In the Margins of the Hebrew Verbal System: Situation, Tense, Aspect, Mood

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קצת דמיוני הפעל במקום קצתם

Jonah Ibn Janāh, Seper Hāriqmâ §187[1]

The nature of the verbal system in Classical Biblical Hebrew (hereafter CBH) has been hotly contested in modern times.[2] In recent years the debate generally has turned on the identification of the semantic category – tense, aspect, mood, or some other – that is the primary basis for the contrasts among the major verbal forms, in particular the *Pf.* vs. *Impf.*[3] In light of the considerable differences of opinion, I propose to investigate some of the less frequent uses of these verbal forms, where the debate is often most crucial, in an attempt to delineate some of the key semantic dimensions of the CBH verbal system. I will argue that the linguistic categories of situation, tense, aspect, and mood are present in varying degrees and relationships in the semantics of the CBH verb in these marginal uses, and I will attempt to specify these degrees and relationships.

With regard to the majority of uses of the verb in CBH, the theoretical models of tense alone or aspect alone each work passably well, as the coexistence of these two theories over the last century demonstrates. It is at the margins of language use that the differences are most significant, i.e. in the statistically less frequent uses. In order to understand the verbal system as a whole it is necessary to examine these marginal uses. As in the case of the natural sciences, it is often in the domain of marginal phenomena that the right – or more analytically precise – distinctions can be made, which can then be seen to comprehend the whole. These fine distinctions in CBH begin to disappear in Late Biblical Hebrew (LBH) and are obsolete in Rabbinic

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[1] Translated from the Arabic original *Kitāb al-Luma*ᶜ (11th cent.); modern edition by Tene and Wilensky (1964). For Hebrew transliteration I adopt the following conventions: *a = patah; ā = qāmɛs; i = hirɛq; e = serê; ɛ = sgôl; o = holɛm; u = qibbûs; šwâ* is unmarked. *Matres lectionis* are indicated by a circumflex (note *â* is *ā + mater* with the exception of proclisis, e.g., *mâ-*). *Hāṭep* vowels are indicated by a *breve* (note *ă* is rarely *hāṭep qāmɛs*).

[2] For critical surveys of research, see McFall 1982; Mettinger 1973; Waltke-O'Connor 1990: 455-78 (§29).

[3] The most recent arguments for the primacy of one or another semantic category include: Rainey 1990: 408-13 (absolute tense); Gropp 1991: 51-55 (relative tense); Eskhult 1990 (aspect); Waltke-O'Connor 1990: 475-502 = §29.6-31.1 (aspect and a contrast of dependent/independent); Huehnergard 1988: 22 (aspect and absolute tense); Buth 1992: 103-4 (aspect and absolute tense); Zuber 1986 (mood). A text-linguistic model is advocated by Niccacci 1990, on which see Pardee 1993.

Hebrew (RH), as scholars have long been aware.[4] Hence the margins of CBH are their sole surviving domain. The problem I will address is, in brief, why in certain contexts "some forms of the verb occur in the place of some others", as the great medieval grammarian Ibn Janāḥ observed (quote above). To attend to the semantic contrasts involved in these marginal uses is to discover the axes on which the whole system depends.

A word on terminology. I will use the familar names when referring to the CBH verbal forms, viz., those entrenched in the majority of standard reference works. Familiar names are helpful when discussing complex matters. Moreover, the familiar names are sometimes more accurate linguistically than the modern neologisms, as in the case of the "Converted Imperfect" and the "Converted Perfect", which are indeed treated as "converted" forms in the synchronic structure and historical evolution of CBH.[5] For reasons of pedagogy and utility, therefore, I will use the familiar abbreviations: *Pf.*, *Impf.*, *Juss.*, *Conv. Pf.*, *Conv. Impf.*, *Imv.*, *Pt.*, etc.[6]

The following treatment will be limited primarily to prose usage. In CBH, as in most other languages, poetry extends and plays on normal linguistic rules and forms.[7] Hence to understand the verb in CBH it is prudent to begin with prose, from which poetry takes its point of departure.

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[4]   See Driver 1892: 287, s.v. "Late usages"; Bergsträsser §7g, 8h, 10l; Kutscher 1982: 45; and esp. Eskhult 1990: 103-20, and Sáenz-Badillos 1993: 112-29. For the periods of Hebrew see Sáenz-Badillos.

[5]   While the historical evolution of the *Conv. Impf.* is well-known (*wa + *yaqtul* preterite), the origin of the *Conv. Pf.* is less clear. The best explanation traces the origin in the resultative *wa + *qatala* in the apodosis of conditional clauses (as in Amarna Canaanite, see Moran 1961: 64-65; Waltke-O'Connor §32.1.2), with a secondary extension to all semantic categories of the *Impf.* (including imperfectivity and relative future or non-past tense), plus consecution, by a semantic analogy with *wa-yaqtul conceived as a "converted imperfect". This semantic analogy can be represented (after loss of final short vowels) as *qatal : *wa-yaqtul :: *yaqtul : *wa-qatal. For this analysis see Bergsträsser §3g; Fenton 1973: 38-39; and T.O. Lambdin, unpublished class handouts, Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations 192, Harvard University. In this model the semantic field of *wa-qatala is generated analogically by a synchronic reinterpretation of both *wa-yaqtul and *wa-qatala as "converted" forms, as if indeed the prefixed *wåw* were a *wåw hippûk*, a "*wåw* conversive".

[6]   The only feasable alternative terminology is the morphological/historical series: Suffix Conjugation, Long Prefix Conjugation, and Short Prefix Conjugation (with no clear corresponding terms for the converted forms or the other volitionals). However, these latter terms may be infelicitous since the morphological difference between the Long and Short Prefix Conjugations is preserved in only a few categories in Hebrew.

[7]   See the elegant treatment of Crystal 1987: 71-74.

I. *Situation*

The linguistic term, "situation", while not entirely familiar to Semitists, covers a series of contrasts quite familiar, particularly that of dynamic (or fientic) vs. stative.[8] Situation, as a linguistic category, refers to the inherent meaning of the circumstance signified by the verb. Situation is therefore a quality of the lexicalization of meaning. A stative verb signifies a situation quite different than that signified by a dynamic verb; consider the contrast between "he is fat" (stative) vs. "she opens the door" (dynamic). While linguists have defined various typologies of situations, the one most commonly indicated in language, and the one formally marked in the Hebrew *Qal*, is the contrast of dynamic vs. stative.[9] Bernard Comrie aptly characterizes the contrast between stative and dynamic situations: "states are static, i.e. continue as before unless changed, whereas events and processes are dynamic, i.e. require a continual input of energy if they are not to come to an end".[10] Situation as a lexicalization of meaning is stressed in John Huehnergard's recent discussion of stativity in Semitic, where he advocates that the term stative "be applied only as a *lexical* designation, to refer to the class of roots which lexically denote a state or condition".[11]

In the *Qal* of sound verbs the contrast of dynamic vs. stative is formally marked in the contrasts between vowel classes (or Ablaut). To use T.O. Lambdin's terminology for these vowel classes, the *(a, u) class (qåtal, yiqtol) is the dominant dynamic class for sound verbs, while the *(i, a) class (qåtel, yiqtal) is the dominant stative class for sound verbs. Weak verbs also generally preserve the distinction between dynamic and stative verbs in contrasting vowel classes, with some secondary mixing due to phonological influences.[12] The formally marked contrast between dynamic and stative in the *Qal* has various reflexes in the derived conjugations (see below).

Let us consider some features of situation in the present temporal frame, which is infrequent in CBH prose yet very revealing. The semantic distinction between dynamic and stative verbs correlates with a functional distinction in the present

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[8] On "situation", see Comrie 1976: 13, 48-51; Lyons 1977: 483; Binnick 1991: 170-97. On stative verbs in Hebrew, see Joüon-Muraoka §§41, 111h; Waltke-O'Connor §22.2-4; on broader issues in Semitic (esp. Akkadian) see Huehnergard 1987; Buccellati 1988: 153-89.

[9] Some verbs which are generally stative, such as verbs of intellectual state or emotion, can also be used dynamically, e.g., √yrʾ, "to be afraid" (stative) and "to fear" (dynamic); see the discussion in Waltke-O'Connor §22.2.3. A similar overlap of situation applies to the generally unmarked contrast of being vs. becoming; see Joüon-Muraoka §41b; and below, n. 18. Note that in earlier Semitic the semantic contrast of being : becoming corresponds to the contrast of *qatil (predicate adjective) : *yaqtul/yaqattal (finite verb); see Huehnergard (1987: 227) for the Akkadian evidence. The active *Pf.* for stative verbs would seem to combine the semantic values of predicate adjective and relative past perfective.

[10] Comrie 1976: 13.

[11] Huehnergard 1987: 229.

