Peter Streitenberger

The Verb in Biblical Hebrew: Description of its Functions up through Discourse

Translated by Renate Mauk

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Preface and Acknowledgments

Readers new to the Hebrew language in the Bible will soon find out that the syntax is rather simple but the verbal system widely differs from the English one. In introductory grammars the formation of the verb (its morphology) is treated sufficiently and can easily be grasped from these books or software programs. There are also diagrams and tables of verb forms (their inflection) on the internet.

However, research has shown that the meaning of the verb leaves the reader in doubt about several points. The main issue is, why authors choose certain forms and what they want to express by this choice (e.g. show that events are certain and inevitable, or that they are court announcements). Verb forms can show that a statement is unreal, which means not actually true, or that it expresses a wish, an order, a request, or a supposition, or that it relates to the past, present, or future, respectively. For the comprehension of the Hebrew language in the Bible, it is crucial to gain an exact overview of all these possible meanings of the verb. The verb is the central control element in the sentence. Around it, the other elements are structured and subjects, objects and adverbials depend structurally on it (so called valency). If you can fully understand the verb according to its form and meaning, you can usually well understand the entire sentence. Therefore: If you master the Hebrew verb, you have the essential key to the comprehension of the Old Testament. That is why it is worth the while to study the functions of the verb with all their discursive features on the layer of the sentence and up through discourse.

The author of this book, Peter Streitenberger, has intensely and for a long time dealt with the functions of the verb in classical Hebrew and their meaning as his main point of interest. Over the years, he took up the challenge of summarizing his findings in a theory of the entire verb system and to clarify them. For this book, he has combined his findings with recently published studies by other authors on the topic.

Consequently, this book is an attempt to deliver an introduction, an overview and in some respect a deep insight into the verbal system of Hebrew in the Old Testament, mainly the central (finite, i.e. inflected) conjugations because these are more complex and therefore need more explanation than e.g. simple

infinitives or other infinite verb forms. The book is addressed to readers and learners as well as people interested in the Hebrew Bible.

At the beginning, there is a general overview about all the principles of the word formation in the verbal system. It is followed by the discussion of the single conjugations, i.e. YIQTOL / WEQATAL, WAYYIQTOL / QATAL, and QOTEL.

Traditionally, grammars claim that the main difference is between perfective and imperfective (QATAL-YIQTOL). As a matter of fact, this simple distinction is not in the least sufficient for a complete and extensive description of the entire system. Consequently, and in order to gain a full overview, the two semantically corresponding pairs YIQTOL / WEQATAL and QATAL / WAYYIQTOL and the predicatively used participle QOTEL need to be discussed. Among these, QOTEL will be described especially intensely, because this form has been neglected in former studies, although its exegetical meaning is extremely important.

In the following main part, the verb is analyzed in its syntax, then in the form of a statement (proposition) in the discourse. This includes the discussion of the most important relations of statements. (Bible quotations used throughout may be excerpts rather than complete verses.) This book can also be used to find the right grammatical category and the meaning of the respective verb forms which the reader encounters in the Word of God. This enables the reader to gain a deeper understanding of what the writer wants to express. In addition, it is shown how statements can be analyzed and understood based on the verb forms. The study therefore finishes with the layer of discourse.

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וַתִּקְרְבוּן אֵלַי
כָּל־רָאשֵׁי שִׁבְטֵיכֶם וְזִקְנֵיכֶם:

</div>

And it came to pass, when you heard the voice out of the midst of the darkness,
while the mountain **was burning** with fire,
that you came near to me,
all the leaders of your tribes and your elders.
Deuteronomy 5:23

Parallel to a reference to the *past*, like in the example just mentioned, QOTEL can refer to the *future* (cf. Zechariah 14:12) and to the *present*. QOTEL expresses the *background story* underlaying the *main story*. In the following example, Isaiah adds lexical means to the verbform (that means he uses an extra word) in order to give an account of events that passed *before* labor and pain started, namely the birth of a boy:

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בְּטֶרֶם תָּחִיל יָלָדָה
בְּטֶרֶם יָבוֹא חֵבֶל
לָהּ וְהִמְלִיטָה זָכָר:

</div>

Before she went into labor, she gave birth;
before the pains came upon her,
she delivered a son.
Isaiah 66:7

If you want to put the past, present and future into perspective, you need to distinguish anteriority, simultaneity, and posteriority. One event occurs *before*, *during* or *after* another, while it is possible that events overlap, e.g. when one runner is as fast as another at first, but then increases his or her speed.

The starting point of all time relations is the moment of speaking. You can relate events that occur at the same time, later or before to this point in time. The time described by the word "now" is the moment of speaking or writing. According to Reichenbach, it is called **point of speech** (S). The event or the action the speaker is eventually referring to is called **point of event** (E). It shows the time relationship.

