ADJUSTING OUR FOCUS

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A review of *Focus Structure in Biblical Hebrew: A Study of Word Order and Information Structure.* By Katsuomi Shimasaki. Pp. xvi + 314. Bethesda, Md.: CDL Press, 2002. Cloth, $35.00

Is there a reason why Biblical Hebrew sometimes exhibits verb-subject word order (e.g., נָתַן אֱלֹהִים) and other times subject-verb order (אֱלֹהִים נָתַן)? Are there discernible patterns and motivations for such word order variation in BH? These questions have been asked with increasing frequency in the last few years in a number of studies.[1] These studies have reminded Hebraists that word order is much more than merely a syntactic issue—word order is intimately connected to discourse concerns. Kutsuomi Shimasaki's *Focus Structure in Biblical Hebrew* is the most recent addition to this growing body of research. In this article I will address the contributions and shortcomings of Shimasaki's monograph, and in the process highlight some of the theoretical issues regarding word order and information structure within BH grammar that must be addressed by Hebraists.

The central thesis of Shimasaki's monograph is well-articulated in the introductory chapter: while significant advances have been made in the analysis of Biblical Hebrew word order in the past two decades, no single approach has been able to account for the complexity of the word order variation witnessed in the Hebrew Bible. Shimasaki's goal is clear—"to answer some of the questions raised in the past concerning the word order of Biblical Hebrew" (p. 30). He specifies four aims for his analysis: "(1) to discover the underlying principle for both nominal and verbal clause word order; (2) to ascertain the role of the clause-initial position; (3) to elucidate the functional difference of different word orders (SP/PS, XV/VX); and (4) to clarify the relationship among word order, emphasis, and contrast as reflected in the use of Biblical Hebrew" (p. 30). Shimasaki's methodology and corpus of data are

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[1] For example, see C. H. J. van der Merwe, "The Function of Word Order in Old Hebrew—with Special Reference to Cases where a Syntagmeme Precedes a Verb in Joshua," *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 17 (1991): 129-144; B. L. Bandstra, "Word Order and Emphasis in Biblical Hebrew Narrative: Syntactic Observations on Genesis 22 from a Discourse Perspective," in *Linguistics and Biblical Hebrew* (ed. W. R. Bodine. Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1992): 109-124; M. Rosenbaum, *Word-Order Variation in Isaiah 40-55* (Assen, The Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 1997); T. Goldfajn, *Word Order and Time in Biblical Hebrew Narrative* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); J.-M. Heimerdinger, *Topic, Focus and Foreground in Ancient Hebrew Narratives* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999); A. Moshavi, "The Pragmatics of Word Order in Biblical Hebrew: A Statistical Analysis" (Ph.D. diss., Yeshiva University, 2000).

detailed in sections 3.2 and 3.3 of the first chapter (pp. 30-35). The list of "central interests" in the discussion of his methodology is quite helpful in understanding which proposals and theories have influenced his linguistic framework.

The majority of chapter 1 consists a review of the central studies on Biblical Hebrew word order. The review is divided into two sections, one treating the study of verbless clause word order (which Shimasaki refers to as the nominal clause), the other treating the study of verbal clause word order. In the former, the study of the verbless clause is further divided into four periods: before the 1970s, the 1970s and 1980s, the early 1990s, and the close of the 1990s. While the discussion of works before the 1970s is rather brief, the overview of the works of Andersen (1970), Hoftijzer (1973), Muraoka (1985), Revell (1989), and Niccacci (1993) is helpful.[2] Shimasaki compares the different proposals to one another, and deals admirably with the bewildering array of often idiosyncratic definitions used in these previous studies. At the close of this section, Shimasaki hints that he will be building upon the works of Revell (1989) and Niccacci (1993), a position that he later states explicitly when describing his methodology (p. 30).