[12] E.g., the *(a, a) class is a mixed class, since nearly all II- and III-guttural verbs, whether stative or dynamic, secondarily came into this class by the influence of the guttural on the adjacent vowel. Some other *(a, a) verbs are also semantically stative, as *zåkar* and *yåda'*. Lambdin's full treatment is unpublished; see now Waltke-O'Connor §22.3-4.

frame. For the simple present use the *Pf.* is the primary form used for stative verbs, while the *Impf.* is the primary finite form for dynamic verbs.[13] This contrast conforms to the semantic constituency of present time: since the present is inherently unbounded and incomplete, it requires a verb that either describes an unbounded state or an continuing activity.[14] Hence for stative verbs the *Pf.* is suitable to express a present state. (This follows historically from the adjectival origin of *the qåtel* form.)[15] For dynamic verbs the *Impf.* form is used for the simple or general present, as it is aspectually unbounded (imperfective; see below). The predicate *Pt.*, a tenseless durative form, may also be used for dynamic verbs in the simple present, and is the preferred form when the subject is expressed.[16] Consider the following examples:[17]

stative:
qåtontî mikkol hahăsådîm umikkål-hå˒ĕmɛt (Gen 32:11)
   "I *am unworthy⁻* (*Pf.*) of all the kindness and faithfulness ..."
wa˚ăsê-lî mat˚ammîm ka˒ăšɛr ˒åhabtî (Gen 27:4)
   "and prepare me a delicious meal such as I *love* (*Pf.*)."
yåda˚tî bnî yåda˚tî (Gen 48:19)
   "I *know* (*Pf.*), my son, I *know* (*Pf.*)."

dynamic:
låmmâ zzê tiš˒al lišmî (Gen 32:30)
   "Why *do* you *ask* (*Impf.*) my name?" (simple present)
mâ-ttbaqqeš ... ˒ɛt-˒ahay ˒ånokî mbaqqeš (Gen 37:15)
   " 'What *are* you *looking for* (*Impf.*)?' ... 'I am looking for (*Pt.*) my brothers.' " (simple present)
˚al-ken ya˚ăzåb-˒îš ˒ɛt-˒åbîw w˒ɛt-˒immô wdåbaq b˒ištô whåyû lbåsår ˒ɛhåd (Gen 2:24)
   "Therefore a man *leaves* (*Impf.*) his father and mother and *joins* (*Conv. Pf.*) with his wife, and they *become* one flesh." (general present sequence)[18]

The semantic difference in situation is indicated by the difference in use of the verbal form in these temporal contexts. Although this correspondence has long been noted, its diagnostic significance in the verbal system of CBH verb has not been

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[13] On the predicate *Pt.* used in the present temporal frame in a manner complementary to the *Impf.*, see below.
[14] On the relationship between present time and imperfective aspect, see Comrie 1976: 66-72; Lyons 1977: 704.
[15] See Bergsträsser §6g; Joüon-Muraoka §112a; Waltke-O'Connor §30.5.3.
[16] See Joüon-Muraoka §121d,h; Driver §135; Bergsträsser §13g; Waltke-O'Connor §37.6; Gordon 1982: 1-25.
[17] For additional examples, see Driver §11, 28; Joüon-Muraoka §112a, 113c; Bergsträsser §6g; Waltke-O'Connor §30.5.3, 31.3.
[18] Note that the construction √*hyh* + *l...*, "to become X", signifies a dynamic situation. This is the only construction in which the situational contrast of being vs. becoming is formally marked in CBH; see above, n. 9.

adequately stressed. The distribution of *Pf.* vs. *Impf.* according to situation conflicts with the general characterization of these forms in CBH as "past" vs. "present-future." This characterization is imprecise since the form used in the present varies according to situation. A more accurate characterization of the complementarity of these forms with respect to situation and tense is as follows (with further refinement to come below in the treatment of tense):

stative: *Pf.*   non-future (= present/past)
               Impf. future
dynamic: *Pf.*   past
               Impf. non-past (= present/future)

For verbs of a given situation, the use of the opposite form (i.e., *Pf.* in the place of *Impf.*, and vice versa) in the present will signal a semantic difference on another level, that of aspect (see further below). A representative use of this type of contrast is the performative (only used for dynamic verbs) in which an action is effected pragmatically by verbal declaration.[19] Performative statements use the *Pf.* in the present frame. The use of the performative *Pf.* poses a formal contrast with the *Impf.* in the present for dynamic verbs, indicating an aspectual value of perfectivity, viz., as action wholly achieved and complete in the act of saying it.[20]

performative:
hinnê nåtattî låkɛm ʾɛt-kål-ʿeśɛb zoreaʿ zɛraʿ … låkɛm yihyɛ̂ lʾåklå *(Gen 1:29)*
    "I *(hereby) give* (*Pf.*) to you all seed-bearing plants ... this will be your food."
ûlyišmåʿeʾl šmaʿtîkâ hinnê beraktî ʾotô (Gen 17:20)
    "Concerning Ishmael I have heard you; I *(hereby) bless* (*Pf.*) him."
wayyoʾmɛr bî nišbaʿtî … kî-bårek ʾåbårɛkkå (Gen 22:16-17)
    "And he said, 'By myself I *swear* (*Pf.*) ... that I will indeed bless you.' "
ʾåmartî ʾattâ wṣîbåʾ tahlqû ʾɛt-haśśådɛ̂ (2 Sam 19:30)
    "I *(hereby) proclaim* (*Pf.*) that you and Ziba shall divide the land."

An aspectual contrast indicated by the use of the contrasting verbal form in the present frame is rare for stative verbs.[21] The sole example in prose is the artful statement by Yahweh:

ʾɛhyɛ̂ ʾåšɛr ʾɛhyɛ̂ (Exod 3:14)

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[19] See Ewald §135c; Joüon-Muraoka §112f; Bergsträsser §6e; Waltke-O'Connor §30.5.1d; Hillers 1995.

[20] For additional examples see the previous note. Comparable to the aspectual contrast in the performative *Pf.* is the use of the gnomic *Pf.*; see Joüon-Muraoka §112d; Bergsträsser §6f; Waltke-O'Connor §30.5.1c.

[21] Such a use is not uncommon in the past frame, particularly for *yihyɛ̂* and *whåyå*; see Joüon-Muraoka §§111i, 113a; Lambdin §110; and Exod 33:8-9, below.

The grammatical sense of this statement may be represented as "I am one who is/exists enduringly", with the use of the *Impf.* signaling an imperfective sense for the verb "to be".[22] The semantic force of this verbal use not only creates an appropriate sense of the eternality and dominance of God, but offers an elegant paronomasia by which the statement both conceals and partially reveals the name Yahweh.

From a consideration of these marginal uses in the present, it is clear that distinctions of both tense and aspect may be indicated by the contrasts of *Pf.* and *Impf.*, which formal contrast in the present frame derives initially from the distinction of situation.

A number of other key issues in the CBH verbal system pertain to the semantics of situation. Several scholars have done important work on the relation between situation in the *Qal* and in the derived conjugations.[23] There are derivational relationships between stative *Qal* and factitive *Piel*, and between dynamic *Qal* and causative *Hiphil*, plausibly stemming from the original semantic relationships among these conjugations. In the synchronic system of CBH the relationship among these conjugations has become more complex, but there remain discernible distinctions in *Piel* and *Hiphil* based on the *Qal* situation contrast of stative vs. dynamic, and on the inner contrast within the dynamic class of transitive vs. intransitive. These relationships may be charted roughly as follows:[24]

Qal	*Piel*	*Hiphil*
stative >	factitive	intransitive
dynamic/intransitive >	frequentative	causative/singly transitive
dynamic/transitive >	resultative	causative/doubly transitive

There are also relationships between situation in the *Qal* and the semantics of voice in the derived conjugations.[25] The *Niphal* effects a change in voice and situation for dynamic/transitive verbs, functioning as a complement to situation in the *Qal*.

Qal	*Niphal*
dynamic/transitive >	reflexive/transitive
	or middle/intransitive
	or passive/intransitive
	or resultative/stative

While these analyses may need further refinement, they demonstrate the relevance of situation for an understanding of the derived conjugations.

In sum, the semantics of situation, involving the meaning of the circumstance signified by the verb, is a key dimension in the verbal system of CBH. Contrasts of

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22 See the commentaries.

23 On the relationships among *Qal*, *Piel*, and *Hiphil*, see esp. Jenni 1968; Lambdin 1971: 193-95, 211-13, and unpublished course handouts; and Waltke-O'Connor §24, 27.

24 After Lambdin, unpublished class handouts; similarly Jenni 1981 §§12.4.3, 13.4.3.

25 See the intriguing treatment in Waltke-O'Connor §21.2. On the *Qal* : *Niphal* relationship, see Lambdin §140; Müller 1985; Waltke-O'Connor §23.

situation concern not only the verbal lexicon, but also the semantics of tense and aspect, and the relations between the *Qal* and the derived conjugations.

II. *Tense*

Ibn Janāh and grammarians since have been particularly concerned with the temporal contexts in which the *Impf.* takes the place of the *Pf.*, and vice versa. Rabbinic, Medieval, and Modern Hebrew are absolute tense systems, in which the *Pf.* marks the past, the *Pt.* marks the present, and the *Impf.* marks the future.[26] Medieval grammarians (and from them the early moderns) saw the CBH verb through this template, and hence did not grasp the differently constituted category of tense in CBH. Theories of relative tense, as opposed to absolute tense, have been applied in various forms to CBH since the mid-1700's,[27] and have been embraced in varying forms by some modern scholars, most notably Gotthelf Bergsträsser in his 29th edition of Gesenius' Hebräische Grammatik.[28]

I will argue that relative tense as currently understood in general linguistics provides an accurate model for the operations of tense in CBH. I differ from other advocates of relative tense in holding that this is not the only or primary category in CBH, but operates in relationship with the categories of aspect, mood, and situation. That which distinguishes absolute tense from relative tense in instanced in the less freqent uses, viz., in the margins of the verbal system.

The system of relative tense, as with any tense system, involves the relationships among three temporal points: that of the speaker or speech-act (S), the event (E), and the reference point (R).[29] In this manner, as Robert Binnick observes, "a tense does not 'situate' a process in time, but rather 'orders' it relative to a point of reference".[30] In an absolute tense system the reference point is always the time of the speaker or speech-act (R = S). In a relative tense system R may or may not coincide with S. R may be past to the speaker (R < S), it may be simultaneous (R = S), or it may be future (R > S). As a result of this non-identity of R and S in a relative tense system, the event E may be in different temporal relations to R and S. In the case of

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[26] Segal 1927: 150-56; Gordon 1982: 26-30. Qumran Hebrew is an early exemplar of this phase: see Qimron 1986: esp. 70-86.

[27] See McFall, *Enigma*, 21-23, 33-34, 41-43, 177-79; on the wider history of these concepts, see Binnick, *Time*, 37-43, 109-18.

