

Artikel

The Proposal in Biblical Hebrew: Preliminary Studies Using a Deep Structure Model

Thomas J. Finley (*La Mirada, California*)

Much modern linguistic theory contrasts “surface structure” with “deep structure”. According to this model of language, the actual words of an utterance (surface structure) result from various strategies developed by a particular language for representing underlying meanings (deep structure)¹. Evidence includes ambiguous surface structures, the possibility of representing the same underlying structure in more than one way (paraphrase), elements that are implicit in the deep structure but unexpressed (implied) in the actual utterance, and skewing of the surface structure. Skewing means that the usual or central functions of the surface structure do not match the intended meaning. An example in English is “negative raising”. In a sentence of the type, “I don’t want him to see me yet”, a deeper level of analysis would make explicit the meaning, “I want him to not see me yet”. That is, the negative is “raised” from the subordinate clause to the “higher” clause, resulting in a skewed word order.

Hebrew grammarians have come to similar conclusions without adopting an explicit deep structure model. Gesenius, for example, distinguished between objective and subjective “genitive”², thereby recognizing the ambiguous surface structure of a Hebrew phrase such as “the violence of your brother” (Obad 10). Moreover, he also brought in certain ideas such as “comparative” that in reality resemble deep structure notions. That is, while Hebrew does not have an adjectival *form* that can be called comparative, it does have a means of expressing the comparative notion³.

Deep structure grammar does make possible an advance in understanding over grammarians such as Gesenius, however. Typically the reference grammars tend to organize syntax around forms. Thus, Gesenius discusses the syntax of the verb

¹ The present study grew out of a week of intensive discussion sponsored by Biola University between two faculty-members from the School of Intercultural Studies, Dr. Harwood Hess and Dr. Sherwood Lingenfelter, and myself from Talbot School of Theology. The interaction centered around insights from cultural anthropology and linguistics for biblical exegesis. Significant suggestions were made that I subsequently followed up for this paper. For the theory of deep structure as it relates to “transformational” grammar, see Robert P. Stockwell, *Foundations of Syntactic Theory*, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey 1977. R. E. Longacre approaches the subject from the standpoint of “discourse analysis” (*An Anatomy of Speech Notions*, PdR Press Publications in TAGMEMICS 3, Lisse, Belgium 1976).

² E. Kautzsch (ed.), *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, trans. by A. E. Cowley (2d Eng. ed., Oxford 1970, = GKC) § 128g, h.

³ GKC § 133a.

under the headings “perfect”, “imperfect”, and so on. The model consists of specific forms, each with more than one usage.

The deep structure model, on the other hand, allows the linguist to analyze the various underlying notions in terms of the relations between underlying meaning and explicit forms. This has the effect of forcing the careful definition of these notions. Elsewhere I have argued that the traditional terms “perfect” and “imperfect” in Hebrew grammar, for example, are imprecise, linking particular forms with functions that are vaguely defined⁴. A whole complex of factors comes into play with these forms, including aspect (the subjective choice of the speaker as to how the action is to be viewed), tense, the presence of continuing results (“perfect” in the more classical sense), kind of action (objective description of the action), and inherent meaning of the verb⁵. When the interpreter treats the Hebrew text as a whole discourse unit rather than as isolated forms, the interplay of factors such as word order, negation, and clause relations provide previously unrecognized clues to the connections between deep and surface structure⁶.

Brockelmann took a major step forward in the study of Hebrew with his *Hebräische Syntax* (1956). Unlike previous studies of syntax⁷, Brockelmann made a broad division between “exclamatory sentences” (*Ausrufesätze*), “declarative sentences” (*Aussagesätze*), and “the interrogative sentence” (*der Fragesatz*). Subheadings under exclamatory sentences include “command” (*Befehl*), “wish” (*Wunsch*), and “affective” (*Gefühlsausdruck*). While it would be possible to dispute some of Brockelmann’s divisions, as a whole he has managed to treat syntax on the basis of relationships rather than on the basis of morphology. Especially significant for the present study is his discussion of the “command”.

Brockelmann recognizes that commands may be formed with an infinite absolute (“remember the sabbath day”, Ex 20:8), an imperative, an interjection (“behold!”), and a jussive (“you shall crawl”, Gen 3:14) or cohortative (“let us give”, Gen 19:32). This would seem to reflect the idea of more than one surface structure for the same deep structure, as discussed above. Moreover he divides the “command” itself into various nuances, including prohibition, exhortation, request, wish, permission, assent, promise, blessing, curse, and threat⁸.

