat.IND=from-3-MSG eat.PST.IND-2-MSG 2MSG
‘Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?’ (Genesis 3:11)

(45) hēn [l-ī] lōʔ nātat-t-ā pro zārāʾ
lo! to-1SG NEG give.PST.IND-2-MSG 2MSG seed
‘You have given me no children.’ (Genesis 15:3)

(46) lū [šāqūl] yi-š-sāqēl kaʾš-ī
google.INFO.ABS 3-MID-weigh.NPST.IND.MSG anguish-1SG
‘If only my anguish could be weighed.’ (Job 6:2)

We arrive again at the clause structure in (47). However, we have now established explicitly that the topic has not raised beyond the complementizer, and thus cannot be in [spec,ForceP]. Moreover, we observe that only one constituent appears between the illocutionary-force particles and the finite verb.

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17 As we shall see below, the verb moves out of FiniteP to Top, and the subject, when topical, moves to [spec,TopP].
5.4 Null-subject pronouns and pseudo-V1

Having set the clause structure in (47) on a firm foundation, we can now re-examine the null subject pronoun and its position in the clause. Representative data are given in (48)-(53).

(48) ha- pro yda'-'tem 
Q- 2MPL know.STATIVE-2MPL ACC=Laban son.GEN=Nahor
'Do you know Laban, Nahor's grandson?' (Genesis 29:5)

(49) he- pro hōdāl-tī 
Q- 1SG give.up.PST.-1SG ACC=sweetness-1SG
'Should I [a fig tree] give up my fruit, so good and sweet?' (Judges 9:11)

(50) wa-hinnēh pro lō=ha-ğgad=l-i 
and-lo! 3MSG NEG=CAUS-PASS-told.PST.IND.3MSG=to-1SG DET-half
'Indeed, not even half was told to me.' (1 Kings 10:7)

(51) wa-hinnēh pro nātan yād-ō 
and-lo! 3MSG give.PST.IND.3MSG hand-3MSG
'Because he had given his hand in pledge.' (Ezekiel 17:18)

(52) lū= pro hi-qšāb-t-ā 
IRR 2MSG CAUS-attend.PST.IND-2-MSG to-commandment-FPL-1SG
'If only you had paid attention to my commands.' (Isaiah 48:18)

(53) lū= pro mát-nū ba-ʔereš mišráyim 
IRR 1PL die.PST.IND-1PL in-land.GEN Egypt
'If only we had died in Egypt!' (Numbers 14:2)

Let us return briefly to the alternative view that if no overt topic can be seen before the verb, no topicalization has occurred. Under this view, the correlation between a lack of topicalization and the absence of an overt subject would be completely coincidental. The presence of a topic projection in the
clause would either also be coincidentally related to the presence of an overt subject (which might or might not be the topic), or it would have no features needing to be checked. The correlation between null subjects and apparently V1 clauses is a major syntactic generalization, which can be captured if we adopt the structural analysis of (52) in (54), but not under the no-topicalization view. We shall refer to clauses of this sort, with a phonologically null subject in [spec,TopP], as “pseudo-V1” clauses.

(54)

6 Rhetorical questions and polarity in BH

We now turn to rhetorical questions, a statistically prevalent construction in the biblical text, which will provide evidence for yet another projection in the left periphery of the clause, this one between Force and Top.

6.1 Typology of questions

We may directly compare the syntax and semantics of BH questions with the typology of non-wh questions in Latin (Morwood 1999: 92-93). First, both languages have a neutral yes/no question, headed in Latin by the postposed clitic ne, and in BH by the complementizer hà ‘is it the case?’ Next, both languages have a negative rhetorical question, headed in Latin by ne + nōn → nōnne, and in BH by hà + lōˀ ‘is it not the case?’. There is also a positive rhetorical question introduced in Latin by num ‘whether’ and in BH by hà + ˀim ‘if, whether’. Finally, Latin has another interrogative particle an and its negation an ne/an nōn which gives a rhetorical exclamation of surprise, indignation, disgust, etc.: ‘Can it really be that ...?!’ It is this last sort of question that is formed by verb movement in BH, as we shall see in section 6.4 below.

6.2 Negative rhetorical questions and high negation

We will argue that negative rhetorical questions in BH are characterized by the presence of a high negation, housed in Polarity Phrase, which occupies a position below the overt complementizer in Force,
and above a (possibly) overt topic in [spec,TopP]. The syntactic evidence is given first, followed by a semantic argument from the rhetorical force of high negation.

