Transitivity in Biblical Hebrew

By Jeff Berry

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1. Introduction

Word Order in Biblical Hebrew (henceforth BH) has been studied by many people using many different approaches. Most of these studies conclude that BH has VSO underlying word order. For example, Waltke and O'Connor's (1990:129) important work *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* states, 'for verbal clauses the basic Hebrew word order is *verb + subject* (VS)'. Most of these studies then proceed to list the many exceptions to this rule in an ad hoc fashion. To overcome the problem of word order variation, scholars have attempted to classify Biblical texts as either prose or poetry. The prose sections tend to have much less word order variation, the majority of which are narrative texts. Consequently, several studies on narrative have been published in the last few years, including Heller's (2004) *Narrative Structure and Discourse Constellations*, which will be discussed below. In discussing factors that determine word order, these studies ignore a very large portion of the BH corpus, namely the poetic sections of the Bible, arguing that in the more poetic texts, word order is determined according to stylistic criteria and therefore cannot be accounted for in a scientific manner. In contrast, Hans Henrich Hock (2000) argues that poetry should be studied as well as prose, since most poetry does not have significant changes in syntax. It makes sense to include poetic

texts in any study on BH grammar, since a large portion of the limited available data is often classified as poetry.

In his book *The Idea of Biblical Poetry*, James Kugel (1981:85) argues that there is no clear-cut distinction between prose and poetry in BH. Unlike classical European poetry, Biblical poetry does not have a distinctive meter or rhyming pattern, but employs other devices such as parallelism. Kugel argues that all the texts of the Bible use these techniques to some degree, and therefore there is not a clear distinction between poetry and prose, but rather there is a continuum with highly prosaic texts on one end that use few poetic devices, and highly poetic texts on the other which use many of the devices. The majority of the texts fall somewhere in the middle of the continuum, and use some of the poetical devices. Some of these devices will be discussed below. In attempt to explain this, Luis Alonso Schökel (1988:11) speculates that some of the narratives may have originally been epic poems much like those of nearby contemporary societies that were passed on from generation to generation as an oral tradition, eventually to be written down as prose by a later author, but retaining some of the poetry of the original.

In her dissertation, Fariss (2003) argues that transitivity as described by Hopper and Thompson (1980) can be used to explain word order variation in BH poetry. If correct, this would help solve some of the problems of explaining word order in BH and would eliminate the difficulty of trying to classify a text as either poetry or prose. This would allow for a more holistic approach to word order and syntax in BH, and would give us a better picture of the language as it might have actually been spoken, since it would make use of more of the available data. This paper will take Fariss's arguments as a starting point and analyze data from BH using Hopper and Thompson's transitivity

parameters in order to verify the argument that transitivity plays a role in determining word order in BH. In section 2, several previous studies will briefly be examined in order to provide a background for the arguments of this paper. In section 3, some of the poetic devices used in BH will be outlined. Section 4 will consist of the analysis of the data, and section 5 will state the conclusion.

2. Previous Studies

This section will briefly discuss two recent studies that involve word order in BH. The first is Roy Heller's (2004) book *Narrative Structure and Discourse Constellations*, which is a study on the Hebrew verb in narrative texts. The second study is Katsuomi Shimasaki's (2002) book *Focus Structure in Biblical Hebrew*, which addresses word order variation using information theory. The discussion of these studies will give background to the issues in explaining word order variation in BH.

2.1. *Narrative Structure and Discourse Constellations.*

The Hebrew verb has puzzled scholars for centuries. BH exhibits five[1] conjugations of the finite verb that have different functions. Traditionally, these conjugations have been divided into suffixing and prefixing verbs. The basic suffixing verb conjugation is referred to as QATAL, which means that in the third person masculine singular, the vowel pattern is CaCaC, where the C represents a root consonant. The root qtl, which means 'kill', is chosen for the paradigm because none of its

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[1] Most scholars divide the verbal system into four conjugations, not distinguishing the WəYIQTOL from the other prefixing conjugations.

consonants behave irregularly[2]. The basic prefixing verb conjugation is referred to as
YIQTOL, which means that in 3ms, the vowel pattern is yiCCoC. The other three verb
conjugations have what has traditionally been called the waw-consecutive attached to
either the prefixing or suffixing conjugation in the following patterns: WƏQATAL,
WƏYIQTOL, and WAYYIQTOL. The problem for scholars has been to understand the
functions of these five conjugations. Heller discusses four major trends in descriptions of
the BH verbal system: tense-based, historical-comparative, aspect-based, and discourse-
linguistic approaches. In the first three approaches, the QATAL is thought of as past
tense or perfect aspect, and the YIQTOL as future or imperfect aspect. In these
approaches, the addition of the waw-consecutive to the verb reverses the tense or aspect,
making WƏQATAL a future or imperfect, and WƏYIQTOL and WAYYIQTOL past or
perfect.

