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MARKED WORD ORDER IN THE BOOK OF JOEL¹

ABSTRACT

The function of BH word order (or more specifically clause constituent order) patterns has received considerable attention during the last two decades. Recently, Lunn (2006) provided an innovative explanation of how the relative frequently occurring instances of fronting and double fronting in poetic texts could be explained. In this paper marked constituent order patterns in the book of Joel are analyzed in terms of the information structure of the strophes and stanzas in which they occur in order to determine whether Lunn's model also applies to the poetry of the book Joel. Using their own semantic-pragmatic model for explaining constituent order, the authors establish that, on the one hand their findings concur with those of Lunn, but on the other hand, they do not need to resort to the "uniquely poetic" principles formulated by Lunn.

1. INTRODUCTION

The interpretation of BH word order, or more specifically, constituent order within the clause, has received much attention over the last two decades.² Most of these studies are framed in models that have their roots in the Praguean functional sentence perspective. The notions topic and focus have been widely used, as defined by Dik (1989) and his followers,³ and refined by Lambrecht (1994 and 2001) in terms of the cognitive processing of information in a discourse or textual unit, i.e. its information structure.⁴ This "information structure model" had been embraced for its ability to go beyond explaining fronting in BH merely in terms of static text imminent "either/or" categories. There are,

1 The financial assistance of the National Research Foundation (NRF) of South Africa towards this research is hereby acknowledged. Opinions expressed in this publication and the conclusions arrived at are those of the authors and are not necessarily to be attributed to the NRF.

2 Cf. Holmstedt (2009:112).

3 Cf. Buth (1995 and 1999) and Rosenbaum (1997).

4 Disse (1998), Heimerdinger (1999), Van der Merwe and Talstra (2002/3), Floor (2003, 2004, 2005), Van Hecke (2005), Hayes (2008), Holmstedt (2009) and Moshavi (forthcoming).

nevertheless, still many issues to be resolved. On the one hand, linguists disagree on how a theory of information structure should be conceptualized and presented (Erteschik-Shir 2007:211). On the other hand, there are still many issues concerning the constituent order of BH that have not yet received adequate attention, e.g. “the position of the verb in the clause, the constituent order in non-indicative clauses and the constituent order in clauses with copula” (Van Hecke 2005:436). One may go further and ask: What “counts” as information in a poetic text, how should the high frequency of fronting be interpreted, and how should the relatively frequent occurrence of double fronting and other instances of “apparently irregular” constituent order in poetry be explained?⁵

In a recent study, Lunn (2006) compares the constituent order of about 1200 verbal clauses from poetical material (Pss 1-12, 96-99, 142-143, Isa 61-66, Prov 5-7 and Job 3-10) with a similar number of clauses from narrative material (Gen 11-14, Exod 1-2, Josh. 1-3, 1 Sam. 5-7, 1 Kgs 1-3). He found that in narrative material, 85.5% of the clauses appears in the so-called canonical word order (VS(O)(Modifier)). In poetic material only 66% of the verbal clauses are according to the canonical order. However, according to Lunn, of the remaining 34% which displays a non-canonical order, 75% can be explained in terms of pragmatic considerations (i.e. the notions topic and focus). The remaining 25%, i.e. the 8.4% of all clauses with a non-canonical order, should be interpreted as “poetic defamiliarization.” Moreover, the majority (83.9%) of the defamiliarized clauses occur in the B-line of parallel constructions. The rest appear in environments “where they perform specific discourse functions” (Lunn 2006:277). In other words, Lunn claims (1) that although verbal clauses with a non-canonical word order occur significantly more often in poetry than in narrative, the majority can still be explained in terms of the same pragmatic considerations as those instances of non-canonical word order in narrative, and (2) those instances that could not be explained in terms of these pragmatic considerations, could be accounted for in a principled manner.

The question is, however, can Lunn’s model also account for the non-canonical constituent order of verbal clauses in poetical material in the rest of the Tenach? Of course, this question could only be answered if we had an exhaustive analysis and description of all the verbal clauses in all the poetic material in the Tenach. The problem is that we do not even have an exhaustive description for the narrative sections. When one

5 Van Hecke (2006) and Floor (2005).

considers the range of factors that Holmstedt (2009:118) points out to be taken into account if one wants to compile sound data, it may be argued that Lunn's data is not fine-grained enough. To complicate matters, despite major strides in the notional frame of reference to describe the pragmatic considerations that govern constituent order in BH, there is still no consensus among scholars about some aspects of this pragmatic model.⁶ In the analysis of a corpus, assigning the labels topic and focus in an inter-subjectively testable way provides a challenge in its own right. To move forward, we believe, one must first try to establish a firmer foundation for the empirical validity of these pragmatic explanations – beyond that of a mere taxonomy of labels. It is in this regard that this paper would like to make a contribution.

The purpose of this paper is twofold: First, it sets out to defend the hypothesis that nearly all the instances of non-canonical word order in the book of Joel can be explained in terms of the same pragmatic model as that applied to narrative texts. In other words, not all poetic texts need the “additional” principles that Lunn advocates. Second, it would like to illustrate as explicitly as possible the authors’ own *modus operandi* in assigning the notions topic and focus, in order to facilitate scrutiny of their conclusions regarding Lunn, as well as other patterns of use they have identified with regard to fronted constructions in the book of Joel.

For these purposes, we commence with a brief description of our theoretical model – a model that has its roots in the functionalist views of Dik (1989), benefited much from Jacobs (1988 and 2001) and Lambrecht (1994), and in recent times from some of the insights of Relevance Theory and cognitive linguistics.⁷ Secondly, we will provide a brief statistical summary of the constituent order of clauses in Joel. Thirdly, we illustrate by means of a detailed description of the information structure of the clauses in Joel 1:2-2:17⁸ that we can account for the marked

6 Not all scholars agree that BH is a VS language (e.g. Holmstedt 2005) or even a configurational language at all (Andersen & Forbes forthcoming). There are also differences of opinion about the empirical status, the definition, as well as the differences between the notions “topic” and “focus.” Van Hecke (2005:113-124) provides, in our opinion, a useful overview in this regard.