These two factors cannot distinctly define a tense system because events *before* or *after* other events exist that do not equal S or E, e.g. when English uses past perfect or future perfect. That is why a **point of reference** (R) needs to be

an action as a *result* (resultative) or as *centralized* in one point (punctual). All these are covered in the term **aktionsart**. In English, lexemes such as *awake*, *arise*, *start*, or *arrive*, *lose, wither* describe the beginning or the end of an action. Aktionsart is an important distinction in the verbal system of Hebrew, too. It will be useful in the following text for the description of certain phenomena.

1.5. Word Order

Word order means in which place the parts of sentences (subject, predicate, object, adverbials) or the words they consist of (like adverbs) are located within the sentence. Hebrew has a standard word order (non-marked case), which is a more or less statistical denomination. For different reasons, authors divert from it by shifting parts of sentences to the left or to the right (left- or right-dislocation). In English, there is the concept of *topicalization*, which has fewer possibilities of stressing parts of sentences compared to Hebrew.

In addition, some authors claim that the position of each single word on its own is not a part of word order, but only the parts of speech and their parts. This is not the only possible view if you consider which layer (word, phrase, part of speech) you are referring to. In all these layers, word order ("where is which element placed in the sentence") can be of interest. As a rule, it makes a difference in all layers, whether or not an element takes its regular place. Some do not dwell on a divergence of the regular word order, although there are studies that explain it explicitly (e.g. the dissertation "Towards a discourse-pragmatic description of left-dislocation in biblical Hebrew" by Joshua Westbury, Stellenbosch, 2010).

For Hebrew, the order PSO is commonly accepted in verbal sentences, that means, the predicate (most of the time the finite verb) takes the front-position, the corresponding subject follows, the objects (direct/ indirect) take the end-position. In poetical texts, word order is much more flexible than in prose.

The most common word orders are SPO, OPS and APS (that means, an adverbial is placed at the beginning of the sentence, in front of the predicate and the subject). The overall tendency to place the element with the most important information first, shows that according to the standard word order the predicate marks the structural center of the sentence – as could be expected.

An interesting stylistic device (figure of speech) differing from the usual word order is the *hyperbaton*, which means that a phrase is interrupted by the insertion of other words, which makes the word order discontinuous:

$$\text{הֲרָרִי בַּשָּׂדֶה חֵילְךָ}$$
$$\text{כָּל־אוֹצְרוֹתֶיךָ לָבַז אֶתֵּן}$$
$$\text{בָּמֹתֶיךָ בְּחַטָּאת בְּכָל־גְּבוּלֶיךָ:}$$

My mountain in the field, your wealth,
all your treasures to the spoil I **will give away**
– your high places, because of the sin throughout your territory.
Jeremiah 17:3

At first glance, the predicate "I will give away" is unusual in the position after the direct object ("my mountain…") and the prepositional complement ("to the spoil"). Thus, it becomes the focus. The object even continues after the predicate ("your high places"). At the end of the sentence, Jeremiah places an adverbial phrase of reason ("because of…"). Unfortunately, such stylistic devices of word order have been of little interest in the Hebrew language.

1.6. Syntax

Syntax deals with the rules in the sentence. Its smallest units are single words and their inflection, then phrases (e.g. prepositional phrases), then parts of speech (e.g. predicates), then sentence types (declarative sentences, questions, relative clauses etc.).

1.7. Important Verb Categories

In Grammar, there are **dynamic** and **stative verbs** ("A kisses B" describes an action, "A is 80 years old", however, describes a state of being). This distinction is important for the verbal system in Hebrew because stative verbs in present perfect are used to refer to the present instead of the past, that means they describe a present state:

$$\text{וְאַבְרָהָם זָקֵן}$$

The Hebrew verb "bless" (marked in the text) takes different forms depending on its stem: In the Piel stem it appears in the active voice ("bless"), while in the Pual stem it appears in the passive voice ("be blessed").

4. Conjugations

4.1. Overview

The terminology of the different approaches concerning the Hebrew verb differs in some parts and may be confusing for some readers. Therefore, it makes sense to gain an overview first:

The following verb forms can be listed; they will be treated in detail later: **perfect**, **imperfect**, **volitive** modality (hortative, jussive, imperative), two **infinitives** and one **participle** (active and passive).

Since the focus of this book is the function and meaning of the verb in the sentence, the *finite* conjugations perfect and imperfect are of greater importance because those define the system, together with the participle. Therefore, the other conjugations (infinitives and volitives), which are less complicated to describe, can be reviewed in a short synopsis. Finite forms have a full inflection whereas infinite ones have no or a limited inflection.

The imperfect is sometimes called prefix or preformative conjugation because the inflection is done with prefixes at the beginning of the verb. In contrast, the perfect is called affix conjugation because the inflection is done at the end of the verb. In contrast to infinite ones, finite conjugations offer the option of inflection, i.e. determination of number, person, tense etc.

4.2. Infinitives

In descriptions and grammars two infinitives are differentiated: the **infinitive construct** and the **infinitive absolute**. These are the prototypical infinitive forms.

5. YIQTOL / WEQATAL

5.1. Overview

YIQTOL and WEQATAL differ only *morphologically* and *topologically* (in form and word order), not *semantically* (in meaning).

