

# Methodological Implications in the Early Signs of a New Dictionary of Classical Hebrew<sup>1</sup>

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## 1. Introduction

Almost one hundred years after the appearance of the First Part of BDB (i.e. the Hebrew English Lexicon of the Old Testament edited by F. Brown, S.R. Driver and C.A. Briggs), material of a new dictionary of Classical Hebrew has been published. In 1989 a set of proofs was published by a team of lexicographers and their assistants, under the leadership of David Clines of Sheffield University.<sup>2</sup> The document comprises a two-page preface, five pages of „protocols“ and eleven pages of dictionary entries, all beginning with the letter *aleph*. These proofs constitute the Third Sample of The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew, Part I. Although these few pages enjoy the status only of proofs and the protocols reflect merely in-house rules for the handling of practical issues by the researchers themselves, the document provides sufficient information to permit a limited comparison of the sample with BDB and a tentative evaluation of the perceived lexicographical theory underlying the proposed dictionary.

Subsequently Clines also published a report on the project.<sup>3</sup> Several aspects of that report actually demand fuller treatment than they enjoy in this article. It seems preferable, however, to respond to these aspects cursorily rather than omit them from the present discussion, since at least some of these issues will bear repetition and subsequent elaboration.

## 2. Description

According to the editor, apart from the age of BDB, the writing of a new dictionary has been prompted by developments in three areas of research. First, the discovery of additional sources (viz the Dead Sea scrolls, Hebrew manuscripts of Ben Sira and inscriptional material) permit and demand a broader representation of Hebrew down to 200 AD. Secondly, knowledge of cognate languages, especially Akkadian and Ugaritic, has increased dramatically, the results of which are to be „silently incorporated“ (so Clines) in the dictionary. Thirdly, the insights of the modern

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<sup>1</sup> The financial assistance of the Institute for Research Development of the Human Sciences Research Council towards this research is hereby acknowledged. Opinions expressed in this publication are those of the author alone.

<sup>2</sup> The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew, Part I: א ב ג, edit. David J.A. Clines, Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield, 1989. This document is hereafter referred to by the abbreviation „DCH-Proofs (1989)“ and all our references to אבד are based on the presentation of אבד in DCH-Proofs (1989).

<sup>3</sup> Clines: The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew, ZAH 3:1, 1990, pp. 73-80.

science of linguistics cannot be ignored and are to be blended with traditional Old Testament lexicography<sup>4</sup>.

In the sample entries the practical outworking of these developments is evident. First, the number of occurrences of a word is indicated at the beginning of each entry. Four separate but consecutive figures are given, each indicating the number of occurrences of that word in the Old Testament, Ben Sira, the Dead Sea scrolls (and related sources) and inscriptional material respectively. Secondly, the „silent“ (so Clines) incorporation of information from a comparison of cognates actually means the omission of references in DCH-Proofs (1989) to the cognate languages. Thirdly, the importance of the insights of modern linguistics, regarding the syntagmatic and paradigmatic tensions within a language, has led to the inclusion of supposed synonyms and antonyms, as well as indications of which subjects, objects, prepositions and adverbs occur with which verbs.

Five further elements are projected for this dictionary:

- (i) Irregular forms are to be listed with cross reference to the relevant lemma.
- (ii) The composition of a thesaurus based on semantic fields.
- (iii) Publication of pertinent bibliographical information.
- (iv) Publication of an index of Semitic cognates.
- (v) Publication of a very abbreviated version of the dictionary proper.<sup>5</sup>

### 3. Evaluation

Any user of BDB will readily recognise in DCH-Proofs (1989) the use of extra-biblical sources, both in the consistent and more complex means of indicating the number of occurrences of a word, as well as in the citing, within the entries, of specific references to the extra-biblical sources. The number of occurrences of words is not consistently given in BDB and figures cited therein are with reference to the Old Testament alone. One could also not fail to notice the omission of comparative philological data in DCH-Proofs (1989), as well as the more elaborate inner-lingual data of a syntagmatic and paradigmatic nature. By contrast BDB provides lists of supposed cognates and cites, without distinction, both genuine synonyms and mere parallel occurrences of semantically distinct words and phrases that occur in poetic passages.