In the second part of chapter 1, Shimasaki reviews previous studies of verbal clause word order. Like the section on verbless clauses, this section only briefly includes consideration of older works and/or traditional theories, highlighting the positions of Gesenius-Kautzsch-Cowley (1910), Muraoka (1985), and Joüon-Muraoka (1993) in three paragraphs.[3] Shimasaki then moves quickly through the works of Lambdin (1971), Andersen (1974), Khan (1988), Niccacci (1990), Gibson (1994), Gross (1996), and Van der Merwe (1999),[4] before spending considerable space on the theories of

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[2] F. I. Andersen, *The Hebrew Verbless Clause in the Pentateuch* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1970); J. Hoftijzer, "Review: The Nominal Clause Reconsidered," *Vetus Testamentum* 23 (1973): 446-510; T. Muraoka, *Emphatic Words and Structures in Biblical Hebrew* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1985); E. J. Revell, "The Conditioning of Word Order in Verbless Clauses in Biblical Hebrew," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 34 (1989): 1-24; A. Niccacci, "Simple Nominal Clause or Verbless Clause in Biblical Hebrew Prose," *Zeitschrift für Althebräistik* 6 (1993): 216-27.

[3] E. Kautzsch, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar* (trans. A. E. Cowley; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910); T. Muraoka, *Emphatic Words and Structures in Biblical Hebrew* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1985); P. Joüon, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (trans. and rev. T. Muraoka; Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1993).

[4] T. O. Lambdin, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971); F. I. Andersen, *The Sentence in Biblical Hebrew* (The Hague, The Netherlands: Mouton Publishers, 1974); G. Khan, *Studies in Semitic Syntax.* (London: Oxford University Press, 1988); A. Niccacci, *The Syntax of the Verb in Classical Hebrew Prose* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990); J. C. L. Gibson, *Davidson's Introductory Hebrew Grammar - Syntax* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994); W. Gross, *Die Satzteilfolge im Verbalsatz alttestamentlicher Prosa: Untersucht an den Büchern Dtn, Ri und 2 Kön* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Morh, 1996); C. H. J. van der Merwe, J. A. Naudé, and J. H. Kroeze, *A Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999).

Longacre (1989), Endo (1996), and Buth (1995).[5] His discussion of these three scholars is foundational for the ensuing chapters – Shimasaki adopts (and modifies) many pieces of Longacre's discourse approach as well as Endo's and Buth's proposals regarding the relationship of the verbal system, word order, and sequentiality.[6]

Shimasaki concludes chapter 1 by making explicit his methodology, the corpus of data used in his analysis, and a few limitations of his study. Although this section is quite helpful, it highlights more "limitations" of Shimasaki's study than he lists under that rubric. The most prominent of the limitations concern the type and size of his corpus. First, he states explicitly that he does not take "literary genre or text-unit types" into consideration (p. 32), i.e., he does not alter his methodology or assumptions in analyzing the word order and information structure of narrative/non-narrative and prose/poetry materials. Second, he acknowledges that he has based his study on a limited corpus, beginning with selected clauses taken from Andersen (1970) and Muraoka (1985) as well as Deut 4:44-11:32. Finally, he reveals that he restricts his analysis to "only the two-number nominal clauses" (presumably, he means 'two member' verbless clauses) and "the first two constituents of verbal clauses" (p. 35). Given these limitations, one cannot help but wonder how the model that Shimasaki builds in the remainder of the work might be modified if he would have taken genre, a larger corpus, and more complex clauses into consideration.

If we take all of chapter 1 into consideration, without a doubt the most troubling aspect is Shimasaki's discussion of verbal clause word order: he assumes that the "universally . . . recognized . . . normal sequence" of VX (i.e., verb followed by non-verbal element) is accurate (p. 22), but he does not establish it empirically. In this respect, he follows other studies of BH word order in side-stepping this issue. There are two closely related questions that must be addressed in any word order analysis of the the Hebrew Bible: 1) What is 'basic word order'?, a question that has been answered in very different ways within general linguistics;[7] and 2) given some definition of

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[5] R. E. Longacre, *Joseph: A Story of Divine Providence: A Text Theoretical and Textlinguistic Analysis of Genesis 37 and 39-48* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1989); Y. Endo, *The Verbal System of Classical Hebrew in the Joseph Story: An Approach from Discourse Analysis* (Assen, The Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 1996); R. Buth, "Functional Grammar, Hebrew and Aramaic: An Integrated, Textlinguistic Approach to Syntax," in *Discourse Analysis of Biblical Literature* (ed. W. R. Bodine; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), pp. 77-102.

[6] J. A. Cook ("The Biblical Hebrew Verbal System: A Grammaticalization Approach," [Ph.D. diss., The University of Wisconsin – Madison, 2002]), however, has recently shown the "sequential/non-sequential" analysis of the verbal system proposed in Endo (1996) and Buth (1995) to be problematic.