These types of approaches give the general sense of the verbal system, but there
are many exceptions to the rules. In poetic texts especially, the QATAL and YIQTOL
conjugations do not fit nicely into the past/perfect-future/imperfect categories, as in the
following example:

(1) ʔohavaj   və-reʕaj   minɛgɛd   nigʕij
    My.loved   and-my.friends aloof   my.affliction

    yaʕamodu   u-qrovaj   meraħoq   ʕamadu

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[2] The reader will notice that verbs that are labeled with a conjugation name such as QATAL do not always
fit the pattern of the paradigm. This is due to at least one of the following three reasons:
(i)   the verb is inflected for something other than 3ms,
(ii)   the root has a w, y, or laryngeal-pharyngeal consonant: ʔ, ʕ, h, ħ, r, which cause vowel changes,
or
(iii)   the verb is in one of the six patterns (binyans) that take on additional morphology to alter the basic
meaning of the root.
Traditionally, the names of the verb conjugations use the root qtl, and the names of the verbal patterns use
the root pʕl. For example HITPAʕEL is the name of the iterative or reflexive verbal pattern. When a verb
of this pattern appears in QATAL in the 3ms, it will be of the form hithallek, 'he wandered around'.

stand.3mp [YIQTOL] and-my.near   from.far   stand.3mp [QATAL]

'My loved ones and my friends stand aloof from my affliction, and those near to me stand from afar.' (Psalms 38:12)[3]

In this example, the verbs are better rendered in English as present tense, rather than future and past. Watson (1986:279-80) argues that this variation in tense is a poetic device used to break up repetition that otherwise could lead to monotony[4].

Heller (2004:430-431) attempts to solve these types of problems using the fourth approach mentioned above, which assigns a set of discourse functions to each of the five verb conjugations. He does not attempt to explain the verb in poetry, but concentrates on narrative texts. He finds that in narrative texts, the most common verb conjugation is the WAYYIQTOL, and argues that more than three consecutive WAYYIQTOLs form a 'chain' that implies 'sequentiality of action in the narrative'. These chains form the backbone of the narrative, and move the storyline along. The other verb conjugations are used either to mark paragraph boundaries or give 'background or off-line information, which does not occur within the sequentiality of the main narrative'.

Heller's arguments are significant to a study on word order because clauses that have a WAYYIQTOL always have VSO word order as in the following example:

(2)   vajoʔmer   ʔɛlohim   jəhij   ʔor
        said [WAYYIQTOL] God   be   light

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[3] All Hebrew text taken from *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*. All translations are the author's unless otherwise noted.

[4] Some comparative-historical approaches explain that the YIQTOL in these clauses are remnants of an earlier form that was different from YIQTOLs that mark imperfect aspect. According to Smith (1991:5-6), in Proto-Hebrew, what were earlier two distinct forms, the preterite *YAQTUL, and present-future *YAQTULU became indistinguishable when the final short vowels were dropped. *YAQTUL eventually fell out of use, or may have been the precursor to the WəYIQTOL form. The *YAQTULU dropped the final short [u] and later became YIQTOL. The problematic YIQTOL in these clauses may be remnants of the earlier *YAQTUL, indistinguishable from the later YIQTOL, since the vowels were not added to the text until Rabbinic times. If correct, this approach resolves the problem of variation in tense, but does not explain the switching between QATAL and *YAQTUL.

vajhij   ʔor
was [WAYYIQTOL]   light

vajarʔ   ʔɛlohim   ʔɛt   ha-ʔor   ki   tov
saw [WAYYIQTOL] God   Acc   the-light   that   good

vajavdel   ʔɛlohim   bejn   ha-ʔor
separate [WAYYIQTOL]   God   between   the-light

u-vejn   ha-ħoʃɛx
and-between   the-darkness

'God said, "Let there be light", and there was light. God saw that the light was good; then God separated the light from the darkness.' (Gen. 1:3, 4)

This is the beginning of a long WAYYIQTOL chain that makes up the creation narrative in Genesis. As Heller explains, these clauses use the WAYYIQTOL to move the story along, and contain the foregrounded material. From this passage and other narratives, we can see that this text type is more likely to exhibit VSO word order because it uses WAYYIQTOL chains. Other text types such as lyric, expository, predictive, and direct discourse are more likely to have word order variation, because they do not tell a story, and therefore do not use WAYYIQTOL chains. Below, we will argue that since foregrounded clauses are by nature more transitive than backgrounded clauses, and are specially marked in BH by the use of the WAYYIQTOL, the WAYYIQTOL is a sign that transitivity has an effect on the syntax of BH.