An even more obvious sign of the use of new sources in DCH-Proofs (1989) is the inclusion of new words. In the material published thus far, only the personal names, אבא and אבבעל, occurring on seals and an ostrakon respectively, are indications of this extension. The restricted corpus of the Old Testament has long obliged careful semanticists to work very tentatively with many words of limited occurrence, or with words the semantic range of which includes a rare meaning. The advantages of broadening the base of reference sources will hopefully become equally obvious for such problems as well.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Clines: DCH-Proofs (1989), pp. 1, 2.

<sup>5</sup> Clines: DCH-Proofs (1989), p. 2.

<sup>6</sup> Although all words comprising the lexicon of a language must be represented in a dictionary of that language, personal names yield little linguistic information and usually require a

*These differences between BDB and DCH-Proofs (1989) are refinements rather than innovations, however. The traditional alphabetical arrangement of individual words, citing of numbers of occurrences, inclusion of grammatical information and morphological data, as well as the extensive use of translation equivalents to convey meaning are unchanged. Yet it is precisely these traditional features of dictionaries, specifically dictionaries of the Old Testament and of Classical Hebrew, that require re-evaluation in the light of developments of modern linguistics.*

### 3.1 Alphabetical format

A simple alphabetical arrangement of entries is a relatively efficient and common format used in dictionaries. That this format is not without its shortcomings, however, is obvious from the recognised need in DCH-Proofs (1989) to include synonyms and antonyms under each lemma. For the citing of this paradigmatic material implies that the meanings of words are more precisely outlined by comparing words of related meaning. In the light of this, a somewhat different format may be preferable, viz the grouping together of words of related meaning. After collating the lexical units in such groups, words may then be arranged alphabetically so as to assist the user in tracing them. The lexicographer is free to select the format that will most adequately serve the aim of his dictionary, but the user is also entitled to expect clarity regarding differences in meaning between cited synonyms. In lexica with a strict alphabetical format, synonyms are usually listed in quite different places. Consequently the same glosses are often used for synonyms that are not necessarily identical and little or no further effort is made to distinguish one from the other.

Although our knowledge may not always allow us to draw semantic distinctions, the lexicographer should not shirk his descriptive duties by merely repeating for each synonym one or more of the same limited number of glosses. Some indication of semantic distinction would obviously be useful to the user in passages where synonyms co-occur. Where semantic distinctions cannot be made, either because of the very close semantic relationship between the two words, or because of the paucity of occurrences of one or both words, this state of affairs should be intimated. The fact that אָבָר, גָּרַע and מָוֶה may all be translated „die“ (so BDB and DCH-Proofs (1989)) will not be very helpful to the exegete analysing, or to the translator rendering, a text where these words co-occur (e.g. Ps. 49:11). Even where different glosses are used, it is doubtful that glosses alone will serve as an adequate guide. Thus the mere listing of synonyms plus glosses in DCH-Proofs (1989) will probably prove for most users to be little more than a collection of words of apparently related meaning, a possible starting point for serious comparisons to be attempted. The lack of semantic interpretation will in fact necessitate considerably

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minimum of encyclopaedic information to be satisfactorily treated in a semantic dictionary. It would therefore be very much more heartening to the lexicographer to be presented with other types of lexemes rather than personal names, for then an extension of substantial semantic significance would be demonstrated. Furthermore, the name „Abibaal“ is not completely foreign to the field of classical Hebrew, but is already noted with two orthographies in BDB, in connection with the names אָבִי-עֶלְבֹן and אָבִיאל, and it is posited in BHS (1 Chr. 11:32).

more research by the user before any real benefit can be derived from this collation, which research probably lies beyond the reach of the average reader of Classical Hebrew texts.