[28] Bergsträsser §6-7; also Kuryłowicz 1972: 79-93, and 1973; Bartelmus 1982: 15-79; and Gropp 1991: 51-55. Bergsträsser describes (§7d) the temporal contrasts of *Pf.* : *Impf.* as "Vergangenheit : Gegenwart/Zukunft und Vorzeitigkeit : Gleichzeitigkeit/Nachzeitigkeit." He adds: "kommt also noch Einmaligkeit : Wiederholung (z. T. auch Ereignis : Zustand)". This formulation of the temporal contrasts is inexact, however, in that it only applies to dynamic verbs (see above). Kuryłowicz's description of the prime contrast of *Pf.* : *Impf.* as "anteriority : non-anteriority" similarly fails to address stative verbs, as noted by Gropp (1991: 51-52), who nonetheless adopts Kuryłowicz's analysis. Bartelmus (1982: 49-51) regards the relative tense value of *Pf.*, *Pt.,* and *Impf.* as Vorzeitigkeit, Gleichzeitigkeit, and Nachzeitigkeit, respectively, thereby missing the omplementarity, according to verbal situation, of the *Pf.* and *Impf.* in present usage.

[29] On this model, which derives from the work of Hans Reichenbach with modifications by Bernard Comrie, see Comrie 1985; and Binnick 1991: 109-16.

[30] Binnick 1991: 361.

R < E < S the tense relation is called relative future, i.e., E is future relative to R, even though past to S. In the opposite case of S < E < R the tense relation is relative past, i.e., E is past relative to R, even though future to S. In the many cases where R = S, the tense relations are the same as those in an absolute tense system: E < R = S is relative past and absolute past; E = R = S is relative present and absolute present; and E > R = S is relative future and absolute future.

In a relative tense system a single verbal form is used as relative past (in CBH the *Pf.*) and another as relative future (in CBH the *Impf.*). In contrast, in an absolute tense system a variety of different forms and constructions are required to express the equivalent values. Hence to translate the *Pf.* it is necessary in English to use the past form ("did"), the pluperfect ("had done"), and the future perfect ("will have done"). To translate the *Impf.* it is necessary to use the future construction ("will do") and various other constructions ("would do" for relative future to a past R). Some tense relations expressed clearly in a relative tense system cannot be conveyed unambiguously in an absolute tense system.

In a sense, absolute tense is a subset of relative tense, since it consists of one out of many possible configurations of the temporal relationships of S and R. In most relative tense systems, including CBH, R = S in most instances, hence the model of absolute tense is usually adequate. In the margins of verbal use, however, R may be past or future to S, revealing the identity of CBH as a relative tense system.

In the following examples I will restrict the terms "relative future" and "relative past" to cases where R ≠ S, and will retain the ordinary terms "future," "past," and "present" where R = S. This use is not intended to confuse the identification of the system as a whole as a relative tense system, but simply to highlight the marginal but linguistically significant cases where E is in different temporal relations to R and S. In these marginal uses relative tense value of the verb is usually indicated contextually by the clause structure, particularly by subordination or disjunction, and by the use of temporal adverbs.[31]

The following examples illustrate the relative future uses of the *Impf.*, where R < E < S. R is in each case the time of the previous independent verb in the clause sequence, which is the contextual 'present' within the narrative sequence. If the relative future is in a subordinate clause, then R is the time of the verb in the governing clause. Note that these relative future uses are indicated by subordination or by temporal adverbs, such as ʾāz, (b)terem, or ʿad (with compounds).[32]

relative future (R < E < S):
wayyiqqaḥ ʾet-bnô habkôr ʾăšer-yimlok taḥtâw (2 Kgs 3:27)
    "He took his first-born son, who *was to rule* (*Impf.*) after him."
ʾănî terem ʾăkallê ldabber (Gen 24:45)
    "Now I *had* yet *to finish* (*Impf.*) speaking."

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[31] Binnick (1991: 307-8) aptly calls temporal adverbs "frame adverbials", lexemes that refer to intervals of time, or to intervals anchored at one end, which serve to locate the reference point.
[32] For additional examples, see Joüon-Muraoka §113i-k; GKC §107c; Bergsträsser §7a,c,g; Waltke-O'Connor §31.6.2c-3c.

wayyir'û 'otô meråhoq ûbterem yiqrab 'ălêhem wayyitnakklû 'otô (Gen 37:18)
   "They saw him from a distance, and before he *drew near* (*Impf.*) to them,
   they conspired against him."
'åz yåšîr mošê (Exod 15:1)[33]
   "Then Moses *sang* (*Impf.*)."
'åz yibnê šlomô båmâ likmôš šiqqus mô'åb (1 Kgs 11:7)
   "Then Solomon *built* (*Impf.*) a high place for Chemosh, the abomination of
   Moab."
wayyešeb tahtêhå bassel 'ad-'ăšer yir'ê mâ-yyihyê bå'îr (Jonah 4:5)
   "He sat under it in the shade until he *would see* (*Impf.*) what *would happen*
   (*Impf.*) to the city."[34]

In each of these instances, including stative and dynamic verbs, the events are past
with respect to the speaker, who may be a character in the narrative (as in Gen
24:45) or the narrator (as in the other examples).[35] The event referred to by the *Impf.*
form is future with respect to R, which is the time of the previous independent verb
in the sequence. The event is, therefore, future with respect to the ongoing 'present'
in the narrative sequence.

The temporal adverb *(b)terem*, "not yet, before," requires a relative future verb by its
inherent meaning. The adverb *'åz*, "then," may be followed by a relative future, but
may be followed by other forms as well, depending on the temporal circumstance
(for an example of a relative past after *'åz*, see below). The use of *'åz* + *Impf.* as
relative future in a narrative sequence seems to include both disjunction and
temporal succession, thereby indicating a stylistic or logical pause (as Exod 15:1 and
1 Kgs 11:7, above), compared to the ordinary past sequential use of the *Conv. Impf.*
Hebraists often tend to resort to quite convoluted reasoning to explain the relative
future uses of the *Impf.* and the force of these temporal adverbs, though advocates
of relative tense have long since analyzed them correctly.[36]

The use of the *Pf.* as a relative past when future to the speaker (S < E < R) is also
indicated contextually, usually by subordination or by temporal adverbs such as *'ad*

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[33] This verse and other instances of *'åz* + *Impf.* were taken by rabbinic interpreters as proof of
the resurrection of the dead in the world to come; see *b. Sanh.* 91b (citing Exod 15:1, Josh 8:30,
but troubled by 1 Kgs 11:7). Ibn Ezra correctly compared this use to Classical Arabic; see McFall
1982: 8; Waltke-O'Connor §31.6.3a. On Classical Arabic as a relative tense and aspect system, see
Comrie 1985: 63-64; 1976: 78-80.

[34] Note *yihyê* used dynamically. On the situational multivalence of some stative verbs,
particularly in the future, see above, n. 9.

[35] Note that there is no difference between direct speech and narrative (third person) discourse in
the relative tense system.

[36] Bergsträsser §7a-c; though he hedges on *'åz* + *Impf.*, appealing in some cases to the old *yaqtul*
preterite (cf. §7c,g). For various imaginative explanations, see Rundgren 1961: 97-101; Rabinowitz
1984; Waltke-O'Connor §31.6.3. Note the loss of the relative future (as with the whole relative
tense system) in LBH, where *'åz*, *terem*, and *'ad* in the past frame are consistently followed by the
Pf.

(and compounds), *'ahar*, and *'âz*.[37] The relative past tense is generally rendered in English by the future perfect construction.

relative past (S < E < R):
wheśîbû 'el-libbåm bå'åreṣ 'ăšer nišbû-šåm (1 Kgs 8:47)
> "and they will take it to heart in the land to which they *will have been taken captive (Pf.)*"

kî lo' 'ε'ězåbkå 'ad 'ăšer 'im-'åśîtî 'et 'ăšer-dibbartî låk (Gen 28:15)
> "Indeed I will not leave you until I *will have done (Pf.)* what I have told you."

lo' 'okal 'ad 'im-dibbartî dbåråy (Gen 24:33)
> "I will not eat until I *will have spoken (Pf.)* my words."

'åz teḥĕråṣ kî 'åz yåṣå' yhwh lpånêkå (2 Sam 5:24)
> "then take action, for then Yahweh *will have gone (Pf.)* before you."

w'im yåšûb hannεga' ûpåraḥ babbayit 'ahar hilleṣ 'et-hå'ăbånîm (Lev 14:43)
> "if the plague returns and infests the house after he *will have taken out (Pf.)* the stones."

wtihar hakkohen 'et-habbayit kî nirpå' hånnåga' (Lev 14:48)
> "the priest shall declare the house clean, for the plague *will have been healed (Pf.)*."

In each of these instances the event is past to R but future to S. R is the previous independent verb in the clause sequence or the verb of the governing clause. The speech-act in each of these instances is that of a character (Moses, God, Abraham's servant, etc.) who is referring to future events.[38]

A more frequent class of relative past use of the *Pf.* is when both the event and the reference point are past to the speaker, in the configuration E < R < S. This value corresponds to the English pluperfect. This use is generally indicated contextually by subordination or by simple disjunction within a clause sequence. Note that a subordinate or disjunctive clause with a *Pf.* does not require a relative past value, but merely allows it, according to context: simple past use of the *Pf.* is also common in these clauses. Relative past tense is one kind of semantic information, among others, that may be signaled syntactically by disjunction or subordination.[39] This condition emphasizes that relative tense is not merely a function of clause structure, but is one semantic axis among others that clause structure may indicate.

relative past (E < R < S):
wayyar' 'ělohîm 'et-kål-'ăšer 'åśâ (Gen 1:31)
> "God saw all that he *had made (Pf.)*."

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[37] For additional examples, see Driver §17; Joüon-Muraoka §112i; Waltke-O'Connor §30.5.2b.

[38] Driver (§138) and Joüon-Muraoka (§167h) suggest that some uses of the *Pf.* in the protasis of a real condition (marked by *'im*) express a relative past value future to S. For an alternative analysis, see below.