To begin with, consider the example in (55). The topic occurs after the complementizer and the negative particle lōʾ (in bold) and before the finite verb. The negative lōʾ and the finite verb typically form a single prosodic constituent, to see them split by the topic is decidedly unusual. The independent behaviour of the negative here suggests that it heads its own projection, which we call Polarity Phrase or ΣP (Laka 1990). The proposed analysis is given in (56).

(55) hā-lōʾ ʾal kiʾêñ ʾēlōh-ay ba-qirb-i mašāʾ-û-nî hā-rāʾ-ôt Q-NEG upon because=NEG god-1SG in-midst-1SG find.PST.IND-3PL-1SG DET-evil-FPL

hā-ʾélleh DET-this.PL

‘Have not these disasters come upon us because our God is not with us?’ (Deuteronomy 31:17)

(56)

The negative particle lōʾ is not the only element that can appear between Force and TopP. In a yes/no existential question, one of two particles, ʾêñ ‘there is not’ and yēš ‘there is’, appears after the complementizer hā and before the topic, while the element quantified by the particle appears lower in the clause, below the topic. In (57), ʾêñ ‘there is not’ which quantifies over ʾiššā ‘woman’, appears before the topic PP, while ʾiššā appears at the end of the clause. Similarly, yēš ‘there is’, which quantifies over māqôm ‘place’, appears before the PP topic in (58), while māqôm appears after it. These existential

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18 See also Rizzi’s (2001) Interrogative Phrase (IntP).
19 The 1PL reading is derived from the larger context, but is not warranted grammatically.
particles can also be found immediately below other overt complementizers: in (59), for example, the negative existential appears as an independent word below the complementizer hinnêh.

(57) ha-ʔên bi-bn-ôt ʔah-ê-kâ û-bâ-kol=ammm-î ʔîssâ
Q-3x among-daughter-FPL.GEN brother-MPL-2MSG and-among-all=people-1SG woman
‘Isn’t there an acceptable woman among your relatives or among all our people?’ (Judges 13:3)

(58) hâ-yêš bêt= ʔâbi-k măqôm lâ-nû lâ-lîn
Q-3x LOC.house.GEN= father-2FSG place to-1PL to-sleep.INF
‘Is there room in your father’s house for us to spend the night?’ (Genesis 24:23)

(59) wa-hinnêh ʔên=yôsêp b-ab-bôr
and-lo! ~3x=Joseph in-DET-cistern
‘and saw that Joseph was not there [in the cistern].’ (Genesis 37:29)

It can easily be shown that the high negation in (55) is distinct from ordinary clausal negation, which is always adjacent to the finite verb, since there are clauses in which both appear. One such case is shown in (60b), where two instances of the negative lô (in bold) are separated by the topic darkêkem.

(60) a. hâ- dark-î lô yi-t-tâkêkê
Q- way.MSG-1SG NEG 3-MID-estimate.NPST.IND.MSG
‘Is my way unjust?

b. hâ- lô dark-ê-k-em lô’ yi-t-tâkêkê-û
Q- NEG way-MPL-2-MPL NEG 3-MID-estimate.NPST.IND-MPL
‘Is it not your ways that are unjust?’ (Ezekiel 18:25)

High negation also appears in non-interrogative clauses. In (61), the imperative negative ʔal precedes the topic adverbial lâ’ad, which in turn precedes the finite verb.

(61) wa-ʔal= lâ’ad ti-zkôr ʕawôn
and-NEG= forever 2-remember.MSG sin
‘do not remember our sins forever.’ (Isaiah 64:8)

We also find apparent instances of high negation with lô without an overt complementizer, as in (62). The NIV translators seem to be trying to express constituent negation, assuming that the adverbial infinitive môt ‘die’ is directly negated. However, such a parse would give a reading that amounts to ‘You will die, but not surely’, or perhaps ‘it is not certain that you will die’. Neither of these readings makes good sense in this context, which demands something like ‘It is surely not the case that you will die’, as reflected in the JPS ‘You are not going to die’. Moreover, the NIV seems to be led astray by the KJ ‘Ye shall not surely die’. In the latter translation, it is quite possible that the placement of not is purely a function of Elizabethan grammar.

(62) lô= môt tâ-mût-ûn
NEG= die.INF.ABS 2-die.NPST.IND-MPL
‘You will not surely die.’ (Genesis 3:4)

The semantic argument flows from the observation that negated questions are rhetorical questions demanding the answer ‘yes’. We therefore propose that there is a rhetorical operator high in the syntactic structure, responsible for the reversed polarity. Accordingly, we posit the syntactic feature [RHETORICAL] or [RH], located in head of ΣP.