⁴ Thomas Finley, *The WAW-Consecutive with ‘Imperfect’ in Biblical Hebrew: Theoretical Studies and its Use in Amos*, in: *Tradition & Testament; Essays in Honor of Charles Lee Feinberg*, ed. John Feinberg and Paul Feinberg (Chicago 1981), 241–62.

⁵ Cf. Bernard Comrie, *Aspect; An Introduction to the Study of Verbal Aspect and Related Problems*, Cambridge Textbooks in Linguistics (Cambridge, England 1978).

⁶ It is wrong, for example, to worry that *waw* cannot change the “imperfect” function of the verb in the form traditionally called “*waw-consecutive*” with imperfect. For historical, structural, and stylistic reasons the form aligns with functions typically found in the “perfect” (cf. Finley, 241–53; W. Gross, *Verbform und Funktion. wayyiqtol für die Gegenwart? Ein Beitrag zur Syntax poetischer althebräischer Texte*, *Arbeiten und Text und Sprache im Alten Testament*, St. Ottilien 1976, pp. 163–66).

⁷ Cf. A. B. Davidson, *Hebrew Syntax* (3d ed., Edinburgh 1964 [repr. 1901]); GKC; Joüon. Ronald J. Williams (*Hebrew Syntax; An Outline*, 2d ed., Toronto 1980) contains a clearer (though less comprehensive) presentation but did not follow up on Brockelmann’s organization. The chapter “Syntax of the Verb” views the evidence mostly, though not entirely, from the standpoint of form. Cf. also Rudolf Meyer, *HGr III* (Berlin 1972).

Brockelmann-Synt., p. 1–5.



ZA 7452

Though Brockelmann's presentation helps to see the underlying relationships more clearly, he did not make explicit enough how the different surface structures relate to the deeper notions. For example, his term "command" as a major heading seems to encompass the finer nuances listed above, but later on he states, "Dieselbe Form [imperative] aber dient nicht nur dem strikten Befehl, sondern auch bloßen Ermahnungen [Hos 10:12] . . . , und Bitten [2 Kgs 5:22] . . . , und Wünschen [Gen 23:13] . . ."⁹. Apparently, then, some of the notions discussed by Brockelmann under the rubric "command" are not really to be taken as commands in the strict sense of the term. Also, he takes no notice of the fact that the particle *n'* ("now", "please") is added to the example cited of a "request", a significant feature of the context that relates to proper interpretation of the form.

Similar criticisms can be brought against the discussion of the cohortative. The relationship between the various types of cohortative to the overall category of "command" is unclear, and Brockelmann does not always indicate the precise nature of the surface structure (e. g., the imperative form in Ruth 3:15 is discussed under the cohortative). Additionally Brockelmann's presentation can be criticized for including the category of "command by interjection". The examples reflect more of a deictic use of the particles traditionally translated "behold!" Notice Gen 15:17, adduced by Brockelmann, "and *behold*, there appeared a smoking oven". Hebrew *hinnēh* here serves to bring the smoking oven into focus¹⁰.

Deep Structure Notion of the "Proposal"

In the remainder of the paper a deep and surface structure model will be developed for what will be termed "proposal" as a broad term that can cover various notions¹¹. The concept of "proposal" will be used for a situation where a speaker communicates a desire for something to a listener, with the speaker having some degree of expectation that the listener will fulfill that desire.

The sub-categories, borrowed largely from Brockelmann, are based on the degree of expectation within the speaker, especially with reference to authority. First, there are various situations for which the speaker has authority over the listener, who is subordinate. These situations will include the categories of "command", "prohibition", and "permission". A "command" implies that the speaker has authority to demand that the proposal be carried out, and "prohibition" represents the negative

⁹ Brockelmann-Synt., 2.

¹⁰ Brockelmann calls this category an "original" (*urtümliche*) form of the command (Synt., 2). Perhaps some cases could be thought of as a proposal by the speaker for the listener to pay attention. Often the particle *hnh* (Brockelmann also mentions *hn* and *h'*) will introduce a statement which forms the basis for a proposal ("See now, I know that you are a beautiful woman Please say that you are my sister"; Gen 12:11, 12). Because of the complexities it would introduce, the role of these particles in proposals will not be examined here. Such an examination should prove fruitful for further study, however (cf. C. J. Labuschagne, The particles *hēn* and *hinnēh*, OTS 18 [1973] 1–14).