In his report, Clines explains several factors militating against a paradigmatic arrangement of dictionary entries, viz that a thorough going analysis of this sort would necessitate a complete description of the semantic fields in Hebrew as a preliminary stage, that a much larger corpus of texts is necessary than that which is currently available for classical Hebrew and finally that it is difficult to imagine how such an arrangement could be presented in an accessible format to the average user.<sup>7</sup> In the first instance we contend that the use of semantic fields or domains does not entail the imposition of a preconceived set of categories, as though categories may be borrowed from an existing thesaurus, into which the lexemes of classical Hebrew would then be distributed. The semantic domains of any language are the classifications that will be most suitable to the particular lexical stock of a language. Semantic domains are not prescriptive, but descriptive categories. Thus they cannot be formulated prior to the semantic analysis of the lemmata as Clines demands, but rather arise from that analysis. They are a consequence of rather than a prescription for the semantic analysis.<sup>8</sup>

Secondly, with regard to the limitation of sources for Classical Hebrew, it should be realized that no matter how seldom a word occurs, a meaning will be assigned to that word, even if the meaning is highly dubious. But once meaning is assigned, semantic connections may be recognized and the word may be described as a probable or possible synonym of other words. No matter how tentative, the first step is unavoidable for the lexicographer and the second step is inevitable in research.

Thirdly, there is absolutely no reason why the paradigmatic arrangement of a dictionary should render the content any less accessible to a person with only a rudimentary knowledge of Hebrew, than a traditional, alphabetically arranged dictionary. All words treated in the dictionary can be listed alphabetically, either at the back of the dictionary, or in a separate volume. Next to each word, the specific paragraph number, indicating where the word is treated in the dictionary, can be cited. This same number must also appear in the margin of the dictionary proper, to mark the relevant lemma. Thus a user would first look up the word in an alphabetical register, note the relevant paragraph number and then look up the paragraph number within the dictionary. In this way he could also compare the defined meaning of that word with any listed synonym.<sup>9</sup>

A second problem generated by a simple alphabetical format is the inclination amongst O.T. lexicographers to concentrate on the word alone as the unit of meaning. Idiomatic phrases are also semantic units, however, and actually deserve

<sup>7</sup> Clines: *ZAH* 3:1, 1990, p. 75.

<sup>8</sup> For an example of a semantic analysis in terms of (tentative) semantic domains, see the present writer's article „Hebrew lexicography: A new approach“ in *JSem (Journal for Semitics)* 2:1, 1990, pp. 1-15.

<sup>9</sup> The format outlined above is already in use in a dictionary of semantic domains written for the New Testament, viz *Greek-English Lexicon* Vols. 1 and 2, edit. J.P. Louw & E.A. Nida, United Bible Societies, New York, 1988.

to be listed as independent entries. Yet it is also possible to include these longer units as separate meanings under each of the entries for the words constituting that idiomatic phrase. Thus לב אבר (Jer. 4:9, Eccl. 7:7 (*Pi<sup>c</sup>el*)) may be construed as an idiom, i.e. „the heart dies/cause the heart to die“ conveys the meaning of one’s resolve weakening/being weakened. As such it should be listed independently with cross references from the entries of the constituent words, or it may be assigned an independent meaning within the entries of both אבר and לב. In DCH-Proofs (1989) the expression is treated somewhat inconsistently, in that the *Qal* form of the expression is presumably to be translated „(the king’s) courage (i.e. לב) ceases“ (see *Qal* meaning 3), whilst the *Pi<sup>c</sup>el* form is presumably to be translated „(a bribe) kills the mind“ (see *Pi<sup>c</sup>el* meaning 1). Since the *Pi<sup>c</sup>el* may express the causative of *Qal*, it is surely reasonable to reflect this relationship of meaning in literal translations of the expression. Consequently it seems preferable to also list the reference of Jer. 4:9 under *Qal* meaning 1 „die“, rather than *Qal* meaning 3 „cease“. In both instances לב is nevertheless not assigned its literal meaning, denoting the physiological organ „heart“. In the light of this figurative occurrence of at least part of the expression, it is possible to argue that the expression is a unit, a „low grade“ idiom, deserving to be listed in some independent form. Similarly, such units may be cited as synonyms of individual words. Since the expression ימים ארך (*Hip<sup>c</sup>il*) is included in the synonyms for *Qal* forms of אבר, it is a little surprising that the expression דם שפך is not cited amongst the synonyms for the *Pi<sup>c</sup>el* or *Hip<sup>c</sup>il* of אבר in DCH-Proofs (1989).