Our understanding of [RH] is consistent with Han (1998, 2002), Romero & Han (2003, 2004). In the absence of the privative feature [RH], an ordinary yes/no question P? simply seeks an answer that chooses between P and ~P. Following Groenendijk & Stokhof (1985), we assume that the question partitions the set of all possible worlds as in (63). However, following Sadock (1971, 1974), we assume that a rhetorical question does not seek an answer, but rather is a strong negative assertion, as indicated in
(64). Thus, the rhetorical question \( P? \) effectively has the illocutionary force of \( \sim P! \).\(^{20}\) Conversely, the negative rhetorical question \( \sim P? \) has the force of \( \sim \sim P! \), or more simply, \( P! \), as in (65).

(63) \[[[Does Vince drink?]]
   i. Vince does drink.
   ii. Vince does not drink.

(64) RHETORICAL([[Does Vince drink?]]]
   i. *Vince does drink.
   ii. Vince does not drink.

(65) RHETORICAL([[Doesn’t Vince drink?]]]
   i. Vince does drink.
   ii. *Vince does not drink.

6.3 Positive rhetorical questions and polarity heads

This account of negative rhetorical questions predicts that there should also be a positive rhetorical question demanding the answer ‘no’. On the basis of Latin *num* ‘whether’, employed in the positive rhetorical question, the corresponding BH particle might be *‘im* ‘if, whether’. Moreover, we expect that *‘im, which would presumably spell out a positive Σ head with the feature [RH], will appear below the particle expressing illocutionary force and above the topic preceding the finite verb. These predictions are borne out.

First, *‘im can be used independently to form a rhetorical question that expects the answer ‘no’. Such is the case, for example, in (66); from the context it is clear that the king’s loyal servants are certain the answer is ‘no’. Notice that the particle precedes the overt topic, which in turn precedes the finite verb; the particle is clearly higher than the Topic projection. Consider another instance in (67); even though these are verbless clauses, it is still clear that the subject kōḥî has been inverted with a topical predicate.

(66) *‘im mē-*ā‘et *‘ādôn-i ham-melek
   if from-with lord-1SG DET-king
   ni-hyah had-dābār haz-zeh
   MID-be.PST.IND.3MSG DET-thing DET-PROX
   ‘Is this something my lord the king has done?’ (1 Kings 1:27)

(67) *‘im= kōaḥ *‘ābān-im kōh-i *‘im= bašār-i nāhûš
   if= strength.GEN stone-MPL strength-1SG if= flesh-1SG bronze
   ‘Do I have the strength of stone? Is my flesh bronze?’ (Job 6:12)

Even more striking and supportive of the hypothesis that *‘im is a Σ head is that this particle can introduce negation even without a question particle, as shown in (68) (*māgēn in this example must be understood as a HT*).

(68) māgēn *‘im pro y-ē-rā‘eh wā-rōmaḥ
   shield if 3MSG 3MSG-MID-see.NPST.IND and-spear
   ‘and not a shield or spear was seen.’ (Judges 5:8)

Furthermore, it can be shown that *‘im occupies the Σ head, immediately following an overt complementizer in Force. This is illustrated in the question in (69), in which hā spells out Force. The illocutionary force of the question, as predicted, is a strong negation: ‘Moses, tell us it isn’t so!’

\(^{20}\) Han considers this negation in light of the Gricean Maxim of Quantity: keep the contribution as informative as required. Thus, for her, this negation is a pragmatic implicature. “In effect, rhetorical *yes-no* questions implicate the speaker’s expectation towards the answer in the strongest possible form” (Han, 2002: 216).
The analysis here of `ʔim` as a Polarity item finds a direct parallel in Rizzi’s (2001) analysis of Italian se and Spanish si ‘if’. He shows that the interrogative complementizer se occupies a position distinct from and lower than the position of the declarative complementizer che ‘that’. He concludes that se projects an Interrogative Phrase (ΣP) that may also host wh- sentence adverbials: “an assumption which helps explain certain peculiarities of such elements in Italian and other Romance languages” (p. 287).

We have assumed that the existential particles yēš and ʾên, and the high negation and ʾim, appear in the same position in the structure: namely in Σ. However, this turns out not to be true. Consider now (70), in which ʾim co-occurs with the existential particle ʾên. This pattern suggests that there is an additional projection between Force and TopP, and that if high negation and ʾim occupy Σ, the additional projection sits between Σ and TopP. We thus propose the expanded structure in (71), with the new projection provisionally labelled ExistentialP or ΞP. In the next section, we will see another construction in which all three particles appear.