7 We have, though, to partially concur with Erteschik-Shir (2007:78) “that it may be premature to search for a cognitive basis for IS concepts such as topic and focus at this stage.”

8 We will discuss in detail only the examples from Joel 1:2-2:17. However, all the other instances of fronting in verbal clauses in 2:18-4:21 will also be

constituent order in the book of Joel in terms of our semantic-pragmatic model and that we do not need to resort to the supplementary principles that Lunn (2006) has identified.

2. THEORETICAL MODEL

Our model is based on various hypotheses of how humans store and process information in a communicative process, and it has benefitted much from Kintsch's (1998 and 2002) hypotheses about comprehension and Harken's (1999) ideas of how literary texts are processed.⁹ We will focus here in a simplified matter only on how information is processed at *clause level*. We will concur with Erteschik-Shir (2007:7) that "topic and focus are the only information structure primitives needed to account for all information structure phenomena." We will not try to account in a systematic way how the focus of each clause contributes to the "theme(s)" of the strophe and/or stanza in which it occurs,¹⁰ but will endeavor to explain each instance of fronting in terms of the information structure of the strophe and/or stanza. As far as the notion "topic" is concerned, it will be evident that we restrict ourselves to the topic of a clause. At clause level then, fronting typically signals that the topic of clause A differs from that of B.

To illustrate the most pertinent features of our model, we will use different aspects of the text of Joel.

Our knowledge about the book of Joel, a literary *entity*, consists of an x amount of semantic *propositions*, e.g., Joel is one of the minor prophets, there is a difference of opinion about Joel's dating, who "Joel" the person was, etc. As Biblical scholars, we certainly have a *file* in our long term memory, called "The book of Joel." This may not be the case for a Buddhist scholar.

The number and type of propositions in our respective Joel-files may differ. Furthermore, the file "The book of Joel" has a number of interconnected *sub-files* linked to it, e.g. Joel's historical background,

referred to. For an analysis of all the clauses in the book of Joel, see http://academic.sun.ac.za/jnsl/Volumes/JNSL%2036_2%20appendix.pdf.

9 It is also assumed that "rather than viewing the brain as a system of modules linearly feeding to each other and ultimately to a central system, connectionism views the brain as a network characterized by causal processes by which units of intricate systems excite and inhibit each other and thus dynamically adapt to their environment" (Marmaridou 2000:48).

10 For attempts in this regard, cf. Floor (2003, 2004 and 2005).

Joel's people, Joel's sociocultural and religious setting, Joel's poetic features, Joel's language, and so forth. From now on, as far as this paper is concerned, any of these presupposed, identifiable files and/or their sub-files could easily be activated to become the *topic* of a clause or a related sequence of clauses. In the latter case, the topic of a clause may attain a thematic character. However, an entity may also become the topic of only one clause and then be dropped again. The "discourse active" topic of a clause is that entity a speaker wants to say something about which he/she assesses as being relevant to the addressee. In typical human discourse, topics that are brand-new to the addressees, and that have first to be established, e.g., the opening of "the book of Joel" for a Buddhist linguist, are relatively rare. Many topic entities are identifiable because they are either linked to other discourse active entities and/or part of the presupposed scripts and frames invoked by means of those entities. Consider, e.g., Joel 1:12a-b: after addressing the farmers and vine-dressers in 1:11a and 1:11b, the vine and the fig trees, as part of the typical farmer scenario, are readily available to the interlocutors to act as the topics of 12a and b respectively.

The fronting of a clause constituent and dislocation (*casus pendens*) are in BH overt markers of topic shift. One would expect that topics are prototypically the living entities or things about which something is said in a discourse. However, we must grant, that overt stage topics,¹¹ i.e. adjuncts of place and time, may also be the topic of a clause.

We said above that "the discourse active topic of a clause is that entity a speaker wants to say something about which he/she *assesses as relevant* to the addressee." According to relevance theorists, this "something said" about a discourse active topic is relevant to an addressee if 1) it tells the addressee something about the topic that he/she did not know before, e.g., if you did not know about the direct relationship between "locusts and drought" in Joel and Amos (cf. Amos 7:1-6); 2) it alters an existing proposition, e.g. if you had dated the book of Joel as pre-exilic and we refer you to Jeremias (2007:2), who provides a convincing argument for a late post-exilic dating; or 3) it confirms an existing proposition, e.g., we provide good arguments to confirm your views about the discourse structure of the book of Joel. In other words, the *focus* of an utterance is any information said about a discourse active topic which causes any one of these three cognitive effects.

11 For the notions "stage topic," as well as other types of topics, cf. Erteschik-Shir 2007:5-27.

Statistically the most frequent type of focus in narrative texts is *predicate focus*, in other words, what discourse active entities (typically pronominalized) did, will do, or must do. Across languages, clauses with predicate focus tend to display the most unmarked order of constituents, e.g. Joel 2:18a-19b, as well as 19d. In Hebrew the V(S)(O)(M) order is considered its unmarked order. *Constituent focus* can be manifested when the referent of a fronted constituent, or some feature of that referent, represents the “piece of information” of a proposition that is typically already discourse active, e.g. Joel 1:15c and 3:5b.¹² *Clause focus* is relatively rare, and represents instances where everything in a clause is new, typically the answer to the question “What happened?” The covert topic, referred to as the stage topic, in such cases is the particular situation (i.e. the time and place) about which something is asserted. In Joel, we could identify only one instance, viz., Joel 1:6a (see discussion below). According to Lambrecht (1994:234-235), across languages, clauses with clause focus and constituent focus tend to have the same linear order of constituents.

For a constituent, predicate or clause to qualify as the focus of an assertion it needs to represent a deliberate choice in a context where more than one option is possible. If one considers the notion of “topic shift” referred to above, it is obvious that a different topic also represents such a choice. This is in our view also the reason why some scholars wrongly consider topics that are contrasted or compared to be instances of constituent focus. In Gen 41:13, two entities are contrasted, viz. me and him.¹³

When we consider the content and word order of the book of Joel, we must keep in mind that poetic texts seldom convey information for the sake of pure instruction or enlightenment alone. Prophets and preachers normally try to change the behavior of their audience, e.g. influence them to do something or to think differently. The information provided typically serves as part of the motivation for why the audience should

12 A “discourse active proposition” is not necessarily something that has been explicitly mentioned. In Joel 2:6b it is said that “the face of *each* turned pale.” The notion “faces turned pale” is not explicitly mentioned before, but is implied by “peoples writhed” in 2:6a.