[7] See J. H. Greenberg, "Some Universals of Grammar with Particular Reference to the Order of Meaningful Elements," in *Universals of Language* (ed. J. H. Greenberg; Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1963), pp. 73-113; G. Mallinson and B. J. Blake, *Language Typology: Cross-linguistic Studies in Syntax* (Amsterdam: North-Holland Publishing Company, 1981); J. A. Hawkins, *Word Order Universals*. New York: Academic Press, 1983); A. Siewierska, *Word Order Rules* (London: Croom Helm, 1988); M. Mithun, "Is Basic Word Order Universal?," in *Pragmatics of Word Order Flexibility*

word order, what is the basic word order of BH? These two fundamental questions must be addressed at the outset of any study of BH that has as its goal "to discover the underlying principle for both nominal and verbal clause word order" (p. 30). The implications of these questions are clear for word order analysis — judgments regarding the information structure of BH clauses would change if BH were not a VS (i.e., verb-subject) language.[8] Even Longacre (from whose work Shimasaki draws heavily) states that BH narrative is primarily VS but that "in expository discourse . . . SVO [i.e., subject-verb-object] predominates and is on the mainline."[9] Thus, the possibility that SV may be the basic word order for at least a type of discourse (e.g., expository) suggests that a simple VS position for BH word order as a whole cannot be assumed, as Shimasaki does.

In chapter 2 Shimasaki introduces and defines the type of linguistic analysis known as information structure. He builds upon Lambrecht (1994), who describes information structure in the following manner:

> The student of information structure is . . . concerned with . . . the discourse circumstances under which given pieces of propositional information are expressed via one rather than another possible morphosyntactic or prosodic form . . . . [information structure] is concerned with the question of why one and the same meaning may be expressed by two or more sentence forms.[10]

The primary goal of Shimasaki's second chapter is to address the variety of information structure distinctions and propose a coherent model for his discussion in ensuing chapters. Given the numerous and diverse frameworks as well as the terminological tangle within the general study of information structure, this is a crucial chapter for the rest of his work. The chapter is divided into five parts, each addressing important and rather thorny issues related to the study of information structure: 1) *identifiability*; 2) *focus*;

(ed. D. L. Payne; Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1992), p. 15-61; P. Downing, "Word Order in Discourse: By Way of Introduction," in *Word Order in Discourse* (eds. P. Downing and M. Noonan; Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1995), pp. 1-27; D. L. Payne, "Verb Initial Languages and Information Order," in *Word Order in Discourse* (eds. P. Downing and M. Noonan; Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1995), pp. 449-85.

[8] I argue at length elsewhere that BH is fundamentally an SV language in which VS word order is present in syntactically restricted, predictable environments (R. D. Holmstedt, "The Relative Clause in Biblical Hebrew: A Linguistic Analysis," [Ph.D. diss., The University of Wisconsin – Madison, 2002], pp. 126-239).

[9] R. E. Longacre, *The Grammar of Discourse* (New York: Plenum Press, 1996), p. 23.

[10] K. Lambrecht, *Information Structure and Sentence Form: Topic, Focus, and the Mental Representations of Discourse Referents* (Cambridge Studies in Linguistics 71; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 4-5.

3) *argument* and *predicate*; 4) *topic, comment,* and *theme*; and 5) *new* and *old information, presupposition,* and *assertion.*

The chapter begins with a discussion of identifiability and activation status. In Lambrecht's terms (upon which Shimasaki depends heavily), identifiability "has to do with a speaker's assessment of whether a discourse representation of a particular referent is already stored in the hearer's mind or not."[11] In contrast, activation "has to do with the speaker's assessment of the status of the representation of an identifiable referent": activated, accessible, inactive, or unidentified/brand-new.[12] Simply, we may say that identifiability addresses the question *"Do we know the item being invoked?",* whereas activation addresses the question *"What is the status of the item being invoked?"* as well as the effort needed to use/process the item effectively. Unfortunately, it appears that Shimasaki blurs the lines between these two concepts (this is most evident in his summary paragraph on p. 49), which Lambrecht considers to be "independent cognitive categories."[13] More importantly, though, Shimasaki does not address precisely how these cognitive concepts apply to the study of a textual corpus like the Hebrew Bible. How should we determine that any item in a biblical narrative is "in a person's focus of consciousness" or "in the background awareness" (p. 39) since we do not have access to the consciousnesses of the speakers/listeners outside of the text? To be fair, however, this is a significant theoretical issue that has not been discussed adequately within the field of BH studies or within linguistics generally.