[39] On disjunctive clauses generally, see Lambdin §132, 197; Waltke-O'Connor §39.2. For further examples, see Driver §16; Bergsträsser §6d; Joüon-Muraoka §112c, 118d.

wayyålɛn šåm kî-båʾ haššɛmɛš (Gen 28:11)

"He stayed there for the night for the sun *had set* (*Pf.*)."

wloʾ-yådaʿ yaʿăqob kî råhel gnåbåtam (Gen 31:32)

"Now Jacob did not know that Rachel *had stolen* (*Pf.*) them."

wråhel låqhå ʾɛt-hattråpîm wattśimem bkar haggåmål watteśɛb ʿålêhɛm (Gen 31:34)

"Now Rachel *had taken* (*Pf.*) the teraphim and *had put* (*Conv. Impf.*) them in a camel-bag and *had sat* (*Conv. Impf.*) on them." (relative past sequence)

wayhî yšaʿyåhû loʾ yåsåʾ håser (with *qrê*) *hattîkonâ ûdbar-yhwh håyâ ʾelâw* (2 Kgs 20:4)

"Now Isaiah *had not left* (*Pf.*) the middle courtyard, when the word of Yahweh came to him."

This use of the *Pf.* as relative past when past to S persists in later stages of Hebrew as a vestige of the CBH relative tense system.

A special use of the *Pf.* as a relative past is as what Dennis Pardee and others call the epistolary *Pf.*[40] In this use, found only in letters and formal messages, the *Pf.* "represents a situation in past time from the viewpoint of the recipient of a message".[41] This is a species of relative tense in which R is neither the time of the speaker nor a point indicated grammatically within the discourse, but the time of the reception of the message. In the following examples, from royal messages, the event is past relative to R (the recipient/reception), though present to S (the speaker/speech-act): S = E < R.

relative past (epistolary):

wayyišlåhem hammɛlɛk ʾåsåʾ ʾel-bɛn hădad ... leʾmor ... hinnê šålahtî lkå šohad kesɛp wzåhåb (1 Kgs 15:18-19)

"King Asa sent them to Ben Hadad ... saying .. 'I *have sent* (*Pf.*) you a gift of silver and gold.' "

wayyåbeʾ hassepɛr ʾel-mɛlɛk yiśråʾel leʾmor wʿattâ kbôʾ hassepɛr hazzê ʾelɛ̂kå hinnê šålahtî ʾelɛ̂kå ʾɛt-naʿ ămån ʿabdî (2 Kgs 5:6)

"He brought the letter to the King of Israel, which read, 'Now when this letter reaches you, note that I *have sent* (*Pf.*) to you my servant Naaman.' "

wayyoʾmɛr hûråm mɛlɛk-sor biktåb wayyišlah ʾel-šlomô ... wʿattâ šålahtî ʾîš-håkåm (2 Chron 2:10-12)

"Huram, King of Tyre, said in a letter that he sent to Solomon ... 'Now I *have sent* (*Pf.*) you a wise man.' "

This epistolary use is found in epigraphic CBH and other Semitic languages (Ugaritic, Akkadian, Phoenician, Aramaic),[42] and has parallels in non-Semitic languages. As a species of relative tense, Binnick notes, "it seems to refocus the

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40   See Pardee 1983; Waltke-O'Connor §30.5.1d.

41   Waltke-O'Connor §30.5.1d.

42   See Pardee 1983; Pardee and Whiting 1987.

deictic center from the ego to the other (or to some other)".[43] Note that this relative past use of the *Pf.* is formally identical to the performative *Pf.*, though the two have different nuances. The act of sending a gift or a wise man is not accomplished in the act of its utterance, unlike a blessing or oath or legal bequest which are accomplished in the speech-act itself.[44] Rather there must actually be a gift in the package or a wise man sent for the epistolary statements above to be felicitous. Further, the epistolary *Pf.* is a polite form, expressing some deference to the recipient. (For other polite uses of the *Pf.* in modal utterances, see below.)

These examples of the *Impf.* used as a relative future and the *Pf.* used as a relative past show quite clearly that, when viewed from these marginal uses, CBH is a relative tense system. This system begins to break down in LBH and disappears entirely in Rabbinic Hebrew, where the *Pf.* is restricted to the absolute past (and the pluperfect) and the *Impf.* to the absolute future, with the *Pt.* now the form for present tense.[45] In Rabbinic Hebrew, as in Modern Hebrew, tense is absolute.

The semantic relations in CBH of *Pf.* and *Impf.* with respect to tense may be characterized as follows. The relations among tense, aspect, and mood will be explored below.

stative: *Pf.*   relative non-future (= present/past)
              Impf.   relative future
dynamic: *Pf.*   relative past
              Impf.   relative non-past (= present/future)

III. Aspect

Heinrich Ewald, in his Kritische Grammatik der hebräischen Sprache of 1827, described the Hebrew verbal system as primarily aspectual, which he defined as contrasting "completed" (*perfectam*) and "non-completed" (*imperfectam*) events, irrespective of temporal frame.[46] Particularly through the modern revisions of Gesenius's grammar (with the exception of Bergsträsser's) and the influential Treatise on the Use of the Tenses in Hebrew by S.R. Driver (3rd ed. 1892), this

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[43]   Binnick 1991: 317.

[44]   For this reason the use of *brk* in the *Pf.* in greeting formulae in epigraphic CBH is best regarded as a performative *Pf.* (*pace* Pardee 1983: 35). Note that this usage occurs outside of letters (as at *Kuntillet ʿAjnūd*, cf. Gen 17:20, above), unlike the restricted epistolary use of *šlh*. Hillers (1995: 764) includes the epistolary use of *šlh* in his treatment of performatives, overlooking the semantic and pragmatic differences between the two uses.

[45]   The changes in the tense and aspect system of CBH begin to occur in LBH, probably by influence from Aramaic (see, e.g., Sáenz-Badillos 1993: 129). Aramaic, in its turn, changed from a relative to an absolute tense system probably by influence from Persian, an Indo-European language. On the influence of native Persian speakers on Imperial Aramaic, see recently Kaufman 1992: 174.

[46]   Ewald 1870 is the final edition of this work; see Ewald §§134-36. On Ewald's precursers in Hebrew grammar, see McFall 1982: 43-44; and on the history of aspectual theory, see Binnick 1991: 43-50. It is interesting to note that Bishop Lowth contributed to aspectual theory in a work on English grammar but did not see the relevance for CBH; see Binnick 1991:45-47; McFall 1982: 13.

model has become the dominant one in the field.[47] Our present understanding of aspect, however, requires some finer distinctions.[48]

Aspect is concerned with the "different ways of viewing the inner temporal constituency of a situation",[49] in contrast to tense which describes the temporal relations between an event, a speaker, and a reference point. The primary aspectual distinction that is grammaticalized in most languages is that of perfectivity vs. imperfectivity. In Bernard Comrie's formulation:

> the perfective looks at the situation from outside, without necessarily distinguishing any of the internal structure of the situation, whereas the imperfective looks at the situation from inside, and as such is crucially concerned with the internal structure of the situation.[50]

Aspect is concerned with the differing perceptions of an event, either seen from without as a bounded whole (perfective) or seen from within as an unbounded process (imperfective).

An alternative but logically equivalent description of this aspectual contrast addresses the relationship between an event (E) and the event frame through which E is perceived.[51] If the event is seen as a whole within the event frame then it is viewed perfectively; if the event's boundaries (either beginning or end) extend outside of the frame then the view is imperfective. Both descriptions emphasize that any event or situation, even stative ones, may be viewed perfectively or imperfectively. The difference of aspect is one of perspective, not of an inherent quality of the event or situation. As Comrie states with admirable precision, aspectual differences relate to how one "looks at a situation".

There are many occasions in the margins of CBH where the occurrence of one verbal form in the place of another indicates an aspectual distinction. The uses that show most clearly the semantics of aspect are when the *Impf.* is used to express imperfectivity in a past context, and when the *Pf.* is used to express perfectivity in a future context. These classes of verbal use appear to contradict the ordinary tense values for these forms, discussed above. In these (and only these) aspectual uses of the verb, tense reference is neutralized; viz., the verb expresses primarily aspect, with the ordinary tense value reduced to zero.

Herein lies one of the curious features at the margins of the CBH verbal system: the *Impf.* in the past frame (to S) may be used primarily to express tense (relative future) or aspect (imperfectivity); and conversely, the *Pf.* in the future frame (to S)

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[47] E. Rödiger revised Gesenius's grammer from the 14th through 22nd editions (1845-1872) and replaced Gesenius's absolute tense model with Ewald's aspectual model; see McFall 1982: 15; GKC §§47a, 106a. Driver 1892 remains an invaluable work despite the apt criticisms of Waltke-O'Connor §29.31-m.

[48] On the following, see Comrie 1976; Lyons 1977: 703-18; Dahl 1985; and Binnick 1991: 135-214.

[49] Comrie 1976: 3.

[50] Comrie 1976: 4.

[51] Binnick 1991: 209-13, esp. 212: "Aspect characterizes the different relationships of a predicate to the event frame."

may be used primarily to express tense (relative past) or aspect (perfectivity).[52] How does one determine which is the primary semantic value of a verb in these marginal uses? The answer, as ever, is context – clause structure, adverbs, and the general implicature of the discourse. Various linguistic and discursive signals are given such that these marginal uses are rarely obscure.[53] As a general rule, where there are no contextual indicators of relative tense value, the aspectual sense is primary. The grammatical and discursive context is sufficient (in prose) to determine the semantics of tense and aspect in these marginal uses. This is not to lose sight of the fact that in the vast majority of uses in CBH there is a coincidence of tense and aspect in verbal use.