13 What is asserted in each clause, is what happened in a corresponding manner to each entity, “*Me*, he restored to my office, and *him*, he hanged.” The contrast that is involved is created by the different things that happened to each of the fronted topics.

give heed to the speech acts directed to them. Consider briefly the frequent use of a motivating **כִּי** in Joel 1-2 (1:5d, 6a, 10c, 11c, 12d, 13f, 1:15b, 17d, 18d, 19b, 20b, 2:1d, 1e, 11b-d, 13e). Furthermore, in a text where the prophet tries to convince his/her addressees to act, one might also expect more often than in narrative texts, the confirmation or reaffirmation of already shared information.

3. STATISTICAL PROFILE

For this study we used Richter's *Biblica Hebraica Transcripta* (1993) as the point of departure, and then compared that with the division of the *Stuttgart Electronic Study Bible* for identifying all the clause divisions in the book of Joel (See the Appendix). We identified 213 verbal clauses with finite verbs in Joel. Of these, 17 have, apart from the verb no other lexicalized constituent; 11 are אֲשֶׁר relative clauses and 20 are כִּי clauses. In addition to these 213 verbal clauses, 10 instances of ellipsis of a finite verb can be postulated. We also identified 30 nominal clauses, of which 6 are participle clauses. A further 7 instances have been identified where nominal clauses with an ellipsed constituent could be postulated.

Of the 213 verbal clauses, 134 have the so-called canonical or unmarked word order. Of these 43 are imperatives, 29 *weqatal*, 25 *x+qatal*, 6 *x+yiqtol*, 4 *we x+yiqtol* (where x is not a clause constituent) 16 *qatal*, 5 *yiqtol*, 7 *wayyiqtol* and 3 *weyiqtol* forms. This means that 64.4% of the verbal clauses in Joel display this unmarked order. This statistic accords well with the 66% of Lunn's corpus. In 62 instances one constituent has been fronted and in 13 instances, two constituents. The question of how many of these instances can be explained in terms of our theoretical model is the theme of the main body of this paper. This takes the form of a mini semantic-pragmatic commentary on Joel 1:2-2:17, as follows.

4. JOEL 1:2-2:17

4.1 Stanza A (1:2-14)¹⁴

The prophet calls all Judeans to lament over a national disaster, and then summons the priests to initiate a collective public reaction

Stanza A opens in 1:2a and 2b with an attempt to get the attention of “**בָּל יוֹשֵׁבְךָ אָרֶץ**”¹⁵ and “**הַזָּקְנִים שָׁמְעוּ**” of “**הָאָזִינוּ**”

14 The division of the stanzas and strophes is based primarily on Wendland (2009:20).

the first two parallel lines are followed by a rhetorical question in 2c, viz., **הַחִתָּה זוֹאת בִּימִיכֶם וְאֵם בִּימִי אֲבָתִיכֶם:** Suspense is created in lines 2a-2d by two factors, first the use of **זֹאת**, a pronoun for which the antecedent is as yet unknown, and second the implication that “this thing/event” has never happened before, i.e. **בִּימִיכֶם וְאֵם בִּימִי אֲבָתִיכֶם**. The suspense created by **זֹאת** is heightened in 1:3a by the fronting of two prepositional phrases, viz., **לְבָנֶיכֶם עַלְיהָ**.

In his study of 698 instances of double fronting (“Doppelt besetzte Vorfeld”) in poetry and 135 in narrative texts, Gross (2001) established that in most of these constructions, the first fronted item can be interpreted as a shift in topic and the second fronted item as an instance of constituent focus. Consider briefly, Joel 4:16a. In 15a and b, celestial bodies were talked about (i.e. they are the topics of those clauses), but in 16a, there is a topic shift, viz. to Yahweh. This is the first fronted constituent in 16a. The second fronted constituent **מִצְרַיִם** specifies the place from where Yahweh will roar. In a context in which the people of Zion appear to have been threatened and by implication experience the absence of God (Joel 2:17), it is reasonable to argue that the fact that Yahweh will again speak from *Zion* is the focus of the utterance in 4:16a. This is confirmed by the fronted construction in the parallel line in 4:16b.¹⁶ Also in 4:18e, 4:19a-b and 4:20a, the double fronting in each case can be interpreted as a topic shift followed by a constituent that is the focus of the assertion. However, in 1:3 the first fronted constituent, viz. **עַלְיהָ** (with reference to **זֹאת**) is discourse active and hence cannot be regarded as a topic shift.

It is, according to Gross, quite often possible that both fronted constituents are instances of constituent focus.¹⁷ In Joel 1:3a, this is indeed the case. It confirms that “this” is exactly what they should talk

15 In the rest of this stanza A we will observe how this general audience is further specified in vss. 1:5a (“drunkards”), 5c (“wine-drinkers”), 11a-b (“farmers” and “vine-dressers”), and finally expanded to include the priests (first referred to in 1:9b and then directly addressed in 1:13b-c).

16 Cf. also Joel 3:5c and 4:12c. In both these **כִּי** clauses it is asserted that, contrary to what the addressee may expect, it is in the fronted locations where a discourse active event will take place.

17 If one adopts the perspective referred to in §2 on the notion of topic, many of the instances identified by Gross (2001) as double focus constructions, may rather be regarded as instances of shift of topic followed by an instance of constituent focus, e.g. Pss 38:13c and 89:2a. Cf. Gross (2001: 275-276).

about, and they should tell it to their children. However, not only should they tell it to **בָנֵיכֶם** (1:3b), but **לְבָנֵיכֶם** (1:3c). These explications are regarded as evidence that the fronted **לְבָנֵיכֶם** in 1:3a can indeed be regarded as one of the two most salient pieces of information conveyed in 1:3c.