The next concept presented in chapter 2 is much more central to the framework and goals of the work: the important and quite troublesome notion of *focus.* Shimasaki first identifies the diverse (and sometimes contradictory) uses of focus within the study of Biblical Hebrew: to refer to *emphasis,*[14] *stress,*[15] *contrast,*[16] *the filling in of missing information ,*[17] or *the placement of items in first position.*[18] Shimasaki then attempts to address the

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[11] K. Lambrecht, *Information Structure*, p. 76.

[12] K. Lambrecht, *Information Structure*, p. 76.

[13] K. Lambrecht, *Information Structure*, p. 105.

[14] A. Niccacci, "Types and Functions of the Nominal Sentence," in   *The Verbless Clause in Biblical Hebrew: Linguistic Approaches* (ed. C. L. Miller; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1999), pp. 215-48; W. Gross, "Is There Really a Compound Nominal Clause in Biblical Hebrew?," in *The Verbless Clause in Biblical Hebrew: Linguistic Approaches* (ed. C. L. Miller. Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1999), pp. 19-50; van der Merwe, Naudé, and Kroeze, *A Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar.*

[15] A. Niccacci, "Types and Functions."

[16] R. Buth, "Word Order in the Verbless Clause: A Generative-Functional Approach," in   *The Verbless Clause in Biblical Hebrew: Linguistic Approaches* (ed. C. L. Miller; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1999), pp. 109-124.

[17] R. Buth, "Word Order."

[18] E. J. Revell, "Thematic Continuity and the Conditioning of Word Order in Verbless Clauses," in   *The Verbless Clause in Biblical Hebrew: Linguistic Approaches* (ed. C. L. Miller; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1999), pp. 297-320.

confusion by defining and illustrating focus anew. He provides the following definition at the outset:

> To focus is to mark an item as being informationally prominent or to highlight it. Both new information and old information may be focused for functional purposes. This focus can be expressed prosodically, morphologically, or syntactically. (p. 42)

Before addressing Shimasaki's definition and explanation of focus, it will be instructive to consider briefly how linguists in general have been studying the concept of focus in recent years. Although there is disagreement within the linguistic literature about the definition of focus, two general approaches to focus can be isolated: 1) focus may refer to the relatively most important or salient piece of information in a clause;[19] or 2) focus may refer to the information in a clause that the addressee does not share with the speaker (and thus is "asserted", "new" or "added").[20] It should be noted that "new", "added", and "asserted" are not necessarily equivalent concepts and often linguists take great pains to distinguish among them; even so, this approach to focus means that every clause must have a focused item (excluding an absolute redundancy) since some information is always being added or asserted. In contrast, the first approach to focus leaves one asking the question: what does it mean for an item to be "relatively the most salient"? The answer can be and often has been given in terms of a linguistically nuanced way of discussing the layperson's 'emphasis,' or 'contrast'. In order to understand better where Shimasaki's "informationally prominent" definition of focus situates him with regard to these two general approaches to focus, we need to consider the definitions of focus provided in the two linguistic works listed in Shimasaki's bibliography from which he draws heavily, Lambrecht (1994) and Dik (1997).[21]

Lambrecht defines focus as "[t]he semantic component of a pragmatically structured proposition whereby the assertion differs from the presupposition."[22] Although he is careful to distinguish his type of focus from

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[19] See S. C. Dik, *The Theory of Functional Grammar, Part 1: The Structure of the Clause* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1997); B. Comrie, *Language Universals and Linguistic Typology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 63; M. A. K. Halliday, *An Introduction to Functional Grammar* (London: Edward Arnold, 1985), p. 278; E. Vallduví and M. Vilkuna, "On Rheme and Kontrast," in *The Limits of Syntax*, ed. P. Culicover and L. McNally (San Diego: Academic Press, 1998), pp. 79-108.