The *Impf.* used to express imperfectivity in the past generally conveys habitual, iterative, or durative sense, as the grammars observe. These uses are signaled contextually by clause disjunction, with the *Impf.* providing backgrounded information.[54] Occasionally one finds imperfective sequences (*Impf.* + *Conv. Pfs.*) in past tense narration, backgrounding the perfective main sequence. The following is an example of an imperfective sequence backgrounding a past perfective sequence:[55]

imperfective in past:

wayyarʾ whinnê bʾer baśśådê whinnê šlošâ ʿɛdrê-soʾn robṣîm ʿåléhå kî min-habbʾer hahîʾ yašqû håʿădårîm whåʾ ɛbɛn gdolâ ʿal-pî habbʾer wnɛʾ ɛspû-šåmmâ kål-håʿădårîm wgålălû ʾɛt-håʾɛbɛn mɛʿal pî habbʾer whišqû ʾɛt-hassoʾn wheš̂ibû ʾɛt-håʾɛbɛn ʿal-pî habbʾer limqomâ wayyoʾmɛr låhɛm yaʿăqob ʾaḥay meʾayin ʾattɛm (Gen 29:2-4)

> "He saw a well in the field with three flocks of sheep lying by it, for from that well they *used to water* (*Impf.*) the flocks, and there was a big rock on the mouth of the well; all the flocks *would be gathered* (*Conv. Pf.*) there, and they *would roll* (*Conv. Pf.*) the rock from the mouth of the well, and they *would water* (*Conv. Pf.*) the sheep, and *would return* (*Conv. Pf.*) the rock to its place on the mouth of the well. Jacob said to them, 'My brothers, where are you from?' "

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[52] The relative past use of the *Pf.* also seems to entail perfectivity; for the aspectual sense of the relative future *Impf.*, see below.

[53] Note Lyon's remarks (1977: 396-97): "It is a universally recognized and demonstrable fact that many of the acceptable utterances of English and other languages are ambiguous: they can be interpreted in two or more different ways. Frequently, though not always, their ambiguity passes unnoticed in everyday language-behaviour, because the context is such that all but one of the possible interpretations are irrelevant or relatively improbable."

[54] Imperfective clauses may also begin with *whåyâ*, which similarly indicates a backgrounded clause or sequence; see Waltke-O'Connor §32.2.6. Lambdin notes (§197c) of a similar construction: "Such clauses are conjunctive by definition, but because of their formal departure from the sequence in which they occur, they clearly mark an anticipatory temporal subordination."

[55] Other extended imperfective sequences include Exod 33:7-11; Exod 34:34-35; Num 9:15-23. For other examples, see GKC §107b,e; Bergsträsser §7d; Joüon-Muraoka §113e-f; Waltke-O'Connor §31.2b.

Note that the *Impf.* can express imperfectivity in the past for either dynamic or stative verbs, as in the following example:

ken yihyê tåmîd hɛˁånån ykassɛnnû (Num 9:16)
"Thus it *used to be* (*Impf.*) continually, the cloud *would cover* (*Impf.*) it."

The contrast between perfectivity and imperfectivity in the past is illustrated in the following passage:[56]

wˁeli zåqen mˀod wšåmaˁ ˀet kål-ˀăšɛr yaˁăśûn bånâw lkål-yiśråˀel wˀet ˀăšɛr-yiškbûn ˀet-hannåšîm hassobˀôt pɛtaḥ ˀohɛl môˁed wayyoˀmɛr låhɛm låmmå taˁăśûn kaddbårîm håˀellê ... wloˀ yišmˁû lqôl ˀăbîhɛm (1 Sam 2:22-25)
   "Now Eli was very old, and he *was hearing* (*Conv. Pf.*) about all that his sons *were doing* (*Impf.*) to all Israel, and how they *were lying* (*Impf.*) with the women who stood at the door of the Tent of Meeting. He *said* (*Conv. Impf.*) to them, 'Why *are you doing* (*Impf.*) such things?...' But they *would* not *hear* (*Impf.*) their father's voice."

The past imperfective events ("was hearing", "were doing", "were lying", "would hear") are those seen as extending without boundary, without discernible beginning or end from the perspective of the speaker/speech-act (note also the present imperfective, "are doing"), while the perfective event ("said") is seen as complete and bounded.

An exception to this use of the *Impf.* to express imperfectivity in a past frame is the case where two events co-occur, one complete and the other durative (a type of imperfectivity). In these cases of aspectual contrast the durative action is expressed by a noun clause, commonly with a predicate *Pt.*[57]

wayyiśśaˀ ˁênâw wayyarˀ whinnê šlošâ ˀănåšîm niṣṣåbîm ˁålâw (Gen 18:2)
   "He *lifted* (*Conv. Impf.*) his eyes and *saw* (*Conv. Impf.*) that three men *were standing* (*Pt.*) before him."
wayyimṣåˀehû ˀîš whinnê toˁê baśśådɛ̂ (Gen 37:15)
   "A man *found* (*Conv. Impf.*) him while he *was wandering* (*Pt.*) in the fields."
hemmâ yôrdîm biqṣê håˁîr ûšmûˀel ˀåmar ˀɛl-šåˀûl (1 Sam 9:27)
   "As they *were going down* (*Pt.*) to the edge of the city, Samuel *said* (*Pf.*) to Saul ..."

The predicate *Pt.*, in CBH a tenseless durative form, fits well into this restricted use in the place of the wider-ranging imperfectivity of the *Impf.*

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[56] Note also the literary contrasts between the proper and improper acts of "hearing" and "desire" by Eli, Yahweh, and the wicked sons.
[57] See Driver §§31, 135; GKC §116u; Bergsträsser §13e; Joüon-Muraoka §166c-i; Waltke-O'Connor §37.6.

The counterpart to the past imperfective with *Impf.* is the future perfective with *Pf.* This use is quite rare in CBH, where it goes by the title of "prophetic perfect".[58] The instances where the *Pf.* "takes the place" of the *Impf.* to express perfective aspect in the future, while rare, are clear enough in their perfective nuance. This primarily aspectual use of the *Pf.*, with tense value neutralized, occurs most often in relation to divine actions or their consequences, particularly in poetry, hence the attribute "prophetic". The emphasis on the already complete quality of the action also makes this use appropriate for oaths and threats. Unlike the relative past use of *Pf.* in a future frame, which is contextually indicated by clause structure and temporal adverbs, the perfective *Pf.* in the future is indicated solely by semantic context:

perfective in future:
hen gåwaˁnû ˀåbadnû kullånû ˀåbådnû (Num 17:27)
   "Alas, we *will die* (*Pf.*), we *will perish* (*Pf.*), all of us *will perish* (*Pf.*)!"[59]
kî ˁattâ titten wᵉim-loˀ låqahtî bhåzqâ (1 Sam 2:16)
   "Now give it; if not, I *will take* (*Pf.*) it by force."
hay-yhwh kî-ˀim-rastî ˀahărâw (2 Kgs 5:20)
   "As Yahweh lives, I *will run* (*Pf.*) after him."

Note that in these instances there is no ambiguity concerning an aspectual vs. relative tense interpretation; contextually aspect is the only relevant possibility.

In the examples above where a temporally unexpected *Pf.* takes the place of the *Impf.*, and vice versa, we see the workings of the aspectual system of CBH. As we have seen, there is a complementarity of aspect and tense value in these marginal domains, for which the indications of clause structure, adverbs, and semantic context are crucial in showing the proper sense. The contrast of perfective vs. imperfective obtains in all temporal frames (past, present, and future) by using *Pf.* and *Impf.* in a manner that contrasts with the aspectual force of the other form in a given temporal frame. In this way the CBH system achieves a maximum of semantic contrasts with a minimum of distinctive forms. The predicate *Pt.* also belongs to this system as a tenseless imperfective (durative) form.

In most languages, including CBH, the past temporal frame is the most clearly marked for aspectual contrasts.[60] In CBH the present is also marked for aspectual contrasts, as we have seen above in the discussion of situation. The future, as often is the case, is less clear. The occasional use of the *Pf.* as a future perfective indicates that the *Impf.* is the contrasting imperfective form. Yet one also finds the *Impf.* as future yet not clearly imperfective. In the following example the durative future event is expressed with a *Pt.*, and the intersecting sequence of events expressed with *Impf.* (and *Conv. Pf.*):

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[58]   See recently Klein 1990; also see Driver §14; Joüon-Muraoka §112g; Bergsträsser §6h; Waltke-O'Connor §30.5.1e.
[59]   Note the parallel expression *yåmût*, "will die", in the following verse.
[60]   See Comrie 1976: 71-73, esp. 72: "it may well be a general characteristic of human languages to resort to greater aspectual differentiation in the past than in other tenses."

hinnê ʿôdak mdabbɛrɛt šåm ʿim-hammɛlɛk waʾănî ʾåbôʾ ʾahărayik ûmilleʾtî ʾɛt-dbåråyik (1 Kgs 1:14)

"Then, while you *are* still there *speaking* (*Pt.*) with the king, I *will come* (*Impf.*) in after you and *will confirm* (*Conv. Pf.*) your words."

The future sequence, "will come" and "will confirm", represents a series of events that will interrupt the durative act, "are speaking". This aspectual contrast, with *Pt.* vs. *Impf.* in the future, indicates that the *Impf.* may not have a clear or primary aspectual value in some uses.[61] Where the contrast in the future is with a *Pt.*, the *Impf.* may be used primarily for tense as a future form; where the contrast in the future is with a *Pf.*, the *Impf.* clearly has tense and aspect value as a future imperfective. As ever, the context serves to indicate and to disambiguate the primary semantic values.

Our characterization of the semantic contrasts of *Pf.* and *Impf.*, as illustrated by their marginal uses, may be refined as follows with respect to situation, tense, and aspect. The relative frequency of use for the different values is indicated by *a* (frequent use) and *b-c* (marginal uses). In the discussion above we have indicated the grammatical and contextual conditions for the semantic values of each form.

stative:	*Pf.*	*a.* relative non-future state
		b. perfective state (zero tense)[62]
	Impf.	*a.* relative future state
		b. imperfective state (zero tense)
dynamic:	*Pf.*	*a.* relative past perfective event
		b. perfective event (zero tense)
	Impf.	*a.* relative non-past imperfective event
		b. imperfective event (zero tense)
		c. relative future event (zero aspect)

As in the case of the relative tense system of CBH, the aspectual system begins to break down in LBH and becomes extinct in RH. Beginning in LBH one finds all kinds of imperfectivity expressed by the *Pt.* (with the periphrastic construction of √*hyh* + *Pt.* for past or future imperfectivity) or by adverbs. The subtle dance of relative tense and aspect in CBH, involving the contrasts of *Pf.* (+ *Conv. Impf.*) and *Impf.* (+ *Conv. Pf.*), changes utterly in postclassical Hebrew.