### 3.2 Number of occurrences

In BDB, only the number of occurrences of very common words is cited and sample representation of meanings provided, whilst the number of occurrences of less common words is not cited. A small cross, at the beginning or end of the entry rather indicates the exhaustive treatment of that word. Apparently it is the intention in DCH-Proofs (1989) that the number of occurrences of *all* entries is to be cited. It seems that many users of O.T. lexica are impressed by these figures and use them as a rough yardstick as to the reliability of the semantic conclusions that are drawn, i.e. users of the traditional O.T. lexica would feel more confident accepting the proposed meaning of a word that is said to occur more than say thirty times, in contrast to their distrust of meanings proposed for a word that occurs less often. These figures are then very misleading, however, since several different meanings are often assigned to a word. To which particular meaning do the numbers refer? With what difficulty and tentativeness meanings are often assigned to words of limited occurrence, the lexicographer is fully aware. It is for this reason that numbers of occurrences should reflect the number of times a particular *meaning* occurs, rather than the number of times the various *forms* of the lexeme occur. Such numbers could then serve as a genuine early warning device to the user. Thus meaning 2a of the *Pi<sup>c</sup>el* of אבר is apparently of very limited occurrence, despite the total number of occurrences of the various forms of אבר. To „lose wealth“ focuses upon no longer possessing wealth - that is apparently the meaning assigned to אבר in Prov. 29:3 in DCH-Proofs (1989) (*Pi<sup>c</sup>el* meaning 2a). But for asses to be lost (i.e. the meaning assigned in DCH-Proofs (1989) to אבר (*Qal*

meaning 4) in 1 Sam. 9:3) means that the whereabouts of the asses are unknown. If אבד has the meaning „lose possession“ and this meaning occurs only four times, then the number of occurrences is in this instance noteworthy. However, whether a word occurs once or a hundred times, the researcher (textual critic, exegete or translator) is bound to offer an interpretation. Meaning is the issue, not the total number of occurrences of the various forms of the lexeme.

### 3.3 Grammatical and morphological information

Grammatical and morphological information have long been included in commonly used O.T. lexica. Because of the occurrence of different orthographies (i.e. defective and full) and dubious forms and the confusion of roots, it can be helpful to the user to be able to check the lists of cited forms to ensure that he is consulting the relevant entry. Where a valid orthographic variety occurs, all forms should be cited, e.g. the variety of spellings of the personal name of the king of Babylon נבוכדנאצר, נבוכדנאצור, נבוכדנצר, נבוכדראצור, נבוכדראצר, נבכדנאצר, נבכדנאצר, נבכדנצר) and those instances where, for example, radicals such as *sin* and *šin* and final *aleph* and *heh* have been confused. However the citing of forms of the various conjugations is arguably not pertinent to a dictionary, but to a grammar book.

Even less relevant to a dictionary may be the identification of parts of speech, since a so-called skewing of grammatical categories and semantic meaning continually occurs in language. Thus in English it is grammatically correct to label such words as „give“ and „make“ as verbs, but semantically in expressions such as „give permission“ and „make a promise“ the verbs have no semantic content, but merely link the agent to the action stylistically. Thus the style of these two expressions may be altered without changing the semantic content, by simply saying „permit“ and „promise“ respectively. From a semantic and lexical standpoint, therefore, these linking words are agent markers. The grammatical category „verb“ is of no relevance to an understanding of the expression.

It is also necessary to distinguish the meaning conveyed by the *word itself* and what meanings may be suggested by the *form* of the word. Thus where a causative force is due only to a *Pi<sup>c</sup>el* or *Hip<sup>c</sup>il* inflection, it is not to be suggested that the word itself has that force. Similarly the imminent nature of an event may be suggested by the general context and/or the inflected form of a verb. This aspect of meaning is to be discussed in a commentary if it is due to the gist of the passage or, if it is due to a particular form of the verb, discussion should be offered in a grammar. The distinction therefore in DCH-Proofs (1989) between meaning 1a to „die ...“ and 1b „be about to die ... always ptc. except Num. 17:27“ as listed in the *Qal* of אבד, cannot be sustained at a lexical level. The use of the Hebrew participle to announce an imminent event is common knowledge, i.e. the so-called *futurum instans*. It is also said that participles may convey the durative force of an action. Are we then to expect these and other grammatically (and perhaps more contextually) bound nuances to dictate lexical distinctions wherever these forms occur? Surely such issues are more appropriately discussed in a grammar book.