(70) ha- ʾim ʾèn ʿezr-āt-ʾi b-ʾi wā-tūšiyyā
Q- if ~∃x help-FSG-1SG in-1SG and-success
ni-ddāh-ā mimmen-nī
MID-drive, out-PST.IND-3SG from-1SG
‘Do I have any power to help myself, now that success has been driven from me?’ (Job 6:13)

6.4 Exclamatory rhetorical questions and verb movement

BH has a further type of rhetorical question which clearly encodes exclamatory force, and is the direct counterpart of Latin an in the positive (a strong negative exclamation) and anne in the negative (a strong positive exclamation). The BH particle ʾāp ‘indeed’ is used, giving an interpretation something like ‘how much more?’ in the positive, and ‘how much less?’ when the clause is negated.

In (72), ʾāp appears below the complementizer ha and above the topic šōnēʾ mišpāt, which in turn precedes the finite verb. Structurally, this clause has ordinary V2 syntax in TopP. The example in (73) is an instance of pseudo-V1, with pro in [spec,TopP].

(72) ha- ʾāp [šōnēʾ mišpāt] ʾaḥ-ḥābhōš
Q- indeed hate.PTCP.MSG.GEN judgement 3-control.NPST.IND.MSG
‘Can he who hates justice govern?’ (Job 34:17)

(73) ha- ʾāp pro t-āpēr mišpāt-ʾi
Q- indeed 2MSG 2-discredit.NPST.IND.MSG judgement-1SG
‘Would you discredit my [the Lord’s] justice?’ (Job 40:8)
As with other rhetorical questions, we can find instances of exclamatory rhetorical questions with Force, Σ, and Ξ all overtly spelled out, as in (74), with the structure in (75).

(74) ha- 'ap ẓên = ẓô't
Q- indeed 3x this
‘Is this not true?’ (Amos 2:11)

(75) \[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{ForceP} \\
\text{Force} \\
\Sigma \text{P} \\
\Sigma \ ap \\
\Xi \text{P} \\
\Xi \ ẓên \\
\text{TopP} \\
\text{DP} \\
\text{FinP}
\end{array}
\]

With all this in mind, we come finally to the last case we will consider here of apparent V1 order in BH. These are exclamatory rhetorical questions that have no overt Polarity particle, but only the complementizer hā, which we assume is in Force. An examination of such clauses reveals that such questions in fact have a true V1 structure. Consider the sentence in (76), understood to be uttered by the deity. The questions express enraged surprise, and are clearly understood as strong negative exclamations. The insertion of ever into the translation is one way to capture the distinction; similarly any other is stronger than another.

(76) a. hā- šāmaʾ ʿām qôl ʿēlōhîm
Q- hear.PST.IND.3MSG people voice GEN god
‘Has any other people heard the voice of God?’ (Deuteronomy 4:33)

b. ʾō hā- nissâ ʿēlōhîm lā-bôʾ lā-qāḥat l-ô
or Q- try.PST.IND.3MSG god to-go.INF to-take.INF to-3MSG
‘Has any god ever tried to take for himself ...’ (Deuteronomy 4:34)

(77) hā- yi-pālēʾ mēʾādôn-āy dáḇār
Q- 3-MID-difficult.NPST.IND.MSG from-lord-1SG thing
‘Is anything too hard for the Lord?’ (Genesis 18:14)

In these examples, the grammatical subjects are overt, and therefore we cannot assume that there is a phonologically null element in [spec,TopP]. The subjects ʿām ‘people’ in (76a) and ʿēlōhîm ‘god’ in (76b) must therefore be assumed to be in [spec,TopP] in their respective clauses, and the PP mēʾādônāy ‘for the Lord’ in (77) likewise.