2.2. *Focus Structure in Biblical Hebrew*.

In *Focus Structure in Biblical Hebrew*, Katsuomi Shimasaki (2002) analyzes word order variation in BH using information theory outlined by Knud Lambrecht (1994). He argues that word order varies according to what the focus of the clause is. He gives the following definition for focus:

> To focus is to mark an item as informationally prominent. Not only new information but also old information may be focused for functional purposes. This focus can be expressed prosodically, morphologically, or syntactically. (2002:240)

Shimasaki outlines three different focus structures: Predicate-Focus Structure, Argument-Focus Structure, and Sentence or Clause-Focus Structure. Each type of Focus Structure has distinct pragmatic functions. The function of Predicate-Focus Structure is to comment on an active or accessible topic, as in the following examples:

(3a)　Ɂaħaj　　　meɁajin　　　Ɂatɛm
　　　my.brothers　from.where　you.pl
　　　'My brothers, where are you from?'

　　　meħaran　　　Ɂanaħnu
　　　from.Haran　we
　　　'we are from Haran.' (Gen. 29:4)

(3b)　mij　　atah
　　　who　you
　　　'Who are you?'

　　　ʕamaleqij　　　Ɂanoxij
　　　Amalekite　　　I
　　　'I am an Amalekite.'(2 Sam 1:8)

In these examples, the second clauses have their predicates fronted for focus. Similarly, the Argument-Focus structures have a single argument fronted that identifies the topic as in the following example:

(4)　mij　jaʕalɛh　　　lanu
　　　Who　will go up　　for us
　　　'Who will go up for us?'

　　　jəhuda　　　jaʕalɛh
　　　Judah　　　will go up
　　　'Judah will go.' (Judges 1:1, 2)

In this example, the argument 'Judah' is focused to identify the missing argument from the previous sentence. The Clause-Focus structure focuses the entire clause, and is used

for other functions. Since the word order is not changed in this type of focus, it will not be discussed here.

The tendency for focused constituents to be fronted in BH is important for a study on word order variation. In order to maintain the hypothesis that transitivity has a direct effect on word order in BH, we must be able to explain clauses that do not seem to fit the theory. Transitivity is by no means the only property that affects BH syntax. Focus structures such as those discussed by Shimasaki may help to explain variations from standard VSO word order that cannot be explained by transitivity.

3. Poetic Devices in Biblical Hebrew

Another important cause of word order variation in BH is the stylistic use of poetic devices. W.G.E. Watson (1986) discusses some of these devices in his book *Classical Hebrew Poetry*. Biblical poetry utilizes a technique known as parallelism. Kugel (1981:1) defines parallelism as follows:

> The basic feature of Biblical songs—and, for that matter, of most of the sayings, proverbs, laws, laments, blessings, curses, prayers and speeches in the Hebrew Bible—is the recurrent use of a relatively short sentence-form that consists of two brief clauses.
> The clauses are regularly separated by a slight pause—slight because the second is . . . a continuation of the first and not a wholly new beginning. By contrast, the second ends in a full pause. The structure might be schematized as
> _____ / _____ //
> with the single slash representing the pause between the clauses (short) and the pair of slashes representing the final pause (long).

The second clause is used to emphasize or second the first clause. Kugel (1981) explains this pattern as saying, 'A, and what's more B'.

This parallelism is manifested in many ways. Some of the most common devices used to tie the two clauses together are: word pairs, repetition, Ellipsis, Merismus,

Enjambment, and grammatical gender patterns. These types of devices do not involve

change in word order, but there are other devices that do. Perhaps the most famous of

these devices is chiasmus or mirror parallelism. There are several types of chiasmus

outlined by Watson, but we will focus only on syntactic chiasmus, which causes variation

in word order. In the following examples, the verb and other constituents switch order in

the second clauses in a mirror pattern such as NP V / V NP//.

(5a) ʕenej   gavhut   ʔadam   ʃafel /
      eyes.of   pride.of   man   be humiliated

      vəʃaħ   rum   ʔanaʃijm //
      cower   arrogance.of men

      'The proud look of man will be humiliatied /
      And the arrogance of men will cower //' (Isaiah 2:11)

(5b) vəhimtartij   ʕal   ʕir   ʔɛħat /
      I cause rain to fall on   city   one

      və-ʕal ʕir   ʔaħat loʔ   ʔamtijr //
      and-on city   one   Neg   I cause rain to fall

      'I will cause rain to fall on one city /
      And I will cause rain not to fall on another //' (Amos 4:7)

These examples also exhibit the change in verb conjugation from clause to clause as

discussed earlier in (1). The change in word orders in these clauses cannot easily be

explained by discourse factors or information structure, but can only be attributed to

stylistics.