What all the people should be talking about is finally referred to explicitly in 1:4a-4c. It would be reasonable to assume that the catastrophe they have to talk about was on everybody's mind. What had to be told in detail was the extent and severity of the disaster. For this purpose, participants that typically would form part of the complete frame of this natural catastrophe are invoked by means of three clauses with fronted subjects. Each represents a shift in topic, and what is said of each add up to intensify the gruesome picture of the catastrophe. Similar to this instance of entities that form part of the script or frame of a situation and that are invoked to provide details about a situation, are examples to be found in 1:12a-b, 2:3a-b;¹⁸ 2:9a-9d, 2:10c-d, 2:22c-d, 3:1d-e, 4:2d-3a, 4:5vR1-2 and 4:6a, 4:15a-b, 4:18c-d.¹⁹ In other words, these interrelated pairs amount to 24 out of the 34 instances of topic shift that we have identified in the book of Joel.²⁰

The next strophe (i.e. 1:5a-1:7e), opens with three imperative forms, two of which are followed by vocatives (in 5a and 5c). **שִׁבּוֹרִים** are called upon to **כַּלְשֻׁתִי יְיָ** and **וּבָבוֹ** and **הִקִּיצוֹ** to “wail.” The ground of the directives in 1:5a-b is postponed. It is given only in 5c, but then at first greatly underspecified, viz. **עַל־עֲסִיס**. Only the next line, 5d, is more explicit – **כִּי נִבְרָת מִפְּיכֶם** – yet still in figurative language. What caused this to happen is explained in detail with more metaphoric imagery in 1:6a-1:7e. The revelatory assertion that governs the subsequent 7 clauses has a fronted indefinite subject, **גֹזֵי**. The realities of the catastrophe to be told

18 Here not physical things, but references to locations are fronted.

19 Joel 3:4a-4b can be included here. It differs from the rest in that the verb is ellipsed in the second line.

20 According to Lunn (2006:156) in his treatment of marked parallelism, “The B-line will be ordered according to the markedness of the A-Line.” Whether this use of fronted pairs (and groups) happens significantly more frequently in poetry than in prose, is plausible, but needs to be confirmed by more empirical investigations. Furthermore, in Joel 2:20a, 4:3c and 17d the fronted constituent (i.e. marked construction) appears only in the B-line of a pair to signal a topic shift. For a discussion of these constructions in narrative material, cf. Moshavi (forthcoming: 206-233).

to next generations (1:3a) and described in 1:4a-4c are now portrayed more vividly. Important for the purposes of this paper is the question of how the fronting in 1:6a should be interpreted. We regard this to be an instance of *clause focus* since it reports on “what happened?”²¹ Consider also the following examples: Num 21:28 and 2 Kgs. 1:6.²² In Joel, after 1:6a, the threatening features of the perpetrators are first described (1:6b-c), and then what they did in clauses (1:7a-e) with *predicate focus*.

The next strophe, 1:8-10e, opens again with an imperative form; this time though the addressee is feminine, most probably, the city of Jerusalem. She is called to wail like a virgin for her husband to be. The reason is not overly marked by בַּי or עַל as in the previous strophes. New identifiable entities and the frame of the cultic activities at the temple are now invoked in 1:9a, viz. מִנְחָה וּנְסָךְ. The normal sacrificial products from the land are cut off from the temple. The priests mourn because the land and their source of cultic supply have been devastated. The ground mourns because the grain crop has been devastated, the wine dried up, and the oil has run out. The community has to lament deeply, for she lacks the means to maintain her relationship with God. The “ground” laments because she cannot produce. One may ask why there are no instances of fronting in this strophe where a number of topic shifts could be postulated, i.e. שָׂדָה and אֲדֹמָה in 10a-b as well as דְּן, תִּרְוֹשׁ and יְצָהָר in 10c-e. One reason may be the fact that the unmarked word order allows for a phonological stress that cannot be traced anymore. Another reason may be that the verbs of destruction are meant to be the foci of each utterance. What we did observe is that in comparison with the constructions used in the list in 1:4a-4c, as well as most of the other lists referred to above,²³ the subjects in 1:10a-10d are all indeterminate.

The addressees in 11a-12d are אֶכְרִים, who are called upon to be dismayed, and בְּרִמִּים, who are told to wail. In a similar way as in 1:5c, the reason is at first underspecified in 11b, viz. עַל-חָטָה וּעַל-שְׁעָרָה.

21 According to Lambrecht (2000:623), “In a SF (*i.e. sentence focus, chjvdm*) sentence, the subject referent is not conceptualized as actively involved in some situation but as appearing on the ‘scene’ of the discourse.” Although it may be argued that the locusts were already active in 1:4, in the causal frame introduced in 1:6a, they are represented as a גַּ�י that had appeared on the scene.

22 Also Num 16:35; 22:5; 25:6; 1 Sam 23:27; 2 Sam 1:2; 1 Kgs 13:1; 20:17; 2 Kgs 2:23; 4:42; Jer 30:23; 37:5 and 48:45.

23 Fronted subjects that are indeterminate are to be found in Joel 2:22c-22d and 4:15a-b.

Subsequently, in the clauses that are governed by conjunction **כִּי**, 1:11c-12b, the descriptive details are provided. In 11c, a general statement is made אֶבֶד קָצֵיר שְׂדָה. In 1:12a and 12b, two fruit bearing entities, הַגְּפֹן and הַתְּאֵנָה are listed by means of fronting. These listed entities have predicates which are semantically near-synonyms, viz. “to dry out” and “to whither.”²⁴ The three other types of trees, רָמָז גַּם-תְּמָר וְתְּפֹוח, followed by the appositional quantification in 1:12c, confirm that the combination 12a + *we* + 12b, followed asyndetically by 12c, has only one purpose, viz. to depict the wide extent of the devastation. While 1:12a and 12b are instances of topic shift that are similar to those identified in 1:4a-c,²⁵ the fronting in 12c has to be interpreted as an instance of constituent focus. The use of the “summarizing” quantifier **כָל** is decisive in this regard.²⁶ 12d completes the strophe by means of a **כִּי** clause. It confirms why the motivation of the directive speech acts in 1:11a-b by means of the content of 11c-12c is valid. In 12d, the essence of what is said in 12a-c is drawn out, and the preceding agricultural personifications כִּי-הָבִיש are actualized with an idiomatic reference to all humanity, viz. שֶׁשְׁזַן מִזְבְּנֵי אָדָם “the fact of the matter is, joy among humans has dried out.”²⁷