In WEQATAL, the use of *waw* causes a **conversion**, resulting in semantic alignment with YIQTOL. However, there is a topological difference, as this form is used where the conjunction "and" is required (perfect after *waw consecutive*), typically at the beginning of the sentence. Through the *waw*, WEQATAL indicates a connection to the preceding text. While QATAL usually refers to real past events, WEQATAL is primarily used for future or modal events.

YIQTOL is topologically restricted to positions within the sentence, with understandable exceptions (e.g. as jussives, which are often formally identical). Both forms, YIQTOL and WEQATAL, are therefore merely alternative versions with different topological characteristics, regarding their sentence position. Both conjugations primarily refer to **future** or **modal** events. When these do not relate to the speech time (S), an additional reference time (R) *before* YIQTOL / WEQATAL can be assumed, *after* which the event (E) described in these forms takes place. Thus, YIQTOL / WEQATAL are used for the representation of events that have not yet become reality, as they lie in the future (cf. Genesis 1:29; 2:16ff.; 2:23f.; 3:2f. etc.). Since **modality** is also non-real, i.e. a necessity ("I must"), an obligation ("I should"), or a possibility ("I can") do not represent actual realities, these two conjugations are also used for these cases. A special usage is the expression of recurring events (**iterative**). Present time reference with this conjugation can only occur in this case, in the gnomic aspect, or in questions.

In summary, YIQTOL / WEQATAL show five basic meanings: *future* events, *modality*, *general* statements, *recurring* events in the present and past, and present time reference in *questions*. Additionally, the form can be used for the *irrealis* mood of the present.

5.2. Simple Future (S<E)

The main use of YIQTOL / WEQATAL encodes **simple future** ("I will do", "I am going to do"), i.e. it refers to events that lie in the *future* of the speaking time, which are not yet existent in reality, as the following example shows:

וַיִּקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמוֹ נֹחַ לֵאמֹר
זֶה יְנַחֲמֵנוּ מִמַּעֲשֵׂנוּ
וּמֵעִצְּבוֹן יָדֵינוּ מִן־הָאֲדָמָה
אֲשֶׁר אֵרְרָהּ יְהֹוָה:

And he named him Noah saying,
"He **will comfort us** concerning our work
and the toil of our hands caused by the ground
the LORD has cursed."
Genesis 5:29

Father Lamech uses YIQTOL in order to make a statement about future events, which is appropriately translated with future I (he will). As will be shown later, this sometimes overlaps with modal use, since Lamech could also have uttered a wish (he may / should).

Topologically, YIQTOL *in the middle of the sentence* equals WEQATAL *at the beginning* of it:

וְאָמְרָה אֵלַי
גַּם־אַתָּה שְׁתֵה וְגַם לִגְמַלֶּיךָ אֶשְׁאָב

And she will say to me,
"You drink, and I **will draw** for your camels as well";
Genesis 24:44

5.3. Posterior Reference Time (E<R<S)

In the following example, the reference time is expressed with YIQTOL, which lies after the main event (E):

Would you not **be angry** enough with us to destroy us,
leaving us no remnant or survivor?
Ezra 9:14

The first use of YIQTOL cannot be deontic, since the question "Could we break your commandments again?" would make no sense if it expressed an obligation. Instead, it expresses the possibility for the action – an epistemic modality indicating whether such an action could occur again. In the second case, YIQTOL presents an ambiguity: It could express either God's self-imposed *obligation* (deontic modality – indicating God *must* act in this way and cannot do otherwise), or it could indicate the speaker's assessment of high *probability* that God will act in this way (epistemic modality). The contrast between these functions is evident in their different degrees of obligation, which can be expressed in English through modal auxiliaries: "Could we" versus "would you".

5.7. Recurring Events (Iterative)

If the context points to it, YIQTOL / WEQATAL can refer to *recurring* or *habitual* events in the past, present or future. First, the following examples show iterative events in the **past**:

הוּא־הָיָה גִבֹּר־צַיִד לִפְנֵי יְהוָה
עַל־כֵּן יֵאָמַר
כְּנִמְרֹד גִּבּוֹר צַיִד לִפְנֵי יְהוָה׃

He was a mighty hunter before the LORD;
that is why **it is said**,
"Like Nimrod, a mighty hunter before the LORD."
Genesis 10:9

The statement about Nimrod has obviously been repeatedly uttered or could have been a sort of proverb at that time (cf. gnomic use). In the translation, the general validity of the statement is additionally underlined by the passive wording "it is". In the following example, the past participle (which is a passive one) serves the same purpose:

וּמִשְׁמַרְתָּם
הָאָרֹן וְהַשֻּׁלְחָן וְהַמְּנֹרָה
וְהַמִּזְבְּחֹת וּכְלֵי הַקֹּדֶשׁ
אֲשֶׁר יְשָׁרְתוּ בָּהֶם
וְהַמָּסָךְ וְכֹל עֲבֹדָתוֹ:

Their service was:
the care of the ark, and the table, and the lampstand,
and the altars, and the articles of the sanctuary
(which are) **used** in ministering,
and the curtain, and everything related to their use.
Numbers 3:31

The use of YIQTOL indicates that the service was to be done again and again, i.e. it was not only a one-off action that was demanded.

