McMaster Divinity College

Hebrew Verbal System

A Presentation Paper Submitted To:
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In Partial Completion of Course:
Advanced Greek Grammar and Linguistics
PhD Course Code: G105

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April 10, 2007
1. Introduction

The understanding of the biblical Hebrew verbal system has been a long-standing struggle for Hebrew scholars. Especially, since the last quarter of 20th century, scholarly debates on this issue have become more intensive than before. One reason, which makes this debate more intensive, is because the Hebrew verbal system has internal problems which are caused by the different written period between biblical writings or difference between genres. Many scholars have tried to establish the scheme of the Hebrew verbal system which covers the whole corpus of biblical writings.\(^1\) Hebrew scholars, however, began to realize that the Hebrew verbal system may work differently according to the genre and the written period.\(^2\) In order to effectively propose my thesis in this paper, therefore, I will focus on narrative discourse in Classical Biblical Hebrew, which is discerned from Late Biblical Hebrew. Firstly, I will try to summarize some difficult issues related to the Hebrew verbal system and some proposals which have been developed in the history of biblical Hebrew studies. Then I will introduce some recent proposals which adopt several linguistic theories, such as theories of tense and aspect and discourse analysis. Through critically synthesizing those approaches, I will develop my own approach. Finally, through

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applying my own approach to the Hebrew text, I will examine the applicability of my approach.

2. The Enigma of the Hebrew Verbal System

Some basic difficulties for studying biblical Hebrew rise from the fact that biblical Hebrew, which is defined as the language documented in the Old Testament, is not spoken anymore. In addition, because the Old Testament had been written over nearly a millennium, there are some differences between books within the Old Testament. Therefore, some scholars would distinguish between Classical Biblical Hebrew, which includes the Pentateuch and Former Prophets, and Late Biblical Hebrew, which includes Ezra-Nehemiah, Esther, and the non-synoptic parts of Chronicles. Some features that are found in Late Biblical Hebrew are more radically developed in Mishnaic and Modern Hebrew, which have a clear tense system. The difference is found not only in this diachronic aspect but also in the synchronic aspect. Many discernible characteristics are found between genres, particularly between narrative and poetry.

Furthermore, the Hebrew verbal system shows some distinctive features from other ancient Semitic languages by having only two major conjugations and the waw relative


In the indicative mood of biblical Hebrew, the verbal system has only two major conjugations, suffix and prefix. Verbal forms is expressed by the combination of these two conjugations and the conjunction waw. There are six types of combinations: qatal, wəqatal (relative), wəqatal (copulative), yiqtol, wayyiqtol (relative) and wəyiqtol (copulative). Both suffix and prefix conjugations occur in every temporal situation, such as present, future, and past. It is strange in the point of view of European speakers who use tense-based languages. More surprising is the fact that a series of wayyiqtol denotes sequential events in the past while yiqtol without waw usually describes imperfective events in the present or future. On the other hand, qatal is usually used for perfective events in the past, while

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7 There are other popular names: perfect and imperfect. However, in order to avoid some confusion which may arise from the implication of the names, I will use suffix and prefix conjugation as the titles of those two conjugations. However, when these names are used with waw relative forms, I will use the terms qatal, wəqatal, wayyiqtol, and yiqtol. See Waltke and O'Connor, Syntax, 455-56.

8 Most Hebrew scholars recognize five types of combinations without distinguishing between wayyiqtol (relative) and wayiqtol (copulative). However, I will use six types of combinations, because wəqatal (relative) and wəqatal (copulative) are functionally discerned, just as wayyiqtol (relative) and wayiqtol (copulative) are distinguished. “Copulative” indicates that the combination between conjuction waw and a verb does not make any change from the normal use of each conjugation and “relative” means that the combination makes some change from the normal function of each conjugation. Following Waltke and O'Conom I use the name ‘waw relative’ rather than the popular name, ‘waw consecutive,’ because this combination describes not only sequential relationship but also subordinate relationship.
\textit{wəqatal} (relative) is often for imperfective events. These seemingly boundless uses of both conjugations have led Hebrew scholars to propose many theories about the Hebrew verbal system.\textsuperscript{9}

3. The History of the Verbal System in Biblical Hebrew

From the earliest Jewish grammarians such as David Qumhi (1160-1235) until 1827, the traditional view, which prevailed in the Christian universities of Europe, was tense-based theories, because Mishnaic Hebrew and most European languages are tense-based languages.\textsuperscript{10} Following Mishnaic Hebrew, they considered three tenses in biblical Hebrew: \textit{qatal} = past; \textit{yiqtol} = future; \textit{qotel} = present. They called the combination of a verb form with \textit{waw} conjunction \textit{waw hippûk}, that is, \textit{waw-conversive}, because when the verb form is combined with \textit{waw} conjunction, the tense of the verb form is converted into the tense of the opposite verb form.\textsuperscript{11}

However, these tense-based theories have some weaknesses because in practice these theories do not fit well. According to McFall’s statistics, the RSV translates \textit{qatal} with a past tense in 10,830 instances out of a total of 13,874 occurrences, \textit{wayyiqtol} with a past in 14,202 out of a total of 14,972, \textit{yiqtol} with a future in 5,451 instances out of a total of 14,299, and \textit{wəqatal} (relative) with a future in 2,932 out of a total of 6,378. As seen in these statistics, \textit{qatal} and \textit{wayyiqtol} support these tense based theories but \textit{yiqtol} and

\textsuperscript{9} See Leslie McFall, \textit{The Enigma of the Hebrew Verbal System: Solutions from Ewald to the Present Day} (Sheffield: Almond, 1982); Waltke and O'Connor, \textit{Syntax}, 455-78.
\textsuperscript{10} Waltke and O'Connor, \textit{Syntax}, 458-59.
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 459.
weqatal betray the theories.\textsuperscript{12} The RSV translates \textit{yiqtol} and \textit{wəqatal} with a past tense respectively in 484 and 774 instances. Especially in poetry books, the breaking of these rules is more radical.\textsuperscript{13} While being aware of these problems, Hebrew scholars tried to correct their tense-based theories with notions of relative time and a comparative-historical approach, but they still held fast their tense-based theories.\textsuperscript{14}

It was Heinrich Ewald (1803-1875) who broke new ground in the study of the verbal system. Following the teaching of Johann Jahn (1750-1816) with respect to the terminology of the verbal system, Ewald wrote of the two conjugations in 1827: “The first aorist (\textit{qatal}) conveys a completed (\textit{perfectam}) thing, whether present, preterite, or future. The second aorist (\textit{yiqtol}) conveys a non-completed (\textit{imperfectam}) thing, whether present, preterite, or future.”\textsuperscript{15} Ewald considered \textit{waw-relative} to indicate more emphatically the consequence of an action and called it \textit{waw-consecutive}. In addition, he argued that \textit{wayyiqtol} functions as the antithesis of \textit{wəqatal}. While anticipating later comparative-historical research, Ewald observed that the \textit{wayyiqtol} form is related wherever possible to the jussive form.\textsuperscript{16} While Ewald’s views better satisfied the data than any tense theory, his terms “perfect” and “imperfect” replaced the temporal terms. Even standard works on the other Semitic languages came to employ similar concepts and terms.\textsuperscript{17}