In the previous sections we briefly summarized two studies that deal with word

order variation. From these studies we can conclude that word order in BH is affected by

discourse factors such as selection of the WAYYIQTOL verb conjugation to signal

foregrounded information essential to the progression of the storyline, and by the

information structure of the sentence. We also found that word order can be affected by stylistics. We should therefore not expect transitivity to explain all deviations from VSO word order. In the next section we will analyze how transitivity plays a role in BH grammar and how it can help explain some cases of word order variation.

4. Transitivity in Biblical Hebrew

In light of the previous studies mentioned above, transitivity seems to show promise in helping to explain word order variation in BH. As Heller points out, the selection of the verb conjugation seems to be determined by discourse factors. In their article 'Transitivity in grammar and discourse', Hopper and Thompson (1980:251) state that 'the defining properties of Transitivity are discourse-determined'. They give the following parameters by which transitivity can be marked in the clause:

	High Transitivity	Low Transitivity
A. Participants	2 or more	1
B. Kinesis	action	non-action
C. Aspect	telic	atelic
D. Punctuality	punctual	non-punctual
E. Volitionality	volitional	non-volitional
F. Affirmation	affirmative	negative
G. Mode	realis	irrealis
H. Agency	A high in potency	A low in potency
I. Affectedness of O	O totally affected	O not affected
J. Individuation of O	O highly individuated	O non-individuated

These parameters are designed to characterize the degree to which an action is transferred from the Agent (A) to the Patient (O) in a clause. With these parameters, we should think of transitivity as a continuum, with the consequence that even though a clause may have only one participant (traditionally referred to as intransitive), it may rank higher on the

transitivity scale than a clause with two participants, if the first clause has more of the

parameters in the 'High Transitivity' column than the second.

Hopper and Thompson (1980:255) also formulate the Transitivity Hypothesis,

which states:

> If two clauses (a) and (b) in a language differ in that (a) is higher in Transitivity according to any of the features A-J, then, if a concomitant grammatical or semantic difference appears elsewhere in the clause, that difference will also show (a) to be higher in Transitivity.

The converse of this hypothesis also holds. From this hypothesis, we should expect a

clause that exhibits one of the 'High Transitivity' parameters to be more likely marked

for 'High Transitivity' in other parameters. In the following subsections, we will discuss

how BH marks Transitivity.

4.1. *The Particle ʔɛt in Biblical Hebrew*

Hopper and Thompson (1980:256) point out that in Modern Hebrew, a definite

object is marked with the Accusative particle ʔɛt, while the indefinite object receives no

such marking, as in the following examples:

(6a)   David natan   matana   lərina
       David gave   present   to.Rina
       'David gave a present to Rina.'

(6b)   David natan ʔɛt   ha-matana   lərina
       David gave   Acc   the-present   to.rina
       'David gave the present to Rina.'

This example illustrates how Modern Hebrew uses ʔɛt to mark the second clause as more

transitive, since it has a more individuated object than the first clause (parameter J).

BH often marks individuated objects in the same manner, as in the following

example:

(7) bə-reʔʃijt   baraʔ ʔelohim   ʔɛt   ha-ʃamajim və-ʔɛt   ha-
     in-first   create God   Acc   the-heavens and-Acc the-
     ʔarɛ͡ts
     earth
     'In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.' (Gen 1:1)

Unlike Modern Hebrew, BH can often omit the ʔɛt marker, even when the object is

individuated. This omission may be linked to transitivity, as the following example

illustrates:

(8a) vajasex   ʔɛt   nisk-o
      pour.3.M.SG [WAYYIQTOL]   Acc   libation-his
      'He poured out his libation' (2 Kings 16:13)

(8b) bal   ʔasix   niskej-hɛm   midam
      Neg   pour.1.SG [YIQTOL] libations-their   of.blood
      'I will not pour out their blood libations' (Ps. 16:4)

In (8a), the object is individuated by the presence of the possessive suffix –o, and

therefore is marked with ʔɛt. In (8b) however, the object is not marked with ʔɛt, even

though it is also individuated by a possessive suffix (-hɛm). The Transitivity Hypothesis

seems to offer an explanation for the lack of ʔɛt in the second clause. As will be argued

below, the WAYYIQTOL is used in highly transitive clauses, since it normally marks

telic, punctual, affirmative, and realis events (parameters C, D, F, and G above), as in

(8a). On the other hand, the YIQTOL in (8b) ranks lower on the transitivity continuum,

since the action is negative and irrealis, and therefore, by the Transitivity Hypothesis, will

not mark other parts of the clause as transitive, which accounts for the lack of ʔɛt.