וְכֵן יַעֲשֶׂה שָׁנָה בְשָׁנָה
מִדֵּי עֲלֹתָהּ בְּבֵית יְהוָה כֵּן תַּכְעִסֶנָּה
וַתִּבְכֶּה וְלֹא תֹאכַל:

And **he** [Elkanah] **did** so year by year.
When going up to the house of the LORD, **she** [Penninah] **provoked her**
[Hannah] so much that she wept, and did not eat.
1Samuel 1:7

In addition to YIQTOL, the time given as "year by year" defines the event as iterative, i.e. (always) recurring and rooted in the time then, i.e. the past. Similarly, the provocations by Penninah were recurring at every going up to the house of the LORD. Compare this with the following verse:

עַל־פִּי יְהוָה יִסְעוּ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
וְעַל־פִּי יְהוָה יַחֲנוּ
כָּל־יְמֵי אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁכֹּן הֶעָנָן עַל־הַמִּשְׁכָּן

At the LORD's command the children of Israel **set out**,
and at his command they **encamped**.
All the days that the cloud **stayed** over the tabernacle they **encamped**.
Numbers 9:18

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All YIQTOL cases in the example above are iterative: The setting out and the encamping happened *again and again*. *Whenever* the cloud stayed over the tabernacle, the children of Israel encamped. With the use of YIQTOL, Moses encodes a recurring event of the past.

וְהָיָה כַּאֲשֶׁר יָרִים מֹשֶׁה יָדוֹ
וְגָבַר יִשְׂרָאֵל
וְכַאֲשֶׁר יָנִיחַ יָדוֹ
וְגָבַר עֲמָלֵק:

And it came to pass, as long as Moses **held up** his hand,
the Israelites were winning,
and whenever he **lowered** his hands,
the Amalekites were winning.
Exodus 17:11

In the two subordinate clauses mentioned above, the recurring action of Moses is underlined, who held up his hands *repeatedly* and thus brings about the victory of Israel. However, *time and time again*, he lowered his hands, so that the Amalekites were winning.

The following example shows the same meaning of the corresponding WEQATAL:

וְרוּחַ יְהוָה סָרָה מֵעִם שָׁאוּל
וּבִעֲתַתּוּ רוּחַ־רָעָה מֵאֵת יְהוָה:

Now the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul,
and an evil spirit from the LORD **tormented him**.
1Samuel 16:14

This verse first shows a unique action, namely that the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul; this is encoded in QATAL. Then the following part of the story also shows, that he was tormented by the evil spirit again and again; this is encoded in WEQATAL.

The following example also shows a habitual and recurring event in the past, encoded in YIQTOL, namely the usual community and the periodic visit to the house of GOD:

אֲשֶׁר יַחְדָּו נַמְתִּיק סוֹד
בְּבֵית אֱלֹהִים נְהַלֵּךְ בְּרָגֶשׁ
We **used to have** (or: we shared) **close fellowship**;
we **walked** with the crowd into the house of God.
Psalms 55:14

Some of the English translations show that there was a habit in the fellowship with the wording "used to", others neglect this fact. In Hebrew, the form YIQTOL leaves no doubt about the habit, since the context excludes any other use: The story points to past events that were reality, so that the use as future ("will go") or modality ("we want to go") – both unreal – can be excluded.

The following find shows the exegetic significance of the iterative use:

וְאֵד יַעֲלֶה מִן־הָאָרֶץ
וְהִשְׁקָה אֶת־כָּל־פְּנֵי־הָאֲדָמָה:
And a mist **was rising** from the land
and **was watering** the whole surface of the ground.
Genesis 2:6

Both forms – YIQTOL and the corresponding WEQATAL – indicate iterative events in the past. In this narrative context, both events (the rising of the mist and the watering of the ground) were recurring and happened regularly.

This verse challenges recent theories claiming that YIQTOL is imperfective and WEQATAL perfective. There are several reasons why these theories are inappropriate. First, while these forms express iterative action, they do not – contrary to some claims – encode permanent or imperfective background actions underlying the main narrative. That function is characteristic of the participle QOTEL. Second, YIQTOL expresses an iterative action within the main story line itself, not as background information. The actions described are central to the narrative progression, not supplementary or contextual information. This demonstrates that YIQTOL does not function as a purely imperfective form, as the imperfective / perfective theory would suggest. The presence of both YIQTOL and WEQATAL expressing similar iterative actions in the main narrative further undermines the strict aspectual distinction these theories propose.

6. The Participle QOTEL

6.1. Overview

The **participle QOTEL** comes from a verbal root and takes one of the **stems** (Qal, Nifal etc.). It can be in the **active** and in the **passive** voice; it is inflected like a **noun**, and it can have an **article** if it is not used as a verb (predicatively). The Latin root of the word "participle" (i.e. participate, have a part) points to the fact that it has *nominal* as well as *verbal* and *adjectival* qualities. The participle therefore can represent different parts of speech.