¹¹ The deep structure notions arise from a study of language as communication. They are based, to be sure, on the theory of the individual linguist, but their universal validity can be checked by the study of various languages. In the case of a spoken language, the field investigator can query an informant, whereas with texts preserved only in written form the clues must come from context and historical-cultural situation.

counterpart. "Permission" pertains to a situation where the speaker communicates that the subordinate's desires coincide with or do not conflict with the speaker's wishes.

In other situations the speaker's expectations concerning the proposal depend not primarily on authority but on the willingness of the listener. In such a case we may speak of "request" and "exhortation". The latter grounds the expectation for response in the listener's own recognition of his or her best interests. The request also depends on the listener's willingness, but the main benefit in carrying out the proposal accrues to the speaker.

A special case of the request does recognize authority, but it resides with the listener, not the speaker. Here the speaker can only hope for a positive response based on the mercy of the listener. This situation I will label "entreaty". Not included here are Brockelmann's notions of promise, blessing, or curse, none of which depend on the listener for their consummation. The threat does depend on the listener's response, but perhaps it is better to consider it a special case of a conditional situation rather than of a proposal. The following chart summarizes the deep structure notion for the "proposal" as explicated here.

Chart 1: The Notion of a "Proposal"

1. Authority Resides with the Speaker
 - A. Command – I command you: you do something. (Obey me!)
 - B. Prohibition – I command you: you not do something. (Don't tread on me!)¹²
 - C. Permission – I permit you: you do something. (Yes, you may go now.)
2. Speaker Relies on the Willingness of the Listener
 - A. Request – I request you: you do something. (Please write.)
 - B. Exhortation – I exhort you: you do something. (Please listen to what the teacher has to say.)
 - C. Entreaty – I entreat (on the basis of mercy) you: you do something. (Please forgive me.)

Surface Structures for the "Proposal"

Hebrew represents proposals in different ways, including a form that the grammars recognize as an imperative. Often the imperative will be used for commands, permission, and so on, but it can function in other ways. For example, a conjoined imperative may express result. Thus, Amos 4:4b can be translated, "Seek me that you may live", but the Hebrew consists of two imperative forms, "seek" and "live". Since the central function of the imperative is to form proposals, a surface structure imperative will be considered unskewed (unmarked). Some other form for a proposal, if in most contexts it would not be used for a proposal, will represent a skewing. An imperative form in a non-proposal situation would also be an example of skewing.

¹² To be complete, we should also include the negative counterpart of the other categories. The inclusion only of prohibition is a concession to surface structure; the imperative (surface form) used for a command and the negative counterpart have different forms that are in complementary distribution (see below).

1. *Forms without a Personal Marker*

Hebrew has two verb forms with personal markers, one with the marker added after the base (the base consisting of root plus vowel pattern) and one with the marker prefixed to the base. Traditionally these forms are called “perfect” and “imperfect”, respectively. Here they are designated “Suffix Conjugation” (SC) and “Prefix Conjugation” (PC), respectively.

a. *PC Base with Endings (Imperative)*. From a synchronic perspective, it is convenient to describe the imperative form as consisting of the PC base plus endings without the personal prefix. Four forms are used to distinguish masculine-feminine and singular-plural¹³. From a diachronic viewpoint, however, it might be better to say the Hebrew imperative developed from an infinitival form which had no prefixes¹⁴. For purposes of the present discussion the ultimate origin of the imperative is of little consequence.

b. *Infinitive Absolute*. The infinitive absolute (used without prepositions or pronominal suffixes and not syntactically bound to a following phrase) often functions as a finite verb, either as imperative or with some of the functions of the SC or PC. For the examples examined¹⁵, the infinitive could substitute in proposals that would often be formed with imperatives of any of the four forms except the feminine plural (masc. sing., Jer 2:2, *hlk*, “go”; fem. sing. [only one example], Isa 14:31, *nmwg*, “melt away”; masc. pl., Amos 4:5, *wqtr*, “and offer”). As an example, consider the case of the fourth commandment, “Remember the sabbath day” (Exod 20:8). English expressions such as “no fishing” could be compared with the Hebrew surface structure.