IV. *Mood*

Mood is generally defined as involving the speaker's attitude or opinion toward a proposition.[63] The major contrast in mood is between the indicative (or declarative)

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[61] For this reason Joüon-Muraoka (§113b) regard the future *Impf.* as lacking aspectual value; Waltke-O'Connor (§31.1.2) also regard the future *Impf.* as non-aspectual. As we have seen, the semantics of the future *Impf.* involve both aspect and tense in varying relations.

[62] The future perfective ("prophetic perfect") of stative verbs is found only in poetry: *såpel* (Isa 2:11); *mål'â* (Isa 11:9); *håyyînû* (Ps 126:1); *yimmåleʾ* (Ps 126:2); see Klein 1990.

[63] On mood and modality, see Palmer 1986; Lyons 1977: 791-849.

and the modal, in which the former is unmarked for mood and the latter is marked.[64] Like tense and aspect, mood is a key dimension of the grammaticalization of meaning, but differs functionally in that, as F.R. Palmer notes, "modality... does not relate semantically to the verb alone, or primarily, but to the whole sentence."[65] This feature is of particular significance for Hebrew, since there is in many cases no contrast of verbal form for the semantic contrast of indicative vs. modal.[66] The only verbs in Hebrew formally marked and restricted to modal use are the volitional forms (hereafter *Volits.*),[67] i.e. the cohortative, imperative, and jussive. The primary form used to express most other sorts of modality (including volition) is the *Impf.*, which can only be interpreted as modal by context. In rare instances the *Pf.* is also used modally (see below). Hence mood exists differently in the verbal system than tense or aspect, since its chief contrast (indicative vs. modal) is indicated in most cases by semantic context rather than by form. Part of the reason for the multifunctional mood of the *Impf.* lies in its tense reference as relative future (or non-past). Linguists have observed that future reference is often related to modality: since the future is by definition unknown, reference to the future is often expressed with a non-indicative form. In many languages (including the Indo-European languages) there is a historical relationship between modal forms and the future tense.[68] Hebrew would appear to be a prime example of this permeability between modality and the future.[69]

A key semantic distinction among modal utterances in most languages is that between deontic and epistemic modality.[70] Deontic modality (from Greek *deon*, "that which is binding") involves the speaker's will, as in statements of wish, command, permission, or obligation. These kinds of utterances express the speaker's desire or decision concerning an action. Epistemic modality (from *epistēmē*, "knowledge") involves the speaker's opinion or knowledge about a proposition, as in statements of doubt, belief, or other shades of expectation or opinion. Epistemic utterances relate to the speaker's state of knowledge, rather than to the speaker's will.

In English and other European languages some modal verbs may be used for either epistemic or deontic modality, with the particular sense indicated by context, as in the following:

"You *may* be excused from the table now." (deontic)
"He *may* arrive tomorrow." (epistemic)

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[64] On the indicative as the unmarked member, see Palmer 1986: 14-33, 81-88.

[65] Palmer, 1986: 2.

[66] On this feature in CBH and earlier Semitic, see Huehnergard 1988: 20-22.

[67] Following the terminology of Waltke-O'Connor §34.1; similarly Joüon-Muraoka §114; Bergsträsser §10a.

[68] Lyons 1977: 815; Palmer 1986: 216-18.

[69] This is a prime emphasis of Zuber 1986: 13-15.

[70] See esp. Palmer 1986: 18-20, 51-125. Palmer (102-3) also proposes a third kind, "dynamic modality", which involves the utterances of willingness or ability. This kind of utterance, while clearly modal, is not clearly deontic or epistemic. In Hebrew this would pertain to the modal use of the *Impf.* to express what Waltke-O'Connor call (§31.4.c) the "non-perfective of capability".

One finds a similar multivalence in modal uses of the *Impf.* in CBH:

mikkol ʿeṣ-haggån ʾåkol toʾkel (Gen 2:16)
　　"You *may eat* from every tree of the garden. (deontic)
ʾattɛm lkû qhû låkɛm tɛbɛn maʾǎšɛr timṣåʾû (Exod 5:11)
　　"Go get straw yourselves, wherever you *may find* it." (epistemic)

This multivalence in the modality of the *Impf.* has tended to obscure the distinction between deontic and epistemic modality in descriptions of Hebrew.[71]

The distinction between deontic and epistemic modality in CBH is clearly shown in the difference between the modal use of the *Volits.* and the *Impf.* The *Volits.* are specialized for deontic modality, expressing wishes, commands, and the like, while the *Impf.* may be used for either deontic or epistemic modality. Where the two overlap defines the category of deontic modality; where they diverge defines epistemic modality.

In the margins of the modal system in CBH, there are places where some forms of the verb occur in the place of some others to express various kinds of semantic contrast. Within the field of deontic modality these variations in form indicate contrasts either of aspect (perfective : imperfective) or of reality (real : unreal), while in epistemic modality one finds only the contrast of reality (real : unreal). Let us turn first to the contrasts of aspect, found in the deontic classes of prohibition and wish.

In prohibitions (or negative commands) the constructions with *Juss.* vs. *Impf.* seem to indicate a difference of aspect.[72] The construction *ʾal* + *Juss.* is used for perfective prohibitions, while *loʾ* + *Impf.* is used for imperfective prohibitions.[73] The latter construction is used for situations seen as unbounded by the speaker, as in perpetual commands or legal prohibitions (consistently in apodictic law), while the former is used to prohibit specific, punctual events. Compare, for example, the aspectual difference among the following prohibitions:

ʾal-nåʾ taʿǎbor meʿal ʿabdɛkkå (Gen 18:3)
　　"*Do not pass by* your servant." (perfective prohibition – a specific event)
ʾal-tišlah yådkå ʾɛl-hannaʿar wʾal-taʿaś lô mʾûmå (Gen 22:12)
　　"*Do not lay* your hand on the boy; *do not do* anything to him." (perfective prohibition – a specific event)
loʾ toʾkal mimmɛnnû (Gen 2:17)
　　"*Do not eat* of it." (imperfective prohibition – unbounded duration)

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[71] The tendency in the grammars is to adopt the traditional categories of Greek and Latin grammar.

[72] These constructions and the contrast of *Conv. Impf.* : *Impf.* are the only clear survivals in CBH of the older aspectual contrast between the *yaqtul* perfective and the *yaqtulu* imperfective. In earlier Northwest Semitic (and West or Central Semitic) these forms contrast aspectually in both indicative and in deontic modal use; see Huehnergard 1988: 20-22.

[73] Lambdin (§102) describes the contrast as "immediate, specific commands" vs. "durative, non-specific". Similarly Williams (§396) describes the latter as having "imperfect aspect". Varying descriptions of the contrast are given in GKC §§107o, 109d; Bergsträsser §10m-n; Joüon-Muraoka §113m.

loʾ tirṣåh loʾ tinʾåp loʾ tignob (Exod 20:13-15 = Deut 5:17-19)

"Do not murder. Do not commit adultery. Do not steal." (imperfective prohibition – unbounded duration)

The *ʾal + Juss.* construction is used for a complete and bounded event, with beginning and end in sight, while the *loʾ + Impf.* is used for an unbounded situation, conceived without end. This contrast, like other contrasts in the aspectual system of CBH, disappears in the course of LBH.[74]

The other class of deontic modality in which an aspectual contrast is formally indicated is in the (rare) use of the precative *Pf.* In these uses, clearly found only in poetry, the *Pf.* is used to indicate a perfectivity of wishful expectation, with the event conceived as complete and bounded, hence expressing confidence in its accomplishment. As in the future perfective use of the *Pf.* in the indicative (to which this modal use corresponds), the precative *Pf.* generally describes divine actions. In the following poetic bicola the precative *Pf.* in the second colon acts as an intensifying parallel to the *Imv.* in the first colon, giving a sense of perfectivity to God's act of salvation:[75]

hôšîʿenî mippî ʾaryê
ûmiqqarnê remîm ʿănîtånî (Ps 22:22)

"Save (Imv.) me from the lion's mouth;
Rescue (Pf.) me from the horns of wild bulls."

This deontic modal use of the *Pf.* to express a perfective wish is found in other Semitic languages (Aramaic, Arabic), and is paralleled in non-Semitic languages.[76] The aspectual contrast in this instance is with the other forms used for wishes (*Volits.* and *Impf.*), which are therefore either imperfective or aspectually neutral in this use. If the aspectual contrast evident in the prohibitions (perfective [*ʾal + Juss.*] vs. imperfective [*loʾ + Impf.*]) is compared to this aspectual contrast in positive volition, then we may infer that the *Pf.* is 'more' perfective than the *Volits.* in deontic modality. It may be simpler, however, to regard positive deontic modality as aspectually neutral in the forms other than the *Pf.*, and hence to see a simple opposition (perfective : zero aspect) obtaining for the aspectual contrast of precative *Pf.* : *Impf./Volits.* This issue, pertaining to aspectual contrasts within positive deontic modality, may correspond to the question of the varying prominence of aspect for the *Impf.* in future indicative uses (see above).

The other marginal uses for the *Pf.* within the modal system involve the semantic axis of real vs. unreal.[77] The contrast in degrees of reality, in which the *Pf.* is the

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[74] See, e.g., Qimron 1986: 80-81. The *Juss.* is virtually obsolete in Rabbinic Hebrew; see Segal 1927: 54, 72.

