

Research article

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Some Dynamics of Word Order in Biblical Hebrew

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Abstract: In Biblical Hebrew verbal sentences, suffixed particles and other short adverbial elements tend not to occur where the syntactic rules would lead one to expect them, but instead are located closer to the verb. This phenomenon is well known, but a number of its features have not been described in detail. Three case studies are proposed, revealing some of the dynamics involved in the placement of short adverbial elements. Analyzed through a comparative and typological framework, the Hebrew data suggest that alongside sentence syntax and discourse grammar, prosodic considerations play a role in determining word order.

Keywords: Wackernagel’s law, synchronic and diachronic aspects of syntax, prosody

1 Introduction

Despite important advances in recent times, Biblical Hebrew (BH) word order is still only partly understood.¹ The present study seeks to contribute to a better understanding of items typically occupying the “second position” in their clause or sentence.

1.1 “Leftward” movement of short items in Biblical Hebrew

A well-known feature of BH word order is the tendency for suffixed particles to immediately follow the verb, even in clauses with an explicit subject:

Gen 22:11

וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהֵי מְלָאךְ יְהוָה מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם

But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven.

When the same particles govern a noun, they normally occur after the subject:²

Gen 21:17

וַיִּקְרָא מְלָאךְ אֱלֹהִים אֶל־הָגָר מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם

And the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven.³

¹ See e.g. Muraoka 1985; Gross 1996; Rosenbaum 1997; Moshavi 2010; Khan & Van Der Merwe 2020.

² For the default pattern of verbal sentences in Biblical Hebrew, see below, section 3.1.

³ English translations of the Hebrew Bible follow the NRSV, but have sometimes been adapted to bring out the point in question.

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The “move to the left” (in Hebrew, actually to the right) is not obligatory.⁴ There are many exceptions in which the suffixed particle is positioned after the subject.⁵ However, the postverbal position is the most frequent one. When the same particles govern a noun, the position between the verb and the subject is rare.

The suffixed particles in question are the mono-consonantal prepositions, בְּ “in,” אֲשֶׁר “as,” לְ “for,” other short prepositions, אֶל “toward,” מִן “from,” עַל “on,” עִם “with,” and the accusative marker, אֶת.

The tendency to shift to the left has also been observed with short adverbs or adverbial phrases, notably הַיּוֹם “today,” כִּיּוֹם “now,” כֵּן “thus,” עוֹד “still, again,” and שָׁם “there” (including שָׁמָּה “to there,” מִשָּׁם “from there”). In a clause that has both a suffixed particle and one of these adverbs, both items will gravitate to the position following the verb:

1 Kgs 1:34

וּמָשַׁח אֹתוֹ שָׁם צָדוֹק הַכֹּהֵן וְנָתָן הַנָּבִיא לְמֶלֶךְ עַל־יִשְׂרָאֵל

There let the priest Zadok and the prophet Nathan anoint him king over Israel.⁶

Isa 60:19

לֹא־יְהִי־לָךְ עוֹד הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ לְאוֹר יוֹמָם

The sun shall no longer be your light by day.⁷

As can be seen in these examples, the suffixed particle precedes the adverb when both occupy the post-verbal slot.

The tendency of these items to move to the left is most clearly manifest when the verb is followed by an explicit subject, but a similar rule operates with explicit direct objects, with or without an expressed subject. Adverbial prepositional phrases are expected to follow the direct object. But when the preposition is followed by a suffix, the phrase moves up and comes immediately after the verb:⁸

Gen 34:26

וַיִּקְחוּ אֶת־דִּינָה מִבֵּית שָׁכֶם

And they took Dinah out of Shechem's house.

Gen 43:23

וַיּוֹצֵא אֱלֶהֶם אֶת־שִׁמְעוֹן

Then he brought Simeon out to them.⁹

A detailed description of this phenomenon in classical prose texts, with exhaustive examples from the books of Deuteronomy, Judges and 2 Kings, can be found in Walter Gross's monumental *Die Satzteilfolge im Verbalsatz alttestamentlicher Prosa*.¹⁰

4 The notion of “movement” is to be taken as a figure of speech meaning no more than that a word occurs in a somewhat unexpected position. Nevertheless, at least in the case of ancient Hebrew, it is possible that the position of the items discussed in the present paper did change over time (see notably section 2.2 on the textual variants involving עוֹד “still, again”).

5 A few special constructions countermand it: thus, e.g. the phrase “to X for a wife/God etc.”: Gen 28:21; Exod 10:7; 12:13; 16:15; Lev 16:34; Num 35:29; Deut 28:9; Ezek 24:24; also the construction “to him and to his family” etc., with *l-*: Gen 43:7; Jer 25:5; Isa 7:17; Esth 9:27; with *et*: Deut 28:36; Josh 13:21; 2 Sam 18:12; with *bēn*: Gen 16:5. When a divine name functions as subject, it often precedes the suffixed particle: e.g. Gen 11:8; 25:23; Exod 4:6, 11; Num 11:18; 1 Kgs 3:11; 11:23.

6 See also Gen 26:8; 35:15.

7 See also Jer 30:8.

8 With both subject (S) and direct object (O) lexicalized; see e.g. Num 16:19.

9 See also Judg 8:16; 2 Kgs 1:7.

10 See above, note 1.

1.2 Explanations of the leftward movement of short words

The distinct position of suffixed particles and other short adverbial phrases recalls similar phenomena in other languages.¹¹ It nevertheless calls for an explanation. Why is it that a constituent or adjunct that is normally expected to occupy the second, third or even a later post-verbal position follows the verb immediately instead?

Two types of considerations have been advanced to account for the tendency of suffixed particles to move closer to the verb than particles with nouns. Some scholars explain it in terms of information structure. They point out that pronominal suffixes are often anaphoric; they reach back to the preceding context in a way that nominal forms do not. Alfred Bloch, who was the first to describe the phenomenon in some detail, stated that it reflects the wish “das Bekanntere dem Neueren vorangehen zu lassen” (Bloch 1946: 110–112).¹²

Other scholars prefer a more formal approach. In their view, the tendency for suffixed particles to immediately follow the verb is due to their being short. Walter Groß invokes a “Längeregel,” a rule of length, which states that short words typically precede longer words, thus explaining the leftward movement we have observed.¹³ This type of explanation receives support from typological approaches; in a wide range of languages, the tendency for shorter constituents to precede longer ones can be verified objectively.

The two views are not contradictory, and both may be true. It can be empirically confirmed that shortness is a factor. With the short prepositions enumerated above, the leftward movement happens in a large majority of cases, but with longer prepositions, such as אַחֲרַי “after,” it happens in a minority of cases:¹⁴

V S *’ah^{re}*-suffix Gen 24:39; Exod 14:9; 15:20; Jos 8:20; 20:5; Judg 2:10; 6:34; 8:27; 20:40; 1 Sam 24:9; 26:3; 2 Sam 2:20; 1 Kgs 1:40; Jer 39:5; Ezek 10:11; Am 2:4; Ps 63:9; Eccl 7:14.

V *’ah^{re}*-suffix S Judg 10:1; 2 Sam 11:8; 20:7; 2 Kgs 9:27; Ps 49:18; Neh 12:32; 2 Chron 26:17

Similarly, compound prepositions such as בֵּינֵי or בֵּינֵיךָ precede the subject only occasionally:

V S *b^{yad}*-suffix Gen 19:16; Deut 3:3; Judg 3:10, 15; 4:14 (VSO *b^{yad}*-sf); 7:14; 2 Kgs 14:5; Lam 1:14; Dan 11:11; 2 Chron 7:6; 24:13

V *b^{yad}*-suffix S Exod 22:3; Deut 13:18; 1 Sam 9:8; 24:21; Job 15:23; 1 Chron 5:20

V S *lipnē*-suffix Gen 27:20; 32:4 (VSO *lipnē*-sf); 48:15; Exod 23:23; Lev 26:8; Num 32:29; Deut 1:21; 2:36; 22:6; Judg 11:9 (VSO *lipnē*-sf); 2 Sam 5:24; Jer 2:22; 15:1; Ezek 36:17; Mic 2:13; Mal 3:16; Ps 119:169, 170; 141:2; Lam 1:22; Neh 2:5; 1 Chron 12:18; 14:15; 2 Chron 14:4, 9

V *lipnē*-suffix S Isa 52:12; Ezek 33:10; Ps 22:28; 79:11; 88:3; 143:2; Dan 1:13

In terms of information structure, longer and compound prepositions differ little from shorter prepositions. The statistical difference in word order can therefore likely be attributed to their length.