Since the Hebrew participle can also be an **attribute** or a **noun**, these two functions must be excluded for the analysis of its predicative function in the verbal system (e.g. by the lack of noun qualities or the article, or corresponding objects, or an explicit subject). When the participle is not used in the sense of an adjective or a noun (i.e. it does not take the place of a subject or an attribute in the sentence structure), the *verbal* use remains.

When a predicative participle is found in a sentence, a corresponding subject needs to be determined, since otherwise, no verbal use can be proven. QOTEL is *not* inflected in regard to person, which would form the subject, but in regard to *gender* (masculine, feminine), *number* (singular, plural), and *voice* (active, passive). The subject, which is usually not expressed explicitly, is normally given in the text and can clearly be identified from the context. Mostly, it is mentioned before the participle. It cannot have an article in verbal use:

<div dir="rtl">וְהוּא יֹשֵׁב בִּסְדֹם</div>

And **he lived** in Sodom.
Genesis 14:12

In this verse, Moses uses the personal pronoun in order to point out the subject of the participle. The same can be found in the following example:

<div dir="rtl">כִּי בַּפַּעַם הַזֹּאת אֲנִי שֹׁלֵחַ אֶת־כָּל־מַגֵּפֹתַי אֶל־לִבְּךָ</div>

For this time, **I will send** all my plagues on your heart.
Exodus 9:14

In the Hebrew bible, QOTEL can be found as encoding the *present*, and for the description or references to the *present*, *past* and *future*. In each case, the participle shows *simultaneity*, no matter what tense can be deduced from the

context. This corresponds with the translation of the **Septuagint**, because this Bible version regularly renders QOTEL as **present participle**, which equally expresses simultaneity (cf. Genesis 1:6; 3:5 etc.). In contrast to some recent ideas (cf. Cook 2012, who understands the opposition of QATAL and YIQTOL as perfective versus imperfective), the traditional view concerning the function of QOTEL (not of YIQTOL) is to express the **imperfective aspect**, i.e. the participle describes the background story happening at the same time as the main story. This is especially the case when other conjugations, of which QOTEL depends, describe the events of the main story.

6.2. Present (S=E)

QOTEL on its own can express the present without reference to a superordinate predicate, which corresponds to the English *present progressive* (e.g. "I am reading"). Thus, it shows a present or a just beginning action at the moment of speaking, especially in direct speech or in dialogs. Sometimes, translations with simple present and additional words like "now", "at the moment" may make sense.

וַאֲנִי הִנְנִי מֵקִים

אֶת־בְּרִיתִי

אִתְּכֶם וְאֶת־זַרְעֲכֶם אַחֲרֵיכֶם

"**I now establish** (literally: **I am establishing)** my covenant with you and
with your descendants after you.
Genesis 9:9

Since there is no other verb form in this sentence, QOTEL here shows that it can express present on its own. Compare the following verse, in which the present becomes clear by the time additionally given in the word "today":

הַיּוֹם אַתֶּם יֹצְאִים

בְּחֹדֶשׁ הָאָבִיב:

Today, **you are leaving**,
in the month of Abib.
Exodus 13:4

7. QATAL and WAYYIQTOL

7.1. Basic Function

The fundamental function of these conjugations is coding anteriority – indicating that an event precedes another event. Writers typically use QATAL / WAYYIQTOL to report completed historical events. This corresponds with the Septuagint translation practice, which regularly renders these forms with the aorist tense (cf. Genesis 1:1; Genesis 1:3, and Genesis 1:5).

בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֵת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֵת הָאָרֶץ

In the beginning God **created** the heavens and the earth.

Genesis 1:1

Note that these conjugations express anteriority in a relative way, i.e. also if the time of event is already over or lies in the future.

וַיַּרְא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה

And God **saw** every thing **that he had made**.

Genesis 1:31

Moses' report (S) refers to the past. He describes how GOD looks back (E) at the creation he had made before (R).

QATAL and WAYYIQTOL should be grouped together, as their main difference is topological (word order), while YIQTOL and WAYYIQTOL differ fundamentally in function.

7.2. Past Tense Usage

QATAL encodes anterior events where the speaking time follows the event time. This parallels the usage of the English past, but with an important distinction: past events can have direct or indirect effects on the discourse time. English marks this through the difference between *simple past* and *present perfect*.

הַמֶּלֶךְ הִצִּילָנוּ מִכַּף אֹיְבֵינוּ
וְהוּא מִלְּטָנוּ מִכַּף פְּלִשְׁתִּים
וְעַתָּה בָּרַח מִן־הָאָרֶץ מֵעַל אַבְשָׁלוֹם

The king **delivered** us from the hand of our enemies;
he is the one who **rescued** us from the hand of the Philistines.
And now he **has fled** the country to escape from Absalom.
2Samuel 19:9

QATAL usage shows important distinctions in the relation of past events to the present moment. In examples with multiple QATAL forms, the first two occurrences typically refer to events with only indirect connection to the present time. However, this final QATAL may express an event that, while occurring in the past, maintains direct relevance to the current moment. This distinction is reflected in English translations: present perfect for events with continuing relevance, and simple past for those without.