Although transitivity may account for clauses such as (8b), it does not easily account for all of the missing ʔɛt markers in BH. Take, for example, the following:

(9a) və-hadɛlɛt   sagar   ʔaħarav
      and-the.door shut.3.M.SG after.him
      'and he shut the door behind him' (Gen. 19:6)

(9b) və-ʔɛt   hadɛlɛt   sagaru
      and-Acc   the.door   shut.3.M.PL
      'and they shut the door' (Gen. 19:10)

In these clauses, the verbs are in the same conjugation (QATAL), and have the same rank on the transitivity continuum. The non-canonical OV word order in these clauses suggests that 'the door' is being focused in both of these clauses. The presence of ʔɛt in (9b) might still be explained as marking a more transitive clause, when the larger sentence in which it occurs is examined:

(9c) vajiʃləħu   ha-ʔanaʃijm ʔɛt   jadam
      reach   the-men   Acc   hand.their

      vajavijʔu   ʔɛt   lot   ʔalejhɛm
      bring   Acc   Lot   to.them

      və-ʔɛt   hadɛlɛt   sagaru
      and-Acc   the.door   shut.3.M.PL

      'The men reached their hand out, brought Lot in to them and shut the door' (Gen 19:10).

The presence of ʔɛt in the third clause may have been caused by the ʔɛt markers in the previous clauses, which both have a WAYYIQTOL. Therefore, the sentence as a whole is highly transitive. (9a) in contrast, does not have an ʔɛt in the larger sentence, and therefore did not have the influence of other ʔɛt markers as in (9b).

Many scholars have noted that ʔɛt and other syntactic markers are often left out in poetic texts. Kugel (1981:89-95) refers to this as the 'terseness' of biblical poetry. He explains that Hebrew poetry is often similar in style to a telegraph, in which many particles are omitted for economy, or to strengthen the connection between parallel clauses by placing the particle in one of the clauses, and eliding it in the second, thus making the clauses syntactically dependent on each other. Watson (1986:38) mentions that this 'conciseness' may be due to poetic texts being composed at an earlier stage of the language, in which some of these 'prosaic elements' had not been fully developed. In later texts, these particles were omitted intentionally to give the text a more archaic style.

The Transitivity Hypothesis may also explain the terseness of Hebrew poetry. Poetic texts rarely use the WAYYIQTOL form, and are often in the irrealis mode. Therefore, the clauses of poetic texts generally rank lower in transitivity than clauses of narrative texts, and by the Transitivity Hypothesis, we would expect them to use the ʔɛt marker much less often than narrative texts.

Before we move on, we must examine certain usages of ʔɛt which have caused much debate because they occasionally seem to mark the subject, as in the following examples:

(10a) u-vaʔ   haʔarij   və-ʔɛt   hadov   və-nasaʔ
      and-came   the.lion   and-Acc   the.bear   and-carried
      sɛh
      sheep
      'the lion and the bear came, and took a sheep' (1 Sam. 17:34)

(10b) və-ʔɛt   habarzɛl   nafal   ʔɛl   hamajim
      and-Acc   the.axe head fell   into   the.water
      'the axe head fell into the water' (2 Kings 6:5)

(10c) ʔɛt   ʕamud   hɛʕanan   lo'   sar   meʕalejhɛm

        Acc   pillar.of   the.cloud   Neg   depart from.over.them
'The pillar of cloud did not depart from over them' (Neh. 9:19)

MacDonald (1964:267) adds more data to these examples using readings from a

document that he calls the Samaritan Chronicle II, which is written in a late dialect of BH

(usually referred to as Classical Hebrew to include the extra-biblical material). This text

has many examples of a subject marked with ʔɛt, as in the following example of Joshua

7:9 (written without the vowels):

(11)   wʃmʕw   ʔɛt   jʃbj   ʔr͡ts   knʕn
       hear   Acc   inhabitants.of   land   Canaan

       wsbs   bnw   lhʃmjdnw   mn   hʔr͡ts
       and.surround us   to.eradicate.us   from   the.land

       'When the inhabitants of the land of Canaan hear, they will come against
       us from round about to eradicate us from the land.'

This version differs from the Masoretic (traditional) text, in that the Samaritan version

adds the ʔɛt before the subject. From this and other examples, MacDonald (1964:275)

declares,

> We now have absolute proof that, in the later form of Northern Israelite (Classical)
> Hebrew at least, [ʔɛt] did come in for a much wider range of usages than has
> hitherto been allowed by the great majority of commentators.