[20] See J. Lyons, *Semantics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 509, M. S. Rochemont, *Focus in Generative Grammar* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1986), 9-10, Lambrecht, *Information Structure and Sentence Form,* pp. 206-18, E. Vallduví and E. Engdahl, "The Linguistic Realization of Information Packaging," *Linguistics* 34(1996): 459-519, and M. L. Zubizarreta, *Prosody, Focus, and Word Order* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1998).

[21] K. Lambrecht, *Information Structure*; S. C. Dik, *The Theory of Functional Grammar.*

[22] K. Lambrecht, *Information Structure*, p. 213.

new information, it is clear that Lambrecht falls into the second approach to focus given above. In fact, focus as the assertion is the core concept for Lambrecht's threefold focus structure (adopted wholly by Shimasaki; see below), which proposes that each clause fits into one of three information structures: one that presents the entire clause as the assertion, one that presents the predicate as the assertion, and one that presents an argument as the assertion.[23]

In contrast, Dik's focus "concern[s] the changes that S [the speaker] wishes to bring about in the pragmatic information of A [the addressee]."[24] According to Dik, the changes that the speaker wants to effect may take a variety of forms, such as 'adding to' versus 'replacing' the information that the addressee possesses. This leads Dik to propose seven different types of focus: questioning, completive, rejecting, replacing, expanding, restricting, selecting.[25] Dik, like Lambrecht, takes care to avoid identifying his type of focus with new information, although overlap between the two is quite possible.[26] One wonders where to situate Dik in the larger discussion of focus; consider the diagram of focus that he provides:[27]
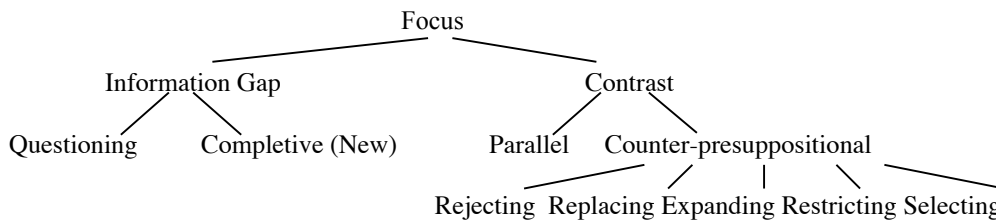
The first division in the diagram is between those foci that fill an "information gap" and those that provide a "contrast". Dik clearly subsumes two very different pragmatic phenomena under the single concept of focus.[28]

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[23] The usefulness of Lambrecht's work is limited because, in the very attempt to distinguish focus from other information structure, pragmatic, semantic, or prosodic phenomena, one is left unsure whether Lambrecht's focus means anything at all. For instance, while he aligns focus with new information to a large degree (though he is careful to assert that the two are different albeit often overlapping concepts), he states that English allows the placement of a focal object in presubject (i.e. fronted) position. This suggests that Lambrecht's focus contains properties of both the type of focus that marks new information and the type of focus that marks a constituent as 'prominent'. In addition, he uses question-answer pairs to highlight the focus in the answer. However, Vallduví and Vilkuna argue that it is illegitimate to use question-answer pairs to identify the "assertion" type of focus (E. Vallduví and M. Vilkuna, "On Rheme and Kontrast").

[24] S. C. Dik, *The Theory of Functional Grammar*, p. 326.

[25] S. C. Dik, *The Theory of Functional Grammar*, p. 330-35.

[26] S. C. Dik, *The Theory of Functional Grammar*, p. 326.

[27] S. C. Dik, *The Theory of Functional Grammar*, p. 331.

[28] See E. Vallduví and M. Vilkuna, "On Rheme and Kontrast."

With these issues in mind, we may now return to Shimasaki and his definition of focus. Where does he belong? What does it mean that focus is "informationally prominent" or used "to highlight"? With this language, Shimasaki appears to belong to the first camp, that focus is similar or related to "contrastiveness" and its linguistic kin (exhaustiveness, identification, etc.). Beyond the definition, though, it is simply not clear what Shimasaki means. For instance, he asserts that "the comment is always focused" and that "[a]ll new information is prominent, but not all prominent information is new" (p. 43). Within the same discussion he also states that "old information is often focused for specific functions" (p. 43). Finally, he claims that the "clause-initial position is marked for focus" (p. 42). If it is possible to synthesize Shimasaki's comments on the nature of his focus, there are at least three implications: 1) every clause contains a focus (a position that suggests that Shimasaki's focus may belong better to the second approach, that is, that focus marks an item as asserted, new, or added); 2) all new information is focused and thus if old/given information is focused it is always in addition to the entirety of the new information; and 3) in BH one particular clause position is identified with focus—clause-initial position.