Unlike the predicative participle QOTEL, WAYYIQTOL does not indicate present events. However, it can express past events whose effects continue into the present moment. This way of marking past events parallels similar constructions in both Greek (perfect tense) and English (present perfect):

וַיְצַו אֹתָם לֵאמֹר
כֹּה תֹאמְרוּן לַאדֹנִי לְעֵשָׂו
כֹּה אָמַר עַבְדְּךָ יַעֲקֹב
עִם־לָבָן גַּרְתִּי וָאֵחַר עַד־עָתָּה׃

And he instructed them and said:
"This is what you are to say to my lord Esau:
'Your servant Jacob says,
I **have been staying** with Laban and **have remained** there until now.'"
Genesis 32:4

Jacob looks *back* at the time of his stay with Laban, and he expresses this by QATAL (E<S). This means that the past state until the time of the utterance ("until now") is still unchanged and true (WAYYIQTOL). Thus, an event is encoded which lies in the past but is still true in the present. This is called resultative (E<S=R). Compare also:

וָאִוָּתֵר אֲנִי לְבַדִּי
וַיְבַקְשׁוּ אֶת־נַפְשִׁי לְקַחְתָּהּ

8. Syntactic Functions

8.1. The Verb as a Structural Center in the Sentence

Every student of classical languages is advised to begin a translation by identifying the finite verb in a sentence, to determine its form and the parts of speech depending from it (subject, object etc.). This demonstrates that the verb functioning as predicate is the center of the sentence. In nominal clauses, it is even elided due to Hebrew's linguistic nature: "A (is / becomes) B". Such verbless constructions are frequent in the Old Testament:

$$\text{וְאַבְרָם כָּבֵד מְאֹד בַּמִּקְנֶה בַּכֶּסֶף וּבַזָּהָב:}$$

Abram [was / had become] very wealthy in livestock, in silver and gold.
Genesis 13:2

While other sentence constituents (here: subject and predicative) are mandatory in Hebrew nominal clauses, the predicate, though the governing element, can be elided in clauses without a full verb.

The predicate creates structural slots in the sentence (valency), which must be filled by constituents: Who / what performs or undergoes the action (subject), what is affected (object), and under what circumstances (temporal, causal, modal, concessive etc.) does it occur. Adverbials are syntactically optional and can be omitted without compromising grammaticality, thus, they are no part of the valency of the verb:

$$\text{בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֵת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֵת הָאָרֶץ}$$

In the beginning God **created** the heavens and the earth.
Genesis 1:1

The sentence centers on the predicate "created". Its valency requires a subject ("God") and a direct object ("the heavens and the earth"). The temporal phrase ("in the beginning") is optional without affecting grammaticality: "God created the heavens and the earth." Nevertheless, Moses deemed it important to specify when God performed this act.

Therefore, the analysis should begin with examining the valency of the main verb. Verbs can be categorized by their valency patterns (monovalent, bivalent, trivalent). "Create" is bivalent ("A creates B", transitive). "Sleep" and "slumber" are monovalent, taking no object ("A sleeps", intransitive):

9.3. Excursus: Phora and Deixis

Phoric elements create coherence by linking different parts of a text. These elements, such as subject information encoded in verbs (he / she / it), can refer to other elements, whether single words or entire propositions. They are often used to avoid *explicit repetitions* (recurrence). Phoric elements must be *congruent* with their referent (the item they are linked with), e.g. in gender and number.

They can point to the left (**anaphora**) or to the right (**cataphora**), i.e. point backward or forward. Compare "John is building a house. **He** has almost finished it." (anaphora). The pronoun "he", in Hebrew encoded within the verb, except if it is stressed, points back to the word "John", and it is consistent in gender and number with it (congruent). Cataphoric elements are quite rare, since they rather achieve a stylistic effect (e.g. suspension): "It does not come, and does not come, and does not come: the much-awaited springtime." The element, to which "it" refers (the referent) is only mentioned afterwards ("springtime"). A certain arc of suspense is stylistically intended.

The same holds for **deictic items** (e.g. demonstrative pronouns like "this", "that"), which point to the left (anadeixis) or to the right (catadeixis). Deictic items can be used for personal (e.g. "I" for the speaker, "you" for the addressee, and "he / she / it / they" for absent referents), spatial, temporal, and discourse deixis. In spatial deixis, proximal and distal forms can be distinguished (e.g. "this" versus "that", "here" versus "there").

The difference between phora and deixis lies in the immediacy: **Phoric items** are less explicit and exact and serve simply to recur implicitly, and they take the place of the element they refer to and function as its substitute. Phora is the unmarked, normal, and less prominent possibility for recurrence. This form of cross reference to other elements can only take place *within* a text and not in regard to realities outside the text. The referent in this case is aimed at the same element and thus *identical in reference*.