2. *Forms with a Personal Marker*

a. *PC2*. The second person PC (PC2) alone can also occur for a proposal. Note, for example, “you are to perform [*t’šw*] my judgments and keep my statutes” (Lev 18:4). This form of the verb would normally occur in present or future statements. Contextual clues for the proposal situation include the legal literary genre, the legal terms “judgments” and “statutes”, the nearby presence of numerous prohibitions,

¹³ Occasionally the masc., sing. form, ordinarily without any termination, ends with *-h*. Some designate this as an “emphatic” imperative (see Weingreen, *Hebrew Grammar*, 2d ed., Oxford 1969, 88). The evidence for such a statement is not strong. Examples studied for Jer, Hos, Joel, Am, Obd, Mi, Nah, Hab, and Zeph (as listed in *Eight Minor Prophets: A Linguistic Concordance*, The Computer Bible 10, ed. Francis I. Andersen and A. Dean Forbes, 1976) revealed that a large percentage involve weak verbs, especially middle-weak roots. For example, instead of an expected *hb’* (“bring”) the form *hb’h* occurs in Amos 4:1. The examples in GKC (§ 48i) stress strong roots, however. Joüon (§ 48d) thinks that originally the form had an emphatic function that was subsequently lost. For now this form of the imperative should be designated “long” and treated as a free variant. Similarly, some verbs whose masc., sing. imperative ends with a long vowel sometimes occur with the vowel elided (e.g., *hk* [“strike”] shows up more often than *hkh*).

¹⁴ Cf. BLe § 41a; R. Meyer, HGr II (1969), § 63.1.

¹⁵ Taken from Andersen and Forbes, *Eight Minor Prophets*; GKC; Joüon; Brockelmann-Synt., and Meyer, HGr III, § 103.3c.

and the statement “by which a man may live if he does them”. Clearly the Lord is not making a prediction but issuing a command.

b. *Prohibitive in the 2d Person PC*. A feature of the Hebrew imperative form (PC base minus personal prefix) is that it can indicate only positive proposals. Any time a negative command (i.e., prohibition) is issued, the negative must occur with the PC2. Apparently the same is true of the infinitive used for a proposal; no examples of a negated infinitive as prohibition were discovered. Either of two negatives can occur with the PC for a prohibition, *ʔ* being used in most situations and *lʾ* for a more permanent prohibition (e.g., in the Ten Commandments)¹⁶. Because of the mutually exclusive relationship between the imperative and the prohibitive, the former is unskewed when it appears on the surface for a positive proposal, while the latter is unskewed for a negative proposal.

Two examples illustrate the differing negatives:

- 1) *ʔ t-byʔ ʔhryk*
not you-look behind-you
“Do not look behind you!” (Gen 19:17).
- 2) *lʾ t-ršh*
not you-murder
“You shall not murder” (Exod 20:13).

c. *Indirect Proposals with PC3*. The third person (PC3) often functions as an indirect proposal. For the singular a special “short” form normally occurs for certain morphological categories of verbs (some “weak” verbs and the *hiphil* verb pattern). In Amos 5:24 the command is clear (“justice” is the surface subject):

w-y-gl k-mym mšpʔ
and-it-roll like-water justice
“But let justice roll down like water”.

d. *PC1*. Sometimes the first person form of the PC (PC1) has a special ending which tends to correlate with desire on the part of the speaker. Traditionally the form is called “cohortative”, and it overlaps with the notion of proposal when the speaker desires to be included (cf. Isa 2:5, *w-n-lk-h* = and-we-go-cohort., i.e., “and let us go”) or when there is a request for permission (Num 20:17, *n-ʔbr-h* = we-pass-cohort., i.e., “let us pass through”; Num 21:22, *ʔ-br-h* = I-pass-cohort., i.e., “let me pass through”).

e. *W + SC2/SC3*. Similarly, the SC preceded by the conjunction *waw* (*w* + SC) will often express a proposal. Normally this surface structure occurs only when it coordinates with a previous proposal (cf., *yr-ʔw ʔt-YHWH w-ʔbd-tm ʔtw* = fear-pl. Yahweh and-serve-you him, i.e., “fear Yahweh and serve him, 1 Sam 12:24). However, many examples have *w* + SC2 even as an initial proposal, as in Zech 1:3 (cf. also Jer 5:19; 7:27; 8:4; 13:13; and often with the verb “say”):

w-ʔmrt ʔly-hm
and-say-you to-them
“Therefore say to them”.

¹⁶ Cf. Williams, *Hebrew Syntax*, §§ 173, 186. He designates the form with *ʔ* as “vetitive”, with *lʾ* as “prohibition”. Brockelmann says the distinction was lost in later usage (*Synt.*, p. 3).

I have not found any clear examples of *w* + SC1 for a request, though there may be some examples. Instead, an additional request in first person is done by a coordinated PC1 (e. g., Gen 50:5).

f. SC. Joüon noted that in poetic passages, particularly in Psalms and Job, and in “elevated prose” (*prose élevée*; an example is given from 1 Chr 17:27) the SC can sometimes have an “optative” nuance¹⁷. Mitchell Dahood made a listing of the instances of “precativ perfect” he had found in Psalms, including SC1, SC2, and SC3¹⁸.