Finally, I will offer a brief comment on the remainder of chapter 2: Shimasaki's desire to employ a variety of information structure concepts taken from different theoretical frameworks has resulted in an approach that lacks some clarity and coherence. While it is true that many of the information structure concepts (e.g., given/new vs. old/new vs. topic/comment vs. presupposition/assertion) from various theories overlap considerably, the fact is that they are not always compatible.[29] While it is commendable that Shimasaki attempts to synthesize several differing linguistic approaches to information structure, the unfortunate result is a theoretically unfocused model of BH information structure.

In chapter 3 Shimasaki continues to develop his model for clausal information structure. It is crucial to note that in chapter 2 Shimasaki consciously departs from Lambrecht's definition of focus as the "assertion" (p. 42, fn. 3). This departure exacerbates the confusion regarding Shimasaki's focus. Lambrecht defines focus as having "to do with the conveying of new information" and as the "unpredictable or pragmatically non-recoverable element in an utterance."[30] As such, every sentence contains a focus defined in this way, i.e., there is some item in each sentence that represents new information. It is significant that Lambrecht never uses the language

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[29] For a good survey of the various information structure models and the terminology used within each, see D. Goutsos, *Modeling Discourse Topic: Sequential Relations and Strategies in Expository Text* (Norwood, N.J.: Ablex Publishing Corporation, 1997), pp. 1-31.

[30] K. Lambrecht, *Information Structure*, pp. 206-207.

"informationally prominent" for focus, language which is often associated with the alternate definition for focus (see above). Since Shimasaki eschews Lambrecht's choice of focus (as related to new information) in favor of focus as informationally prominent, it raises the question whether it is valid for Shimasaki to adopt wholesale Lambrecht's three-tier focus structure.

Within Lambrecht's scheme there are three basic pragmatic structures that account for any given sentence: predicate-focus structure, argument-focus structure, and sentence-focus structure (which Shimasaki labels "clause-focus" structure). These three structures account for the different communicative functions that a sentence may serve. Thus, predicate-focus structure is used for "commenting on a given topic of conversation," argument-focus structure for "identifying a referent," and sentence-focus structure for "reporting an event or presenting a new discourse referent."[31] These three structures are sensible if by focus one intends something akin to or overlapping with new, added, or asserted information: at least a part of each clause, if not the whole, presents information that is, to use Lambrecht's terms, "unpredictable or pragmatically non-recoverable." A clause without at least one element that is in focus, defined this way, would be entirely redundant.[32]

Shimasaki, however, uses these three structures *and* defines focus as informationally prominent/highlighting. The legitimacy of this position entirely depends on how one interprets what Shimasaki means by "informationally prominent" or "highlighting" as the function of focus. If, contrary to footnote 3 on page 42 but in accordance with the explanation of focus that follows, we assume a use of focus similar to Lambrecht's, then the position is legitimate. In that case, Shimasaki is proposing that each BH clause has a pragmatic assertion (i.e., that information which is not presupposed) and that the assertion is always located in clause-initial position. Thus, we may identify whatever constituent (e.g., verb, subject noun phrase, prepositional phrase) that resides in the first position as the assertion of the statement (see below for further discussion of Shimasaki's 'focus in clause-initial position' proposal).

However, if we take Shimasaki at his word, per his *definition* (and in accordance with footnote 3 on page 42), his model presents a questionable

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[31] K. Lambrecht, *Information Structure*, p. 222.

[32] This is not to deny, of course, that an "old" set of constituents may take on a new prosodic contour, resulting in an update to the discourse. Consider the following possible dialogue, in which the last clause contains identical constituents to an earlier clause and yet contains asserted information:

>   Tim – *What happened?*
>   Kelley – *John left.*
>   Tim – ***Joan** left?*
>   Kelley – ***John** left.*

information structure framework. If we give him the benefit of the doubt and assume that he is building upon Dik's (1997) dual-function focus (used to mark either new information or contrastive information), the question becomes whether it is really helpful to use a much broader concept of focus (i.e., Dikian instead of Lambrechtian) with Lambrecht's three part focus structure. In other words, is Lambrecht's focus structure able to include those instances of focus that are not new/asserted information but rather are contrastive in nature? Given this state of affairs, one must make an interpretive decision regarding Shimasaki's definition in chapter 2 before proceeding to chapters 3-11. Either choice renders the remaining chapters a reading challenge, since one must translate Shimasaki's explanations according to what one decides Shimasaki's focus really means.