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{12} McFall, \textit{Enigma}, 186-87.
\bibitem{13} Ibid.
\bibitem{14} See Ibid., 21-37. McFall mentions N.W. Schroder, Philip Gell, Samuel Lee, and so on.
\bibitem{15} Ibid., 44, as translated from original Latin text in Waltke and O’Connor, \textit{Syntax}, 463. According to McFall, Jahn called two conjugations the first and second aorists, abandoning the terms, Past and Future. Although Samuel Lee accused Ewald of plagiarism, the concepts of two conjugations were Ewald’s.
\bibitem{16} McFall, \textit{Enigma}, 54.
\end{thebibliography}
The Influential British scholar S.R. Driver (1846-1914) accepted Ewald’s theory and made it popular.\textsuperscript{18} However, he did not make a significant independent contribution to the study of the verbal system, although he had some different opinions from Ewald’s theory.\textsuperscript{19} In these early forms of aspect theory, the view of Ewald and Driver had some weaknesses. They confused the concept of “complete” with that of “completed.” As a result, they argued for a so-called “prophetic perfect,” which is prophets’ use of the suffix conjugation for future events. According to them, this use is because prophets recognized the future events as completed.\textsuperscript{20} In addition, it is not fully correct to describe future-time references and modal nuances as the term “imperfect aspect,” as Thomas O. Lambdin mentions.\textsuperscript{21} This aspectualist view is found in most standard Hebrew grammar books in the 20th century.\textsuperscript{22}

Since the last quarter of the 20th century, tense-based theories have begun to appear again.\textsuperscript{23} Furthermore, with help from historical comparative studies and linguistics studies,
debates became more complicated. From historical comparative studies, scholars have tried to find the origin of waw relative. The basic proposal is that the Hebrew prefix conjugation is remnants of two older prefix conjugations (yaqtul and yaqtulu in Ugaritic), the short form (yaqtul) denoting preterite and jussive, and the long form (yaqtulu) imperfective aspect, unreal mood, or general present and future actions. Now while many scholars accept this proposal, they use it for supporting their theories. Although this proposal may have some merits for understanding the ancient Semitic verbal system and the origin of the Hebrew verbal system, this proposal from comparative study has its own set of problems. The main problem is that with most verbs the two alleged prefix conjugations cannot be distinguished. Thus, Waltke and O'Connor, although they accept this proposal, they question “Can a language tolerate such a homonymy? Can a language tolerate over an extended period the same form representing opposing aspects or tenses?”

Therefore, Zevit comments that “Etymological explanations that purport to describe the origins of the Hebrew verbal system are inadequate as descriptions of how this system works in fact.”

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26 Waltke and O'Connor, Syntax, 468.

Recently, scholars tend to adopt some theories which were developed in the field of linguistics. For example, there are studies about ‘time’ and ‘aspect,’ and theories of text-linguistics. While delaying the comment about the former, I will first deal with theories of text-linguistics which were applied to the studies of the Hebrew verbal system, because it is the main focus of this paper.

4. Discourse Analysis Approaches

With the recent increasing interest in discourse analysis many books and articles have appeared from the perspective of discourse analysis. Two main approaches among studies on the Hebrew verbal system can be distinguished. One is an approach influence by a German text-linguistic scholar, Harald Weinrich. Main proponents of this approach are W. Schneider, A. Niccacci and E. Talstra. The other is an approach developed by K.L. Pike and his student R.E. Longacre, the so-called Tagmemics model. Many bible translators and American scholars follow Tagmemics, because K.L. Pike and R.E. Longacre are main figures in the Summer Institute of Linguistics, the linguistic institute for Bible translation in America. For the sake of convenience, I will focus on the views of Niccacci and Longacre, because they are key proponents for each camp.

While responding to criticism of his view, Niccacci is improving his view’s weaknesses. His basic proposal is, however, still based on the theories of Weinrich and

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According to H. Weinrich, text-linguistics refers to “a method used in linguistics to describe all the elements of a language including the function these have in oral and written texts… A grammar which does not accept units beyond the sentence can never even notice let alone resolve the most interesting problems of linguistics.”

Weinrich considers narrative texts from three aspects: linguistic attitude, foregrounding and linguistic perspective. Following Weinrich, in terms of linguistic attitude, Niccacci differentiates two text types (genres), which are group I, “discourse” or “comment” and group II, “narrative.” Later, he calls “discourse” “direct speech” because the term “discourse” is confusing when talking of “discourse analysis” instead of text-linguistics.

According to Niccacci, the term “narrative” “concerns persons or events which are not present or current in the relationship involving writer-reader and so the third person is used.” Later, he distinguishes narrative into a historical narrative and an oral narrative (or report in the direct speech). The term ‘direct speech’ refers not only to dialogue, sermon, or prayer, but

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31 Ibid.

32 Niccacci, Syntax, 19.


34 Idem, Syntax, 29.

also to indirect speech, “as when an author comments in different ways upon the story he is narrating.”

Following Weinrich, Niccacci tries to find “foreground” and “background” in biblical texts, but he does not give an explanation of these terms. P.J. Hopper provides the theoretical explanation of these notions:

It is evidently a universal of narrative discourse that in any extended text an overt distinction is made between the language of the actual story line and the language of supportive material which does not itself narrate the main events. I refer to the former—the parts of the narrative which related events belonging to the skeletal structure of the discourse—as FOREGROUND and the latter as BACKGROUND... One finds, ... a tendency for punctual verbs to have perfective aspect (i.e. to occur in foregrounded sentences) and conversely for verbs of the durative/stative/iterative types to occur in imperfective, i.e. backgrounded, clauses... Strictly speaking, only foregrounded clauses are actually NARRATED. Backgrounded clauses do not themselves narrate, but instead they support, amplify, or COMMENT on the narration... one finds in backgrounding those forms associated with a lower degree of assertiveness, and even forms designated as irrealis: subjunctives, optatives, other “modal” verb forms (including those expressed as modal auxiliaries), and negation.

Similarly to this theory, Niccacci recognizes verb forms for foreground and background in each genre. In “narrative,” wayyiqtol is the verb form for foreground while waw-X-qatal and wəqatal are usually for background. In “direct speech” the forms which build the foreground and background may differ in accordance with the temporal axis that is involved. For example, in the axis of the future wəqatal indicates foreground and w-X-yiqtol background. In the axis of the past, X-qatal and continuative wayyiqtol are used for foreground and waw-X-qatal is for background.

38 Niccacci notices that waw-X-yiqtol and waw-simple nominal clause are also used for background information.
According to this linguistic perspective, he distinguishes verbal forms into retrieved information (flashback, ‘antecedent’ to the ensuing account), degree zero (the level of the story itself), and anticipated information (‘disclosure,’ reveals the end of the story). He shows this table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Hebrew</th>
<th>Recovered Information (†)</th>
<th>Degree zero(O)</th>
<th>Anticipated Information (¶)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Narrative</td>
<td>Past perfect</td>
<td>Simple past Imperfect</td>
<td>Conditional</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WAW-X-QATAL</td>
<td>WAYYIQTOL</td>
<td>WAYYIQTOL</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discourse</td>
<td>Present perfect</td>
<td>Present Volitive moods</td>
<td>Future</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X-QATAL</td>
<td>Volitive forms (x-)QATAL X-indicative YIQTOL Simple noun clause</td>
<td>YIQTOL Final Clauses etc.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Niccacci affirms that “verb forms have fixed temporal reference when they are verbal sentences and /or indicate the mainline of communication both in narrative and in direct speech.”