The category of precativ perfect continues to be controversial, and many of Dahood’s examples can be challenged¹⁹. The recent commentary by Peter Craigie on the first fifty psalms accepted a few of these but rejected most of them. Examples of SC2 (without conjunction *waw*) he translated as precativ include *šbrt* (Ps 3:8), *hrhbt* (Ps 4:2), *ntth* (Ps 4:8), *šwyt* (Ps 7:7), and *pdyth* (Ps 31:6). For SC3 he translated with a precativ only at 10:16 (*bdw*, “let the nations perish”²⁰). Neither he nor Dahood found any examples of SC1 in a precativ sense for Psalms 1–50.

Consider Craigie’s translation at Psalm 3:8:

Rise up, O Lord!

Give me victory, O my God!

Oh, that you would smite all my enemies on the cheek.

Oh, that you would smash the teeth of wicked men.²¹

The first two verbs are imperatives, while the last two are SC2 (*hkyt* and *šbrt*). The more traditional translation given in the Authorized Version (AV) does not fit the context well (“for thou hast smitten . . . thou hast broken”). The references to past deliverance seem too abrupt. However, compare Jerusalem Bible (JB):

Rise, Yahweh!

Save me, my God!

You hack all my enemies to the cheekbone,
you break the teeth of the wicked.

Here the SC forms are plausibly taken as descriptive and contribute to the desperate yet confident tone of the psalmist. The translators of JB apparently rejected the category outright, though compare on Psalm 63:3 (Eng., v. 2).

For the SC1 Dahood lists only Psalms 63:3 (*hzytyk*) and 139:18 (*hqysty*). The latter example would be better translated as a general experience, “I awake and I am still with you”. But Psalm 63:3 may indeed contain an example of a precativ perfect, as Dahood translates:

¹⁷ Joüon § 112k.

¹⁸ Psalms III, AB 17A, New York 1970, 414–17. His suggestion that a few forms of SC2 spelled with a final *h* “may correspond to the energetic ending of the imperative” (Psalms I, AB 16, p. 26) lacks enough examples to support it. Varying scribal orthography seems a more reasonable explanation.

¹⁹ Some are based on emendation of MT (e.g., Ps 44:27 [*zrth*]; 122:6 [*š’lw*]; 144:12 [*šr*]), some are actually *w* + SC (Ps 25:11 [*wslht*]; 52:7 [*wšršk*]; 64:11 [*wšsh*]; 106:48 [*w’mr*]; 141:6 [*wšm’w*]), and some are more plausibly interpreted as descriptive or past (e.g., Ps 4:8 [*rbw*]; 9:7 [*tmw*]).

²⁰ Psalms 1–50, WBC, Waco, Texas 1983, under the passages cited.

²¹ Psalms 1–50, p. 70.

So in your sanctuary may I gaze upon you,
Beholding your power and your glory.²²

The problem is that the SC1 (*hzytyk*) is followed by an infinitive clause (“to behold . . .”). The awkwardness of trying to make sense with the usual translation of the SC as a past is evident in the rather strained rendering of the AV: “To see thy power and thy glory, as I have seen thee in the sanctuary”. Even JB translates, “I long to gaze on you”.

The chart which follows summarizes various possible surface structures for the proposal in Biblical Hebrew.

Chart 2: Surface Structures for a “Proposal”, Root *šmr* (“keep”)

1. Forms without a Personal Marker
 - A. Imperative (*šmr /šēmōr/*, keep)
 - B. Infinitive Absolute (*šmr /šāmōr/*, keeping)
2. Forms with a Personal Marker
 - A. PC2 (*t-šmr*, you-keep)
 - B. Prohibitive (Neg + PC2)
 1. *ʔ t-šmr*, not you-keep (“Do not keep!”)
 2. *l' t-šmr*, not you-keep (“Never keep”)
 - C. PC3 (*y-šmr*, he-keeps, i.e., “let him keep”)
 - D. PC1
 1. *ʔ-šmr-h*, I-keep-cohort., i.e., “let me keep”
 2. *n-šmr-h*, we-keep-cohort., i.e., “let us keep”
 - E. *w* + SC
 1. *w* + SC2: *w-šmr-t*, and-keep-you, i.e., “and you shall keep”
 2. *w* + SC3: *w-šmr-ø*, and-keep-he, i.e., “and let him keep”
 - F. SC (“precative perfect”)
 1. SC1: *šmr-t*, keep-I, i.e., “let me keep”
 2. SC2: *šmr-t*, keep-you, i.e., “may you keep”
 3. SC3: *šmr-ø*, keep-he, i.e., “let him keep”