What this tells us is that the verb in each of these clauses has moved higher than Top, and must occupy a higher functional head which is nonetheless still below the complementizer. We propose that the verb moves to the Σ head, to permit the spellout of a Polarity feature we call [EXCLAMATIVE]. This feature is the null counterpart of the overt Σ particle ʿap. It bears a strong uninterpretable topic feature that triggers verb movement to Σ. The derivation is given in (78). Notice that in the English translation, the exclamatory property is reinforced by the use of anything instead of something or just a thing.
Exclamatory rhetorical questions in BH are thus true V1 constructions, in which the verb moves past the topic to a position preceded only by the Force head. If this is correct, then we expect that verb-movement should also be detectable in negative rhetorical questions headed by ḫalōˁ, and that expectation is borne out. In (79), the subject is again overt, ruling out the possibility of a null subject pronoun before the verb. The overt subject thus occupies [spec,TopP] and, as in the previous example, the verb has raised to Σ. The translation, phrased as an assertion without negation anywhere, confirms our hypothesis this is a negative rhetorical question with the particular semantics associated with the [RH] feature in Σ.

(78)

![Diagram of verb-movement in BH](attachment://diagram.png)

A consequence of this account, which seems to be correct if somewhat inconvenient for translators, is that all questions with a null subject pronoun in [spec,TopP] are in principle ambiguous, given that the movement of the verb from Top to Σ across a null subject does not change the surface word order. Recall above in (76) how verb movement past the overt subject to Σ correlated with the marked exclamative interpretation. In the same string of questions given in (76) and (77), we find the examples in (80), which happen to have null subjects. The context requires that they too have the exclamative reading, even though the same words in the same order in another context might be best interpreted as neutral yes/no questions.

(79) ḫalōˁ ṣiwwā ḥādôn-āy ṣêlōhê=yišrāʕêl lêk
Q-NEG command.PST.IND.3MSG lord-1SG god.GEN=Israel go.IMP.MSG
(lit: Doesn’t the Lord, God of Israel, command you: “Go”?)
‘The Lord, God of Israel, commands you: “Go.”’ (Judges 4:6)

A possible way of confirming or refuting the interpretation based on context would be to consider the phonology of the canonical declamation of the biblical text. This reading tradition distinguishes different levels of phonological phrasing, and there could be some signal in the phrasing of whether the
clause is a neutral yes/no question or an exclamative rhetorical question. In fact, the accents are of two kinds: rising and falling. As Han (2002: 215f) notes, in English a rhetorical question has a falling intonation, whereas a simple yes/no question has a rising intonation.

7 Hanging topics and asymmetric coordination

Recall the question we left open in section 4, namely the structural position of the hanging topic (HT). Hebraists traditionally refer to the HT as the *casus pendens* or ‘hanging case’, while others call it ‘left-dislocation’, taking the term from traditional work in early generative grammar. We will use the descriptive term *hanging topic* to avoid presupposing any particular analysis.

What distinguishes the HT, it is standardly thought, is coreference with an item lower in the clause, typically a pronoun. Holmstedt (2014: 119f) provides an excellent summary of the BH coreferential possibilities and resumptive strategies:

Left-dislocation in Hebrew falls into four basic arrangements depending on the type of resumptive NP within the clause: a) resumption by an independent pronoun; b) resumption by a clitic pronoun; c) resumption by a coreferential locative adverb, such as נָשָׁר [šām ‘there’], and d) resumption by a coreferential NP, such as an anaphoric epithet ...

In section 4, we raised two questions regarding the structures in (34)-(35), repeated here as (81)-(82). As Holmstedt (2014: n. 14, p. 119) notes, the traditional generative analysis adjoins the HT to the left edge of the clause, illustrated in (82) as adjunction to ForceP. For Holmstedt, this is why the HT cannot be embedded (n. 14, p. 119; pp. 122f). An alternative pursued by Benincà (2001, 2004) is shown in (81), in which the hanging topic occupies the specifier of its own projection, here labeled XP. The questions, then, are first, which structure is correct; and second, if (81) is correct, what is the identity of the projection hosting the hanging topic?

(81) ![Diagram](image1.png)

(82) ![Diagram](image2.png)

We will argue that (81) is correct, but that XP is not a projection within the CP system. Rather, it is a higher Conjunction Phrase (&P). We will show that treating the HT as simply an adjoined DP resumed by a pronoun misses a number of generalizations that our account will capture. First, we turn to an examination of modal coordination in BH.

7.1 The syntax of BH modal coordination

A standard view of coordinate structures illustrated in (83) (Kayne, 1994, among others) provides an attractive account of the asymmetry in BH modal coordination. The protasis appears in [spec,&P] with the sequential or consequential clause following as the complement of the head &. In modal coordination,

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21 The structure in (82) does not assume, as we do, a rich articulation of the CP domain. We will be proposing a different structure.
the discourse-salient element within the higher clause in [spec,&P] is resumed in the lower, complement clause. Here, we examine successively smaller phrases in [spec,&P], noting the HT-like behaviour of some discourse-salient constituent contained in [spec, &P], ultimately arriving at a structure in which [spec,&P] contains just a bare DP that behaves as predicted. In short, the HT, with its characteristic resumption, falls out as a special case of modal coordination.