However, when they are nominal clauses and indicate a subsidiary line of communication, they have a relative temporal reference. Thus, in the subsidiary line of communication, aspect in the sense of mode of action (Aktionsart), is a legitimate category of the Hebrew verbal system. Then he summarizes it in this table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Temporal Axes</th>
<th>Comment</th>
<th>Narrative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Present</td>
<td>Simple nominal clause Volitive forms</td>
<td>Simple nominal clause</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past</td>
<td>Qatal, or X-qatal</td>
<td>Wayyiqtol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future</td>
<td>X-yiqtol (indicative) wqatal</td>
<td>X-yiqtol (indicative) wqatal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

41 Ibid., 129.
42 Ibid.
43 Ibid., 120.
Another contribution is about the position of the verb. According to him, the x-Verb type of sentence is not a stylistic variant of the Verb-x type but a different type with distinctively different functions. Thus, “first-place verb form constitutes a plain, unmarked sentence where the verb is the predicate, as expected. On the contrary, second-place verb form constitutes a marked sentence where the verb is demoted to the role of subject, or “given” information or the sentence as a whole is demoted to the status of syntactic dependence.”44 He distinguishes the second-place verb form into three categories:45

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I - Emphasis on “x”</th>
<th>II – No emphasis on “x”</th>
<th>III – No emphasis on “x”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>X (=PP) – V (D)</td>
<td>X – V (antecedent Information)</td>
<td>Oral report (D)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X (=IP) – V (D)</td>
<td>X – V (Circumstance)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X – V (contrast; N)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

D = direct speech; IP = interrogative pronoun; N = historical narrative; PP = personal pronoun; V = finite verb; x = a non-verbal element

Niccacci’s theory shows more systematic explanation of the Hebrew verbal system than the old theories did. The advantage of his view is to consider the verbal system from the perspective of text-linguistics. That is, he focuses not just on the level of word or sentence but on the level of discourse. From this perspective, he effectively explains that each verb form has different function in different text type. Then, he shows the differences of the functions between verb forms in the same text type. Moreover, he also distinguishes between the functions of sentences according to word order. These are insightful points which are gained by a text-linguistics approach.

45 Ibid.
However, as one of the founders of the new approach in Hebrew studies, his view has some weaknesses. Although his theory begins with a presupposition of a top-down character, he considers his theory to be a bottom-up approach in contrast to a top-down approach which is the characteristic of Longacre’s theory and he often complains that discourse linguists posit too many text types. 46 This is, however, not a proper criticism because his approach has the same starting point as Longacre’s in terms of discerning text types. The difference is that he has just two text types while Longacre has at least four: narrative, procedural, expository and hortatory discourse. 47 Then, he also divides these two types into more categories but the classification between categories is often not clear, as seen between oral narrative and direct speech. 48

Another problem is his tendency toward overstatement of the rules of syntax, which sometimes makes his own arguments inconsistent. 49 Thus, the lack of his work’s thoroughness caused some critics to complain that “such an approach takes us into the realm of semantic forces of individual verb and ultimately can tell us nothing about … WP (=wayyiqtol) in a more generalized sense.” 50 Because some weakness of his theory overlaps with Longacre’s theory, I will later deal with it in my comments on Longacre’s theory.

49 See Dawson, Text-Linguistics, 32-33.
Another distinctive approach is Longacre’s Tagmemic theory, which is one of functional approaches in the field of discourse analysis.\(^{51}\) While his theory is based on the work of K.L. Pike, he developed his own theory.\(^{52}\) Tagmemics has three concepts: tagmeme, syntagmeme, and hierarchical linguistic structure.\(^{53}\) “The tagmeme was originally defined as a slot-class correlation” and he prefer to refer to the slot-filler correlation as function-set. Thus tagmeme may be a functional element which constitutes the clause, such as a subject-as-agent tagmeme and object-as-patient tagmeme. Tagmemes combine to form structured wholes, that is, syntagmemes. The English transitive clause is such a syntagmeme. Thus, “the functions of the various tagmemes are expounded by sets of syntagmèmes and a syntagmeme is composed of tagmèmes… Together, tagmeme and syntagmeme related yield a systematic theory of grammatical hierarchy. At every level of structure from the stem level to the discourse level, tagmemes compose syntagmèmes. Thus, discourse-level tagmèmes are units such as episodes in stories or points in a sermon.”

Van der Merwe summarizes some basic assumptions of Longacre’s discourse grammar:\(^{54}\)

1. Any morphosyntactic form in a text represents the author’s choice whether conscious or automatic; we may not know the why’s of all such choices, but we may speculate on them as implementations of different discourse strategies… Among these problems have been dexis and the use of articles. Pronominalization, and other anaphoric ways of referring to a participant; better understanding of tense, aspect, mode, and voice in verbs; use of optional temporal and spatial expressions; the function of extrapolation; left dislocation, and others such features; subject selection, object selection, and other focus phenomena; the functions and thrust of conjunctions and other sequence signals; and the

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\(^{54}\) C.H.J. van der Merwe, “A Critical Analysis of Narrative Syntactic Approaches, with Special Attention to Their Relationship to Discourse Analysis,” *Narrative Syntax*, ed. Van Wolde, 142-43.
function of mystery particles which occur in connected contexts in some language, which the native speaker knows where to use and where not to use, but which defy translation.

2. In the grammar of language, there are hierarchical levels from morpheme to stem, word, phrase, clause, sentence, paragraph, and discourse.

3. At each level a number of syntagmimes or discourse types that consist of tagmemes are distinguishable, e.g. at the level of discourse four discourse types are distinguished in terms of the parameters “agent and temporal succession,” viz. narrative (+agent, +succession), procedural (-agent, +temporal succession), hortatory (+agent, -succession) and expository (-agent, -temporal succession).

4. Each discourse type has its own grammatical rules, e.g. – There is a different word order in the clauses that encode their mainline information, as in Biblical Hebrew, where the order VSO (verb, subject, object) prevails in narrative, but SVO in exposition.

5. The narrative discourse type consists of the following tagmemes, viz. title, apertures, stage, episode, peak, a peak’ (in which the peak is resolved) and closure. Each tagmeme has a set of constructions that are associated with it, e.g. the peak and peak’ has the following type of surface structure characteristics: “(1) rhetorical underlining by means of repetition and paraphrase, (2) heightened vividness by a tense shift or by person shift, … (7) ’slowing the camera down’ by treating structures that are not usually on the event line as if they were.”

6. “Comprehension of a story results from multiple processing, including top-down (use of the schema) and bottom-up (use of content) and cues provide by the text.”

Based on his theory of discourse analysis, Longacre proposes verbal rank schemes according to discourse type. This is a verbal rank in narrative:55

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Band 1: Storyline</th>
<th>1. Preterite(^{56}): primary (wayyiqtol)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Band 2: Backgroundered Actions | 2.1. Perfect (qatal)  
| | 2.2 Noun + perfect (with noun in focus) |
| Band 3: Backgrounded Activities | 3.1. hinnēh + participle  
| | 3.2. Participle  
| | 3.3. Noun + participle |
| Band 4: Setting | 4.1. Preterite of hāyā, ‘be’  
| | 4.2. Perfect of hāyā, ‘be’  
| | 4.3. Nominal clause (verbless)  
| | 4.4. Existential clause with yēš |
| Band 5: | 5. Negation of verb clause: irrealis (any band) |

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56 He believes that prefix form in *wayyiqtol* is related to preterite form in early Semitic languages, separated from prefix form which means imperfective (Ibid., 65).
He treats clauses with a preterite (wayyiqtol) as on the narrative line and all clauses with some other form of the verb as off-the-line.\(^{57}\) That means that the typical word order of main line clauses is VSO. Clauses with a verb in qatal have a secondary function marking backgrounded actions, and clauses with a participle backgrounded activities. According to Longacre, wayyiqtol verbs are ‘punctiliar’ and ‘sequential’ in narrative, while qatal is found to be a non-punctiliar and non-sequential kind of past tense.\(^{58}\) On the other hand, “the imperfect (yiqtol) and the participles are respectively implicitly and explicitly durative in framework of the story and hāyā clauses and verbless clauses represent static elements toward the bottom of the scheme and negated clauses rank lowest.”\(^{59}\) wayyiqtol verbs have the important property of advancing the progress of a narrative. These clauses report events in the same order as their succession in the real world.\(^{60}\)

He also shows the second verb rank scheme in predictive discourse:\(^{61}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Band 1: Lind of Prediction</th>
<th>1. waw (consecutive) perfect (wəqatal)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Band 2: Backgrounded Predictions</td>
<td>2.1. Imperfect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2. Noun + imperfect (with noun in focus)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Band 3: Backgrounded Activities</td>
<td>3.1. hinneḥ + participle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2. Participle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3. Noun + participle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Band 4: Setting</td>
<td>4.1. wəqatal of hāyā, ‘be’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2. Imperfect of hāyā, ‘be’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3. Nominal clause (verbless)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4. Existential clause with yēš</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to Longacre, “the general parallelism of prediction (events told in advance of their happening) and narration (recounting of events that have already

\(^{57}\) Ibid., 80.
\(^{58}\) Ibid., 59.
\(^{59}\) Ibid.
\(^{60}\) See Ibid., 90.
\(^{61}\) Ibid., 107.
transpired) is seen in the common adherence to a strict VSO (or VOS) ordering of storyline clauses and the restriction to the affirmative. Thus, \( w\text{qatal} \) verbs are composed of storyline while \( yiqtol \) of off-the-line. That is, the highest ranking form of the verb in predictive discourse is \( w\text{qatal} \). The next highest ranking verb forms are forms of the imperfect, that is, \( yiqtol \).