In DCH-Proofs (1989) the subjects and objects that actually occur with a particular verb are to be included in the lemma treating that verb. Similarly verbs will be listed under the particular subject and object nouns with which they actually occur.

According to Clines, the listing of these and other syntagmatic relations reflect adherence to the linguistic principle that the meaning of a word can be determined only from its use in context. The syntagmatic relationships between particular words Clines describes as „educational and indeed quite interesting“. Comparisons may also be made with „the nearest parallel usages“, so enabling the beginner and even advanced researcher to have „greater control over the material“ than is permitted by other Hebrew dictionaries.<sup>10</sup>

Many various kinds of information are indeed required by researchers of ancient texts, such as historical, geographical, literary, linguistic, palaeographic etc. How much of this information is pertinent to a dictionary depends on the aims of the dictionary. Bible dictionaries are the most obvious repositories of such encyclopaedic information as may be generally labelled historical, geographic, literary and palaeographic. Yet even this encyclopaedic information would not be wholly inappropriate in a semantic dictionary, depending on the degree to which the encyclopaedic information could assist in distinguishing between the meanings of different words. The wholesale inclusion of such information would, however, swamp a dictionary of the lexicon of a language and leave the user wondering to what extent he is to allow that information to influence his use of any cited glosses. The problem becomes more acute when unnecessary linguistic information is included in a dictionary, the aim of which dictionary is to inform researchers of the possible meanings of words. Thus if אָבַד describes the physiological process of death, no matter whether the cited subject or object be male or female, individual or group, man or animal, good or bad, the meaning of אָבַד is unchanged and the paradigmatic substitution of various subjects and objects is irrelevant. When the subject or object cannot be literally perceived as undergoing such a physiological process, *then a new meaning of אָבַד has been encountered and should be listed separately*. To list „righteous“, „pious“, „slaves“, „enemies“, „sailors“, „lions“ etc. as subjects or objects of אָבַד, gives no clearer idea of the physiological process אָבַד is said to denote. However, if it is evident that a word is used exclusively with a particular subject or object, a note explaining this peculiarity could be helpful to the user.

The citing of subjects and objects is said by Clines to be „a rational and meaningful“ ordering rather than a „random or merely alphabetical“ ordering.<sup>11</sup> Consequently personal and animate subjects are collated and separated from inanimate subjects and from abstract nouns. But we suspect that these rationalised collations will fail to produce the envisaged semantic fields. For Clines explains that „among abstract nouns, subjects of similar meaning or belonging to the same semantic field, such as verbs of movement, will be gathered together“. <sup>10</sup> Yet a „gourd“ is not an inanimate object (see *Qal* meaning 2) and if נֵיר „lamp“ is figurative of „life“ in Num. 21:30 (see *Qal* meaning 2) then, like קִיקִיּוֹן, it should not be listed as an inanimate object. These inconsistencies are an indication that these rationally (and even grammatically) based categories will not necessarily yield semantic fields. Similarly the grouping together of nouns such as עֶשֶׂר „wealth“ and יוֹם „day“ (*Qal* meaning 3)

<sup>10</sup> Clines: *ZAH* 3:1, 1990, pp. 74, 75.

<sup>11</sup> Clines: *ZAH* 3:1, 1990, p. 75.

as abstracts is lexically misleading. The state of wealth may come to an end („cease“), or the objects marking that state may be no longer visible („vanish“), but whichever of these two different meanings is appropriate to עָשָׂר in Ec. 5:13, neither is appropriate to יָוֹם in Job 3:3. The day of Job's birth had passed and therefore could not „cease“, nor could it „vanish“ in the same physical way that items representing a state of wealth could. The listing of such grammatical data as subject, object, verb etc., is thus seen to be only the initial step in a semantic analysis, which analysis is not identical with a rational categorisation of words. It thus appears that the dictionary foreshadowed in the content of DCH-Proofs (1989) will not fulfil the greatly needed interpretative role of a semantic dictionary, but may at best facilitate the beginning of such semantic research.