In spite of these statistical differences, the fact that even such longer particles or quasi-particles do move to the left of the sentence in an appreciable number of cases suggests that informational value is also a factor. Personal suffixes are important to the cognitive process of “participant tracking”; they contribute to the coherence of the text beyond the level of the sentence (De Regt 2019). This justifies their location near the head of the clause. The short adverbs enumerated above play a similar role.

11 E.g. in French “Je vois **ton** père” versus “je **le** vois.”

12 “To let what is better-known precede what is newer”. Cf. also Levinsohn (2015:5): “However, when an object or adjunct is pronominal, its default position is immediately after the verb. This is because, typically, the information conveyed by the pronominal is more established than that conveyed by the other non-verbal constituents.”

13 Gross 1996: 270–271, with reference to Otto Behaghel and Simon Dik.

14 V = verb, S = subject, O = direct object.

Some of them are deictics taking their precise meaning from the nearby context. As to עֹד “still,” it expressly refers back to and links up with the preceding context.

1.3 Wackernagel’s Law

The drift of pronouns toward the left of the sentence, away from the position that the syntax would seem to assign to them, is a well-known phenomenon in general linguistics often discussed under the heading of “Wackernagel’s law.” In a dense article of over 100 pages, Wackernagel (1892) showed that, in Homeric Greek, enclitic pronouns, as well as certain adverbs and particles, tend as closely as possible to follow the first word of the sentence:

Iliad 1:8

Τίς τάρ σφωε θεῶν ἔριδι ξυνέηκε μάχεσθαι;

Who then of the gods was it that brought **these two** together to contend?¹⁵

Although the pronoun σφωε “them two (third person dual accusative)” is the direct object of ξυνέηκε “he brought together,” it is located far to the left of the clause, as close as possible to the first word.

Wackernagel extended this observation to other Greek texts, both literary and documentary, and to other ancient Indo-European languages. His paper had a huge impact on the study of ancient Greek grammar and on comparative and general linguistics. It continues to be cited until the present day.

Homeric Greek differs in many ways from Biblical Hebrew and notably so in matters of word order and sentence structure. The word order illustrated above from Iliad 1:8 has no parallel in Hebrew. The Hebrew suffixed particle never moves beyond the verbal form, even when other elements precede the verb:

Gen 48:7

וְאֲנִי בָבֶלַי מִפְּדָן מָתָה עָלַי רָחֵל בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן

And as for me, when I came from Padan, Rachel died **by me** in the land of Canaan.

Although the suffixed particle did move up, it went only as far as the post-verbal position. Wackernagel’s law in this case would require the suffixed preposition to follow the first word of the sentence, the extraposed וְאֲנִי. Word order of this type is not attested in Biblical Hebrew. Suffixed particles may figure before the verb when they are focused or topicalized (see e.g. Gen 48:20, quoted in the next section), but otherwise their position is limited to the post-verbal field.¹⁶

In spite of these differences, Wackernagel’s study, based as it is on a very thorough inspection of primary material, identifies a number of linguistic phenomena that appear to be relevant to Biblical Hebrew. In what follows, I will point to three such phenomena:

- The breaking up of linguistic units hosting a pronominal element
- The migration of short particles out of their syntactic domain
- The repetition of particles that have moved away from their natural host.

Each of these processes, *mutatis mutandis*, finds parallels in BH. It is hoped that this comparison will give a clearer view of some syntactic processes in BH and suggest ways to account for various patterns of word order.

¹⁵ Translations of Greek texts generally follow the translations proposed on Perseus (www.perseus.tufts.edu), but some of them have been lightly revised to bring out the point being discussed.

¹⁶ A few possible exceptions are found in poetry, e.g. Micah 5:1 מִמֶּךָ לִי יֵצֵא לְהָיוֹת מוֹשֵׁל בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל “from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel”; Psalm 55:13bα.

1.4 Excursus: The prosodic nature of suffixed particles and short adverbs in BH

The starting point of Wackernagel's study is the position of enclitic pronouns, which in Greek are distinguished from other words by lacking an accent (note the lack of accent in the pronoun $\sigma\varphi\omega\epsilon$ above). Hebrew does not have such a category. BH has independent pronouns and pronominal suffixes, but no enclitic pronouns. Given this fact, is it legitimate to compare the phenomena investigated in Wackernagel's study with BH data?

This question is hard to answer, not least because no one has been able to give a precise definition of the term "clitic" (including "enclitic").¹⁷ In ancient Greek, enclitics can be positively identified on the basis of the accentuation.¹⁸ But even in Greek, the definition of enclitics is not entirely unproblematic. Wackernagel himself discusses a few items, notably the modal particle $\alpha\upsilon$, that are not considered enclitics in Greek grammar, yet do seem to follow similar placement rules.¹⁹ In a recent study on "second-position" items in ancient Greek, David Goldstein (2016: 61–65) shows that there is no distributional difference that can be broken down according to the enclitic/postpositive divide; the two groups do not follow distinct placement rules.²⁰

As for BH, neither the suffixed particles nor the short adverbs enumerated above can be regarded as enclitics in the strict sense of the word. Under the right circumstances, all of these items can occur at the head of a clause:

Gen 48:20

בְּךָ יִבְרַךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל

By you Israel will invoke blessings

Exod 15:25

שֵׁם שָׁם לוֹ חֹק וּמִשְׁפָּט

There the LORD (Heb. "he") made for them a statute and an ordinance.

Our adverbs and suffixed particles are not "special clitics." Nevertheless, their size, their nature, and the placement rules they follow assimilate them to enclitics in Greek and other languages. Perhaps they may be regarded as "simple clitics," i.e. as words that under certain circumstances can attach themselves to a preceding word and form with it a prosodic unit.²¹

In the Masoretic text, monosyllabic suffixed particles are regularly joined to a preceding verb by the *maqeph*; in this case, they bear the single accent of the two-word unit. Bi- or tri-syllabic suffixed particles are only rarely attached by means of a *maqeph*, but in practically all instances they are joined to the verb by a conjunctive accent. The same is true of short adverbs immediately following the verb. On the whole, the evidence provided by the Masoretic accents remains inconclusive.²²

In the absence of precise phonological information, the present paper will focus on word order rather than any other type of data.

¹⁷ See the insightful paper by Luraghi (2013).

¹⁸ Greek accents only began to be annotated in the Hellenistic era and are not necessarily reliable for earlier chronolects.

¹⁹ Wackernagel (1892: 371) refers to such items as "Quasi-Enklitika," quasi-enclitics.

²⁰ Note also Martin Haspelmath's (2023:1) remark: "In the stereotypical view of clitics, they are 'prosodically deficient' in some way, but the phonological effects are quite diverse and cannot serve as a basis for a definition."

²¹ "According to Zwicky's definition, simple clitics are unaccented variants of 'real' words that lose their lexical accents in specific conditions as, for example, the unaccented form [əm] of the English third person non-subject pronoun him. On the contrary, special clitics are not simply unaccented variants of lexically accented words: they are lexically unaccented items, which have a distribution of their own, and, crucially, peculiar placement rules which appear to be cross-linguistically limited to a small number of options." (Luraghi 2013: 166)

²² Many scholars hold that the accents encode syntax; see e.g. Aronoff 1985. More likely, however, they reflect the prosody of the underlying reading tradition. For the debate, see Drescher 1994.

2 Three case studies

2.1 “Host splitting”: construct infinitives and their subject

The leftward movement of suffixed particles briefly described above regularly occurs not only in main clauses, but also in subordinate clauses:

Gen 19:29

הָעָרִים אֲשֶׁר־יָשַׁב בְּהֶן לוֹט

The cities in which Lot had settled.²³

It also regularly occurs in subordinate clauses, telic or temporal, whose verbal form is an infinitive construct:

Jer 21:1

הַדְּבָר אֲשֶׁר־הָיָה אֶל־יִרְמְיָהוּ מֵאֵת יְהוָה בְּשִׁלַּח אֵלָיו הַמֶּלֶךְ צִדְקִיָּהוּ אֶת־פָּשְׁחור

This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, when King Zedekiah sent to him Pashhur.