He also shows verb rank scheme in hortatory discourse:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Band 1: Primary line of Exhortation</th>
<th>1.1. Imperative (2 person)</th>
<th>1.2. Cohortative (1 person)</th>
<th>1.3. Jussive (3 person)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Band 2: Second line of Exhortation</td>
<td>2.1. ( \text{\ddot{a}l} ) + jussive/imperfect</td>
<td>2.2. Modal imperfect</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Band 3: Results/Consequences (Motivation)</td>
<td>3.1. ( w ) (consecutive) perfect</td>
<td>3.2. ( l\text{`o}’/\text{pen} ) + imperfect</td>
<td>3.3. (Future) perfect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Band 4: Setting (Problem)</td>
<td>4.1. Perfect (of past events)</td>
<td>4.2. Participles</td>
<td>4.3. Nominal clauses</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In hortatory discourse, command forms are central. Commands in Biblical Hebrew are formally distinguished according to person. In the second person, (positive) commands are imperative. In the first person, cohortatives occur and in the third person jussives. In the secondary band he puts negative commands and modal uses of the imperfect jussives. He places final clauses in the third band, which are expressed by \( w\text{qatal} \) in the positive result and \( l\text{\`o}’/\text{pen} \) + imperfect in the negative result.

This is not a full explanation but shows Longacre’s contribution in terms of the Hebrew verbal system. His approach is based on observations of a variety of languages and

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62 Ibid., 106.
63 Ibid., 121.
is still scrutinized by him on a regular basis in the light of new findings. Moreover, in comparison with the approaches of Niccacci and other scholars, some may argue that he has a much more sophisticated frame of reference. However, as we will explain below, his theory has some weaknesses which are in common with Niccacci’s.

Recently, Jean-Marc Heimerdinger wrote a book on topic, focus, and foreground in ancient Hebrew Narratives from the perspective of discourse analysis, which was originally based on his Ph.D. dissertation. Through his entire book, he criticizes Longacre’s theory and proposes his own approach.

First, Heimerdinger’s main criticism of Longacre’s theory is against his notion of foregrounding. Longacre usually argues the foreground/background approach which relies upon only one form in each discourse type, e.g. wayyiqtol in narrative discourse. However, as Heimerdinger shows throughout his book, wayyiqtol clauses do not form always main story lines. They may be an evaluative comment, a descriptive detail, a summary, an enumeration, and explanatory information, which do not move the action or the event forward. This observation indicates that, depending on its function in discourse, wayyiqtol may or may not be foregrounded. In addition, temporally sequenced events need not be

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64 Van der Merwe, “Analysis of Narrative Syntactic Approaches,” 144.
encoded in a uniform grammatical class, nor in a homogeneous formal class (wayyiqtol) as Longacre assumes.68

Secondly, Heimerdinger argues that the notion of foregrounding is faulty because, by grammaticalizing the notion of foregrounding it also ends up by grammaticalizing the notion of importance in the discourse. As he shows in his book, foregrounding is not a simple matter which can be found only by the verbal form. Rather, various linguistic items, which in the perspective of pragmatics will evoke reader’s interest, can be put to use for foregrounding.69 Thus, van der Merwe argues correctly:70

The growing awareness of the complexity of human communication and that trying to understand a text involves much more than decoding a linguistic code, caution us towards the following: - the holistic type of text semantic type of approach of Longacre and claims like “it is my conviction that the verb forms in a narrative constitute the main clue to the author’s perspective in presenting information.”

Thirdly, although Longacre’s theory claims to be a simultaneous top-down and bottom-up approach, it has an intrinsic weakness which is often found in top-down approaches. His own notional framework often tends to override the formal aspect of his data, which in terms of his own theory should play an equal role.71 Den Exter Blokland complained that “in spite of incorporation of syntactical features, exploring the workings of the Hebrew text syntax does not seem Longacre’s primary concern. Rather his concern is in bringing to the text a kind of universal syntax of semantics, a formalization of textual

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68 Ibid., 261. Also see ibid., 98-100.
69 Ibid., 262-63. Also see R. Buth, “Functional Grammar, Hebrew and Aramaic: An Integrated, Text Linguistic Approach to Syntax,” Discourse Analysis of Biblical Literature: What It Is and What It Offers, ed. W.R. Bodine (Atlanta: Scholars, 1995), 77-102. Buth, 87, also observes similar problems: “If we define foreground as a pragmatic function, instead of semantically, we get around the impasse of non-sequential events being encoded with a “sequential-foregrounding” structure… We would not be able to point to an event in a narrative and say categorically, based only on the referential nature of the event itself, that it is or is not a foregrounded event.”
70 Van der Merwe, “Analysis of Narrative Syntactic Approaches,” 145.
71 Ibid., 144.
interpretation.\textsuperscript{72} In fact, as a top-down approach, his theory’s first step is to determine the discourse type of the text. However, determining its discourse type is not easy without analyzing the text by bottom-up approach. Therefore, it is another difficulty with his approach.

As seen in the studies of Niccacci and Longacre, the approaches of discourse analysis have many advantages which traditional grammars have not made. Especially, they show the function of the verbal system of the level of discourse and its difference according to discourse types. Overstatement and oversimplification which are revealed in their theories should be corrected. Because human communication is more complicated and reading text is not only the process related to its semantics but also to its pragmatics, in order to find the meaning and function of the Hebrew verbal system, we should pay attention to more various linguistic items than Niccacci and Longacre suggest. While I appreciate the great contributions of previous scholars, from both traditional approach and discourse approach, I will propose my own approach for understanding the Hebrew verbal system.\textsuperscript{73}

5. A Proposed Approach for Understanding the Hebrew Verbal System

The Hebrew verbal system is based on aspect, not tense. However, it does not mean that the Hebrew language does not have a means of conveying the time of an event. It just means that in Hebrew tense is not encoded in verbal forms as an absolute tense system. Rather, tense is determined by context, that is, discourse type, temporal expressions and so

\textsuperscript{72} A.F. den Exter Blokland, \textit{In Search of Text Syntax: Towards a Syntactic Segmentation Model for Biblical Hebrew} (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1995), 89.

\textsuperscript{73} Honestly speaking, it is not a new method but may be more balanced method than previous ones.
on. Although I accept the theory of the aspect-based verbal system, I still need to clarify some related definitions.

5.1. Aspect

Aspect is defined as “different ways of viewing the internal temporal constituency of a situation.” Aspect is different from Aktionsart which often is a confused term with aspect. Aktionsart is a German word meaning ‘kind of action.’ While it is not always clear how aspect and aktionsart can be distinguished, there are several proposals. Comrie argues that the distinction is “between aspect as grammaticalisation of the relevant semantic distinction and Aktionsart which represents lexicalisation of the distinctions, irrespective of how these distinctions are lexicalised.” It is also claimed that aspect and Aktionsart correspond to a subjective versus objective opposition.