Deictic items, however, are more explicit and distinct and thus more prominent. They make it possible to refer to something *within* the text or directly and distinctly to realities *outside* it, as if one pointed with a finger to it ("this one and no other"). This also means that with deictic items, the referent to which the element refers can be outside the text:

The two statements by Sarah and GOD form the connects, contrasting each other. Such connections can be detected easily in the antithetical parallelism of the Hebrew poetry. The right and the left connect represent direct opposites, although they are constructed in a parallel way. Adverbials or conjunctions ("but", "however" etc.) are used as connectors or the conjunction *waw* is to be understood in this manner:

כִּי־יוֹדֵעַ יְהוָה דֶּרֶךְ צַדִּיקִים
וְדֶרֶךְ רְשָׁעִים תֹּאבֵד:

For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked leads to destruction.
Psalms 1:6

9.4.6. Logical Relations

The following class comprises seven specific patterns, how relations can be linked, if the nucleus is e.g. the consequence of a reason, the result of an instrument etc., i.e. if there is a reasonable and understandable connection between the two connects, which is usually visible by the connectors ("so that", "although", "in order to"), if there are any:

Reason-CONSEQUENCE relations: This is the first and rather frequent possibility, how two statements can be related: "Paul went into the office (reason), so that he was not at home (consequence)". The subordinating conjunction "so that" introduces this relation as a consecutive one. A *consequence* – in contrast to the *purpose* – does not mention whether or not it was intended. Compare "Tom went at 60 mph in town (reason) so that he got a speeding ticket (consequence)." The speeding ticket was surely not intended, but only the consequence of driving too fast. This also becomes clear in the following example:

אִם־בַּמַּחְתֶּרֶת יִמָּצֵא הַגַּנָּב
וְהֻכָּה וָמֵת
אֵין לוֹ דָּמִים:

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If a thief is caught breaking in at night
and **is struck so that he dies**,
the defender is not guilty of bloodshed.
Exodus 22:2

Moses here encodes negligence and not intention, which would be encoded by "in order to kill him" or a comparable phrase. The nucleus "strike" (WEQATAL) is only seen as a cause to the consequence, not that this was intended.

וַיִּקְרָא אַבְרָהָם שֵׁם־הַמָּקוֹם הַהוּא
יְהוָה יִרְאֶה
אֲשֶׁר יֵאָמֵר הַיּוֹם
בְּהַר יְהוָה יֵרָאֶה

And Abraham **named** that place:
The LORD will provide;
that is why today it is said:
"On the mountain of the LORD, **it will be provided**."
Genesis 21:44

The naming of the place by Abraham was the reason, why this was said until the days of Moses ("today"). Whether Abraham wanted it to be this way, remains open.

RESULT-instrument relations: They describe the second possibility, namely the consequence or the result which is achieved by certain instruments, acts, or methods etc. Whether the result or the consequence is welcome or not, remains open. Compare "the neighbors hear loud music (instrument). *Because of this*, they cannot sleep (consequence)." The following example shows the consequence of the addressees' fathers being untrue to GOD in their acts. Whether the blasphemy of GOD was intended or not, is less in the focus, if a result-instrument relation is subsumed. At least, Ezekiel uses the natural sequence (RESULT-instrument). The consequence of their behavior is at the center:

עוֹד זֹאת גִּדְּפוּ אוֹתִי אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם בְּמַעֲלָם בִּי מָעַל
In this also your ancestors blasphemed me by being unfaithful to me.
Ezekiel 20:27

ORDER-reason relations: These are the seventh option. They are wishes, orders, encouragements etc. necessary for some reason, often expressed by the volitive modality:

וַיֹּ֤אמֶר יְהוָה֙ לְנֹ֔חַ
בֹּֽא־אַתָּ֥ה וְכָל־בֵּיתְךָ֖ אֶל־הַתֵּבָ֑ה
כִּֽי־אֹתְךָ֥ רָאִ֛יתִי צַדִּ֥יק לְפָנַ֖י בַּדּ֥וֹר הַזֶּֽה׃

And the LORD said to Noah,
"**Come** into the ark, you and your whole family,
because I have found you righteous before me in this generation.
Genesis 7:1

The nucleus is the volitive form "come". The statement in the following sentence forms the background information. The "because" at the beginning shows that a reason shall be given, namely that Noah is found righteous and so shall not die in the flood.