The suffixed preposition “to him” immediately follows the infinitive, before the subject.²⁴

As in clauses with a finite verb, this position of the suffixed particle is not obligatory. In a minority of cases, the nominal subject follows the infinitive, and the particle comes after the subject.²⁵

As in clauses with a finite verb, short adverbs follow the same placement rules. With infinitives, the only adverb attested in this way is שָׁם “there”:

Exod 8:18(22)

וְהִפְלִיתִי בַיּוֹם הַהוּא אֶת־אֶרֶץ גֹּשֶׁן אֲשֶׁר עָמַד עָלֶיהָ לְבִלְתִּי הִיּוֹת־שָׁם עָרָב

But on that day I will set apart the land of Goshen, where my people live, so that no swarms of flies shall be there.²⁶

Clearly, the mechanism underlying the remarkable word order in all these instances is the same as in the cases where a suffixed particle or an adverb comes between a finite verb and its nominal subject. A short item that contributes to the coherence of the text moves toward the head of its clause.

Whereas with finite verbs such sequences merely diverge from the usual word order, with infinitives the sequence also interferes with the morpho-syntax. The combination of an infinitive construct with a nominal subject takes the form of a construct phrase. This can clearly be seen when the infinitive construct has a specific form for the construct state:

2 Chron 2:10(11)

בְּאַהֲבַת יְהוָה אֶת־עַמּוֹ נִתְּנָךְ עָלֵיהֶם מֶלֶךְ

Because the LORD loves his people he has made you king over them.²⁷

A pronominal subject is invariably attached to the infinitive as a suffix, never as an independent pronoun:

Gen 2:17

בַּיּוֹם אֲכָלְךָ מִמֶּנּוּ מוֹת תָּמוּת

In the day that you eat of it you shall die.

23 Other examples: with אֲשֶׁר: Gen 17:21; 21:3; with אֶת־אֲשֶׁר: Gen 9:24; כִּי־אֲשֶׁר: Gen 12:4; 17:23; כִּי: Gen 4:25; 46:33; Exod 4:5; 7:9.

24 Other examples with a prepositional phrase: Gen 34:15; Lev 13:14; 25:30; Num 11:25; Josh 11:20; Judg 9:2; 1 Sam 16:16; Jer 22:23; 33:21; Ezek 17:10; 35:5; Joel 2:17; Jona 2:8; Nah 2:1; Psalm 51:2; 124:2; 142:4; Prov 1:27; with the accusative particle: Gen 4:15; Josh 14:11; Isa 20:1; Jer 40:1; Ps 56:1; Prov 25:8. Twenty-six cases in all.

25 With prepositions: Exod 16:8; Deut 4:10; Josh 2:14; 2 Kgs 7:17; 10:7; Job 37:15; with the accusative particle: Deut 9:23; Josh 14:7; 1 Kgs 11:24; 2 Kgs 4:25.

26 See also, with שָׁמָּה, Deut 19:3; Num 35:15; Josh 20:9. Cf. Job 38:7.

27 Similarly 1 Kgs 10:9; Hos 3:1; Deut 1:27.

This again shows that the combination of the infinitive construct with its subject takes the form of a construct phrase.

In Hebrew, as in other Semitic languages, no element can come between the members of a construct phrase.²⁸ The breaking up of such phrases where a suffixed particle or short adverb comes between the infinitive and its subject is therefore highly remarkable.

The phenomenon has interesting parallels in ancient Greek. In his search for enclitic pronouns that tend to occur in second position, Wackernagel (1892: 358–362) encountered a large number of passages where the pronoun, on its journey toward the head of the sentence, splits up word-groups that normally would be expected to belong together, such as articles and their nouns, or prepositions and the noun-phrases they govern:

Herodotus 6, 69, 20
 ἐν γάρ σε τῇ νυκτὶ ταύτῃ ἀναιρέομαι
 for I conceived **you** that night

The enclitic pronoun σε “you (accusative),” which functions as the direct object of the verb, is lodged between the preposition ἐν “in” and the noun phrase it governs, τῇ νυκτὶ ταύτῃ “that night (dative).”

In other cases, the pronoun splits up a composite word, whether a particle such as οὐκέτι “no longer” or a verb:

Alcaeus fr. 377
 ἔκ μ’ ἔλασας ἀλγέων
 You drove **me** from my grief.

The aorist of the verb ἐξελαύνω is here broken up into its component parts, the preverb ἐκ “out” and the simple verb ἐλαύνω “to drive,” so as to allow the enclitic pronoun to occupy a position as near as possible to the beginning of the sentence.²⁹

Although the items moving leftward and the items that are split up differ materially, ancient Greek and Biblical Hebrew exemplify a single phenomenon, a tightly-knit unit being undone in order to host an element moving toward the left end of the clause. An additional example of this process in BH will be discussed below.

Similar cases of “host-splitting” are found in other languages and notably have been studied in dialects of Serbo-Croatian:³⁰

U ovoj **je** sobi klavir.
 in this AUX room piano
 The piano is in this room

Although the nature of the items again differs from what we see in BH (and ancient Greek), the way the auxiliary breaks up the nominal phrase “this room” in order to approach the left edge of the sentence as closely as possible is essentially similar.

2.2 “Clitic migration”: עַד “still, again”

As was pointed out above, in Hebrew, suffixed particles do not usually move in front of the hosting verb unless they are focused. The same rule applies to most of the short adverbs enumerated above. They tend to immediately follow the verb and only occur in the preverbal field when they are fo-

²⁸ As one of the reviewers remarked, there is an exception to this rule: the directive *he* does come between the two components of a construct phrase, e.g. בֵּיתָהּ בְּחַיִל “to the house of Bethuel” (Gen 28:2).

²⁹ Note that the breaking up of composite verbs (“tmesis”) may happen for other reasons too, and is less shocking in Greek than in some other languages with composite verbs.

³⁰ See Thomas 2009; Werle 2009: 294–305.

cused. However, one of the adverbs may occasionally drift further to the left. Fascinatingly, this movement can sometimes be observed in the textual history.

As was pointed out above, one of the adverbs that behaves similarly to suffixed particles with regard to word order is עוד “still.”³¹ While the normal position of adverbial phrases is after the subject and the direct object, עוד may jump ahead of those constituents and immediately follow the verb:

2 Sam 6:1

וַיִּסַּף עוֹד דָּוִד אֶת־כָּל־בְּחוּרֵי בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל

David again gathered all the chosen men of Israel.³²

As with suffixed particles, this leftward movement is not obligatory.³³ Moreover, a number of variant readings show that, in some instances, the position of the adverb immediately after the verb is secondary. Note the following divergences between the Masoretic Text (MT) and the Samaritan Pentateuch (SP):

Deut 34:10 MT

וְלֹא־קָם נְבִיא עוֹד בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל כְּמֹשֶׁה

Deut 34:10 SP

וְלֹא קָם עוֹד נְבִיא בִּישְׂרָאֵל כְּמֹשֶׁה

Never since has there arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses.

Gen 9:11 MT

וְלֹא־יִכָּרֵת כָּל־בָּשָׂר עוֹד מִמֵּי הַמַּבּוּל

Gen 9:11 SP

וְלֹא יִכָּרֵת עוֹד כָּל בָּשָׂר מִמֵּי הַמַּבּוּל

Never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood.

Gen 35:10 MT

לֹא־יִקְרָא שְׁמְךָ עוֹד יַעֲקֹב

Gen 35:10 SP

לֹא יִקְרָא עוֹד שְׁמְךָ יַעֲקֹב

No longer shall you be called Jacob.

It is generally admitted that the Samaritan text on the whole reflects a later type of Hebrew than the MT (see e.g. Florentin 2016). These examples confirm this view. They also show that the notion of “leftward movement” is not a mere figure of speech. At least in the verses quoted, there really was a stage where the adverb occurred in the position to which the syntax would assign it; from there it moved closer to the verb in a later stage.

Note also the following examples:

1 Kgs 10:5

וְלֹא־הָיָה בָּהּ עוֹד רוּחַ

2 Chron 9:4

וְלֹא־הָיָה עוֹד בָּהּ רוּחַ

There was no more spirit in her.