3. Some Additional Surface Indications of a Proposal

a. *The Post-Positive Particle n'.* The particle *n'* is added after a verbal form nearly 400 times, and almost all the examples occur in the context of a proposal²³. The form is often translated “please”: *šym-n' yd-k*, place-please your-hand, i.e., “please place your hand” (Gen 24:2).

b. *The Pre-Positive Particle n' or nh.* A similar form, *n'* or *nh* (“I beg you” or the like), occurs before the imperative form in some cases (e.g., Gen 50:17; 2 Kgs 20:3). It is found thirteen times, all with an imperative except for Dan 9:4. Daniel’s actual plea to the Lord does not occur until verse 16, and it has the form of a PC3 (“let now your anger and your wrath turn away from your city . . .”).

c. *The Vocative.* Sometimes a noun phrase appears in the surface structure as a description of the listener. The traditional term “vocative” normally refers only to

²² Psalms II, p. 94.

²³ Examples were observed in Mandelkern.

such a phrase used with the imperative, but it may show up also for the PC3 (traditionally “jussive”) and the PC1 (traditionally “cohortative”). In the latter cases it functions, from the standpoint of surface structure, as the subject. Observe the following:

- 1) *bn-’dm* *’md* *’rglyk*
 VOCATIVE IMPERATIVE
 son-of-man stand on-your-feet
 “Son of man, stand on your feet” (Ez 2:1).
- 2) *y-hy* *’wr*
 PC3 SUBJECT
 it-be light
 “Let there be light” (Gen 1:3).

Correlations between Deep Structure and Surface Structure

A command, with implication of the authority of the speaker, was found to occur in several surface structures, including imperative (Gen 1:22, *prw*, “be fruitful”), infinitive absolute (Ex 20:8, *zkwr*, “remember”), PC2 (Gen 3:14, *tlk*, “you shall go”)²⁴, PC3 (Am 5:24, *wygl*, “let justice roll down”), and *w*+SC2 (Jer 35:2, *wdbri*, “and speak”). The negative counterpart, the prohibition, occurs with the PC2 (*l’trsh*, Exod 20:13, “You shall not murder”). No examples were found for the infinitive absolute with a negative, and *waw*+SC cannot be negated in the surface structure. Examples of a prohibition with the PC3 were rare (cf. Hos 4:4,15). The PC3 with the command seems usually to be associated with a surface structure subject that is inanimate, either for rhetorical effect or for divine creation (i.e., “let there be light” [Gen 1:3], etc.)²⁵.

One interesting correlation from the 26 examples studied of infinitive absolute as proposal is that all, with the possible exception of Joshua 1:13 (exhortation, *zkwr*, “remember”) can be described as commands. Typically the Lord commands a prophet to do something (cf. Jer 2:2; Zech 6:10). The prophet is acting as the Lord’s servant or messenger in this case. The infinitive in this idiom often occurs at the head of a series of commands, and the verb “go” followed by another command is quite common, especially in Jeremiah (2:2; 3:12; 13:1; 17:19; 19:1; 28:13; 34:2; 35:13; 39:16). It is rare for the infinitive to be embedded in a series of imperative forms (Amos 4:5, *wqtr*, “and offer”)²⁶ or included at the end of a sequence of imperatives (Isa 14:31, *nmwg*, “melt away”).

The PC3 (and *w*-SC3) is often used in a proposal when the speaker is aware of inferior ranking in relation to the listener (Gen 44:33, *yšb n’ bdk*, “let your servant remain”). The PC3 (and corresponding *w*-SC3) are most used, then, for requests, entreaties, and exhortations. Notice the English translation, where the surface

²⁴ Cf. Williams, Hebrew Syntax, § 173. He uses the term “injunctive”.

²⁵ The indirectness in Genesis 1 possibly reflects opposition to the non-Israelite view that the light, sun, stars, etc. were divine.

²⁶ BHS proposes emending the form to a plural imperative, but Hans Walter Wolff refers to the standard grammars as support for the Hebrew text (Joel and Amos, Hermeneia, Philadelphia 1977, p. 290, n. a). The analysis here can either be taken as an argument in favor of emendation or as the proverbial exception which proves the rule.

subject of the Hebrew verb becomes the object of the imperative “let”. The English thereby makes a more explicit reference to the proposal situation, though it is not absent from the deep structure of either language. Also the SC2 and SC3 in a precative or optative sense seem to occur in the context of humans addressing the Creator.