Aspect is distinguished into two categories, perfectivity and imperfectivity. Perfectivity denotes “the view of a situation as a single whole, without distinction of the various separate phases that make up that situation; while the imperfective pays essential attention to the internal structure of the situation.” When we explain the term perfectivity, there has been some confusion between meanings of “completed action” and “complete action.” Comrie explains the difference between two:

“…despite the formal similarity between the two words, there is an important semantic distinction which turns out to be crucial in discussing aspect. The perfective does indeed denote a complete situation, whereas the use of the perfective puts no more emphasis,

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74 Comrie, Aspect, 3.
75 Ibid., 6-7.
77 Comrie, Aspect, 16.
necessarily, on the end of a situation than on any other part of the situation, rather all parts of the situation are presented as a single whole.\textsuperscript{78}

According to this definition, in biblical Hebrew the suffix conjugation expresses perfectivity, while the prefix conjugation imperfectivity. \textit{Waw} relative forms, \textit{wayyiqtol} and \textit{wayqatal}, are basically sequential forms respectively following the aspect of the suffix and prefix conjugation. Although many theories have been proposed for the origin of \textit{waw} relative forms, as seen above, it is still not clear. In the synchronic level, however, there are clear parallel sets, \textit{qatal} and \textit{wayyiqtol}, and \textit{yiqtol} and \textit{wayqatal}, whatever origin they have. In addition, although I am aware of debates on the relation of \textit{yiqtol} and modal forms, jussive and cohortative and of actual morphological, functional, and semantic overlap between them, I will focus on these four forms in this study because of the importance of the four forms in narrative discourse.

\textbf{5.2 Tense}

As mentioned above, in biblical Hebrew tense is not encoded in verbal forms. It means that Hebrew does not have an absolute tense system, but a relative tense system.\textsuperscript{79} The system of relative tense involves the relationships among three temporal points: the speaker time (S), the event time (E), and the reference time (R). This is the notion which was founded by H. Reichenbach.\textsuperscript{80} According to him, the reference time (R) may precede, follow, or coincide with S (speaker time or speech act time), just as E (the time of the event

\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., 18.
\textsuperscript{79} Cf. Comrie, 78-84.
or state of affairs) may precede, follow or coincide with \( R \). Reichenbach expresses tenses in diagrams using a comma to indicate coincidence and an arrow for the line of time:\(^{81}\)

\[
\begin{array}{ccc}
\text{Past Perfect} & \text{Simple Past} & \text{Present Perfect} \\
\text{I had seen John} & \text{I saw John} & \text{I have seen John} \\
E & R, E & S \quad E \\
S, R & \quad E \quad S, R & F \\
\end{array}
\]

In biblical Hebrew the relative tense value of the verb is usually indicated contextually by the clause structure, particularly by subordination or disjunction, and by the use of temporal adverbs.\(^{82}\) I will show some examples from biblical texts. In these examples the relationship between those points will be signalled as this: \(<\) (precede); \(>\) (follow); \(=\) (coincide).\(^{83}\) In the first example the *yiqtol* denotes the point of the relative future, in which the relationships between points are \( R < E < S \). In this example \( R \) time is the time of the previous independent verb in the clause sequence. If the relative future is in a subordinate clause, then \( R \) is the time of the verb in the governing clause.

\[
\text{“Before I had finished speaking in my heart, there was Rebekah coming out… (Gen 24:45).”}^{84}
\]

Although this is a past event in the perspective of the speaker, because the event of the second verb happens prior to the complete of the event of the first verb, the first verb is


\(^{83}\) In using these signs, I will follow Binnick.

\(^{84}\) The translation is from NRSV, otherwise it is noted.
in the form of *yiqtol*, which denotes that the action is imperfective. The temporal adverb יִהֲרֹּע also points out the relative future use in this clause.  

The next example is use of the relative past of *qatal*. In this case when the event time is to the speaker (S<E<R), the use of *qatal* as a relative past is also indicated contextually, usually by subordination or by temporal adverbs.

"...for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you (Gen 28:15)."

In this example the events of the first verb and the second verb are in future to the speaker but the event of the first verb (הָעָבֵר, to leave) is after the event of the second verb (עָשַׁה, to do). In addition, the temporal adverb בּוֹדֶה compounded with the conjunction רָמָה indicates the relative time. However, this relative past use of *qatal* and relative future use of *yiqtol* should not be confused with pure aspectual uses of *qatal* and *yiqtol*. *qatal* and *yiqtol* denote respectively perfectivity in future, so-called prophetic perfect, and imperfectivity in past time, so-called customary or incipient past.

The more frequent class of relative past use of *qatal* is when both the event and the reference point are past to the speaker (E<R<S). This corresponds to the English pluperfect. The last use of the relative past of *qatal* is the epistolary perfect. Although the

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87 Ibid., 163-68.
writer is writing one’s message in the present, the writer uses the perfective form which represents a situation in past time from the view point of the recipient of a message.\textsuperscript{90}

5.3 Discourse Function of the Hebrew Verbal System

In order to fully understand the Hebrew verbal system, we have to know its function at the level of discourse. Especially in narrative discourse, the Hebrew verbal system indicates discourse boundaries and prominence in the discourse, and forms the cohesion of the discourse.

5.3.1 Discourse Boundary

“A discourse boundary is a linguistic means of indicating when a unit of a discourse, such as a pericope or paragraph, concludes and when a new unit begins.”\textsuperscript{91} The beginning and ending of a paragraph are usually found by the means of discourse markers,\textsuperscript{92} a shift in grammatical person and main characters, or a shift in verbal forms.\textsuperscript{93} In biblical Hebrew narrative, a shift in verbal forms is a very important indicator of topic-shift, or unit-shift. As seen above, Niccacci and Longacre argued that wayyiqtol is a verb form for main story line in narrative discourse. Although their arguments have some pitfalls, their arguments still

\textsuperscript{90} Waltke and O’Connor, Syntax, 489.
\textsuperscript{91} Stanley E. Porter, Idioms of the Greek New Testament, 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 301.
\textsuperscript{93} See Brown, and Yule, Discourse Analysis, 94-100. Porter, Idioms, 301, argues for the importance of shift in verb tense-forms in biblical Greek.
point out the importance of wayyiqtol in marking boundaries in narrative discourse.\footnote{Although Niccacci argues a main story line and secondary line of information can be determined by the verbal forms of the sentences, as Talstra and Heimerdingen correctly point out, his argument does not do justice to cases where main line verbal forms are used in a paragraph referring to background information. See Talstra, “Clause Types and Textual Structure,” 174; Heimerdingen, \textit{Topic, Focus and Foreground}, 76-93.} When the chain of wayyiqtol is broken by the interruption of another verb form, it means that the discontinuance of the story line occurs. In fact, the reason of the interruption is not simply determined by the few options which Niccacci and Longacre proposed, rather it is found by the careful study of the context. Nevertheless, the broken chain of wayyiqtol may indicate the shift in the boundary. Judges 3:19-22 is a good example. This is the scene in which Ehud kills King Eglon of Moab. V. 20 begins a new stage of the story with qatal (_DECL he came back). Then, wayyiqtol verbs continue the story of the killing until the first clause in v. 23 (DECL he went out). However, the last clause of this killing ends with a qatal verb (DECL he locked) with waw conjunctive.\footnote{This is not a \textit{waw} relative because the imperfective meaning of \textit{waw} relative clause with \textit{qatal} is not proper in this context but the perfective meaning of \textit{qatal} is fit well in this context.} In this case we observe the shift of the story unit by the shift of verbal forms.