³¹ For this adverb, see Mastey 2020. Mastey does not refer to the placement rules discussed in the present paper.

³² See also Gen 30:19.

³³ See the examples below in section 3.4.

2 Sam 5:13 4QSam

[ויולד]ו לדוד עוד בנים ובנות

2 Sam 5:13 MT

ויולדו עוד לְדוֹד בְּנִים וּבָנוֹת

And more sons and daughters were born to David.

Isa 62:8 MT

אִם-אֶתֵּן אֶת-דִּגְגִּי עוֹד מֵאֶכֶל לְאֹיְבֵיךָ

Isa 62:8 1QIsa^a

אִם אֶתֵּן עוֹד דִּגְגִּי מֵאֶכֶל לְאֹיְבֵיךָ

I will not again give your grain to be food for your enemies.

Chronicles is later than Kings, the MT of Samuel is often secondary to the text of the scrolls from Qumran, and the language of the great Isaiah scroll reflects a later stage than the MT. All these examples show that, in the history of the Hebrew language, there was a tendency to bring the adverb עוד closer to the head of the clause. Additional examples of this tendency will be reviewed below.

It is difficult to say why such variants are attested with עוד but not with suffixed particles or other adverbs. Perhaps the tendency to position עוד just after the verb developed later than that of the other items.

Above and beyond the leftward movement of עוד in the examples examined so far, this adverb illustrates an additional phenomenon. With verbs governing an infinitive clause, the adverb may be positioned in the complement clause:

1 Sam 3:6

וַיִּסַּף יְהוָה קְרָא עוֹד שְׁמוּאֵל

The LORD called again, "Samuel!"³⁴

More often, however, the adverb is attached to the main verb:

Num 22:15

וַיִּסַּף עוֹד בָּלַק שְׁלַח שָׂרִים רַבִּים וְנִכְבְּדִים מֵאלֵהָ

Once again Balak sent officials, more numerous and more distinguished than these.³⁵

Most of the relevant cases are with the verb יסף "to add, to continue," but the phenomenon also occurs with יכל "to be able":

2 Sam 12:23

הֲאוּכַל לְהָשִׁיבוּ עוֹד

Can I bring him back again?³⁶

Exod 2:3

וְלֹא-יִכְלֶה עוֹד הִצְפִּינוּ

She could hide him no longer³⁷

Other verbs governing an infinitive clause do not exhibit the same variety, perhaps simply because the Biblical Hebrew corpus is rather small.³⁸

³⁴ See also Gen 8:21; Deut 19:20; Jer 31:12; Zeph 3:11; Psalm 77:8.

³⁵ See also Gen 18:29; 37:5, 8; 38:26; Exod 10:29; Num 32:15; Deut 28:68; Judg 9:37; 11:14; 1 Sam 7:13; 23:4; 2 Sam 2:22; 2 Kgs 6:23.

³⁶ See also Jer 19:11.

³⁷ See also Deut 31:2; Judg 2:14; 2 Sam 3:11.

At first sight, one might be tempted to see two distinct constructions here: one (a) in which the adverb qualifies the main verb, and one (b) in which it qualifies the infinitive clause. Schematically:

- a) He **still** continued/was able to do X
- b) He continued/was able to **still** do X

However, the semantics of the examples do not favor this analysis.³⁹ The force of the adverb, even when it figures in the main clause, falls on the infinitive: Balak sends princes again, after the first delegation was unsuccessful; and after three months, Jochebed is unable to hide her baby. The semantics of the two patterns are similar if not identical. This is confirmed by a few instances of textual variation between the MT and the Samaritan Pentateuch:

Gen 8:21

לֹא־אֶסְפָּף לְקַלֵּל עוֹד אֶת־הָאֲדָמָה בְּעִבּוֹר הָאָדָם
לֹא אוֹסִיף עוֹד לְקַלֵּל אֶת הָאֲדָמָה בְּעִבּוֹר הָאָדָם

I will never again curse the ground because of humankind

Gen 35:10

לֹא־יִקְרָא שְׁמֶךָ עוֹד יַעֲקֹב
לֹא יִקְרָא עוֹד שְׁמֶךָ יַעֲקֹב

No longer shall you be called Jacob.⁴⁰

In terms of textual history, these cases are similar to the ones presented above: the witness that is known to use a later type of Hebrew (SP) places the adverb earlier in the sentence than the witness that uses an earlier type of Hebrew (MT). Thus, the variants show that the difference between the two patterns is at least partly a matter of language evolution. In an earlier period, the adverb was more often positioned in the infinitive clause, but as the language evolved, it became more common to position the adverb in the main clause. In other words, this is another instance of leftward movement.

In one respect, however, these examples differ essentially from the earlier ones. In Deut 34:10, a short element moved up within the confines of the clause; in Gen 8:21 it migrates out of its clause into a different one. This process is similar to the “clitic climbing” known from Romance and Slavic languages, in which a pronominal argument moves from an infinitive clause to the verb governing this infinitive.⁴¹

Gianni vuole comprar**lo**
“Gianni wants to buy **it**”

Gianni **lo** vuole comprare
idem

³⁸ See 2 Sam 10:19 (יִרָא “to fear”); Eccl 4:13 (יָדַע “to know”); 1 Chron 19:19 (אָבָה “to want”), all with עוֹד in the infinitive clause. In a comment on Gen 24:20 לְשֹׂאֵב עוֹד אֶל־הַבְּאֵר לְשֹׂאֵב, “she ran again to the well to draw,” Samuel David Luzzatto (Shadal) notes that Rebekah had not yet run, but had drawn water. So the adverb likely pertained to the infinitive and should more correctly have been placed after it. This would be the only case of “clitic climbing” with an infinitive expressing purpose. For Luzzatto’s comment, see <https://mg.alhatorah.org>.

³⁹ Note however that in some cases עוֹד יִסְפָּךְ + is used in reference to a third iteration: Gen 18:29 “Again he spoke to him,” i.e. for the third time. See also Gen 38:5, where the repeated process is expressed in a main clause (see above, note 36).

⁴⁰ See also Deut 19:20.

⁴¹ See Luraghi 2013: 175–176. There is a vast amount of literature on clitic climbing in various Romance and Slavic languages.

Both utterances are correct in Italian. In the second, *lo*, which is the direct object of *comprare*, has moved out of its proper domain and attaches, as a proclitic, to the main verb. More rarely, this type of movement has been observed with adverbs, such as *y* “there” and *en* “from there” in French (see e.g. Cinque 2002).

In modern linguistics, clitic climbing is often interpreted as an indication of “restructuring,” a process by which the main verb and the infinitive dependent on it came to be viewed as a single verbal predication.⁴² This is an interesting approach.⁴³ But the phenomenon should not be viewed in isolation from the broader phenomenon of leftward movement of pronouns and particles as documented by Wackernagel. As Wackernagel (1892: 335–336, 342, 343, 358 and 397) noted, the leftward movement of enclitics in Greek sometimes involves their migrating from their own domain to a sub- or superordinate clause preceding it:

Iliad 22, 347

χαίρει δέ μιν ὅς τις ἐθείρη

And glad is he that tills it (the orchard dried by the North Wind).

Accusative μιν “it” is not governed by the initial verb, which would have required the dative, but by the verb of the relative clause that follows it. Its expected position would be somewhere after the relative pronoun ὅς “he who.”

Plato, Timaeus 26 B

ἐγὼ γὰρ ἃ μὲν χθὲς ἤκουσα, οὐκ ἂν οἶδ’ εἰ δυναίμην ἅπαντα ἐν μνήμῃ πάλιν λαβεῖν

For myself, I know not whether I could recall to mind all that I heard yesterday.

The conditional particle pertains to the oblique clause governed by the verb “to know,” but it has moved out of its domain and attached itself to the first word of the main clause.⁴⁴

In a less spectacular way, the movement of עוֹד, discussed in the present section, illustrates the same process. On its way to the head of the sentence, the clitic shows little respect for syntactic divisions and appears to obey a higher force. It moves out of its own syntactic domain and into a domain where it does not naturally belong.