In the 10 clauses of 1:13a-14d, nine imperatives are directed to the **הַפְּהָנִים** (1:13b), specified as **מִשְׁרָתִי מִזְבֵּחַ אֱלֹהִי** (1:13c) and (1:13e). First they are called to lament (1:13b-13e), כִּי נִמְנַע מִבֵּית אֱלֹהִיכֶם מִנְחָה וְנִסְקָך (1:13f). If one compares the constituent order of 1:13f with that of 1:9b, it is clear that the subject in 1:13f, מִנְחָה וְנִסְקָך, is moved to the sentence final position. In accordance with rules of post-verbal word order formulated by Gross (1996), the displaced item is thus marked for constituent focus. This makes perfect sense in this context. The biggest crisis for the cultic officials is that they who are ministering on behalf of the people do not

24 In narratives, the referents of paired fronted constituents are typically contrasted or compared. Cf. Gen 14:4; 31:38; 34:9; 41:13. In Deut 7:5 and Josh 11:6 the “comparison” has the character of a list.

25 More prototypical examples are found in Joel 2:20a and 4:17d. In 2:23a, a vocative is fronted in a context where there is a shift in the addressees.

26 A similar pattern, with the same information structure, is found in 3:1d-e + 3:2. In 4:10c, a fronted subject is the focus of an utterance in a context where the use of the focus particle **כִּי** is expected, viz. הַחֲלָשׁ יֹאמֶר גָּבוֹר אָנִי, but left implicit.

27 Of the 20 **כִּי** clauses in Joel, 15 are verb-initial. Of the 12 nominal clause, 10 have the sequence, predicate + subject.

have the means to perform their cultic duties, i.e. מִנְחָה וּנְסֶךָ. To address this crisis, the priests are encouraged to call out a fast (1:14a), קְרַאוּ עֲצָרָה and וְעַקְוּ אֱלֹהִיּוֹה (1:14b-c) and בְּתַת יְהֹוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם (1:14d). This crucial imperative marks the emotive climax, the thematic peak, as well as the structural closure of this stanza.

4.2 Stanza B (1:15-20)

A prayer of lamentation: Please respond O Lord!

The prayer of lamentation in Stanza B is presented by means of three short strophes (1:15a-1:16b; 1:17a-1:18d and 1:19a-20c).²⁸ The first strophe opens (1:15a) with an expression of fear, אֲהָה לִיְמָה. The reason for this expressive speech act is explicitly indicated by four clauses governed by בַּי, each with one or another form of marked constituent order. 15b is a nominal clause with its predicate marked for focus, viz. קָרוּב יּוֹם יְהֹוָה. It is beyond the scope of this paper debate the status of this eschatological concept in Joel.²⁹ What has to be observed, however, is that this “day” is perceived as a severe threat and, in particular, its imminence is the ground for the speakers’ dismay. Why this is so is then explained in 1:15c with its fronted adjunct מִשְׁדֵּי יְבוֹא. Apart from the wordplay with the root שַׁדָּה in 1:10a and 10c, the destructive manner in which the day of Yahweh is coming is the focus of the utterance. A הַלּוּא interrogative clause is used in 16a to “justify” the assertions of 1:15b-c.³⁰ This clause has two fronted constituents. The fronting of the adjunct of place is obviously an instance of constituent focus. The addressees are dismayed since they are actually witnessing the catastrophe, namely, the discourse active event of things being cut off, already mentioned in 1:5d and 1:9a. This is happening נֶגֶד עִינֵינו – thus “near” spatially as well. Why the subject of the passive verb is fronted, we cannot explain with certainty in terms of our information structure model. It may be due to the fact that the verb נִכְרַת has been moved to the left to do double duty as the verb of 1:16a and 16b. If 1:16b is read in this way, its “marked” constituent order correlates exactly with that of 1:13f. No access to מִנְחָה וּנְסֶךָ implies no שְׂמִחָה וְגִיל. This correlation has also been confirmed in 1:12d. From a literary perspective, the loss of “food” is a Leitmotif of this entire chapter (two stanzas): No “food” (metonym) means a diminishing of physical

28 The first two are presented as communal prayers (עִינֵינו) in 1:16a and 1:16b), while the third is that of an individual (אַתָּה in 1:19a).

29 For an overview of the debate, cf. Schwesig (2006).

30 Cf. Moshavi (2007:175) for more instances of this use of הַלּוּא.

well-being, social and political security, and also religious confidence since the cultic connection between God and man via the priestly service in God's house has ceased.

In the strophe 1:17a-18d, the pitiful state of the grain harvest as well as that of the flocks in the pasture is described. Of the eight verbal clauses, six have the canonical order. One, 1:18a, has a fronted WH-question word, an expression that by syntactic default is fronted, here initiating an expressive exclamation. In the other, i.e. 1:18d, the subject is fronted: גַּם־עֲדָרִי הַצָּאן נְאֹשֶׁמוֹ. The latter is clearly an instance of constituent focus. While larger animals are expected to suffer when there is not enough to eat for them, things are so bad that even the more robust smaller livestock are suffering. We have indicated elsewhere that a constituent governed by a focus particle tends to be fronted (Van der Merwe 2009:330).