5.3.2. Prominence

distinction between old and new information in terms of pragmatic presupposition and assertion:

The typical sentence is characterized by the coexistence in it of a presupposition, evoked lexically and grammatically, and an assertion. The presuppositional component consists of a set of propositions which the speaker believes the hearer knows or is ready to take for granted. To make an assertion is to establish a relation between the presupposed set of propositions and a non-presupposed proposition... The definitions of topic and focus in terms of presupposition and assertion correlate with their pragmatic roles... As for focus, it is the part of an utterance whereby the presupposition and the assertion differ from each other.98

As focus is a relational pragmatic category, the property of being new in discourse, i.e. not previously mentioned, is not defining of focus. A constituent may be in focus even if its referent cannot be described as new in this sense. The ‘newness’ required for focus is not the newness of the constituent, but the newness of the role of the constituent in the abstract presupposed proposition. In contrast to the notion of ‘newness’ of the constituent, such property is pragmatically not recoverable from the context and is unpredictable.99

Following Lambrecht, he divides focus structures into three categories: predicate-focus, argument-focus, and sentence-focus.100 The predicate-focus and sentence-focus are broad foci, which extend each focus domain (that is the syntactic domain which expresses the focus components of the proposition) over more than one constituent, and argument-focus is narrow focus, which limits its focus domain to a single constituent.101 These categories are easily applicable to word order and clause structure in biblical Hebrew. These three categories can be explained in English examples, as it is shown below.102

1) Debbie visited Venice.
2) Debbie visited Venice.
3) Debbie visited Venice.

Press, 1994).  
98 Heimerdinger, Topic, Focus and Foreground, 130. 
100 Heimerdinger, Topic, Focus and Foreground, 165 
101 Ibid. Focus domains are phrasal categories such as noun phrase, verb phrase, and not lexical ones. 
102 Ibid. Italics indicate focus domains.
4) Debbie visited Venice.

The predicate-focus structure is exemplified in 2), which answers to the question *What did Debbie do?* It is the usual unmarked focus type. The sentence-focus structure is exemplified in 1), which answers to the question *What happened?* The argument-focus is explained by 3) and 4), which answer respectively the questions *Which town did Debbie visit?* and *Who visited Venice?* In a spoken discourse these focus structures is usually indicted by accentuation. However, because a written discourse does not have the prosodic component, the analysis of the written text has to rely on morphology or syntax, together with analysis of the context. In biblical Hebrew word order and focusing particles are tools by which focus in the text can be detected. Especially in biblical Hebrew, word order and the verbal system have a close relationship because the fronting of noun phrases is not possible without the breaking of *waw* relative clause. Therefore, following Lambrecht’s guide, we will examine the functions of the verbal system in marking focus through word order.

5.3.2.1. Unmarked Word Order

The VSO (Verb-Subject-Object) order represents for biblical Hebrew its most unmarked order as far as verbal clauses are concerned. According to Lambrecht, the unmarked order means that the clause contains only presupposed information or has predicate focus. Thus in the Hebrew narrative clause the predicate-focus structure is easily

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103 Ibid., 165-66.
104 Ibid., 166. For the analysis of spoken discourse, see Brown, and Yule, *Discourse Analysis*, 153-69.
found in the clause of so-called narrative verb form *wayyiqtol*. In predicate-focus structure the basic assumption is that the subject and object are presuppositional, that is, established topics, and the predicates, that is, *wayyiqtol* verbs, are the focus domains. Therefore, in narrative discourse continued by *wayyiqtol* verbs the story advances by the information contained in *wayyiqtol* verbs. Thus scholars have often illuminated this progress of the story line by *wayyiqtol* clauses as foregrounding. However, this *wayyiqtol* clause, which does not allow the fronting of other elements, complicates matters.

Although *wayyiqtol* clauses may often be interpreted as expressing predicate focus and progress together, the contexts of progress in *wayyiqtol* clauses eliminate the possibility of fronting constituents that refer to brand new entities or argument that is the focus of an utterance.\(^{106}\)

> נ흐ְתָה נְעַקּ חֲלָאָב וַיֶּבָךְ אַחַז עִם מִרְעָתָה נַחֲשַה:  
> Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until daybreak (Gen 32:25).

> יָאָמְרוּ אַלָּיִי אֲשֶׁר עִם נַחֲשַה יִקְרָאתֶנָּה:  
> “They answered him, ‘There came a man to meet us…’ (2Kgs 1:6).”

In both examples “a man (םָﬠ)” is a new entity which can front before the verb. However, because the context of progress in the first example limits the possibility of fronting the subject, the subject “a man (םָﬠ)” is placed after the verb, keeping VSO order. This also implies the problem of the term foreground/background, because focus is not always on *wayyiqtol* verb forms.

### 5.3.2.2. Fronted Constituents

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In narrative verbal clauses the fronting of elements other than the verb usually means that the wayyiqtol verb form is broken and other-focus structure than predicate-focus structure. Then, the meaning of the constructions is detected by either the information structure of the communicative situation or specific syntactic and semantic considerations.

5.3.2.2.1. The argument-focus structure

The argument-focus structure occurs when the argument, or some aspect of it, represents the semantic element that turns the “presupposed proposition” conveyed in the clause into a piece of information. It may be divided into several categories: establishing a relationship between a specific semantic item and the presupposed proposition, showing the contradicted relationship between a proposition and an entity, and confirming the already established role of a particular entity in a presupposed proposition.

The LORD said, “Judah shall go” (Jdg 1:1-2).

In the second clause the subject Judah (יהודה) is focused by fronting, establishing a relationship with the interrogative “Who.”

For they have not rejected you,”

but they have rejected me from being king over them (1Sam 8:7).”

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107 Ibid., 81-85. Contra Heimerdinger, *Topic, Focus and Foreground*, 200-12, while having the broad definition to the predicate-focus structure, he considers some occurrences of ‘fronting’ to belong to the predicate-focus structure.


109 Ibid.
In this example, there are two parallel clauses. Especially the two objects “you” (ָהִי) and “me” (ָהָי) are fronted in each clause and are focused, emphasizing the referent rejected by people.

“And we utterly destroyed them, as we had done…”

“But all the livestock and the plunder of the towns we kept as spoil for ourselves” (Deut 3:7-8).

The first one is a wayyiqtol clause but the second one has fronted objects “all the livestock and the plunder of the towns” which are compared with the object “them” (ָהָי) in the first clause, which were destroyed.110

“Then they said, ‘The God of the Hebrews has revealed himself to us…’ (Exod 5:3).”

In this clause, the subject, “The God of the Hebrews,” (ָלִיְהֵמָה) is fronted, confirming the already established role of God.

5.3.2.2.2. The Sentence-Focus Structure

The sentence-focus structure occurs “when the fronted argument refers to a brand new entity and the predicate refers to a proposition that is neither discourse active nor can be inferred from the co-text or context.”111 This type of focus structure is found in two pragmatic functions: it either introduces a new entity or referent in the narrative discourse, or it asserts the occurrence of an event which necessarily involves a referent, but which is incidental to the event itself.112 It has been often called the background information. This

110 Ibid., 83, classify this example into separate category because they do not consider these examples of topic frame to belong to three focus structures. However, I argue that these examples, which are the topics to be compared or contrasted, belong to argument-focus structure, because fronted elements can be considered arguments.

111 Ibid., 82.

112 Heimerdinger, Topic, Focus and Foreground, 214.
sentence-focus structure sometimes begins with a temporal clause or phrase which relates the following event temporally to the preceding context.\textsuperscript{113}

“Now the wife of a member of the company of prophets cried to Elisha…” (2 Kgs 4:1)

This clause with the fronted subject “the wife” (אשה) introduces a new referent and begins a new story. Thus the whole sentence is focused. Here the referent becomes a topical participant in the narrative which follows.

“Now Laban had gone to shear his sheep… (Gen 31:19).”

This is not a new beginning of the story, but occurs in the middle of the account of Jacob’s secret flight from Laban. This event took place earlier than the present event of Jacob’s flight. Therefore, this event is not in the chronological order, but rather introduces a flashback.

In the fifth year of King Rehoboam, King Shishak of Egypt came up against Jerusalem (1 Kgs 14:25)

The fronted temporal clause anchors the event asserted in the next clause in a certain time reference which is mentioned in the previous context. Then the new referent “King Shishak” occurs, which becomes a topical participant in the following narrative. The whole sentence begins a new story.