A final observation on the position of עוֹד will lead us to the next case study. When the verb יָסַף expresses continuation or repetition, the process that is continued or repeated is occasionally expressed not by an infinitive clause, but by an independent main clause:

Gen 25:1

וַיִּסָּף אַבְרָהָם וַיִּקַּח אִשָּׁה וּשְׁמָהּ קֵטוּרָה

Abraham took another wife, whose name was Keturah.⁴⁵

The first clause in this verse is semantically deficient (“Abraham continued” needs to be complemented with information about what the continuation involved), but grammatically it forms a complete and independent sentence. The semantic complement is expressed in the next main clause.

When the adverb עוֹד is added to such a bi-clausal complex, it always comes in the first clause:

Judg 11:14

וַיִּסָּף עוֹד יִפְתָּח וַיִּשְׁלַח מְלָאכִים אֶל-מֶלֶךְ בְּנֵי עַמּוֹן

Once again Jephthah sent messengers to the king of the Ammonites.⁴⁶

⁴² For ancient Greek, the argument is made in Goldstein 2016, 261.

⁴³ However, it is not universally recognized by specialists in languages that exhibit clitic climbing. See notably Kulik 2021.

⁴⁴ The words preceding οὐκ ἂν are extraposed.

⁴⁵ See also 1 Sam 19:21; Job 36:1; Esth 8:3; Dan 10:18.

⁴⁶ See also 2 Sam 18:22; 1 Chron 14:13. In Gen 38:5, יָסַף עוֹד may be used in the meaning “to do a third time”; cf. n. 39 above.

As in the cases with a יסף + infinitive clause, the meaning of the adverb actually applies to the second verb: Jephthah did not “continue (or repeat) *again*,” but “send messengers *again*.” The expected position of עוד is in the second clause. Its presence in the first clause can be explained in the same way as in the יסף + infinitive constructions examined above. To all appearances, עוד has moved to the left.⁴⁷

Wackernagel does not record cases of migration from one main clause to another in ancient Greek. All his instances of clitic migration occur within the confines of the sentence. I am not aware of other languages where migration between independent clauses has been observed, though this may be due to ignorance on my part. The few examples that can be found in BH are open to different interpretations. Nevertheless, on a theoretical level, there is no reason to think that BH could not contribute original material to a cross-linguistic typology of “second-position” items.

In the next case study, we will again find instances of a short item, נָּ “pray,” ostensibly migrating from its host clause to the preceding one.

2.3 “Clitic repetition”: נָּ “pray”

The particle נָּ is one of very few BH words that can only occur after another word; it is a “special clitic.” It possibly originated as a verbal affix in a cognate of Arabic “energetic” forms (*yaqtulanna*).⁴⁸

The particle’s meaning in BH has been hotly debated. Most scholars hold that it nuances volitional utterances in some way and notably expresses shades of politeness (Shulman 1999). Others prefer to give it an inferential meaning (Fassberg 1994). The first approach is probably closer to the mark. The vast majority of occurrences of the particle are with volitive forms: imperative, cohortative, jussive. Consequently, several scholars have argued that its meaning is close to that of English “please.” However, the existence of a small group of clauses where נָּ combines with the cohortative to express a deliberative meaning makes this unlikely.⁴⁹ A better solution is to suppose that נָּ underscores the speaker-centeredness of the utterance. In requests, it adds a notion of personal appeal: “Do it for me.” Deliberative statements like that of Moses in Exod 3:3 are naturally speaker-centered. Jeremiah’s peculiar use of the cry לִי אֵי־נָּ “woe to me” (Jer 4:31; 45:3; cf. Lam 5:16) also agrees with this function.

As a post-positive particle nuancing volitional statements, the natural place of נָּ is immediately after the verb:

Gen 12:13

אָמַרְיִי־נָּ אֶחָתִי אֶתְּ

Say you are my sister.

Gen 33:15

אֶצְיָגֶה־נָּ עִמָּךְ מִן־הָעָם אֲשֶׁר אִתִּי

Let me leave with you some of the people who are with me.

Gen 40:14

כִּי אִם־זָכַרְתִּי אִתָּךְ כַּאֲשֶׁר יִיטֵב לְךָ וַעֲשִׂיתִי־נָּ עִמָּדִי חֶסֶד וְהִזְכַּרְתִּנִּי אֶל־פַּרְעֹה

But remember me when it is well with you; please do me the kindness to make mention of me to Pharaoh.

This is the only instance of נָּ following *weqatal*.

⁴⁷ Cf. above n. 36.

⁴⁸ This etymology is not entirely certain, due to the Aramaic cognate (נָּ), which is attested not only in Jewish Aramaic, but also in Syriac.

⁴⁹ Moses, upon seeing the burning bush, says: “Let me turn aside (אֶסְרֶה־נָּ) and look at this great sight” (Exod 3:3).

The verb and the particle are welded together. The only item that can come between them is a personal suffix:

Gen 24:43

הַשְׁקִינִי־נָא מֵעֵט־מִים מִכֶּדֶךְ

Please give me a little water from your jar to drink

Suffixed particles and short adverbs follow נָא:

2 Sam 13:26

יֵלֶךְ־נָא אֹתָנוּ אֲמֹנֹן אִחִי

Please let my brother Amnon go with us.

Although the suffixed particle moved in front of the subject, it was positioned after the unit consisting of the jussive verb and the particle נָא.⁵⁰

The particle נָא does not always follow its verb, however. When a volitive form is negated, it may be attached to the verbal form, as expected, but this occurs only once:

Judg 19:23

אֶל־אֲחִי אֶל־תִּרְעוּ נָא אֲחֵרֵי אֲשֶׁר־בָּא הָאִישׁ הַזֶּה אֶל־בֵּיתִי

No, my brothers, do not act so wickedly, since this man is my guest.

In all other cases the particle comes between the negation and the volitive form:

Gen 18:3

אֶל־נָא תֵעָבֵר מֵעַל עֶבְדְּךָ

Do not pass by your servant.⁵¹

To all appearances, the word order reflects a move to the left of the modal particle. This is surprising in light of what was pointed out above, namely that “second position” items do not usually move up before the verb.⁵² In fact, the syntax of נָא in negated clauses is surprising for yet another reason. In BH, the negation and the verbal form it governs make up a tight prosodic unit that cannot normally be split up.⁵³ In other words, we are looking at an additional case of “host-splitting” (see 2.1).

Apart from the cases where נָא is closely associated with a verbal form, the particle is found with other particles (אִי “woe,” אִיֶּה “where,” אם “if,” הִנֵּה “behold”) and once with a noun. The cases with הִנֵּה and אם merit close attention.

2.3.1 הִנֵּה with נָא

As a presentative particle that attracts attention to an item, a person, a process or a circumstance, הִנֵּה occurs with 26 נָא times. In practically all instances, this combination occurs in a context that formulates a request.⁵⁴

Let us first look at examples where הִנֵּה נָא is not followed by other instances of נָא:

50 Other examples with suffixed particles: Gen 40:14; Judg 14:12; 1 Sam 9:3; 16:17; 30:7; 1 Kgs 17:11; 2 Kgs 4:22; 5:22; 8:4; Jer 21:2; with שָׁמָּה : Gen 19:20; with 1 : Kgs 22:5; with עוֹד : Judg 13:8.

51 See also Gen 13:8; 18:30, 32; 19:7; 47:29; Num 10:31; 12:11, 12; 22:16; Judg 6:18.

52 In negated clauses, the only other item that jumps ahead of the verb is the particle עוֹד, and this happens only once: Job 20:9 הֲשֹׁרְטֵנוּ מִקֹּמוֹ וְלֹא־עוֹד תִּשְׁרְטֵנוּ מִקֹּמוֹ “their place will not behold them any longer.” The token may be evidence of an incipient development, but it is problematic to build a case on a single occurrence. Note that the book of Job contains all sorts of oddities.

53 For some apparent exceptions, see Rey 2015: 160–174.

54 A הִנֵּה clause introducing a request does not require the particle נָא; see e.g. Gen 42:2; Judg 20:7; 1 Kgs 15:19.

2 Sam 14:21

הִנֵּה־נָא עָשִׂיתִי אֶת־הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה וְלָךְ הָשֵׁב אֶת־הַנָּעַר אֶת־אַבְשָׁלוֹם

Very well, I grant this; go, bring back the young man Absalom.⁵⁵

The two clauses are closely paired. David's agreement to be reconciled with Absalom provides the grounds for the request to bring Absalom to him. Because the הִנֵּה clause does not formulate a modal (deontic) statement, while the following imperatives do, it is surprising to find נָא in the first clause but not in the second; one might have expected the reverse.⁵⁶

The tendency of short elements to move to the left suggests that, here too, the particle was displaced. As in infinitive clauses with עוֹד, the particle has left its own domain and moved up before the word it qualifies. As in the handful of cases of יסר followed by a main clause, the item has migrated from one independent clause to another.

