

The Function of the 'Jussive' and 'Indicative' Imperfect Forms in Biblical Hebrew Prose

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Introduction

The purpose of this study is to describe the semantic and pragmatic function of the short form of the imperfect, known as 'jussive' (e.g., יְהִי) by examining and analyzing the contexts in which it occurs, in contrast to the contexts in which the corresponding 'long' or 'indicative' imperfect forms (e.g., יְהִי־הוּ) occur. Scholars expressed different views about the significance of the formal distinction between the two verbs. The standard view has been that the jussive and the indicative imperfect forms belong to two different categories of verbs. The jussive is a modal or volitive form, used to express the speaker's will (the other modal forms are the imperative and the cohortative), whereas the indicative form is used to present statements.¹ However, there are scholars who argue that, apart from the imperative, modal verbs are not morphologically marked in Hebrew.

Elisha Qimron argues that although jussive and cohortative forms initially had the function of expressing volition, already in early Biblical Hebrew they lost this function, and could be used in either modal (where volition is expressed) or in indicative utterances. Since they no longer carried a specific meaning, their use was governed by position. Jussive and the cohortative occur in initial position, indicative forms occur within the clause. Qimron suggests that in order to determine whether an utterance is 'modal' or 'indicative', one should rely on the syntax and the context, not on the morphology of the verbs. Therefore he argues that an utterance such as יְהִי אֹר (‘Let there be light’, Gen 1:3) must be interpreted as modal, but not because of the short verb form.²

Peter Gentry argues that modality in first and second person verbs is a function of position rather than of morphology. Outside of the imperative, there is no distinct form of the verb, which marks it as projective. Projective modality is indicated by

¹ See Bergsträsser, G.: *Hebräische Grammatik, II, Teil Verbum*. Leipzig: F.C.W. Vogel, 1929, §10; Driver, S. R.: *A Treatise on the Use of the Tenses in Hebrew*. Oxford, 1892, pp. 54-55; Waltke, B.K.; O'Connor, M.: *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990, pp. 564-579; Lambdin, T. O.: *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971, §107; Revell, E.J.: *The System of the Verb in Standard Biblical Prose*. HUCA 60, 1989, pp. 1-37; Kautzsch, E. (ed.): *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar translated by A. E. Cowley*. Oxford, 1910, §108-110.

² Qimron, E.: *A New Approach Toward Interpreting the Imperfect Verbal Forms in Early Hebrew*. Leshonenu 61, 1998, pp. 31-43.

initial position. In his view, the difference between the short and the long prefix forms is that the former is perfective and the latter imperfective in aspect.³

E. Talstra expressed a broadly based approach to modality, and argued that both word order and the order of clauses can serve as markers of modality. Talstra does not distinguish between forms which are marked as modal and indicative imperfect forms. He treats modal and indicative imperfect forms as a single category.⁴

Waltke and O'Connor argue that the class of volitional forms is only the basis for the syntactic study of volitional expressions and that "some descriptions of commands or exhortations involve the perfective conjugation and others the non-perfective conjugation."⁵

This study is based on the assumption that verbal forms that are morphologically distinct carry different meanings and that this formal distinction had some function in Biblical Hebrew. It is highly unlikely that a formal distinction is maintained in a language with no corresponding semantic difference. An examination and analysis of the contexts in which these forms are used may, in most cases, provide some indication for the interpretation of their meaning and function.

The description of the function of the jussive and the indicative forms is based solely on a study of the contexts and positions in which forms that are formally distinguished occur. Jussive forms are distinguishable from indicative forms only in 2m. s. and 3m/f.s forms. Where the indicative imperfect form shows *i* in a final closed syllable (e.g., יִשָּׂא), the jussive shows *e* (יִשֶּׂא); where the indicative imperfect form shows *û* in a final closed syllable (e.g., יִקְרָא), the jussive shows *o* (יִקְרֹא). In ל"י verbs, jussive forms omit the final vowel (e.g., יִעֲשֶׂה - יַעֲשֶׂה). Jussive forms are used as follows: In negative clauses, a formally distinct jussive form occurs with second and third person singular after לֹא , in affirmative clauses, with third person singular. Plural third person forms are not formally distinct, but marked as jussive when preceded by לֹא .⁶ An indicative form is typically negated by לֹא .⁷

The corpus for this study is the prose portions in the *Pentateuch* and *Former Prophets*. The corpus does not include late biblical books, since it has been shown that the language in these books differs from the language found in earlier books. Scholars agree that changes in the use of modal forms occurred in late Biblical Hebrew, and in the Hebrew of Qumran, leading to the abandonment of all but the imperative forms in Mishnaic Hebrew. Revell briefly describes the changes in the verb system that occurred in late Biblical Hebrew.⁸ Poetic material found in the

³ Gentry, P.J.: *The System of the Finite Verb in Classical Biblical Hebrew*. HS 39, 1998, p. 23.