Following Kayne (1994) and DeCaen (1995: §9.4.2, pp. 293-302), we begin with the asymmetrical coordinate structure in (83).

(83) &P
    XP & YP

In the typical narrative scenario, XP is a full clause reporting on some event, and YP exhibits modal coordination, expressing a meaning like and then verbed. This can be seen in (84). The XP clause has V2 order, and the finite verb hiššîˀánî is in the past indicative. The interpretation is a simple admission of fact. The modally coordinated YP follows as the complement of &: and [then] I ate. As we will show, a general notion expressive in English by then is what unites all such asymmetrical constructions.

(84) han-nāhāš hi-ššîˀá-nî w-ā-ʾōkēl
    DET-snake CAUS-deceive.PST.IND-1SG and-THEN-1SG.ate.NPST.SBJV 1SG
‘The serpent deceived me, and I ate.’ (Genesis 3:13)

We analyze the syntactic structure of this asymmetrical sequence as in (85). The unmarked clause appears here in [spec,&P], headed simply by the interpretable feature [DECLARATIVE]. The syntactically and semantically marked clause in the subjunctive mood is selected by &, giving a different structure for the second clause. Note that a case can be made for understanding the first-person pronoun nî in the first clause as the discourse-salient element, and the phonologically null subject pronoun as its resumption.

(85) &P
    ForceP & ForceP
    Force DECL TopP w
    DP hannāhāš Top hi-ššîˀá-nî FinP

7.2 Subordinate clauses in [spec,&P]

Virtually any sort of clause may appear in [spec,&P]. Crucially, there is always a semantic sequencing: if XP, then YP, protasis and then apodosis. Arguably, any constituent in [spec,&P] functions as a generalized protasis.

Take for example the bi-clausal structure in (86). The subordinate clause with the unmarked past indicative is headed by the complementizer yáʾan ‘because’, and sits in [spec,&P]. The consequent of yáʾan ‘because’ is the modally coordinated clause. Further, note again that there is something like a
hanging topic here: the null subject pro in the complement of & can be understood as resuming ʿādōn-āy ‘the lord’ in the protasis.

(86) [yāʾan māʾās-t-ā pro ʿet=dābar ʿādōn-āy]  
   because reject.PST.IND-2-MSG 2MSG acc=word.GEN lord-1SG  
   wa-y-yi-mōs-k-ā pro mim-mēlek  
   and-THEN-3-reject.NPST.SBJV.MSG-2-MSG 3SG from-king  
   ‘Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has rejected you as king.’ (1 Samuel 15:23)

The relation between the two constituents need not be temporal. It can be causal, as in (86), or it can reflect a move from general to specific information, as discussed by Waltke and O’Connor (1990). They call this the “epexegetical” use of modal coordination: “The major fact or situation is stated first, and then the particulars of details, component or concomitant situations are filled in” (§33.2.2, p. 551). They give (87) as an example of this kind of connection.

(87) ʿābāl ʿiššāʾ=ʾalmānā ʿānī wa-y-yā-mot ʿīš-ī  
   indeed woman=widow 1sg and-THEN-3-die.NPST.SBJV.MSG man-1SG  
   ‘I am indeed a widow; my husband is dead.’ (2 Samuel 14:5)

Temporal, causal, and epexegetical relations can all be seen, from a discourse perspective, as first setting the stage with the protasis, and then moving the discourse forward with the apodosis. The anaphoric connection between a nominal in the protasis and a pronominal or epithet in the apodosis connects the scene being set with the following clause. This connection can be seen in all four examples in (86)-(89), where the coreferential elements are indicated in boldface. It is this same connection that we observe in HT constructions (see Holmstedt 2014: (32); pp. 123f for a similar point).

(88) [kī kol=ʾōkēl ḥāmēṣ]  
   when every=eat.PTCP.MSG yeast  
   wā-ni-krat-ā han-nēpeš ha-hī  
   and.MID-cut.off-PST.SBJV-3FSG DET-soul DET-DIST.FSG from-Israel  
   ‘for whoever eats anything with yeast in it ... must be cut off from Israel.’ (Exodus 12:15)

(89) [kī nāʿar yišrāʾēl] w-ā-ʾō-hābē-hū  
   when boy Israel and-THEN-1SG-love.NPST.SBJV-3MSG  
   ‘When Israel was a child, I loved him.’ (Hosea 11:1)

Since BH is a null-subject language, when the resumptive element is a subject, it is in general phonologically null. In (90), coreference holds between the nominalized clause ‘he who is found to have it’ in [spec,&P] and the covert subject in the modally coordinated consequent. Moreover, in this case the null-subject pronoun refers to the entire nominalized clause in [spec,&P], taking us one step closer to the canonical casus pendens construction.