[75] For other possible examples of the precative perfect, see Ewald §223b; Joüon-Muraoka §112k; Waltke-O'Connor §30.5.4d. Driver (§20) and Bergsträsser (§6h) question the certainty of this usage in Hebrew.

[76] See Waltke-O'Connor §30.5.4c; Loprieno 1986: 22.

unreal member and the *Impf.* the real, may best be described as a modal reflex of tense, derived from the temporal contrast (in the dynamic verb) of past vs. non-past. 'Pastness', seen as a property of the *Pf.*, translates into logical distance from (present) reality; as Robert Binnick observes, "because of its ability to distance, to detach the event from the speech-act situation, the past may be used for irrealities".[78] Many languages use this semantic tense-effect to distinguish between real modality (referring to actual or possible events) vs. unreal modality (referring to impossible or unlikely events). In CBH the *Pf.* is used to indicate unreality in both deontic and epistemic modality. For deontic modality this includes wishes and requests. For epistemic modality this includes conditions and some kinds of questions.

In CBH both unreal wishes (deontic) and unreal conditions (epistemic) are indicated by the *Pf.* plus a particle, usually *lû*, occasionally *kimʿat* or *kaʾăšer*.[79] This use of the *Pf.* contrasts with the use of the *Impf.* or *Volits.* (plus particles) in real wishes and real conditions.[80] Examples of unreality in wishes and conditions are:

lû matnû bᵉʾeres misrayim (Num 14:2)

"Would that *we had died* in Egypt." (wish)

lû hahăyitem ʾôtâm loʾ hăragtî ʾetkem (Judg 8:19)

"If you *had let them live*, I *would* not *kill* you." (condition)

kî lûleʾ hitmahmåhnû kî-ʾattâ šabnû zê paʿămåyim (Gen 43:10)

"If we *had* not *delayed*, by now we *would have come back* twice."[81] (condition)

In these cases the wish or proposition is impossible, hence the temporally past form is used for that which is unfulfillable or unreal. Note that it is not the particle *lû* in itself that indicates unreality, for *lû* + *Impf.* or *Volits.* expresses a real (possible) wish.[82] The use of the *Pf.* is integral to the unreal modal construction.

A related use of the *Pf.* as the less vivid (unreal) form in deontic modality occurs in the case of polite requests. In many languages the past form, as the less vivid, is used to mark politeness or deference, as in the following expressions where one

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[77] On real vs. unreal modality, see Palmer 1986: 116-119, 191-95, 210-13; Lyons 1977: 795-96; Binnick 1991: 390-93; and in CBH, GKC §106p; Joüon-Muraoka §§163c, 167k; Waltke-O'Connor §30.5.4b (though the latter confuse the issue with Greek and Latin irrealis).

[78] Binnick 1991: 390; similarly Lyons 1977: 819.

[79] See Driver §§18, 139-40; Joüon-Muraoka §167k; GKC §106p; Waltke-O'Connor §30.5.4a-b; Zuber 1986: 111-13.

[80] However not all real conditions need be considered modal, as may be seen in the ordinary use of the *Pf.* in past real conditions as past perfectives. On the frequent use of indicatives (modally unmarked forms) in real conditions "where the speaker is not committed to the truth of either clause", and on the modal ambiguity of conditional clauses, see Palmer 1986: 28, 189-91 (quote from p. 28). Lyons also observes (1977: 796 n. 4) that in a conditional clause where a speaker is not committed to the truth or falsity of either proposition, "the function of the past-tense marker in the first clause will be temporal rather than modal".

[81] In the use of the negative unreal construction, *lûleʾ* + *Pf.*, the negation of the action specified in the protasis is unreal, while in the apodosis the consequence is unreal.

[82] E.g., Gen 17:18, 30:34.

'backshifts' into the past (or past modal) for politeness: "I would like"; "je voudrais"; "ich möchte". Compare the following requests in English:[83]

"Would you pass the salt?" vs. "Will you pass the salt?"

The contrast in degree of vividness (past modal form vs. non-past form) may account for some instances in CBH where a *Pf.* is used rather than an *Impf.*, as in the following polite requests, framed as real conditions:

kî ˀim-zkartanî ˀittkå kaˀåšer yîtab låk (Gen 40:14)

"If you *would remember* me when all is well with you."

ˀådonåy ˀim-nåˀ måsåˀtî hen bˤênɛkå (Gen 18:3)

"My lords, if I *find* favor in your eyes."[84]

The kinds of contrast, if any, between *Pf.* and *Impf.* in real conditions is contested.[85] In some instances, such as the above polite requests, the semantic axis of real : unreal, correlating with vivid : less vivid, may account for the use of the *Pf.* in this construction.

Elsewhere one occasionally finds the *Pf.* used in real conditions to express a related value in the axis of real : unreal, that of the real but extremely dubious or remote. In the instances below the *Pf.* expresses a degree of remoteness within a real condition (note that the condition is marked by *ˀim*, not *lû*). These cases express what we may call real-remote epistemic modality;[86] viz., a possible but very improbable event from the speaker's perspective.[87]

ˀim-loˀ håbîˀotîw ˀelɛkå whissagtîw lpånɛkå (Gen 43:9)

"If I *were not to bring him back* to you and set him before you."

ˀim-gullahtî wsår mimmɛnnî kohî (Judg 16:17)

"If I *were shaved*, my strength would leave me."

ki ˀim-hikkîtɛm kål-hel kaśdîm hannilhåmîm ˀittkɛm (Jer 37:10)

"Even if you *were to defeat* the whole Chaldean army that is fighting against you."

ˀim ˤåbartå ˀittî whåyitå ˤålay lmaśśåˀ (2 Sam 15:33)

"If you *were to cross over* with me, you would be a burden to me."[88]

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[83] From Palmer 1986: 211.

[84] Note that this is not a question of past tense reference, since Abraham says it on first seeing the strangers.

[85] Lambdin §196 ("the original distinction … has become obscured"); Waltke-O'Connor §30.5.4b ("perfective value even though that value is not obvious"); GKC §159n ("which will be completely fulfilled in the future"); Joüon-Muraoka §167h n. 1 ("quite frequently for the past future [futur passé]").

[86] On the linguistic relationship of real-remote and unreal modality, note Lyons's comment (1977: 819): "Contra-factivity is simply a special case of subjectively modalized remote possibility."

[87] GKC (§159m) notes this use in some conditions, particularly involving imprecations of innocence (as in Ps 7:4-5; Job 31:9) in which "the speaker assumes for a moment as possible and even actual, that which he really rejects as inconceivable".

[88] Lambdin (§196) suggests that there is no distinction in verbal semantics between this passage and Num 32:29: *ˀim-yaˤabrû bnê-gåd ûbnê-rˀûben ˀittkɛm*. Note, however, that the contrast is

Note that in Gen 43:9 the *Pf.* is followed by a *Conv. Pf.* in the protasis, indicating that an *Impf.* is the expected initial form. In these and other cases (see below, 2 Kgs 7:4), the real condition is given a nuance of remoteness by use of the *Pf.*

The other occasional use of the *Pf.* to express real-remote epistemic modality is in questions which (as Driver observes) "express astonishment at what appears to the speaker in the highest degree improbable"[89]:

ʾaḥărê blotî håytâ-llî ʿɛdnâ waʾdonî zåqen (Gen 18:12)
> "After I have grown old, *am I to have* pleasure, when my husband is also old?"

mî millel ləʾabråhåm hênîqâ bånîm śårâ kî-yåladtî ben lizqunâw (Gen 21:7)
> "Who *would have told* Abraham that Sarah *would suckle* children? But I have borne a son to his old age."

mî šålaḥ yådô bimšîaḥ yhwh wniqqâ … yhwh yiggapɛnnû (1 Sam 26:9-10)
> "Who *could lay* his hand on the anointed of Yahweh with impunity? … Yahweh will strike him down."

In each of these instances the proposition is real (possible), however remote (note that in the first and second instances they actually occur). The *Pf.* as the unreal member of the real : unreal contrast is used fruitfully to express real-remote modality in these utterances.

In these marginal classes of modal use – prohibitions; precative *Pf.*; unreal wishes and conditions; polite requests; real-remote conditions and questions – where one form is used in the place of another, we see, more clearly than in common uses, the effects of the complex interrelationships of tense (and tense-effects), aspect, and mood.

From the vantage point of these marginal uses we may characterize the chief contrasts in form and meaning in the modal system as follows:

deontic:	*Pf.*	unreal or polite
		or real + perfectivity
	Impf.	real
		or real + imperfectivity
	Volits.	real
		or real + perfectivity
epistemic:	*Pf.*	unreal or real-remote
	Impf.	real

explicable in terms of the analysis advanced here. In 2 Sam 15:33 ʾim ʿåbartå is used for an extremely unlikely event, since the king is expressly instructing Hushai not to cross over with him. In Num 32:29 ʾim-yaʿabrû is used by Moses for a situation that he expressly urges, that Reuben and Gad cross over the Jordan. The real : unreal axis is evident in this contrast.

89   Driver §19; GKC §106p; Joüon-Muraoka §112j.

V. Conclusions

The "enigma" of the CBH verbal system is a reflection of the fact that various models work passably well when confronted with the majority of sentences in the Hebrew Bible. To consider for example the major grammars written or revised in the early part of this century, GKC (following Ewald) describes CBH as an aspectual system (hence the terms 'Perfect' and 'Imperfect');[90] Joüon describes the system as consisting in various measures of absolute tense and aspect (hence his terms 'Perfect' and 'Future');[91] and Bergsträsser defines the system as one of relative tense,[92] and inveighs against aspectual theories.[93] All three grammars are invaluable, but their methods too often lead to an atomistic compilation of grammatical categories rather than a sustained attempt to pursue the semantic relations of the verbal system as a whole. Hence the common impression that CBH is a pastiche rather than a language.[94] I have tried to show that attention to the marginal uses in the system may help to reveal the semantic axes of the whole.