### 3.4 Glosses

Glosses are a very important, but difficult element of a dictionary. By means of these translation equivalents we move from the world as perceived by writers of an ancient source language, to the world as perceived by the readers of a modern receptor language. Precise equivalences between lexical items of different languages are said to be at least rare, if they occur at all. Consequently more than one translation equivalent may be appropriate and more than one should be proposed for each different meaning of the word of the source language. This will offer sufficient elasticity to the interpreter of a passage to give that passage the particular tone he senses therein and yet to keep his interpretation within semantically justifiable limits. Care is then required to reflect in the dictionary the same and not different meanings by means of the different glosses proposed, i.e. the glosses must be genuine synonyms. The greater the semantic space separating the glosses, the greater the likelihood that two separate meanings of the receptor language have been mistaken as one. In dictionaries where only glosses are supplied this is a very real danger. The glosses in DCH-Proofs (1989) for אָבַד are not free of this error. „Destroy“ is highly generic and used with reference to the causing of complete and irreparable harm or damage. Whether that is effected upon persons or inanimate objects will influence an English translator to speak in terms of harm or damage. But if it is correct to assert that the meaning „be destroyed“ applies to אָבַד, then the distinction between meaning 1 as affecting persons and meaning 2 as affecting inanimate objects is artificial. Furthermore, „destroy“ is semantically remote from „die“ and both are semantically remote from „disappear“. „Die“ is a physiological process that may affect a nation that is „destroyed“, but destruction could be effected by other means, such as exile. „Disappear“ need not involve either death or destruction. In certain contexts, where persons are said to have disappeared, the death or destruction of persons may be assumed, but „disappear“ of itself simply refers to the fact that something or somebody is no longer present and seen in a particular place. Similarly, the glosses for meaning 4 (*Qal*) „be lost, stray“ are also problematic. Being lost may be the result of straying from a known route, while straying is a deviating movement. Thus the first gloss „be lost“ suggests the result and the second „stray“ the cause. The semantic space between these glosses is too great. Two different meanings are in fact reflected by these glosses.



#### 4. Conclusions

The real significance of the above comments depends largely on the purpose of DCH-Proofs (1989), i.e. the type of readership the composers wish to satisfy. Obviously the semitist will derive little satisfaction from a dictionary that makes only „silent“ use of cognate material. Semitists are primarily interested in comparisons within the Semitic group of languages. Such scholars will probably be far more interested in the proposed index of Semitic cognates. Similarly the translator, especially of the Old Testament, would be dissatisfied with the lack of clear distinction between synonyms and the confusion of meanings suggested by glosses that are too remote from each other. Unless the translator turns formal semanticist, the type of information he requires in order to transfer meaning from a source to a receptor language is at best hinted at in DCH-Proofs (1989). The function of the exegete is akin to that of the translator, in that both are concerned with the meaning of texts. When, in the exposition of a text, comment is required on particular words rather than the gist of the passage, we suspect that the offering of mere glosses may again be unsatisfactory in many instances. These two types of researchers may therefore be better served by the proposed thesaurus. How satisfactory the thesaurus will prove to be remains to be seen. The early signs are not very encouraging, however.

There is surely a wealth of valuable information in DCH-Proofs (1989). Unfortunately for the average user this information is insufficiently interpreted, too much of it is still basic, raw data. One who could most advantageously *and safely* exploit the data in the lists of synonyms, the grammatical information and grammatically orientated divisions of the material, would be a trained semanticist.

#### *Abstract:*

The early signs of the Dictionary of Classical Hebrew (Sheffield) clearly reflect a refinement rather than deviation from traditional Old Testament lexicography. Yet it is precisely the traditional features of Old Testament dictionaries that need to be critically evaluated, viz the alphabetical listing of lemmas, the significance of citing numbers of occurrences of words, the inclusion of grammatical and morphological data and the use of translation equivalents to convey meaning. Of far greater usefulness to the exegete and translator would be the grouping together of words of related meaning, the citing of the number of occurrences of particular meanings rather than forms of a word, a distinction between lexical meaning on one hand and grammatical and contextual on the other and the use of definitions plus several, clearly synonymous glosses to convey meaning.

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