> From these types of usages, Joüon (1991: 344) speculates that ʔɛt was originally a

substantive with a vague meaning, such as 'thing', that underwent a grammaticalization

process. Gesenius (1910:362 n.4) strengthens this analysis to 'It was no doubt originally a

substantive, meaning *essence, substance, self*.' This would make ʔɛt similar to the Latin

ipse. Saydon (1964:192-3) takes this further, and argues that the main use of ʔɛt is to

'emphasize' the word to which it is attached, whether it be a subject or object. These

types of explanations leave much to be desired, since 'emphasis' is often unclear, and is

difficult to define, and there is no way to prove that ʔɛt was ever anything other than a

grammatical particle.[5]

Another approach that seems to have more to offer explains that clauses like those

in (10) are actually remnants of an ergative system, as suggested by Francis I. Andersen

(1971:14). This would explain (10a-c) above, where ʔɛt marks the definite subjects of

intransitive verbs, thereby treating them as morphosyntactically equivalent to definite

objects of transitive verbs, a clearly ergative pattern.[6] Hans-Peter Müller argues that

many early Semitic languages, including Hebrew, exhibit traces of a split-ergative

system.[7] This usage of ʔɛt seems to be functioning in a split-ergative system because

these ergative constructions appear with the suffixing conjugation (QATAL), but not with

the prefixing conjugations, where a nominative/accusative system is normally used. This

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[5] In a recent study, Rubin (2005:121-3) has extensively reviewed the arguments for grammaticalization of ʔɛt, and comes to a similar conclusion: 'the origins of Hebrew *'et* and Aramaic *yāt* are shrouded in obscurity, and we can only hypothesize that they arose via grammaticalization.' There is evidence that ʔɛt was grammaticalized in later stages of Hebrew. For example, in Mishnaic Hebrew (400 B.C.E - 400 C.E.) (Segal 1927:1) ʔɛt with suffixes was reanalyzed as a demonstrative, as in the following example:

    Raʔiti   ʔoto   ha-ʔiʃ ʃe-raʔita
    I.saw   ACC.him   the-man that-you.saw
    'I saw that very man that you saw.'

In Modern Hebrew, the reanalyzed ʔɛt with suffixes has been grammaticalized, and now means 'the same'. The example above would be translated as 'I saw the same man that you saw' in Modern Hebrew.

    According to Kutscher (1972) and Pérez Fernández (1992), Mishnaic Hebrew was the spoken dialect in Palestine, and only became a literary language after the destruction of the second temple (70 C.E.). That the vernacular had an effect on the Bible can be seen in the later texts such as Esther and Chronicles, where use of the WAYYIQTOL has practically disappeared, and the syntax and vocabulary have similarities to Mishnaic Hebrew. From this, any appearances of ʔɛt in the later texts marking a subject could be explained as a demonstrative or emphatic marker, as in the example above. However, most of the occurrences of ʔɛt in question appear in much earlier books, and thus cannot be explained in this manner.

[6] This does not completely explain (10a), where haʔarij is not marked with ʔɛt. On ergativity in general, see Comrie (1981:104-110), and Dixon (1994).

[7] A split-ergative system usually refers to a language that uses ergative/absolutive case marking in certain tenses or aspects, and nominative/accusative case marking in the other tenses or aspects. Hindi, for example is often considered to have split-ergativity, because in the perfective tenses, it marks the agent differently than in the other tenses.

can be seen in (10), where all the verbs are in the QATAL conjugation, which as mentioned in section 2.1, has a perfective aspect. This seems to hold in (11) as well, where the verb is changed from a prefixing conjugation in the Masoretic text to a suffixing conjugation in the Samaritan text, and the ʔɛt is added to mark the definite subject of the intransitive verb.

Split-ergativity provides further evidence for Transitivity in BH. From the Transitivity Hypothesis we expect ʔɛt to occur in highly transitive clauses. Apart from the occurrences in the NIFʕAL, the ergative constructions only appear with QATAL, which normally has perfective aspect. From parameter C above, we see that perfective aspect ranks high in transitivity, and therefore the ʔɛt marker in the ergative constructions appears because the clause as a whole ranks high in transitivity. Conversely, ʔɛt does not appear in this manner with the YIQTOL conjugation (except in the NIFʕAL), because these clauses generally have imperfective aspect, and are therefore less transitive. This split-ergativity / transitivity correlation is found in many of the world's languages, as in Hindi, where the agentive subject marker only appears in the perfective tenses.