In contrast to the initial strophe of this stanza, in 1:19a-20c, nearly all the clauses have fronted constituents (i.e. five out of the six). In each case constituent focus is involved. The exact wording of 1:19a is also found in Pss 28:1 and 30:8, אֱלֹהֵיךְ יְהוָה אֱקָרְא. The supplicant appeals to Yahweh as his only hope. It is only God who can help, for the supplicant is confronted with an overwhelming power. In the light of 1:18c, it may be argued that the devastation of the pastures and field are discourse active. The supplicant pleads to God as his only hope because this devastation is caused by forces of nature hence the fronting of the subjects in 1:19b and c. Verse 1:20a links up with 1:19c. The notion that somebody (i.e. the supplicant) is calling out to Yahweh, is discourse active. The supplicant strengthens his appeal to Yahweh by pointing out to him, by means of a clause with constituent focus, that even the wild animals long (lit. "pant") for him (גַּם־בְּהִמּוֹת שְׂדָה תַּעֲרוֹג אֲלֵיכְךָ). The reason is given in 1:20b-c, "after all, the streambeds dried up and, yes, a fire has consumed the pastures of the wilderness" (כִּי יִבּשׁוּ אַפִּיקִי מִים וְאֵשׁ אֲכַלֵּה נְאוֹת הַמִּדְבָּר). The essence of catastrophe, שָׁאָלָה, is repeated in 1:20c. An utterance does not always have to add new information; it may also confirm that which is already known. Hence our interpretation of the fronting in 1:20c is an instance of constituent focus, exactly like that of the fronting in 1:19b.

4.3 Stanza C (2:1-11)

A fearsome invading army announces the arrival of the awesome day of Yahweh

The first strophe of the second oracle opens with three imperatives, followed by two בַּי clauses in 2:1a-2c. These appeals to take action have exactly the same structure as 1:5a-1:6a, viz., three imperatives followed

by two **כִּי** clauses. In both the **כִּי** clauses in 2:1d and 2:1e, the imminence of the day of Yahweh is the focus of the utterances. In 2:1d the participle is fronted, and in 2:1e the subject of the nominal clause is ellipsed. A transposed appositional phrase is used in 2:2v to elaborate the features of this day of Yahweh. That the arrival of “a nation” (i.e. the locusts) of 1:6a is the same as “the large people/army” which embodies the day of Yahweh is confirmed by the constituent order of 2:2a. The subject of the nominal clause, **עַם רַב וְעֹצָום**, may, in the light of 1:6a, be regarded as discourse active. The predicate of the clause describing their features is fronted and is the focus of the utterance.³¹ The two descriptive clauses that close the first strophe, 2b and 2c, have two fronted constituents. In 2b, “its likeness” is promoted to being the topic of the utterance, viz. **בָּמֶה** **וְאַחֲרֵיו** **לֹא** **יָסֶף** **עַד-שְׁנִי** **זֹרֶר** **וְזֹרֶר**. In 2:2c, **לֹא** **נָהִיה** **מִזְרָחֻלָּם**, the fronted constituent signals a minor shift, this time from before, i.e. “of old” to “after him.”

In 2:3a-b, the fronted adjuncts of place signal a shift (in topic) from talking about the temporal dimension of the day of Yahweh in 2:2c, to that of space in 2:3a-d. Before and after the advancing “army” *everything* will be destroyed. The extent of the destruction is confirmed in 2:3e by means of an utterance with constituent focus – “as for any possible escapee, there is (absolutely) none!” (**וְגַם-פָּלִיטָה לֹא-הִתְהַלֵּךְ**).

The strophe 2:4a-2:9d opens with a nominal clause with predicate focus. The appearance of the destroying army is said to be “*just* like that of horses.” And then, “like chariot-horses,” the referent of the first of two fronted constituents, indicates a (topic) shift in the point of comparison (from sight to sound): **וְכַפְרְשִׁים** **כִּי** **ירֹצֹחַ**.³² The anaphoric deictic (**כִּי**) is the focus of 2:4c. In 2:5a-5c, the proposition “they run like horses” is discourse active, but now the sound they make is the focus of the subsequent utterances. In 2:5a, the adjunct of manner is fronted (**בְּקֹול**),³³ while in 2:5b and 5c the sound they make is likened to that of fire consuming chaff and an army arranging themselves in battle lines. In each of the latter two cases, the discourse active subject is ellipsed.

31 Buth (1999:100-106) provides convincing arguments as to why the predicates in these types of verbless clauses are typically the focus of the utterance.

32 The way in which the destroying army moved, an inexorable forward progression, has a thematic character right through this relatively long strophe.

33 In Joel 4:4d, a fronted adjunct of manner is also the focus of the utterance (**מִהָּרָה אֲשֶׁר גָּמְלָכֶם בְּרָאשָׁכֶם קָלֶן**).

מִפְנֵיו יָחִילוּ עֲמָלִים. A verbal clause with a fronted constituent introduces 2:6a, מִפְנֵיו. The interpretation of the fronting of this causal adjunct is not straightforward. The referents of its pronominal suffix are discourse active. One may assume that the notion of fear is discourse active in a context where the features of a destroying army are described. While the fronting of the subject in 2:6b can be explained as being an instance of constituent focus – the extent of the fear as specified (i.e. on the face of everyone),³⁴ it is not so obvious why מִפְנֵיו is the focus of 1:6a. A possible explanation is that the utterance says that there, wherever *they are present*, “peoples” writhe in fear. It may also be argued that in 2:6a a minor shift in perspective is involved, viz., from that of the actions of the army to that of the experiences of the peoples. The fronting then may have a structural function, viz. signaling the opening of a new strophe. In terms of Lunn (2006), the lines in 2:6a-6b represent a so-called DEF (defamiliarisation) + MKD (marked) parallel pair. Ironically, this type of combination he does not list (2006:193) among those unusual colon arrangements that may have a discourse function.

The way in which the “army” moves, absolutely straight ahead, is specified in 2:7a-c, 2:8a-c by means of clauses with fronted constituents.³⁵ The latter constituents are in each case the focus of their respective utterances. The content of each of these two tri-cola is confirmed in a brief concluding summary by means of clauses with overt negation in 2:7d and 2:8d respectively. In 2:9a-d, the progressive extent of their movement in the city is specified by means of four clauses with fronted constituents (**בָּאָרֶץ יָשַׁקְוּ בְּחוֹמָה רָצַחֲוּ בְּבָתִים יָעַלוּ בְּעֵד הַחֲלֹזִים יָבֹאוּ בְּגַנְבָּה**). Since the army’s movement is discourse active, one may be tempted to regard these specifications of forward progress into the city as instances of constituent focus. However, in each shift in location a different type of movement is involved. This way of dramatically stacking the threatening advance of the destroying army is similar to what we encounter in 1:4a-c. Hence, we regard these as instances of topic shift, all of which function together in concert to foreground the general impression of the irresistible

34 In Joel 3:5b, a fronted subject with a quantifier is also the focus of an utterance (**כָּל אֲשֶׁר־יָקְרָא בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה יִמְלֹט**).