⁴ Talstra, E.: *Text Grammar and Hebrew Bible II: Syntax and Semantics*. BiOr 39, 1982, pp. 30-35.

⁵ Waltke and O'Connor: *An Introduction*. p. 565.

⁶ The justification for considering the negative particle לֹא as marking the following verb as modal is found in the following statistics. Out of 44 occurrences of לֹא + second and third person singular imperfect form, the form is jussive in 41 cases (93%), and indicative in 3 cases (7%), Gen 19:17, 1 Sam 25:25 and 2 Sam 13:12.

⁷ There are only 3 occurrences of a jussive form following לֹא : Gen 24:8, Gen 4:12, and 1 Kgs 2:6.

⁸ See Revell: *The System of Verb*. §§23, 24. See also Qimron: *A New Approach Toward Interpreting the Imperfect*. pp. 38-41; Qimron, E.: *על המורליהו בלשון חכמים*. Leshonenu 55, pp. 89-96.

books studies here is excluded from our study, since prose and poetry have different linguistic features.

1. Modality and Speech-Acts

Discussions of modality by modern linguists can be used to explain the different functions of the 'short' and 'long' forms of the imperfect in Biblical Hebrew. In order to determine the function of a verb form, the utterance in which it occurs, not the verb alone, must be analyzed. J. Austin, in his theory of speech-acts, draws a distinction between 'constative' and 'performative' utterances. Constative utterances are statements and their function is to describe an event, process or state-of-affairs. They can be either true or false. Performative utterances are used to do something, rather than to say that something is or is not the case. They have no truth-value. However, as Austin came to realize, it is not easy to distinguish performative utterances from constative, since to say something is in itself doing something. Constative utterances or statements are therefore just one kind of performatives. Austin calls the act of 'saying something' a 'locutionary act', and the act performed in saying something an 'illocutionary act', e. g., making a promise, giving information or giving orders. The 'illocutionary act' is often equivalent to the 'speech-act'. It has a certain 'force' in saying something. He contrasts both the locutionary and the illocutionary act with a perlocutionary act, which he defines as an act performed by means of saying something (e. g., persuading someone to do something, consoling someone, etc.).⁹ The distinction between locutionary acts and illocutionary acts is very close to the distinction between proposition and modality made by linguists in order to define modality. Modality is described as expressing the speaker's attitude or opinion toward the proposition. Modality in language is concerned with subjective characteristics of an utterance, and is defined as the grammaticalization of speakers' (subjective) attitudes and opinions.¹⁰

The meaning of an utterance necessarily involves the sender's communicative intention and understanding an utterance necessarily involves the receiver's recognition of the sender's communicative intention.¹¹ Therefore, we must determine what speech-act the speaker performs by uttering it, i. e., in what way the speaker is using the utterance: Is he asking or answering a question, making a statement, giving orders or announcing a verdict?

It seems unlikely that a speaker can use any kind of verbal form to perform any kind of speech-act. The use of the 'long' and 'short' imperfect forms in our corpus is determined by the intention of the speaker who uses it. It is, therefore, reasonable to assume that utterances in which the main verb is jussive are used to perform a different speech act from utterances in which the main verb is indicative.¹²

⁹ See Austin, J.L.: *How To Do Things With Words*. London: Oxford University Press, 1962.

¹⁰ See Palmer, F.R.: *Mood and Modality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986, pp. 15-16.

¹¹ Lyons, J.: *Semantics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 733.

¹² See Lyons: *Semantics*. p. 733, where he argues that in all languages sentences are systematically associated, in terms of their phonological, grammatical and lexical structure, with the illocutionary

Clearly, there is no one-to-one correspondence between grammatical structure and illocutionary force. It is well known that the same sentence type may be used to make a statement or issue a command. In English, for example, the sentence "You are coming tomorrow" may be used as a statement or as a command. When a speaker makes a statement he may do so for a variety of reasons, not just to tell the addressee that something is or is not the case. He may use that type of sentence to perform other illocutionary acts, such as utter threats or issue commands. On the other hand, various types of sentences may be used to perform the same act. A request may be expressed by a question ("Can you come tomorrow?"), by a statement ("You are coming tomorrow.") or by an imperative ("Come tomorrow!").