5.3.3. Cohesion

According to Halliday and Hasan, “a text is best regarded as a SEMANTIC unit: a unit not of form but of meaning… A text does not consist of sentences: it is realized by, or

\textsuperscript{113} Ibid., 214-18.
encoded in, sentences.” That is, the primary determinant of whether a set of sentences do or do not constitute a text depends on cohesive relationships within and between the sentences.

Cohesive relationships mean semantic relations between two or more elements in a text which are independent of structure: between the personal pronoun ‘he’ and antecedent proper noun ‘John.’ A cohesive tie is a term to refer to a single instance of cohesion. “Cohesion occurs where the interpretation of some element in the discourse is dependent on that of another.” There are various relations and tools which forms cohesion in a text.

The first item is “reference” which is a semantic relation. The cohesion is in the continuity of reference, by which the same thing is repeated in the discourse. There are three types of reference: Personal reference, Demonstrative reference, and Comparative reference. The second is “substitution” which refers to a relation between linguistic items, which can be nominal, verbal or clausal. There are two sub-categories: parallelism and ellipsis. The third is “collocation” which refers to lexical cohesion, which is made by the reiteration of a same word, synonym, super-ordinate, or general word and by the collocation of words which belong to the same lexical domain. The forth item is “junction” which is a semantic connection between elements in a text. Last item is “tense...

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117 I will basically follow Groom’s revised version of Halliday and Hasan’s items, as seen in *Linguistic Analysis*, 138-40.
118 Groom, *Linguistic Analysis*, 139.
and aspect.” Cohesion is further supported by the tense or aspect, which is usually indicated by verb form.\(^\text{120}\)

Especially in narrative discourse, the Hebrew verbal system is one of most important items for forming cohesion in the text. The main story line usually consists of wayyiqtol clauses. The chains of wayyiqtol verbs continually advance the story line, even after the interruption of other verb forms which may give the flashback information of the main story. In the surface structure of the text, wayyiqtol verbs make a cohesive relationship not only by aspectual and temporal effect but also morphological and even phonological effect through beginning with waw. We will apply these insights to Judges 5.

6. Application to Judges 5

Introduction Information (vv. 1-3): the beginning of the event

The Israelites again did (wayyiqtol) what was evil in the sight of the LORD, after Ehud died (qatal).

2 So the LORD sold them (wayyiqtol) into the hand of King Jabin of Canaan…

3 Then the Israelites cried out to the LORD for help… (wayyiqtol)

Judges 4:1 begins a new story with a wayyiqtol clause but the second clause has a qatal verb form with a fronted subject Ehud. This second clause reports a background event (the death of the judge Ehud) which indicates the reason why Israelites betray God. That is,

it is the *sentence-focus* structure. In vv. 2-3 the sequential events is described with *wayyiqtol* clauses, which result from Israel’s unfaithfulness to God in v. 1.

**Background information (vv. 4-5)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>Translation</th>
<th>Hebrew Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 4     | At that time Deborah, a prophetess, wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel. *(qotel-participle)* | נַעֲשֶׂהָ אֶפֶרֶת בַּנְיָמִין אֶפֶרֶת לְפַרְנָסָה | לֵאמֹר אֲשֶׁר בְּאֹתֶן אֶפֶרֶת לְפַרְנָסָה נַעֲשֶׂהָ אֶפֶרֶת בַּנְיָמִין אֶפֶרֶת לְפַרְנָסָה | 4 At that time Deborah, a prophetess, wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel. *(qotel-participle)*
| 5     | She used to sit under the palm of Deborah… *(qotel)* and the Israelites came up to her for judgment. *(wayyiqtol)* | נַעֲשֶׂהָ אֶפֶרֶת תַחַת תְּנָקָה דבּוֹרָה…וּבָאָהּ בְּאֶפֶרֶת הָעֵדָה שְׁאָלָהּ לִיהוָה | נַעֲשֶׂהָ אֶפֶרֶת תַחַת תְּנָקָה דבּוֹרָה…וּבָאָהּ בְּאֶפֶרֶת הָעֵדָה שְׁאָלָהּ לִיהוָה | 5 She used to sit under the palm of Deborah… *(qotel)* and the Israelites came up to her for judgment. *(wayyiqtol)*

Vv. 4-5 is the background information reporting the situation in which the following event happens. In this background information two participles and one sequential *wayyiqtol* are used.\(^{121}\) In the first clause a brand new entity “Deborah” is fronted. Then the new referent becomes a topical participant in the narrative which follows. It is the *sentence-focus* structure.

**Main Story Line (vv. 6-10)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>Translation</th>
<th>Hebrew Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 6     | She sent and summoned Barak son of Abinoam … *(wayyiqtol)* and said to him, *(wayyiqtol)* “The LORD, the God of Israel, commands you…” | נַעֲשֶׂה הָצִוָּה שָׁבַעַת בְּאָבִינוֹמָר…וּלְמַדְתְּךָ אֶלְּמַדְתְּךָ יְהוָה הַנֹּחַת הַיָּדָה הָיָה הַנֹּחַת הַיָּדָה הָיָה הַנֹּחַת הַיָּדָה הָיָה הַנֹּחַת הַיָּדָה הָיָה H | נַעֲשֶׂה הָצִוָּה שָׁבַעַת בְּאָבִינוֹמָר…וּלְמַדְתְּךָ אֶלְּמַדְתְּךָ יְהוָה הַנֹּחַת הַיָּדָה H | 6 She sent and summoned Barak son of Abinoam … *(wayyiqtol)* and said to him, *(wayyiqtol)* “The LORD, the God of Israel, commands you…”
| 8     | Barak said to her, *(wayyiqtol)* “If you will go with me, I will go…” | נַעֲשֶׂה הָצִוָּה שָׁבַעַת בְּאָבִינוֹמָר…וּלְמַדְתְּךָ אֶלְּמַדְתְּךָ יְהוָה הַנֹּחַת הַיָּדָה H | נַעֲשֶׂה הָצִוָּה שָׁבַעַת בְּאָבִינוֹמָר…וּלְמַדְתְּךָ אֶלְּמַדְתְּךָ יְהוָה H | 8 Barak said to her, *(wayyiqtol)* “If you will go with me, I will go…”
| 9     | And she said, *(wayyiqtol)* “I will surely go with you… Then Deborah got up and went with Barak to Kedesh. *(wayyiqtol)* | נַעֲשֶׂה הָצִוָּה שָׁבַעַת בְּאָבִינוֹמָר…וּלְמַדְתְּךָ אֶלְּמַדְתְּךָ יְהוָה H | נַעֲשֶׂה הָצִוָּה שָׁבַעַת בְּאָבִינוֹמָר…וּלְמַדְתְּךָ אֶלְּמַדְתְּךָ יְהוָה H | 9 And she said, *(wayyiqtol)* “I will surely go with you… Then Deborah got up and went with Barak to Kedesh. *(wayyiqtol)*
| 10    | Barak summoned Zebulun… *(wayyiqtol)* and ten thousand warriors went up behind him; and Deborah went up with him. *(wayyiqtol)* | נַעֲשֶׂה הָצִוָּה שָׁבַעַת בְּאָבִינוֹמָר…וּלְמַדְתְּךָ אֶלְּמַדְתְּךָ יְהוָה H | נַעֲשֶׂה הָצִוָּה שָׁבַעַת בְּאָבִינוֹמָר…וּלְמַדְתְּךָ אֶלְּמַדְתְּךָ יְהוָה H | 10 Barak summoned Zebulun… *(wayyiqtol)* and ten thousand warriors went up behind him; and Deborah went up with him. *(wayyiqtol)*

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\(^{121}\) For the background activity of the participle, see Longacre, *Analysis of Genesis*, 81.
In this unit (vv. 6-10) the main story begins and advances with the chain of *wayyiqtol* clauses which contain the direct speeches between Deborah and Barak.