Müller (1995:264) notes that the Hebrew NIFʕAL verb pattern also shows traces of ergativity. This pattern has two basic meanings: (i) the active meaning of an intransitive verb, and (ii) the passive meaning to a transitive verb, as illustrated in the following examples respectively.

(12a) vǝ-loʔ   jimas   ʔɛt   lǝvav   ʔɛħav
       and-Neg   will melt   Acc   heart.of   brothers.his
       'and the heart of his brothers will not melt' (Deut. 20:8)

(12b) vajivaled   laħanox   ʔɛt   ʕijrad
       was born   to.Henoch   Acc   Irad

'Irad was born to Henoch' (Gen 4:18)

Müller (1995:268) argues that this is also an ergative pattern, since it treats active intransitive verbs as morphosyntactically equivalent to passive transitives. This is also a split-ergative pattern, although the split occurs along different lines. Instead of splitting along the perfective-imperfective divide as mentioned above, the split in the NIFʕAL occurs along the ingressive-stative divide. In other words, the ʔɛt that marks the subject only occurs with ingressive verbs in the NIFʕAL, and never with stative verbs, regardless of whether these verbs have perfective or imperfective aspect. This ingressive-stative split also fits well with the Transitivity Hypothesis, since ingressive verbs involve an action, while statives do not (Parameter B). Thus ingressives are more transitive, and therefore the special ʔɛt markers appear with these verbs.

Thus it appears that there are two distinct types of split-ergativity in BH. MacDonald's findings suggest that certain dialects of Late Classical Hebrew such as the dialect of the Samaritan Chronicle II may have had ergative systems, which may have influenced certain passages in the Bible. Müller's arguments, on the other hand, suggest that ergativity in the NIFʕAL is a remnant of ergativity in Proto-Semitic, or Afro-Asiatic. The fact that the split occurs along different lines for each type of split-ergativity further suggests two possible sources of ergativity in BH.

To summarize, ʔɛt marks clauses as ranking high in Transitivity in several ways. In the vast majority of cases, it marks a definite object of a transitive verb, which shows a highly individuated object (parameter J). Occasionally, ʔɛt also marks a definite subject of an intransitive verb, which suggests traces of an ergative system in BH. These

occurrences of ʔɛt coincide with either perfective aspect (parameter C), or action in the

NIF\SAL (parameter B), and mark the clause as ranking higher on the transitivity

continuum.

4.2. *Verbal Conjugations, Word Order, and Transitivity*

As discussed in section 2.1, the WAYYIQTOL conjugation, when formed into

'chains', is used to move the storyline forward, as in example (2). Tal Goldfajn (1998)

comes to a similar conclusion, in his book *Word Order and Time in Biblical Hebrew*

Narrative. Goldfajn (1998:70-1) argues that WAYYIQTOLs are telic, because the

endpoint of the action is always visible. He argues that this telicity helps to avoid

ambiguity in the interpretation of the verb, as in the following example:

(13)   vajhij   ʔaħarej   xen . . .
          happened   after   this

          vajɛʔɛhavɛha   ʔamnon   bɛn   david
          loved.her   Amnon   son.of David

          'This *happened* afterwards: . . . and Amnon son of David *loved* her.' (2
          Sam 13:1)

The telicity of the WAYYIQTOL causes the verb 'loved' to be interpreted as 'a state that

was completed'.

The WəQATAL conjugation is similar to the WAYYIQTOL in several respects.

It too can occur in chains that denote a sequentiality of events, with the difference that

these events are in the future, rather than in the past, as in the following example.

(14)   havu   ʔɛt   ʔurijah ʔɛl mul pnej   hamilħamah
          place.imp Acc Uriah   to   front   the.fighting

          haħzaqah   vəʃavtɛm   meʔaharav

the.strong   will.retreat.2.M.PL [WəQATAL]   behind.him

vənikah   vamet
will.be.smitten.3.M.SG [WəQATAL]   will.die.3.M.SG [WəQATAL]

'Place Uriah at the front where the fighting is strong; then retreat behind him so that he will be smitten and die.' (2 Sam 11:15)

WAYYIQTOL and WəQATAL are also alike in that they must always come at the beginning of the sentence, and they cannot be negated. In terms of transitivity, both conjugations rank high in kinesis, telicity, and affirmation (parameters B, C, and F), and seem to differ only in realis vs. irrealis (parameter G) because of the past/future distinction. As Hopper and Thompson (1980:292) point out, clauses that rank high in transitivity also tend to 'predominate in the foregrounded portions of discourse', and therefore, foregrounding is a sign of high transitivity.