More often, the particle occurs both in the הִנֵּה clause and in the following volitive clause:

Gen 16:2

הִנֵּה־נָא עֲצָרְנִי יְהוָה מִלֵּדֶת בְּאִמָּה אֶל־שִׁפְחָתִי אִילִּי אֲבֵנָה מִמֶּנָּה

You see that the LORD has prevented me from bearing children; go in to my slave-girl; it may be that I shall obtain children by her.⁵⁷

Again, the nature of the first clause is clear: it states an indisputable fact. The request comes in the second clause. The presence of נָא in the second clause is readily understood, but why does it figure in the preceding motivation as well? An answer to this question will be proposed after a similar set of examples with a different particle have been presented.

2.3.2 נָא with אִם

The particle נָא is found attached to the conditional particle אִם nine times,⁵⁸ all of them in the well-known politeness formula “if I have found favor in your eyes.” The constellations in which this formula occurs are similar to those of הִנֵּה נָא. The politeness formula is closely linked to a request. The request following נָא אִם may lack the particle:

1 Sam 27:5

אִם־נָא מִצָּאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ יִתְּנוּ־לִי מְקוֹם בְּאַחַת עָרֵי הַשְּׂדֵה

If I have found favor in your sight, let a place be given me in one of the country towns.⁵⁹

As in 2 Sam 14:21, quoted above, it is surprising to find נָא in the first clause, which does not express a request, but not in the second, which does; one would have expected the reverse.⁶⁰ The same explanation suggests itself: the particle has moved out of its domain and attached itself to the first word of the preceding clause. A minor difference is that the conditional clause is syntactically subordinate to the following request.

More often, the particle occurs in both the politeness formula and the following volitive clause:

Exod 34:9

אִם־נָא מִצָּאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ אֲדֹנָי יְהוֹה אֲדֹנָי בְּקֶרְבְּנוֹ

If now I have found favor in your sight, O Lord, I pray, let the Lord go with us.⁶¹

⁵⁵ See also 1 Sam 9:6.

⁵⁶ As in Judg 19:24; 2 Sam 24:17.

⁵⁷ See also Gen 19:2, 8, 20; Judg 13:3–4; 19:9; 1 Sam 16:15–16; 2 Sam 13:24; 1 Kgs 20:31.

⁵⁸ Since אִם is otherwise immediately followed by the verb, this may be another case of “host splitting.”

⁵⁹ See also Gen 33:10; Judg 6:17, where the request is expressed with *weqatal*.

⁶⁰ As in 1 Sam 20:9. The same syntax is found in Esth 5:8; 7:3; 8:5, but it should be noted that נָא never occurs following a particle in Late BH.

⁶¹ Other cases include Gen 18:3; 47:29; 50:4; Exod 33:13.

These cases of repeated נָּ with כִּי raise the same question as the above cases with הִנֵּה . While the presence of the particle in the second clause stands to reason, it looks out of place in the first clause. “If I have found favor in your eyes” is not a request.

On this point, Wackernagel’s study again offers an illuminating parallel. After having dealt at length with the placement rules of enclitic pronouns, Wackernagel discusses a small number of adverbs and particles exhibiting similar tendencies. He notably devotes 25 pages to the position of the conditional particle אִם (Wackernagel 1892: 377–402) and demonstrates that, although it is not regarded as an enclitic in Greek grammar, it shows strong similarity to enclitic pronouns in the positions it occupies. In innumerable instances, it appears close to the beginning of its sentence, far away from the modal verb it qualifies. Like the pronominal forms, it can break up compact units (Wackernagel 1892: 397).⁶² And like them, it can leave its own syntactic domain and migrate to a preceding clause.⁶³

A phenomenon noted with אִם that is in contradistinction to the behavior of enclitic pronouns is that it may be repeated. Having moved to the left, at some distance from its proper domain, it is felt to be missing near the verb it modifies, and is used a second time:⁶⁴

Demosthenes, 59, 70

ἔφη... καὶ ἄλλους ἐπαγωγοὺς λόγους, οὓς ἂν τις δεόμενος ἐκ πονηρῶν πραγμάτων εἴποι ἂν .

He added other words calculated to arouse compassion, such as anyone entreating to get out of a nasty mess might use.

The use of ἂν after οὓς “which (words)” can be accounted for if we suppose it has moved from the optative to the head of the relative clause. The second ἂν , near the optative, repeats the first one, whose force is spent by now.

Sophocles, Electra 333–334

ἀλγῶ 'πὶ τοῖς παροῦσιν: ὥστ' ἂν , εἰ σθένος λάβοιμι, δηλώσαιμι' ἂν οἱ' αὐτοῖς φρονῶ.

I am saddened by our present circumstances; indeed so much so that, could I find the strength, I would bare my feelings towards them.

Wackernagel’s explanation of the repetition of ἂν would seem to fit the double use of נָּ in BH. Originally located after the volitive form in the second of two clauses, נָּ has moved to the head of the preceding clause and attached itself to the initial particle (הִנֵּה or כִּי). Having done so, it seemed to be missing in the second clause and was added there as well.⁶⁵

This explanation, though speculative, is more powerful than earlier explanations arguing either that נָּ lent a volitive nuance to the preceding particle, or that the first נָּ anticipates the second one (Joüon, Muraoka 2006: §105c). If it were not for the tendency of short words to move to the left, the presence of נָּ in the first clause would be hard to understand. Presentative הִנֵּה does not introduce volitional utterances,⁶⁶ but instead presents facts that are plain to see or otherwise are well known. Conditional כִּי is modal, but only epistemically so; the reality of the conditional clause does not depend on the will of the speaker, but on the way things will turn out. The presence of a precative element in הִנֵּה and כִּי clauses is surprising, unless the near context is taken into account.

Admittedly, in a number of cases, the composite particles are not followed by a request. These are cases of aposiopesis, where the request is left unsaid for rhetorical reasons:

⁶² Wackernagel, “Gesetz,” 397.

⁶³ See section 2.2.

⁶⁴ Wackernagel 1892: 390–394, 399. For a more complicated explanation of the repeated ἂν , see Goldstein 2012.

⁶⁵ Clitic repetition is rarer than clitic climbing, but it is found in other languages, e.g. Piedmontese dialects (pronouns, Tortora 2014) and Berber (pronouns and ventive marker, Gutova no date).

⁶⁶ More precisely, it does not do so in classical BH. See, however, the remark on Job below.

2 Kgs 2:19

הִנֵּה-נָא מוֹשָׁב הָעִיר טוֹב כַּאֲשֶׁר אֵדְנִי רֹאֶה וְהַמַּיִם רָעִים וְהָאָרֶץ מְשֻׁקֶּלֶת

The location of this city is good, as my lord sees; but the water is bad, and the land is unfruitful.⁶⁷

Although the unspoken request is clear – to do something about the bad water – there is no explicit volitional statement that might have hosted *נָא* and from which it could migrate leftward. Cases like this show that, over time, *הִנֵּה נָא* and *נָא אֵם* became conventional in contexts where they introduced requests.

Four cases of *נָא הִנֵּה* in Job cannot be explained along the lines laid out above (Job 13:18; 33:2; 40:15, 16). In none of these passages does the *הִנֵּה* clause motivate an upcoming request. Instead, *נָא הִנֵּה* itself appears to formulate a request: “Please look.” In two passages, it is paired with the request: “Please listen” (Job 13:18; 33:2). To all appearances, the phrase has been emancipated. From functioning as the first part of a two-part utterance, it has taken on a life of its own.

2.3.3 Additional cases with *נָא*

Two atypical cases remain. They illustrate interesting phenomena but, being unique, they cannot establish norms.

Gen 24:42

אֱלֹהֵי אֲדֹנִי אֲבִרְהָם אֵם-יִשְׁךָ-נָא מַצְלִיחַ דְּרַכִּי אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי הֹלֵךְ עָלֶיהָ

O Lord, the God of my master Abraham, if now you will make successful the way I am going!