(90) [ʾāšer yi-m-māṣē ʿitt-ō mē-ʿābād-ē-k-ā]  
   that 3-MID-find.NPST.IND.MSG with-3MSG from-servant-MPL-2-MSG  
   wā-mēt pro  
   and-THEN-die.PST.SBJV-3MSG 3MSG  
   ‘If any of your servants is found to have it, he will die.’ (Genesis 44:9)

In light of the foregoing examples, we propose that these are all instances of the same construction, and that the standard definition of the casus pendens should be seen as a specific type of modal coordination. In both modal coordination and the casus pendens, overt pronominal resumption is not necessary; the null-subject pronoun pro may in general serve as the resumptive pronoun. Second, the HT antecedent may constitute either the entire [spec,&P] constituent or only a part of it. It remains to be seen whether there are any structural constraints on exactly where the antecedent appears within the protasis; we leave this question for future work.
7.3 Prepositional phrases in [spec,&P]

We now turn to constructions in which a constituent apparently smaller than a full clause appears in [spec,&P], fulfilling the protasis role. Consider the infinitival in [spec,&P] in (91). The phonologically null subject of the infinitive is recoverable from the pronominal suffix -āh ‘she’ of mātāh, and is resumed in the consequent by the pronominal object in the PP ʿälē-hā.

(91) ú-[ka-ʾēt mūt-āh] wa-ta-dabbēr-nā han-ni-ṣṣāb-ōt ʿālē-hā

and-as-time.GEN die.INF-3FSG and-THEN-3-say.NPST.SUBJ3-FPL DET-MID-stand.PTCP-FPL upon-3FSG

‘As she was dying, the women attending her said ...’ (1 Samuel 4:20)

(92) [b-ay-yōm haš-šaliṣî] wa-yi-ṣṣāq ʿabrāḥām ʿet=ṯēn-āyw

in-DET-day DET-third and-THEN-3-lift.NPST.SUBJ.MSG Abraham ACC=eyes-3MSG

‘On the third day Abraham looked up.’ (Genesis 22:4)

In (92), we take the entire temporal PP (square-bracketed) to be the HT, resumed by -y- ‘then’ in the apodosis. Under this view, both (91) and (92) can be seen as involving the same kind of scene-setting, and the same kind of anaphoric relation between protasis and apodosis, as with the modal coordinations discussed above.

Finally, consider the complex structure in (93). In the first pair, the subject šānāyim ‘two’ is resumed by the object -hem affixed to the preposition lā-. In the continuation, we have a second instance of the same construction. Here, above the wh-word ʿēk in Force, we have the PP lēḥād as HT, which we propose is resumed by a null pronominal lower in the clause. The null pronominal is recoverable because the idiom is ‘warm to someone’.

(93) a. [gām ʿīm=yi-škāb-ū šānāyim] wa-ḥam lā-hem

also if=3-lie.down-NPST.IND-MPL two and-THEN-warm.NPST.SUBJ.MSG to-3MPL

‘Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm.’ (Ecclesiastes 4:11)

b. ʿū-ṣ-lēḥād ʿēk yē-ḥām <l-ō>

and-to-one how 3-warm.NPST.IND.MSG to-3MSG

‘But how can one keep warm alone?’ (Ecclesiastes 4:11)

We turn now to the standard cases of casus pendens, in which [spec,&P] is occupied by a simple DP, itself the HT.

7.4 Bare DPs in [spec,&P]

Having surveyed the variety of constructions subsumed under BH asymmetrical modal coordination, we propose to treat them as variations of a common syntactic and semantic structure by broadening the definition of what can count as a HT. On this account, what is standardly considered the casus pendens in BH is in fact a special case of this more general phenomenon.