In contrast to the waw-consecutive forms (WAYYIQTOL and WəQATAL) which mark foregrounding, the QATAL and YIQTOL conjugations do just the opposite. Ziony Zevit (1998) argues that the QATAL is used to form the 'anterior' construction, meaning that the action of the QATAL expresses the action as being anterior to the previous event, as in the following example:

(15)   vajeraʕ   hadavar   ʔaʃɛr   ʕasah   david bəʕejnej
        displeased   the.thing   that   did [QATAL] David in.eyes.of
        yhwh
        Lord
        'The Lord was displeased with what David *had done*.' (2 Sam 11:27)

In this sentence, the action of the QATAL is best translated with a pluperfect, since David's action occurred anterior to the action of the WAYYIQTOL at the beginning of the sentence. The QATAL is also used with negations, or to repeat, elaborate, or expand

on the event just mentioned (Goldfajn 1998:130). From this it is clear that QATAL is often used for backgrounded events, and is less transitive than the *WAYYIQTOL*.

YIQTOL is similar to QATAL in that it conveys background information. It differs from QATAL, in that instead of expressing anteriority, it expresses a single posterior event. It contrasts with WəQATAL in that the posterior events are not continuous. Compare, for example, the following with (14):

(16)   hineh ʔatah ʃamaʕta   ʔɛt ʔaʃɛr ʕasu
           emp   you   heard [QATAL] Acc that   did.3.M.PL [QATAL]

           malxej ʔaʃur   ləxol haʔaratsot   ləhaħarimam
           kings.of Assyria   to.all the.lands   to.destruction.their

           vəʔatah   tinacel
           and.you   be.saved [YIQTOL]

           'You have heard what the kings of Assyria did to all the lands in destroying them; will you be saved?' (2 Kings 19:11)

Here the YIQTOL refers to a singular, posterior event, unlike the WəQATAL, which has the element of sequentiality. YIQTOL also differs from WəQATAL in that it can be negated, and does not have to appear at the front of the clause, as in (16). YIQTOL's other uses usually consist of expression of modality, and other irrealis events. WəYIQTOL behaves similar to YIQTOL, in that it is used to mark a singular posterior event as in (17), although Waltke and O'Connor (1990:563) argue that it began to replace the WəQATAL in post-excilic texts.

(17)   taʕtir   ʔelav   vəjiʃmaʕexa
           You.will.pray to.him   he.will.hear.you [WəYIQTOL]
           'You will pray to him and he will hear you.' (Job 22:27)

Because of the similarities between WəYIQTOL and YIQTOL many scholars do not distinguish them, and treat WəYIQTOL as YIQTOL with the addition of the conjunction və-, and not as a waw-consecutive form.

From the preceding discussion, we may conclude that the waw-consecutive is a marker of high transitivity, similar to ʔɛt, since it only appears in foregrounded clauses that rank high in kinesis, telicity, and affirmation. In contrast, the verbs that do not have waw-consecutive often refer to non-sequential events, mark background information, can be negated, and express modality.

From this, we can conclude that transitivity has a direct effect on word order in BH. The less transitive non-waw-consecutives often vary in word order, as in (16) for example, where the first QATAL clause and the YIQTOL clause have SV(O) word order. Zevit (1998:15) argues that the standard word order for the QATAL anterior construction in a main clause is SV(O), as (16) demonstrates. Andersen (1970) argues that verbless clauses vary in word order according to definiteness, which as discussed in section 4.1, is also linked to transitivity. Specifically, if the predicate is definite, the clause will have Subject-Predicate word order, and if the predicate is indefinite, the order will be P-S[8].

As Fariss (2003) notes, different text types vary in the amount of clauses that deviate from VSO word order based on how inherently transitive the clauses of the text type are. Narrative texts have the fewest number of non-VSO clauses because the majority of the clauses use waw-consecutives, which must always have verb first word orders. On the other hand, Expository and Lyric texts do not use the waw-consecutives as often, because these text types by nature do not need to mark sequentiality, and therefore

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[8] For a thorough discussion of Andersen's findings, and analysis of counterexamples, see Hoftijzer (1973).

have more SVO and other word orders because they use QATAL and YIQTOL more often.

5. Conclusion

The notion of Transitivity as outlined by Hopper and Thompson has been shown to have clear effects on the grammar of Biblical Hebrew. The ability of Transitivity to help explain several seemingly unrelated phenomena shows how deeply rooted in the grammar these effects are. The Transitivity Hypothesis seems to hold for BH, since the more transitive a clause is, the more markings it will likely have, i.e. waw-consecutive or ʔɛt, and the more likely it will have VSO word order. This paper offers a promising new proposal on how to account for these phenomena in the grammar of BH, whose explanations have been problematic for many years. Transitivity and its effects on BH deserve more research, in which more evidence of its importance will undoubtedly be found.

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