[90]   GKC §106-107. Other works advocating a primarily aspectual analysis (with various construals of aspect) include Driver 1892; Rundgren 1961; Kustár 1972; Segert 1975; Williams 1976; Jenni 1981; Pardee 1985; Loprieno 1986; Eskhult 1990. Waltke-O'Connor (§29-31) argue that the *Pf.* has perfective aspectual value and that the *Impf.* signifies "either an imperfective situation in past and present time, or a dependent situation", following some conjectures of D. Michel.

[91]   Joüon-Muraoka §111-13; similarly Lambdin §91; Kutscher 1982: 44; Huehnergard 1988: 20-21; Buth 1992: 95-96.

[92]   Bergsträsser §6-7; similarly Kuryłowicz 1972: 84-91, and 1973 (on which see the criticisms of Binnick 1991: 438); Bartelmus 1982: 40-79; Gropp 1991: 52-54. Blau (1993: 86, 217) holds an absolute tense model, but in subordinate clauses allows for "the writer's discretion whether or not to use the tenses relatively" (p. 115); Revell's view (1989:3-4) is similar in allowing for both absolute and relative tense.

[93]   Others who reject the validity of aspectual theory include Zuber 1986: 1-11 (who argues that the semantic contrast of *Pf.* : *Impf.* is indicative : modal-future); Niccacci 1990: 166 (who presents a text-linguistic model of Hebrew clause sequences); Rainey 1990: 408-9 (who maintains the primacy of absolute tense); and McFall 1982: 50-51 (who argues awkwardly against both tense and aspect, concluding that the system remains an enigma). Note Lyons' remarks (1977: 705): "Aspect is, in fact, far more commonly to be found throughout the languages of the world than tense is: there are many languages that do not have tense, but very few, if any, that do not have aspect"; see also Dahl 1985.

[94]   On theories that CBH is a Mischsprache (e.g., H. Bauer, G.R. Driver, and A. Sperber) see the critical appraisals of McFall 1982: 93-151; Waltke-O'Connor §29.3-4; and Halpern 1987: 134-39. Note also E.A. Knauf's claim (1990) that CBH is an artificial "Bildungssprache" manufactured by exilic and postexilic tradants – though he admits that the verbal system is that of pre-exilic Hebrew; against this extreme position note the abundant continuities between pre-exilic inscriptional Hebrew and CBH (see esp. Sarfatti 1982; Young 1993: 103-21, 203-5; and on verbal syntax, Pardee 1978). More cogently, Sáenz-Badillos (1993: 56) considers CBH as "the language of literature and administration"; similarly Sarfatti 1982: 80-81; Young 1993: 103-13 (who notes some distinctions among literary and administrative genres). I would submit that the analysis of CBH above in terms of situation, relative tense, aspect, and mood is pertinent to the other Northwest Semitic languages of the LB and Iron Age, and to other Semitic languages (on Classical Arabic see Comrie 1976: 78-80; 1985: 63-64), but this awaits demonstration on another occasion.

The major semantic dimensions that characterize the CBH verbal system when seen from its margins, and the major distinctions within these, may be outlined as follows. I refer to lexicalization vs. grammaticalization of meaning as indicating the difference of root or stem meanings (lexicalization) vs. verbal inflection and syntactic or contextual implicature (grammaticalization). The symbol → means "entails, consists of".

> Lexicalization of meaning
> 1. *Situation* → stative : dynamic
>   a. dynamic → intransitive : transitive
> 2. Reflexes of situation in derived conjugations (factitive, resultative, frequentative, causative, etc.)
>
> Grammaticalization of meaning
> 1. *Relative tense*
>   a. dynamic → relative past : relative non-past
>   b. stative → relative non-future : relative future
> 2. *Aspect* → perfective : imperfective
> 3. *Mood* → indicative : modal
>   a. modal → epistemic : deontic; real : unreal

Other distinctions and contrasts occur within each of these semantic dimensions, and each dimension intersects and affects the others in significant ways. No simple diagram will do, since language, which is both systemic and instrumental, is not simple.[95] To return to Ibn Janāh, the first to chart CBH comprehensively, grammatical inquiry into Biblical Hebrew is necessarily a Seper Håriqmâ, a study of a complex and intricately patterned garden.[96]

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[95] Cf. Müller's reflections (1986: 379) on the diverse oppositions and semantic dimensions of language as "eine diffuse Einheit".

[96] My thanks to Randy Garr for his sage advice during the growth of this paper. Thanks also to Baruch Halpern and Bill Propp for their astute comments on an earlier version. My gratitude to the graduate students in my 1993 UCLA seminar on Historical Linguistics of Biblical Hebrew for encouraging the initial formulations of this model.

Appendix: Illustrative Passages

For the following prose passages the form and values of the finite verbs and the type of clause structure are identified. Only the leading elements in each clause are reproduced. While not all of the marginal uses of the CBH verb are found in these passages, there is sufficient variety to serve as a sample for the utility of the above model. The sample passages are Gen 2:3-7 and 2 Kgs 7:3-4.

Genesis 2:3-7:

³ *waybårɛk* ꜣ*ĕlohîm*
"God *blessed*"

Conv. Impf.: past perfective + consecution; main sequence

wayqaddeš
"and he *sanctified*"

Conv. Impf.: past perfective + consecution; main sequence

kî bô šåbat
"for on it he *rested*"

Pf.: past perfective; subordinate clause

ꜣ*ăšɛr-båråꜣ* ꜣ*ĕlohîm*
"which God *had created*"

Pf.: relative past perfective (E < R < Y); subordinate clause (R is time of governing clause, verb *šåbat*)

⁴ ꜣ*ellĕ tôldôt*
"These are the generations"

disjunctive nominal clause

byôm ꜥ*ăśôt yhwh* ꜣ*ĕlohîm*
"When Yahweh God created"

temporal clause, anticipatory subordination (see v. 7)

⁵ *wkol śîaḥ haśśådê tɛrɛm yihyĕ*
"before there *was* any grass of the field"

Impf.: relative future imperfective (R < E < S) signaled by *tɛrɛm*; disjunctive clause (R is time of main clause sequence, vv 4b + 7)

*wkål-*ꜥ*eśɛb haśśådê tɛrɛm yiṣmåḥ*
"and before any vegetation of the field *had sprouted*"

Impf.: relative future imperfective (R < E < S) signaled by *tɛrɛm*; parallel disjunctive clause

kî loꜣ himtîr yhwh ꜣ*ĕlohîm*
"for Yahweh God *had* not *sent rain*"

Pf.: relative past perfective (E < R < S); subordinate clause

wꜣ ådåm ꜣ*ayin*
"and there was no human"

nominal clause, parallel subordination

⁶ *wꜣ ed yaꜥ ălê*
"a flow *used to rise*"

Impf.: imperfective; disjunctive clause (tense neutralized by past context in the absence of other indicators)

whišqâ
"and *used to water*"

Conv. Pf.: imperfective + consecution; disjunctive sequence (note semantic value governed by previous *Impf.* in sequence)

⁷ *wayyîṣɛr yhwh* ꜣ*ĕlohîm*
"Yahweh God *formed*"

Conv. Impf.: past perfective + consecution; main sequence, resuming from anticipatory temporal clause in v. 4b

wayyippaḥ
"and he *breathed*"

Conv. Impf.: past perfective + consecution; main sequence

wayhî hå̄ʾå̄då̄m "and the human *became*"	*Conv. Impf.:* past pefective + consecution; main sequence

2 Kings 7:3-4:

[3] *wʾarbåʿâ ʾǎnåšîm håyû* "Now four men *were*"	*Pf.:* past pefective; disjunctive (scene- initial) clause
wayyoʾmrû ʾîš "and each man *said*" *mâ ʾǎnahnû yošbîm* "Why are we sitting"	*Conv. Impf.:* past perfective + consecution; main sequence nominal clause (with *Pt.*)
ʿad-måtnû "until we *die (will have died)?*"	*Pf.:* relative past perfective (S < E < R) signaled by *ʿad*; temporal clause
[4] *ʾim-ʾåmarnû* "If we *were to say*"	*Pf.:* real-remote epistemic modality; protasis of conditional clause
nåbôʾ " '*Let us goʾ* "	*Impf.:* real deontic modality; direct discourse within protasis of conditional clause
wåmatnû "we *would die*"	*Conv. Pf.:* real epistemic modality; apodosis of conditional clause
wʾim-yåšabnû "and if we *were to stay*"	*Pf.:* real-remote epistemic modality; protasis of conditional clause
wåmåtnû "we *would die*"	*Conv. Pf.:* real epistemic modality; apodosis of conditional clause
wʿattâ lkû "Now *go*"	*Imv.:* real deontic modality; imperative sequence
wnipplâ "so that we *may go down*"	*Coh.:* real deontic modality (expressing purpose/result); imperative sequence
ʾim-yhayyunû "If the *let* us *live*"	*Impf.:* real epistemic modality; protasis of conditional clause
nihyɛ̂ "we *will live*"	*Impf.:* real epistemic modality; apodosis of conditional clause
wʾim-ymîtunû "and if they *kill* us"	*Impf.:* real epistemic modality; protasis of conditional clause
wåmåtnû "we *will die*"	*Conv. Pf.:* real epistemic modality; apodosis of conditional clause

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Abstract:

In view of the current impasse in our understanding of the Classical Hebrew verbal system, it is appropriate to reexamine the marginal or less frequent uses of the verb in order to gain perspective on the semantic axes of the whole system. The linguistic categories of situation, relative tense, aspect, and mood, as currently understood in general linguistics, are analytically useful in discerning the major semantic dimensions, and the significant contrasts within these, of the verbal system. Of special importance are the linguistic signals (adverbs, clause structure, etc.) that differentiate among these semantic dimensions in ordinary classical usage. In various ways the classical system breaks down in Late Biblical and Rabbinic Hebrew, often affecting later interpretations of the system. When viewed from its margins, the Classical Hebrew verbal system is seen to be multidimensional yet coherent, involving as its major semantic axes the interrelations of situation, relative tense, aspect, and mood.

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