35 Strictly-speaking, 2:7c and 2:8b (**וְאַישׁ בְּדֶרֶקְיוֹ יָלֹכְוּ**) contain two fronted constituents. Each of these noun phrase + prepositional phrase constructions, however, may also be interpreted as specially modified subject entities (as we indeed do). Cf. also Gross (2001:79 and 94).

army's forward progression and impending doom for the city's inhabitants.

The closing strophe in stanza C commences in 2:10a with a clause having a fronted adjunct (לִפְנֵי רָגֹז אֶת־צָרָ). The referent of this adjunct is ambiguous. If it refers to the destroying army, one may ask why would such a sudden switch from plural to singular be necessary? Since a singular suffix is used to refer to the destroying army in 2:2b-c, as well as 2:3a-c, most of the major translations (e.g. NRSV, NIV, ESV, NET, NJPS) interpret the pronominal suffix in 2:10a as referring to the locusts. In such a case one cannot argue that a shift in topic took place. They are already discourse active, and no contrast or comparison is involved (i.e. the only contexts where discourse active entities are typically fronted). Since this switch in number is accompanied by a switch from *yiqtol* to *qatal*, and the pronominal reference in 2:10a does not have an obvious antecedent in the immediately preceding context (which is the case in 2b-c and 3a-c), Jeremias (2007:26-27) interprets the singular suffix as referring to Yahweh, as it is clearly indicated in 2:11a, וַיֹּהֲזֵה נָתַן קֹלוֹ לִפְנֵי חַילֹּוֹ. Another argument can be added in support of Jeremias. We have identified an affinity earlier in Joel for creating this type of suspense concerning the referent of an expression, e.g. 1:2c, 1:3a as well as 1:5c and 1:11b.

The two instances of fronting in 2:10c, שְׁמָשׁ וַיָּרַח קָדָרִי, and 10d, כֹּכְבִּים אָסָפוּ נְגַם, represent typical examples of shifts that are associated with the listing of different entities that are involved in a more global event. It forms part of a dramatic shift in the stage of narrative action (and audience perception) from an earthly locale to the “cosmic” realm (10a). The subject of 2:11, Yahweh, is also fronted (וַיֹּהֲזֵה נָתַן קֹלוֹ לִפְנֵי חַילֹּוֹ). The ambiguity about whom the speaker is talking is resolved by this instance of constituent focus. Resolving this ambiguity is not necessarily the primary task of this utterance however. In other words, what is asserted is not “It is Yahweh who ...”, but rather, “Yahweh himself ...”³⁶ There is a

36 Cf. also Joel 4:8c (כִּי יְהוָה דָבָר). Although Muraoka (1985:35) suggests that no “emphasis” is often involved in instances where God is the fronted subject, a preliminary investigation of instances where Yahweh as subject is fronted in the Hebrew Bible suggests otherwise. These cases may be explained as a topic shift in a context where no temporal sequence is involved, e.g. a flashback, e.g. Gen 13:14, 18:17; or part of the description of a state of affairs, e.g. Gen 24:35, Num 30:9,13, Deut 31:2. In a significant number of cases, no shift of topic can be identified. However, in each of them it could be argued that

huge rhetorical surprise here: it is not a natural “army” or even a pagan enemy that is invading the covenant land of Judah, but none other than the LORD himself as leader of this invincible destructive force. Two nominal clauses with predicate focus (2:11b-c) motivate why Yahweh himself needs to be at the head of this destroying army. His army is indescribably huge and those who do what he says are innumerable vast in number. The final **כִּי** clause in 2:11d, governs 11e-f. These three clauses headed by **כִּי** are not dependent on the immediately preceding text. Rather, they confirm why such an awesome picture of Jerusalem’s invasion could have been painted in 2:2-2:11c, “The fact of the matter is that it involves the day of Yahweh, which (as everyone knows) is so great and awesome that nobody can endure it” (**כִּי-גָדוֹל יוֹמֵי יְהוָה וְנֹרֶא מַאֲד וּמַי**).³⁷ By implication, under normal circumstances, no human being or nation would be able to do anything at all to avert the imminent, divinely initiated disaster. Only Yahweh himself could do anything about this disastrous situation. Hence Yahweh’s merciful solution is outlined in the next strophe.

4.4 Stanza D (2:12-17)

Yahweh summons his people to repentance

The construction **וְגַם־עַתָּה** in 2:12 is a phrasal hapax legomenon. This is a typical context for **וְעַתָּה** as text-deictic, viz. introducing a directive that provides the logical thing to do “in the light” of the situation described in the immediately preceding content. In other words, in view of the imminent terrible day of Yahweh, the most reasonable thing for the audience to do is to “return” to Yahweh. The question is, how must **וְגַם** be interpreted in this particular context? In a recent study, Van der Merwe (2009:327-331) identified a few instances where **וְגַם** appears to have lost its “additive” connotation (i.e. “also, even”). However, this is not one of them; otherwise **וְגַם־עַתָּה** would have made perfectly sense as the near-synonym of the text-deictic **וְעַתָּה**. Most exegetes and translations also do

constituent focus is involved, since the significant personal involvement of Yahweh (i.e. Yahweh himself) is the focus of an utterance (Gen 22:14, 24:56, Exod 14:14, 16:29, Num 10:29, Deut 32:30, Josh 10:14; 17:4, 21:2, Judg 4:14 and 11:10).