PC1 (“cohortative”), as noted above, implies that the speaker wants to be included in the fulfillment of the proposal. In the singular form it can express a request (Numb 21:22, *’brh*, “let me pass through”), but the plural can be used for either request (2 Kgs 6:2, *nlkh n’*, “please let us go”) or exhortation (Josh 22:26, *n’sh-n’* “let us act”). Occasionally the PC1 can be used for entreaty (Jonah 1:14, *’l-n’bdh*, “do not let us perish”). No examples of *w*+SC1 for a proposal were found. The single example of SC1 accepted from Dahood (Ps 63:3) represents a strong desire or request (*hzytyk*, “let me gaze on you”). Possibly it could be entreaty.

The situation of permission was not studied in detail. Brockelmann gives an example with the imperative (2 Sam 18:23, *rwy*, “run”), and the category is well known as a special use of the PC2 (Gen 2:16, *t’kl*, “you may eat”)²⁷.

The post-positive *n’* and the pre-positive *n’* or *nh* either deflect attention from the authority of the speaker if the listener is subordinate, or stress submissiveness if the listener has greater authority. The pre-positive form could be called a particle of exhortation. *N’* is often translated “please”: 1) a request, “please, my brothers, do not act wickedly” (*’l-n’ hy tr’w*, Gen 19:7); 2) an exhortation, “please be on guard” (*hšmr-n’*, 1 Sam 19:2); 3) an entreaty, “please pardon” (*slh-n’*, Am 7:2). When the speaker has greater authority, the particle *n’* perhaps indicates close identification with the listener, almost in an empathetic sense (cf. Gen 22:2, *qh-n’ t-bnk*, “take now your son”). Addition of *n’* is apparently excluded if the surface structure form is infinitive absolute, *w*+SC, or SC.

Only rarely does *n’* accompany a command, in which case it stresses resignation on the speaker’s part to something not really desired (Ex 10:11. “Go now [*lkw-n’*] . . . and serve Yahweh, for that is what you desire”; cf. Isa 47:12) or displeasure (Numb 20:10, “Listen now [*šm w-n’*], you rebels; shall we bring forth water . . . out of this rock?”; cf. Numb 12:6, 16:8; 2 Sam 13:17).

The chart below summarizes the most important interrelations between deep and surface structure that were discovered as a result of the study.

²⁷ Brockelmann-Synt., p. 2; Williams, § 170.

Chart 3: The Proposal: Deep and Surface Structure Correlations

PROPOSAL	COMMAND	PROHIB.	PERMISS.	REQUEST	EXHORT.	ENTREATY
IMV	common		occurs	often*	often**	often*
INF	often				rare	
PC2	occurs	+NEG	occurs	?	?	?
PC3	rare	rare		occurs	common*	common*
PC1-sing				often*		
PC1-pl				rare*	often*	rare*
w+SC2	often			occurs	often	?
w+SC3	rare			?	often	often
SC2				rare/?		rare/?
SC3				rare/?		
SC1						rare/?

*—can be accompanied by post-positive *n'*.

**—can be accompanied by pre-positive *'n'* or *'nh*.

IMV—imperative INF—infinitive PC2—prefix conj., 2d pers.

PC3—prefix conj., 3rd pers. PC1-sing—prefix conj., 1st pers. sing.

PC1-pl—prefix conj., 1st pers. plural

SC—suffix conj.

w+SC2—“and” + suffix conj., 2d pers.

w+SC3—“and” + suffix conj., 3d pers. NEG—negative

NOTE: The horizontal axis shows the various deep structure notions that are subordinate to the situation of a proposal. The vertical axis shows the various surface structures used for a proposal.

Summary

It should be evident that Hebrew has a wide variety of surface structures for representing a proposal. The normal forms are the imperative for a positive situation and the PC2 for a negative situation. Note from the chart of correlations (chart 3) that the imperative occurs in all types of proposals except for the negative prohibition. By comparison the infinitive and cohortative (PC1) have limited distributions. The skewing that takes place with PC3 (third person “imperfect”) highlights the stress on the inferiority of the speaker, though in rare instances it can occur for a command or prohibition.

A complete picture of the proposal cannot be given at this point. The chart indicates certain areas of uncertainty, and there may also be additional surface structures. In English a question can be used for a proposal (“could you please pass the salt?”), and it would be interesting to study whether some forms of interrogative or other types of sentences in Hebrew might be used for a proposal as well.