There is no principled difference between (93b) and the structure in (94). In both, the element in [spec,&P] is a PP, though in (94) it is a case-marked accusative instead of the dative in (93). We assume that the HT is accusative in (94) in agreement with the resumptive direct object in the consequent. Seen this way, (94) has an overt object pronoun resuming a DP—the heart of the traditional definition of the casus pendens—though this DP is embedded within the PP headed by ʿēt.22

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22 Assuming that ʿēt in (94) is not a preposition (as it is taken to be by some traditional scholars of BH) but rather a case marker heading a case projection KP, the difference between sentences like (94) and the canonical casus pendens shrinks even further.
(94) wa-[gam ʔet=maʕākā ʔimm-ō]p w-a-ya-siré-hā mig-gobîrâ and-even ACC=Maacah mother-3MSG and-THEN-3-turn.away.NPST.SBJV.MSG-3FSG from-lady ‘He even deposed his grandmother Maacah from her position as queen mother.’ (1 Kings 15:13)

There is very little difference between (94) on the one hand, and (95)-(96) on other. In (95) we see what would unambiguously be deemed a HT: a bare DP bnē yiśrāʾēl ‘Israelites’ resumed by a pronoun, in this case the object pronoun -hem. In (96) we see the identical structure, but with a phonologically null pro resuming the nominative HT.

(95) ʔu-[bn-ē yiśrāʾēl ...] wa-y-yimlōk ʔâlē-hem rahab’ām and- son-MPL.GEN Israel ... and-THEN-3-rule.NPST.SUBJ.MSG over-3MPL Rehoboam ‘But as for the Israelites ... Rehoboam still ruled over them.’ (1 Kings 12:17)

(96) [haq-qōrēp la-mē=hay-yām] wa-y-yi-ṣpāk-ēm DET-call.PTCP.MSG to-waters.GEN=DET=sea and-THEN-3-pour.NPST.SBJV.MSG-3MSPL ‘who calls for the waters of the sea and pours them out over the face of the land’ (Amos 9:6)

In the absence of any clear difference between the constructions with different kinds of constituents in [spec,&P], we conclude that the casus pendens as conventionally understood is simply a special case of asymmetrical BH coordination. The analysis of a nominal HT construction is given in (97). By extension, we claim that all hanging topics are in [spec,&P], crucially outside the CP system.

(97)
```
  &P
   DP
    haqqōrēp
    & wa
     ForceP
      wa
       Force
       y+yiṣpākēm
       TopP
        DP ...
         pro
```

There is thus a direct parallel between conventional HT constructions and the complex BH biclausal structures, both modal coordination and the generalized protasis + apodosis construction. The parallel is explained if HTs and the biclausal coordinate structures are simply two sides of the same coin. Further support comes from the example in (98) with its parse in (99), which makes a link between the asymmetric coordinate structures and the casus pendens. We understand here an elliptical protasis headed by ʿim ‘And what about Sarah?’, in which the embedded DP šārā is coreferential with the lower bat tišʿim šānâ ‘nonagenarian’.

(98) [wa-ʾim šārā] há-bat tišʿim šānâ t-ēlēd and-if Sarah Q-daughter.GEN ninety years 3FSG-give.birth.NPST.IND ‘Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?’ (Genesis 17:17)
8 Conclusion

In this paper we have brought a wide range of BH constructions together, showing that they can be analyzed in a straightforward and regular fashion using the richly articulated clause structure and formal features of current minimalist syntax, along with the assumption that covert subjects are syntactically present, though phonologically null. We have argued that the V2 pattern in BH is primarily driven by a strong TOPIC feature heading a functional projection above Tense but below the rest of the Comp system, attracting a topical XP constituent to its specifier and the finite verb to its head. In this BH is very similar to OF. A well-defined class of apparently V1 clauses was shown to involve the topicalization of a phonologically null subject pronoun; we characterized this class as pseudo-V1 clauses since they are structurally V2.

Having established TopP as the locus of the V2 pattern, we then showed that in questions and narrative-inversion constructions, the verb moves to a functional head above Top, surfacing to the left of the topocalized constituent and thus obscuring the fact that the V2 pattern still holds at TopP. We explored a variety of other constructions that seem superficially to violate the V2 pattern. The result was a richly articulated clausal superstructure, with functional heads sometimes filled by dedicated particles spelling out marked features, but sometimes filled by verb movement. Each of the functional categories we propose is attested in other languages, and the movement processes we observe in BH are also widely attested. In short, BH is a relatively well-behaved head-medial language, with the finite verb moving to a variety of higher functional heads in predictable and systematic fashion.

References

JPS Jewish Publication Society
KJ King James (1611)
NIV New International Version


BIBLICAL HEBREW: A FORMAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE LEFT PERIPHERY