**Background Information (v. 11)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Hebrew</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Now Heber the Kenite had separated from the other Kenites, <em>(qatal)</em> and had encamped as far away as Elon-bezaananim… <em>(wayyiqtol)</em></td>
<td>נָתִּית קְנִיָּה, נָפַּר מַקְסָּם וַיִּקָּהֵל עַד אֶלֹּן בְּצָאוָן עַמּים</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The fronted new referent “Heber” occurs and the new background information reports, which is related to the following event. It is the *sentence-focus* information. The second clause has a *wayyiqtol* verb form which reports a sequential event from the first clause.

**Main Story Line (vv. 12-15)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Hebrew</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>They told Sisera that Barak son of Abinoam had gone up … <em>(wayyiqtol)</em></td>
<td>תָּנַתְּ לָשׁוֹנָה כִּי עָלָה בָּרָק</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sisera called out all his chariots… <em>(wayyiqtol)</em></td>
<td>נַנְחֵם כֶּפֶךָ אֵלֶּךָ חֲלֵפָּךְ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Then Deborah said to Barak, <em>(wayyiqtol)</em> “Up!” So Barak went down from Mount Tabor <em>(wayyiqtol)</em></td>
<td>הָאָמַרְתָּ אֵלֶּךָ אֶלָּפְךָ בְּרָק</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And the LORD threw Sisera… <em>(wayyiqtol)</em> And Sisera got down from his chariot <em>(wayyiqtol)</em> and fled away on foot, <em>(wayyiqtol)</em></td>
<td>נֵחַּמֶךָ אַלַּפֶּךָ בְּרָק נָלָת שִׁירָא הַשָּׁמָּא</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While dealing with the story from the starting of the war between Israel and Canaan to the fleeing of Sisera, *wayyiqtol* clauses advance the main story line which is connected to v. 10.
Comparison: Argument-Focus Structure (vv. 16-17)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>Hebrew Text</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>נִפְשֵׁל כָּפָר הַשָּׁמֶשׁ</td>
<td>while Barak pursued the chariots… (qatal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>לא נישׁאֵר תּוֹרֵת</td>
<td>All the army of Sisera fell (wayyiqtol)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>אַל תָּבִיא נֶמְלָכָה</td>
<td>no one was left. (qatal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>נֶסֶקָה נֶשֶׁב בְּכֵרוֹל</td>
<td>Now Sisera had fled away on foot… (qatal)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In each verse the subject is fronted. These are not new referents or background information. Rather, these clauses continue the main story line. These are the *argument-focus* structures. This comparison implies Barak’s fail and Sisera’s death, which were prophesied by Deborah. In v. 16 *wayyiqtol* (to fall down, *רמות*) and *qatal* (to be left, *נישאר*) means respectively a sequential event and a conclusion remark. In v. 17, while Sisera’s flight is compared with Barak’s pursuing, this flight is connected with v. 18.

Main Story Line (vv.18-21)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>Hebrew Text</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>הנָתַת לְשֵׁלַח פְּרִכְּר</td>
<td>Jael came out to meet Sisera, (wayyiqtol)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>נִתְנָה לְשֵׁלַח פְּרִכְּר</td>
<td>and said to him, (wayyiqtol)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>וַיַּעֲמֹד אֶל הֹרֶה</td>
<td>So he turned aside to her into the tent, (wayyiqtol)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>וַיְהִי הָעַלָּהַה</td>
<td>and she covered him with a rug. (wayyiqtol)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>הָנָא אַלְּלָהַ</td>
<td>Then he said to her… (wayyiqtol)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>שָׁפָה אֲתֵנָאֵד הָחֶלָד</td>
<td>So she opened a skin of milk (wayyiqtol)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>וַיְהִי הָעַלָּהַ</td>
<td>and gave him a drink (wayyiqtol)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>וַיְהִי הָעַלָּהַ</td>
<td>and covered him. (wayyiqtol)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>הָנָא אַלְּלָה</td>
<td>He said to her… (wayyiqtol)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>נָתַת לְשֵׁלַח פְּרִכְּר</td>
<td>But Jael wife of Heber took a tent peg, (wayyiqtol)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>נִתְנָה לְשֵׁלַח פְּרִכְּר</td>
<td>and took a hammer in her hand, (wayyiqtol)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>וַיַּעֲמֹד אָפַּנְיָה</td>
<td>and went softly to him (wayyiqtol)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>וַיַּעֲמֹד אָפַּנְיָה</td>
<td>and drove the peg into his temple, (wayyiqtol)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>וַיַּעֲמֹד אָפַּנְיָה</td>
<td>and it went down into the ground (wayyiqtol)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>וַיַּעֲמֹד אָפַּנְיָה</td>
<td>and (because) he was lying fast asleep (qotel)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>וַיַּעֲמֹד אָפַּנְיָה</td>
<td>and he was faint (wayyiqtol)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>וַיַּעֲמֹד אָפַּנְיָה</td>
<td>and he died. (wayyiqtol)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This unit is connected with Sisera’s flight in v. 17 and forms the main story line which consists of the chain of wayyiqtol clauses. In v. 21 the participle מרגש (to lie fast asleep) offers the reason why Sisera could not resist Jael’s attack and two wayyiqtol clauses close this story with the death of Sisera.122

The Fulfillment of Prophecy (v. 22)

| 22 Then, as Barak came… (qotel) | ויהיה ברק ברק הראה לפניים |
| Jael went out to meet him, (wayyiqtol) | Markt את ירח מעלות |
| and said to him, “Come…” (wayyiqtol) | אשמר פל לך |
| So he went into her tent; (wayyiqtol) | נתן ירח על |
| and there was Sisera lying dead, (qotel) | מרת נופל מות |

This verse belongs to the main story line.123 In this verse, the first clause and the last clause have the focus-argument structures, which consist of waw, interjection (behold, הנה), subject, and participle, and their subjects are Barak and Sisera respectively. The interjection הנה usually focuses attention on an utterance that follows it.124 Therefore, it focuses on the dramatic fulfillment of Deborah’s prophecy (Barak’s fail and Sisera’s death) which is prophesized in v. 9 and implied in vv. 16-17 (Barak’s pursuing and Sisera’s flee).

Conclusion of the whole story (vv. 23-24)

| 23 And God subdued King Jabin… (wayyiqtol) | ויהיה אלהים כ畛ים חמה את יבש |
| 24 Then the hand of the Israelites bore harder and harder… (wayyiqtol) | יידמה ולפייראלאי הגלות והשנה |

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122 Although not every participle is a background activity, this may be a background activity which is pointed in the verbal hierarchy scheme of narrative discourse by Longacre, Analysis of Genesis, 81.
123 Here הנה and a participle structure does not give a background activity but continues the main story line with focus.
124 van der Merwe, Naudé and Kroeze, A Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar, 328-30.
The last two verses conclude the whole story in chapter 4 with two wayyiqtol clauses.

7. Conclusion

The enigma of the Hebrew verbal system, which McFall mentioned 25 years ago, is still true in terms of its origin and development. However, as seen above, there have been valuable researches in terms of the function of the Hebrew verbal system with the support of linguistic theories. Especially the theories of aspect and tense in linguistics give many insights for clarifying the definitions of aspect and tense in Hebrew studies. In addition, the use of discourse analysis has given many fruitful results. By means of this method, scholars have revealed the function of the Hebrew verbal system related to word order and sentence structure not only at the level of sentence, but also at the level of discourse.

However, because the methodology of discourse analysis still develops, when they apply the theories of discourse analysis to biblical texts, biblical scholars have made some mistakes of overstatement and oversimplification. Therefore, although the works of Niccacci and Longacre have provided many valuable results, we should be careful when we use their insights. It does not mean that discourse analysis is not a useful method, as some people argue.125 Rather, it indicates that we have to understand the complexity of human communication. Moreover, it encourages us to develop more suitable methodology to biblical Hebrew.

125 Washburn, “Chomsky’s Separation,” 27-46; Hatav, Semantics of Aspect and Modality, 15-16
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