In chapter 4 Shimasaki spends considerable energy distinguishing focus from contrast. He insists that contrast "is the product of context, not of focus" (p. 64). However, it can be argued that every information structure and pragmatic concept is a "product of context." Without context, it would be impossible to render a judgment regarding the information status of any constituent in a clause (e.g., how would one decide what information is "new" and what is "old", what is the "topic" and what is the "comment", or which item is being "asserted"?).

In the remainder of the work, Shimasaki elaborates on predicate-focus structure (chapter 5), argument-focus structure (chapter 6), clause-focus structure (chapter 7), discusses parallel constructions and lists (chapter 8), addresses some problems for the theory (chapter 9), admits some exceptions to his proposed theory (chapter 10), and summarizes the work (chapter 11). Rather than address each of these chapters in order, I will examine two BH clauses that challenge Shimasaki's theory as the last task of this review.

Before we examine our first example, we must remember that Shimasaki argues that the clause-initial position always carries the focused constituent. Second, when the verb in a verbal clause resides in the initial position, Shimasaki would classify the information structure under the predicate-focus category, a structure that has "the function of commenting, that is, adding new information to a referent" (p. 84). The clear implication is, of course, that every clause in the Hebrew Bible that contains a *wayyiqtol* verb (the so-called waw-consecutive imperfect) will necessarily have a predicate-focus information structure—the *wayyiqtol* must always be in clause-initial position, therefore it must always be focused in Shimasaki's model.

The first question that arises is how to deal with *wayyiqtol* clauses that contain lexical (that is, full noun phrase) subjects: if these subject noun phrases are never part of the focus in these structures, then how do we account for their presence at all (i.e., since BH does not require independent

subjects with finite verbs)? Shimasaki claims that the presence of a lexical subject in the predicate-focus structure (e.g., any clause with a *wayyiqtol* verb) signals one of five functions for the subject: ambiguity resolution, narrowing the topic, literary rephrasing, theme announcement, and participant reference resources (p. 89). No doubt this is true in numerous cases; however, not only are these rather *ad hoc* explanations, they blur the lines between *linguistic* and *rhetorical* analysis.

The second question that arises with regard to Shimasaki's predicate-clause structure concerns the correlation of the focus and the clause-initial position. In order to evaluate this proposal, let us consider our first example, Genesis 14:22 (Shimasaki's example number 4 on page 105):

Gen 14:22

וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָם אֶל־מֶלֶךְ סְדֹם

And Abram said to the King of Sodom

First, this is a common example of a clause type for which Shimasaki suggests that "the predicate domain is divided on both sides of the topic expression" (p. 105); in other words, within the predicate-focus structure, focus may be marked on discontinuous items, not all of which reside in clause-initial position. For Gen 14:22, this means that Shimasaki considers the verb וַיֹּאמֶר and the prepositional phrase אֶל־מֶלֶךְ סְדֹם to be focused. While these observations (namely, that focused items may be discontinuous and that in Gen 14:22 both the verb and the prepositional phrase are focused—if, by focus, one means something similar to new or added information), are accurate they also undermine the correlation between focus and the clause-initial position, a foundational element in Shimasaki's entire theory (see particularly pages 56-57). The prepositional phrase in Gen 14:22 ("to the King of Sodom") is not in clause-initial position, yet Shimasaki recognizes on the basis of the discourse context that it is new information – notice that in this section Shimasaki discusses his focus in terms of new information!