Advantages of the Deep Structure Model

The deep structure model of language has forced us to define terms more carefully than is the case in the standard Hebrew grammars. Vague terms such as “imperfect” and “perfect” have long plagued the study of Hebrew, especially since they tend to beg the question of function. As for the term “imperative”, it is more useful since it does have a central function related to the proposal. Even so it is important to avoid the error of thinking the text contains a proposal *because* an imperative is used. That may be true normally, but not always.

With form and function carefully separated but also interrelated, it becomes clear that the “imperative” form also has non-imperative functions. Already mentioned, for example, is the fact that the correlated imperative can be used for result (as in Amos 5:6).

Another interesting observation that emerged in the process of doing this study is that imperative forms can sometimes be used in a rhetorical way. That is, even as a rhetorical question is not really asking for information, so the “rhetorical imperative” is not really making a proposal.

A rather clear example occurs in Amos 3:9, “*Proclaim [hšmy’w] on the citadels in Ashdod and on the citadels in the land of Egypt and say, Assemble yourselves [h’spw] on the mountains of Samaria and see [r’w] the great tumults within her and the oppression in her midst.*” Here the underscored verbs are surface structure imperatives in the Hebrew text, but what are we to make of the proposals? It does not seem that Amos is literally proposing that the Ashdodites and Egyptians come to Samaria and look at her. Rather, he directs himself to the Israelites in Samaria. The proposal is merely a rhetorical device to focus attention on the “great tumults” and “oppression”. Some other possible examples include Amos 4:4 (irony); 6:2; Obadiah 12–14 (actually prohibitions; note the apparent reference to the past in vv. 11, 15), and Micah 1:10 (= 2 Sam 1:20); Nahum 2:2 (if the surface structure listener is Nineveh); 3:14–15; Zech 11:1, 4 (an allegory?), 15 (nothing is said about how the proposal was carried out).

An additional advantage of the deep structure model is that it makes possible a more holistic view of the structure of the language. A particular language does not consist of isolated parts (phonology, morphology, syntax, vocabulary) which operate independently. The analysis of the “proposal” given here shows only a glimpse of the complex links between the various components of the system.

Notice also how the deep structure model offers special help for Bible translation. The notions presumably can be considered universal²⁸, enabling the translator to map out the strategies of both the original and target languages for expressing the

²⁸ That is, the deep structure notions attempt to get at what speakers try to communicate through language. Ideally results should be based on field studies from many languages. If we find, for example, that a hundred known languages have various surface structures for making a proposal, then the assumption is that the category of proposal is universal. Much linguistic theory is based on philosophical analysis, but I understand from Harwood Hess that the work of Longacre (An Anatomy of Speech Notions) and of those working in the area of “discourse ANALYSIS” or “tagmemics” is generally based on field experience. Contact with numerous languages, especially of widely differing types, helps the linguist to focus on how all languages communicate rather than on the specific surface structures of only a few.

deep structure notions. Thereby it should be possible to arrive at a rendering which is not only faithful but also natural. The model has been especially helpful when the translator deals with languages which differ considerably from the ways in which the biblical languages represent deep structure notions.

Finally, the deep structure model can be useful as a tool for teaching syntax to students. A lot would depend on first making clear different structures within the student's language and then showing how the various Hebrew surface structures correspond or differ. Once the dynamics of the Hebrew system are understood, however, the relationship between syntax and exegesis should be more obvious to the learner.

The deep structure model does not answer all the problems concerning the analysis of Biblical Hebrew, especially since it is not possible to question living speakers about it. However, the approach offers a way to sharpen the focus of Hebrew grammar so that better exegesis and better translations should be the result²⁹.

Abstract

The notion of a "proposal" is first defined according to expectations on the part of the speaker and of the listener. Then various Hebrew surface structures are examined and correlated with those situations, with some new observations being made about the surface structures themselves. From the resulting correlations conclusions are drawn about the advantages of this type of approach over traditional studies which concentrate rather on the various functions of individual forms (imperative, jussive, cohortative, etc.).

Anschrift des Autors:

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Thomas Finley, Semitics and Old Testament, Talbot School of Theology, Biola University, La Mirada, California 90639, U.S.A.

²⁹ This is not to deny that there will still be a need for studies of syntax based on form. The point is that studies on the syntax of the "imperfect" (PC), for example, will be more useful if the interpreter is aware of the central functions, the skewed functions, and alternate surface structures. Also the scope needs to broaden from mere morphology to other issues, such as position of the verb in the sentence, inherent meaning (cf. the distinction in kind of action between "he is singing" and "he is coughing"), and the wider discourse (does the sentence in which the verb occurs start a new paragraph, indicate contrast, etc.?).