The analysis is similar to that of the clauses with *נָא אֵם* discussed above. The precative particle does not belong in the conditional protasis, but has migrated there from the request formulated in verses 43–44: “let the young woman who comes out to draw, to whom I shall say, ‘Please give me a little water from your jar to drink’, and who will say to me, ‘Drink, and I will draw for your camels also’ – let her be the woman whom the LORD has appointed for my master’s son.”

What is unique in the present passage is that *אֵם* is followed by a predicative participle with preposed *יֵשׁ* + suffix.⁶⁸ The precative particle comes between *יֵשׁ* + suffix and the verbal form. The ordering of short post-positive elements is a problem that cannot be exhaustively discussed in the present paper and therefore must be left for future research. As a working hypothesis, one could propose that *נָא* is in second position just as much as *σφε* is in Iliad 1:8, with the preceding elements making up a single prosodic word.

Num 12:13

אֵל נָא רַפָּא נָא לָהּ

O God, please heal her.

This is the only example in BH where *נָא* is attached to a noun. The analysis is the same as for the other cases of reduplication: the first *נָא* has migrated to the left from the imperative clause, and a second *נָא* has then been added to the imperative where it was felt to be missing.

3 Theoretical reflections

The phenomena described in the present paper may seem confusing. In thinking about them, it will help to distinguish between three different sets of factors shaping word order in Biblical Hebrew. Or perhaps, because in each case the outcome of these factors is a single chain of words, it is better to speak of three different levels of analysis: syntax, discourse analysis, and prosody. In discussing these levels, I will move from what is relatively well understood to what is relatively less so.

⁶⁷ See also Gen 18:27, 31, and with *נָא אֵם*, Gen 30:27.

⁶⁸ For this construction, see Joosten 2012: 251.

3.1 Syntax

The first level is syntax in the restricted sense of sentence structure. In verbal clauses with a lexicalized subject and direct object, the default order in BH is VSO.⁶⁹ Additional objects and adjuncts (X, Y, Z) follow the object. The preverbal field is for topicalized (T) or focalized (F) elements.⁷⁰ A basic grid that underlies a large number of utterances can be visualized as follows:

(T) (F) V S O X (Y, Z)

BH word order is not rigid, but it is fairly constant – sufficiently so to be of help in assigning syntactic roles. On the face of it, the usual position of suffixed particles and short adverbs disturbs the basic grid: instead of VSOX, the order is VXSO. (If the particle is the accusative marker, the order changes from VSO to VOS.) Other forms of leftward movement more openly clash with the rules of syntax:

- the migration of עוֹד out of its infinitive clause into the main clause (2.2);
- the movement of אֵיךְ from the request proper to a preceding clause that motivates the request (2.3).
- The position of short items between an infinitive construct and its subject (case study 1), or between the negation and the verbal form it negates (2.3), clash with syntactic rules on the sub-clausal level.

On the level of syntax, these phenomena look irregular. Although there is no reason to suspect any of these patterns – all of which are well-attested in a variety of texts – of being “not well-formed,” some amount of disharmony must be admitted. Two remarks will support this judgment.

First, in one of the above case studies, we observed a case of “syntactic repair.” In complex requests consisting of a volitive statement preceded by presentative clause or a politeness formula, the precative particle אֵיךְ may move to the left, out of the volitive’s domain and into the preceding clause. In many cases, this movement is compensated for by the reinstatement of the particle close to the volitive verbal form. The first אֵיךְ is still somewhat anomalous in terms of clause structure, but at least the second clause now conforms to what can be expected in terms of syntax. If this description is accurate, it shows that the placement rules of certain particles were felt to be irregular by users of the Hebrew language themselves. The repair occurred because something was amiss.

The second remark is more complex. When the adverb עוֹד moves from an infinitive clause to the main clause, the sentence structure is disturbed. Arguably, however, the resulting construction may involve what linguists of Romance languages have described as “restructuring,” where the main verb and the infinitive depending on it are viewed as a single verbal predication. This would partly justify the position of the adverb in a clause like וַיִּסְרֹף עוֹד בְּלֶקֶן שְׁלֹחַ שָׂרִים (Num 22:15). If we view וַיִּסְרֹף ... שְׁלֹחַ “he continued to send” as a single, though discontinuous, verbal predicate, then עוֹד is located in the right clause. To my knowledge, no Hebrew grammarian has argued for the “restructuring” hypothesis, and the material may be too scant to build a solid case. But on a theoretical level, at least, the possibility that “restructuring” has occurred shows how syntax can recover some of its own authority after being disturbed by other factors.

⁶⁹ Not all Hebraists agree on this point. For arguments pro and con, see Joosten 2012: 356–362.

⁷⁰ Khan and Van Der Merwe (2020) argue that the SV word order is also used in “thetic” clauses. This is an interesting proposal, but it remains to be seen whether it will win over a majority of Hebraists. Many of the clauses they quote as examples of this new clause-type can be interpreted as subordinate (circumstantial) clauses.

In conclusion, syntax certainly interacts with the leftward movement discussed in this paper. But the movement itself hardly stems from syntactic forces. To explain why it occurs, a different perspective is necessary.

3.2 Discourse analysis

The second level is that of discourse analysis. As was pointed out above, the items that typically move to the left in the sentence are instrumental in stitching clauses and sentences into a coherent text. The suffixed particles serve in tracking participants in the discursive world – who does what, to whom, for whose sake. The adverbs ensure continuity of place, time and theme. While the semantic load and “newness value” of all these items are typically rather low, they facilitate communication by providing redundant reference to the terms of the discourse. The particle כִּי arguably lends a modal nuance to a stretch of text.

None of these items are “discourse markers” in the way that Greek $\delta\acute{\epsilon}$ “but, and” or $\text{o}\ddot{\upsilon}\nu$ “therefore” are. The primary locus of the Hebrew items is the clause in which they figure. They nevertheless contribute to the coherence of a text on a macro-syntactic level. If these items systematically occur in a well-defined position in the sentence – *in casu* following the verb as closely as possible – they will aid the hearer (and reader) in navigating the discourse. This advantage may well have outweighed the slight disorder on the level of clause structure. Moreover, in a set of two clauses, the movement of an item from the second to the first clause would be unproblematic on the discourse level, where clauses are mere parts of a greater whole.

Thus the discourse perspective is much more powerful than sentence syntax to provide an explanation of the placement rules studied in this paper. Nevertheless, discourse analysis cannot explain everything that happens to our short items. In particular, it cannot account for cases of “host splitting,” such as when the precative particle moves up between the negation and the jussive (2.3), or a suffixed particle or short adverb comes between an infinitive and the noun with which it forms a construct phrase (2.1). It seems that there is yet another factor affecting BH word order.

3.3 Prosody

On this point, Wackernagel’s study holds a final important lesson for our investigation of BH word order. His article mainly comprises lists of examples of passages with second-position items in Homer and other Greek texts. Theoretical reflections and discussions of earlier literature on the topic are kept to a minimum. The main value of Wackernagel’s study lies not in its theoretical contributions, but in its consistent tabulation of data that, in all their diversity, point to a single phenomenon, namely the tendency of certain words to gravitate leftward. He nevertheless makes it very clear which explanation of the phenomenon he prefers. Being certain that sentence syntax is not the answer, and explicitly rejecting the explanation based on what we would call “discourse analysis,”⁷¹ he points instead to the enclitic nature of the second-position items. The items move to the left of the sentence because they are unaccented. In several passages in his study he speaks of the *Drang* – the “urge” or “drive” – of enclitic pronouns and particles to reach the beginning of the sentence (Wackernagel 1892: 336, 367, 374). This drive is what pushes them out of their natural environment into domains where they did not originally belong, and that sometimes even causes them to split up their new hosts to get even closer to the left edge of the sentence.

⁷¹ Wackernagel 1892: 366–367. Wackernagel refers to Bergaigne (1877: 177–178) who had argued that second position pronouns are located close to the beginning of the sentence in order to underscore the link with the preceding sentence.

With his insistence on the “automatic” nature of this tendency, he points to an additional level of analysis, distinct from sentence structure and discourse grammar, namely prosody. This would seem to be a fruitful intuition.