The category of clause-focus structure raises a similar question with regard to the equation of focus and clause-initial position in BH. Within Lambrecht's model, clause-focus (or, in Lambrecht's terms, "sentence-focus") structure is used when none of the information being provided is presupposed; i.e., the entire sentence is asserted (and mostly likely new) information.[33] Lambrecht explains that the function of such clauses is often to report events (i.e., they are "presentational" and are often the answer to the question "what happened?").[34] Within clauses that exhibit clause-focus structure,

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[33] K. Lambrecht, *Information Structure*, pp. 221ff.
[34] K. Lambrecht, *Information Structure*, pp. 221, 233ff.

every constituent is presumably marked for focus, at least within Lambrecht's approach. How does this work with Shimasaki's "informationally prominent" or "highlighting" definition of focus? Is every constituent in a clause that answers the question "what happened?" highlighted? Furthermore, given that Shimasaki associates focus with clause-initial position, does he then consider every constituent in a clause-focus example to be in clause-initial position? Consider the following BH example (taken from Shimasaki, p. 149):

Judg 11:1

וְיִפְתָּח הַגִּלְעָדִי הָיָה גִּבּוֹר חַיִל

Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a valiant warrior.

Clearly, all of the constituents in a clause such as Jugd 11:1 cannot be fronted, or considered to be in the clause-initial position (or if so, the designation "clause-initial" becomes meaningless). Furthermore, the fact that many such clauses in BH are subject-verb in order introduces an added twist: for those who believe BH to be a basic verb-subject language, subjects placed before their verb *must be fronted* (presumably for information structure reasons). Shimasaki's attempt at a solution highlights the corner into which he has maneuvered himself: "we propose that Clause-Focus Structure has an argument that is focused by fronting and high pitch and a following predicate also focused by high pitch. Both the argument and the predicate are focused: XP" (p. 145). The question that immediately arises is: how is the fronting of the subjectival argument (יִפְתָּח in Judg 11:1) motivated? Surely it cannot be due to its focus, because the predicate (הָיָה גִּבּוֹר חַיִל in Judg 11:1) also has focus, but *it* is not fronted.

It is doubtful that the clause-initial position should always be associated with focus (and vice versa). This, then, raises an even more serious question about Shimasaki's methodology: is it legitimate to assume that all word order variation reflects pragmatic or information-structure influence? The conclusion that Shimasaki's model forces one to accept is that each of the almost 15,000 *wayyiqtol* verbs in the Hebrew Bible shares the same information-structure status—they are all focused! Could it not be the case, rather, that some constituent ordering principles are entirely syntax-driven? A good example of a syntactic issue that must be incorporated into a model of information structure is the word order difference between indicative and interrogative clauses in English (e.g., the auxiliary *has* follows the subject in *John has bought the ball*, but it precedes the subject in *Why has John bought the ball?*). A related example of word order that is syntactically constrained is the well-known phenomenon of the verb-second constraint in German (i.e., in main clauses the verb must be in second position, as in *Hans kaufte den Ball*,

whereas in subordinate clauses the verb is in final position, as in *dass Hans den Ball kaufte*). Indeed, Modern Hebrew exhibits a phenomenon similar to the German verb-second rule (compare the main subject-verb clause דני כתב את המכתב to the subordinate verb-subject clause שמעתי שכתב דני את המכתב).[35]

In conclusion, the contribution of *Focus Structure in Biblical Hebrew* to the study of BH word order is a mixed one. First, the addition of Shimasaki's work to the growing number of pragmatic and information structure studies serves to highlight once more the importance of these issues: it is not possible to analyze BH word order without taking into account pragmatic and discourse issues. However, one of the weaknesses of Shimasaki's model is that it does not allow for syntactic factors in the ordering of constituents; in *Focus Structure in Biblical Hebrew*, the reader is led to believe that information structure concepts, such as focus, account for every possible word order variation within BH grammar. Second, Shimasaki's greatest contribution is the presentation of a model that is based primarily upon the functional theories of Lambrecht (1994) and Dik (1997), and this allows us to evaluate the worth of these influential theories when applied to BH. However, instead of strictly adhering to one existing linguistic model, such as that which Lambrecht or Dik offers, Shimasaki appropriates elements of both these theories and attempts to combine them. Not only does this introduce significant terminological and analytical confusion, the difficulty that Shimasaki encounters in applying the information structure concepts contained in Lambrecht and Dik to the study of BH word order highlights the need for Hebraists to be well-versed in the current linguistic discussion of such issues.

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[35] Indeed, I have argued elsewhere (Holmstedt, "The Relative Clause," pp. 126-197) that a similar principle operates in BH.