37 Similar instances where **כִּי** introduces an utterance which confirms what has been said in a preceding context, by means of referring to an already shared implication thereof, are to be found elsewhere (e.g. Joel 1:12d; Pss 1:6 and 84:11).

not interpret **וְגַם־עַתָּה** in accordance with the text-deictic interpretation of **וְעַתָּה**, in other words, merely as “so therefore.” **עַתָּה** is regarded by most scholars as the temporal adverb “now.” It is reasonable to regard 2:12 as a clause which has a fronted adjunct as its focus. This means that the appeal in 2:12 would be interpreted as follows: “And even now, says Yahweh, return to me ...” Most translations render **וְגַם־עַתָּה** as “yet even now” (NRSV, NET, NJPS, ESV).³⁸ Jeremias (2007:27) maintains a similar translation “Doch auch jetzt.” In a footnote, he points out that 2:12aα could also be interpreted as a nominal clause. The verse would then read, “Yet even now the oracle of Yahweh is (still valid): ‘Return to me’ – with all your heart ...” With the latter extensive adjunct of manner (i.e. after the dash), the prophet’s words continue. Apart from 2:13d, a **כִּי** nominal clause with predicate focus stressing the attributes of Yahweh, the rest of the strophe 2:12-2:14d contains no fronted constituent. The **כִּי** governs 2:13d-e, which motivates why the addressees should pay heed to the directives in 2:12-2:13c. The mercy and compassion of God is confirmed. This notion is then foregrounded by the rhetorically shaped suggestion in verse 14 that he may yet change his mind, relent, and bless the people once again: **וְהַשְׁאֵר אֶחָרִיו בְּרָכָה מִנְחָה וְנַסְךָ לִיהְוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם**. Using the same literary technique of “momentary suspense” as in 1:2c, 3a, 5c and 11b, the same “key concepts” referred to in 1:9a, 13f and 16b are re-invoked, **מִנְחָה וְנַסְךָ לִיהְוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם** – only now, the implication is that these crucial agricultural products and sacrificial items will be restored instead of being removed from the people as in the former passages.

The last strophe of Stanza D, 2:15a-17f, is literally packed with cultic directives. In 2:15a-16e, no less than seven imperatives are stacked in asyndetic sequence. The priests are summoned to announce a holy fast and a public gathering: everybody in the community has to be there! Above all, or even they, the priests, the very ministers of Yahweh, are also summoned to weep and address Yahweh at the holiest place outside the temple itself, i.e. “between the vestibule and altar” (**בֵּין הַאֲוֹלֶט וְלִמְזָבֵחַ**) (**יְבֹנו הַבְּהִנִּים**). The content of what the priests have to say is highlighted in direct speech in 2:17c-f. Important for the purposes of this paper is the reason why the long locative adjunct of 2:17a is fronted. No shift of topic could be postulated. If one regards this as an instance of constituent focus, the utterance implies that addressees would not have expected the priests, too, to lament at that particular location. However, if one considers that on this occasion the priests had to appear empty-handed to

38 Allen (1976:76) translates 2:12aα “‘Now is the time,’ runs Yahweh’s oracle.”

lament at the very place where they used to offer the previously mentioned food items to the Lord,³⁹ the reason for the constituent focus makes sense. Along with the concluding rhetorical question incorporating another segment of direct speech (uttered by Judah's enemies!), the dramatic content and vivid manner of expression of verse 17 mark it as a climactic point in the first half of Joel's prophecy as well as an emphatic point of discourse closure.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This study of the constituent order of clauses in the book of Joel has found *firstly* that of the 62 instances of the fronting of clause constituents, 27 can be interpreted as constituent focus and 32 as involving a shift in or activation of an identifiable topic. In three cases (1:18a), a question word is fronted (by default), and in one case (1:6a), an instance of clause focus has been postulated. Among the 29 nominal clauses, 9 instances of predicate focus could be established. In 6 of the 13 cases with double fronting, the first element could be interpreted as signaling a shift in topic and the second a constituent focus. In one (1:3a), each fronted constituent represents a focus entity. We regard two cases (2:7c and 2:8d) as specially modified subjects, and in four cases (1:16a, 3:1d-e and 3:2⁴⁰) we have to concede that we cannot explain with certainty the reason for the second fronted constituent. In two instances (2:6a and 2:17a), it was not unambiguously clear why a constituent had been fronted. Neither of these ambiguous cases occur in the second line of a parallel pair (as an instance of defamiliarization). Joel 2:6a may perhaps signal the onset of a new strophe, i.e. one of the discourse functions that Lunn (2006:159-194) refers to. However, the formal pattern of 2:6a-6b, i.e. DEF//MKD, is not among those listed that Lunn (2006:193) identifies to be fulfilling this type of discourse function.

Secondly, fronting to signal a topic shift occurs predominantly in groups (typically in pairs of two) in contexts where no sequence of events is involved. Typically, the significance of an event or situation is described by means of reference to the states or actions of different entities that are involved (1:4a-4c, 1:12a-b, 2:3a-b; 2:9a-9d, 2:10c-d,

39 Cf. Rudolph (1971:60) and Allen (1976:83).

40 We have not discussed the double fronting in Joel 3:2 explicitly. The first constituent, governed by בָּם, is clearly an instance of constituent focus. However, why the temporal adjunct הַהְמָה בִּימִים is also fronted, is unclear. Zewi (2007) classifies it as a parenthetical construction.

2:22c-d, 3:1d-e, 3:4a-4b, 4:2d-3a, 4:5vR1-2 and 4:6a, 4:15a-b, 4:18c-d.⁴¹
Fronted topics are rarely the topic of more than one clause.

Clauses with constituent focus occur less often in pairs (1:15c, 1:19d, 1:20c, 2:11a, 2:12, 2:17, 3:5a, 3:5c, 4:4d, 4:8c, 4:10c, 4:12c – exceptions are 1:19b-c and the clusters to be found in 2:4a-2:8d and 4:16a-b). They sometimes contain an overt focus particle (1:12d, 1:18d, 1:20a, 2:3e).

Only one instance of clause focus has been identified. The fronted subject in 1:6a is the topic of seven subsequent clauses (1:6b-7e).

Our study has shown that the “normal” rules of pragmatic ordering in clauses (involving “topic” and “focus”) can be used to explain almost all of the occurrences of non-canonical word order in the clauses of Joel. The two doubtful cases of constituent focus can be explained functionally as manifestations of the marking of some standard literary-structural devices within the discourse.

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41 In this corpus, only one case (Joel 2:23a-b) has been identified, and the fronted “constituent” is a vocative.

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