Prosody is a relatively recent addition to the linguist’s toolbox.⁷² Even today, it is mostly concerned with features such as intonation, stress, tempo and rhythm, which are conceived of as “suprasegmentals” added to a text in speech. That prosody has a role in determining word order is not admitted by all specialists. Nevertheless, anecdotal evidence suggests that it does. It has been observed in many languages that in set pairs of words, such as “sons and daughters” the shorter word tends to come first. Thus in Hebrew one typically says *yom walayla* “day and night,” but in Greek *nux kai hemera* “night and day.”⁷³ In the same vein, English heavy noun phrases have been observed to move to the right to an extent that is uncommon with shorter noun phrases. While “I explained to Bill the reinforcement resistance test” is acceptable, “I explained to Bill the test” is doubtful and “I explained to Bill it” is impossible (Büring 2013). Such tendencies suggest that prosodic factors do influence word order to some extent.

Some of the material gathered in the present paper favors the prosodic explanation. As was shown above, longer or composite particles move to the left less often than short particles. This suggests that their phonological shape plays a part in assigning them a position in the clause.

Additional confirmation that prosody is relevant to the leftward movement studied in this paper is the occasional migration of a short item from one sentence to another. As was argued above, the modal particle נָּ may move from the volitive clause to which it belongs to a presentative clause preceding the request (2.3). Another instantiation of this phenomenon can be found in passages where the adverb עַד moves from a narrative clause to the preceding clause (2.2). Sentence structure and discourse analysis cannot account for this interclausal movement, but prosody can. In recent research, the highest, i.e. most complex, level in a hierarchy of prosodic analysis is termed the “utterance.”⁷⁴ Prosodic processes are said to operate within the confines of an utterance, but not beyond it. An utterance is usually, but not always, co-extensive with a sentence. Notably, an utterance can comprise two sentences if they are logically connected:

Turn up the heat. I’m freezing.

It has been observed that sandhi (in this case, “t-flapping”) can occur between the sentences in such complex utterances (Dresher 1994: 15–16). The two constellations in which BH particles appear to migrate from one main clause to another neatly fit this framework.

Syntax, discourse grammar and prosody all come into play when certain items are assigned to the second position in their clause. Prosody pushes items to the left, but syntax restrains this tendency. Discourse factors licence their location, close to the beginning of the clause.

3.4 A hypothesis

While prosody is almost certainly a factor, the precise mechanism by which clitics or other short items are directed to their “second position” has not been definitively elucidated.⁷⁵ The riddle of “second position” items actually consists of two questions: Why did these items move to the left? And why did they not move all the way to the left, being stuck in peninitial position?⁷⁶ No one has been

⁷² A key publication was Selkirk 1972.

⁷³ For Hebrew, see Friedman 1980.

⁷⁴ The successive levels are as follows: utterance – intonational phrase – phonological phrase – phonological word; see e.g. Dresher 1994: 8.

⁷⁵ Many proposals have been made, but no consensus has emerged. See Halpern, Zwicky (eds.) 1996 and the review of this book by Stump (1998).

⁷⁶ Stump (1998: 512): “This is, in fact, two problems: first, why are 2P clitics positioned near the left periphery of their domain, and second, why mustn’t they appear AT this periphery?”

able to provide an answer to these questions that a majority of linguists accept. At the close of the present paper, I will tentatively propose a new hypothesis.

As it happens, the BH data provide a hint as to a possible solution. As was noted above, the postverbal position of suffixed particles and short adverbs is not obligatory. Even with a lexicalized subject and object, the short item may come at the end, where basic clause syntax would normally assign it:

Exod 13:19

וַיִּקַּח מֹשֶׁה אֶת־עַצְמוֹת יוֹסֵף עִמּוֹ

And Moses took with him the bones of Joseph.⁷⁷

The item may also come between S and O:

Exod 15:19

וַיָּשָׁב יְהוָה וַיַּעֲלֵהֶם אֶת־מֵי הַיָּם

the LORD brought back the waters of the sea upon them.⁷⁸

Nevertheless, the statistically dominant order is VXSO, as stated above:

Num 16:19

וַיִּקְהַל עָלֵיהֶם קֹרַח אֶת־כָּל־הָעֵדָה

Then Korah assembled the whole congregation against them.

It is tempting to interpret the various positions illustrated above as stages in a development leading from VSOX to the now normative VXSO word order. The handful of cases of textual variation presented in section 2.2 provide empirical evidence in favor of this scenario.

Again, in sentences containing both the verb יסף “to add” and the adverb עוד, various positions are attested for the adverb. It may come at the end of the sentence:

Deut 17:16

לֹא תִסְפּוֹן לָשׁוּב בַּדֶּרֶךְ הַזֶּה עוֹד

You must never return that way again.⁷⁹

Or it may follow the infinitive construct:

1 Sam 3:6

וַיִּסָּף יְהוָה קֹרָא עוֹד שְׁמוּאֵל

The LORD called again, “Samuel!”⁸⁰

It may climb to the main clause, where it may follow the subject:

2 Sam 7:20

מִה־יִּוְסִיף דָּוִד עוֹד לְדַבֵּר אֵלָיךְ

And what more can David say to you?

However, it most often comes immediately after the main verb:

Num 22:15

וַיִּסָּף עוֹד בָּלַק שְׁלַח שָׂרִים רַבִּים וְנִכְבָּדִים מֵאֵלֶּה

Once again Balak sent officials, more numerous and more distinguished than these.⁸¹

This last pattern differs the most from the pattern that would be predicted by normal syntax. Therefore, the other instances may hail back to earlier templates, in which the adverb had not yet

⁷⁷ Also Num 11:29; 1 Sam 20:33; 2 Sam 10:3.

⁷⁸ Also Gen 29:24; 41:8; 43:16; Deut 9:10.

⁷⁹ Also Gen 8:12; Deut 5:25; 1 Sam 18:29.

⁸⁰ Also Gen 8:21 MT; Exod 14:13; Deut 19:20; 1 Sam 27:1; Zeph 3:11.

⁸¹ Also Judg 13:21 and many other passages.

completed its leftward journey. Once again, a small amount of textual evidence confirms this view (2.2).

This evidence leads up to the new hypothesis: these data may show that not all short items in Hebrew were necessarily projected directly into their “second position.” Some may have arrived there through an incremental process. The mechanism operating in each step of this process would be the prosodic principle, by which short items typically precede longer ones. Since lexicalized subjects and objects are usually longer than suffixed particles or short adverbs, over time, incremental drift would lead many of them to approach the head of the clause or sentence.

Why, then, did the items mostly remain stuck in the post-verbal field? And why did none of them ever drift to the head of the clause? The verbal form would also normally be longer than a suffixed particle or a short adverb. So why did our items not switch places with the verb? For BH, the answer is obvious: the preverbal field was reserved for distinct pragmatic functions that the short items in question did not serve. This was not a prosodic constraint, but a syntactic one, with obvious implications for discourse. However, it was a strong enough constraint to block opposing prosodic forces.

4 Conclusion

This paper has investigated a variety of items – particles with pronominal suffixes, short adverbs, and the enclitic particle נָּ – that fulfill various syntactic roles. Some suffixed particles function as direct or indirect objects; others, as well as some adverbs, are adjuncts. One, נָּ , is a modal marker. These items observe diverse placement rules, with some gravitating as close to the verb as possible and others moving into the preverbal field, or even migrating to a preceding clause. Despite this variety, these items arguably illustrate a single phenomenon: a tendency not to occur in their designated place, but rather further to the left in the clause or sentence. It is therefore worthwhile to study them as a family. Indeed, in addition to the leftward movement, more than one subset of items exhibits other striking phenomena:

- The breaking up of syntagms to give short items a position as close to the head of the clause as possible is found with suffixed particles and short adverbs (2.1), as well as with the modal marker נָּ in negated statements (2.3).
- The migration of an item from one clause to a preceding one is attested with עֹד (2. 2) and נָּ (2.3).

Typological data validate the unifying approach we have essayed. Ancient Greek, as documented in Jacob Wackernagel’s classic study, provides precise formal parallels to many features of Biblical Hebrew word order, as do other languages worldwide.

The potential contribution of our study is twofold. First, the comparative and typological approach allows for a more comprehensive description of BH syntax and a better understanding of particular features. Secondly, by demonstrating the relevance of prosody, the study opens up a relatively new approach to questions of BH word order.

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