9.4.7. Associative-Linking Relations

Another category of different prominence continues a statement with either a *comment* or an *interruption*:

NUCLEUS-comment: The first relation of this category is also called theme-rheme structure. The speaker has more information about the topic he started with, which he associates with the topic and which he comments. The two last terms come from the so-called Functional Sentence Perspective (FSP) and describe first the old, the given part, which can be deduced from the context, i.e. the information both speaker and listener already have. This is often the subject of the sentence. This part of the statements is called *topic* or *theme*. The new, unknown, which forms the climax and the prominence of the statement, is called *rheme*. The link between theme and rheme is called associative. In English, this relation is also called *topic* and *comment* (and: "given-new" is comparable to this). The following example shows how the person Moses is introduced as a nucleus (or theme / topic) in a reasoning for new gods. This causes the people associate that his whereabouts are unknown (rheme / comment):

to the formerly mentioned categories, there is another relation of statements in discourses concerning the nucleus, which can be implicitly or explicitly mentioned and which is explained explicitly to the listener / reader by proportions. Therefore, the conceptional term or the nucleus is either explained in more details or identified (i.e. equalized with something or differentiated from something). The relation is categorized as THING-description or THING-identification.

A frequent way of further explaining the nucleus or to identify it are relative clauses or adjectives or attributes, which either describe (descriptive) or identify (restrictive) it. An example from daily life can illustrate the difference: "Tom asks his wife to fetch him the blue socks from the wardrobe." Two ways of understanding this are possible: First, it can be a descriptive additional and optional description of the socks about the color, if he has only blue socks. Second, it can also be restrictive, if he wants to differentiate the blue socks from those of different color. In the first case, "blue" is a mere description and not stressed, in the second one, the stress of the sentence would be on "blue" and all the other socks would be excluded from the request, so that the adjective here is obligatory and not omissible.

THING-description: A description gives evidence about the nucleus so that this is *described* more precisely without differentiating it from other nuclei:

<div dir="rtl">

יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם

אֲשֶׁר לְקָחַנִי מִבֵּית אָבִי

וּמֵאֶרֶץ מוֹלַדְתִּי

וַאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר־לִי וַאֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע־לִי לֵאמֹר

לְזַרְעֲךָ אֶתֵּן אֶת־הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת

הוּא יִשְׁלַח מַלְאָכוֹ לְפָנֶיךָ

וְלָקַחְתָּ אִשָּׁה לִבְנִי מִשָּׁם׃

</div>

"The LORD, **the God of heaven,**
who brought me out of my father's household
and my native land
and who spoke to me and promised me on oath, saying,
"**To your offspring I will give this land**"
– he will send his angel before you
so that you can get a wife for my son from there.

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If the items that form a *coherence* no longer appear in the text (e.g. if no further imperatives follow, but indicative mood in the future), this is *incoherent*, i.e. it can be subsumed that the writer marks a **discourse border**. The border between discourse units can be syndetic (i.e. with connectors or conjunctions) or asyndetic (i.e. without them). In plain language, a discontinuous coherence shows that a new discourse unit starts. The following paragraph shows the end of a unit and the beginning of a new one, where it is marked:

וַיְגָרֶשׁ אֶת־הָאָדָם
וַיַּשְׁכֵּן מִקֶּדֶם לְגַן־עֵדֶן אֶת־הַכְּרֻבִים וְאֵת לַהַט הַחֶרֶב הַמִּתְהַפֶּכֶת
לִשְׁמֹר אֶת־דֶּרֶךְ עֵץ הַחַיִּים: ס
וְהָאָדָם יָדַע אֶת־חַוָּה אִשְׁתּוֹ
וַתַּהַר וַתֵּלֶד אֶת־קַיִן
וַתֹּאמֶר קָנִיתִי אִישׁ אֶת־יְהוָה:

And he drove the man out,
and he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword
flashing back and forth
to guard the way to the tree of life.
Now Adam knew Eve his wife,
and she conceived and bore Cain.
And she said, "I have acquired a man with the LORD."
Genesis 3:24-4:1

The following hints give reasons for the border in the discourse: The frame (topic) of the expulsion from the garden and its surveillance is replaced by a new frame, situated outside the garden. Moreover, a break in isotopy is visible: The agent changes from GOD to man (change of subject). The new paragraph is incoherent to the preceding one, since the *script* (the correlation of action) before that, i.e. the procedure of securing the garden by the angels and the expulsion, are not continued. The connector "and" takes up the life of the human beings after the expulsion and thus, a new chronological sequence is started. The new script is the recognition of the woman and the giving birth by her. On top of that, with Cain, a new actor is introduced, who has not been mentioned before. The new overall topic in this new sequence is the life of Cain, which ends with him being last mentioned in chapter 4, verse 17.

10. Final thoughts

The previous inspection of the Hebrew verb and its accomplishments have led the reader from features marked in the verb itself like person, number etc. to modifications according to stems up to the description of the verbal system with focus on the different achievements and interactions of YIQTOL, QATAL and QOTEL to the higher hierarchic layers of function. The importance of the verb for the syntax has been shown (e.g. as a predicate), up to its achievements for the discourse, where it is important as the center of the related propositions.

The intended objective has been to develop a comprehensive general concept on all the different layers, so that the reader can group the verbs found in the biblical text and find out, what functions they have. This means in particular that the content of this book should enable the reader of the Hebrew Old Testament to group every verb form and to find out, which interpretation is plausible.

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