This problem is dealt with by distinguishing between 'direct' and 'indirect' speech acts.¹³ A command may be issued directly by uttering a sentence with an imperative, or indirectly by a statement, asserting that the speaker wants the addressee to perform a certain act, or by a question. The notion of indirect illocutionary acts introduces the possibility that an utterance may have two kinds of illocutionary force, its actual and its incidental illocutionary force.¹⁴ The content of the proposition that is asserted or questioned in the performance of indirect illocutionary acts involves the knowledge, beliefs, will and abilities of the participants. These factors are involved in the two types of modality distinguished by linguists: epistemic and deontic modality.¹⁵ Epistemic Modality (from the Greek word meaning 'knowledge') is a category of modal expressions which are interpreted as showing the status of the speaker's understanding or knowledge. Epistemic modality is expressed in statements that assert or imply that a particular proposition is known or believed. Deontic Modality (from the Greek word meaning 'what is binding') includes the following notions: obligation, permission, prohibition and exemption. Epistemic necessity has to do with the truth of propositions; deontic modality is concerned with the necessity or possibility of acts.

The distinction between deontic and epistemic modality corresponds roughly to Jespersen's two types moods: (1) Containing an element of will and (2) Containing no element of will.¹⁶ Deontic modality involves the speaker's will; epistemic modality involves the speaker's opinion or knowledge about a proposition, not his will.

As will be shown below, both jussive and indicative imperfect occur in utterances that may be interpreted as modal. However, the different meanings of the utterances in which these forms occur may be explained in terms of the two types of modality and the different illocutionary acts performed by the utterances.

acts that may be performed in uttering them. There is no one-to-one correspondence between grammatical structure and illocutionary force, but we cannot employ just any kind of sentence in order to perform any kind of illocutionary act.

¹³ See Palmer, F.R.: *Mood and Modality*. pp. 32-33.

¹⁴ Lyons: *Semantics*. p. 785.

¹⁵ For a discussion of the two types of modality, see Lyons: *Semantics*. pp. 793-831; Palmer: *Mood and Modality*. pp. 51-125.

¹⁶ Jespersen, O.: *The Philosophy of Grammar*. London: Allen and Unwin, 1924, pp. 320-321.

2. Second Person Jussive and Indicative Forms

אל + second person jussive is the standard form to present prohibitions in Biblical Hebrew. The corresponding affirmative form is the imperative. Kaddari describes most uses of אל as performative, expressing prohibition, and the uses of לא as constative, expressing negation. But he notes that in Biblical Hebrew, transition from the performative to the constative has occurred in some cases, as well as transition in the opposite direction. As a result of this shift, some cases of ambiguity arose, where both constative and performative interpretations are equally admissible.¹⁷ As noted above, constative utterances are one kind of performatives, since to say something is in itself doing something. If prohibitions are defined as instructions to refrain from carrying out some course of action, then both אל + second person jussive and לא + second person indicative imperfect may be used to express prohibitions. It is well known that in the Ten Commandments indicative forms are used to instruct the people of Israel what they must or must not do.

Consider, for instance, the contrast between אל-תעש and לא תעשה in the following passages. In Gen 22:12, Abraham is holding the knife in his hand, and is about to slay his son, when God ordered him to stop immediately, using אל-תעש.

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהֵי-יִצְחָק יָדָךְ וְאַל-תַּעַשׂ

He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy, and do not do anything to him."

לא תעשה is used in the Ten Commandments, in Ex 20:3-5

לֹא יִהְיֶה-לְךָ אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים עַל-פְּנֵי: לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה-לְךָ פֶסֶל וְכָל-תְּמוּנָה ... לֹא-תִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לָהֶם
וְלֹא תַעֲבֹדֵם

You shall have no other gods beside me. You shall not make for yourself any idol, or any likeness of anything ... You shall not bow down to them, nor serve them.

Ex 20:10 and Deut 5:12-14

וַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי שַׁבָּת לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לֹא-תַעֲשֶׂה כָל-מְלָאכָה

The seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. You shall not do any work.

The difference between the two forms is not that אל-תעש is modal, and לא תעשה is a statement. In both cases God imposes upon the addressee the obligation to refrain from performing a particular act, he is not describing the performance of that act. The difference between the utterances is in the type of modality they express and their illocutionary force. The utterance in Gen 22:12 clearly and directly expresses the speaker's will. It is more subjective, because the speaker conveys a sense of urgency to perform the act. By uttering it, the speaker performs a direct speech act of giving orders. The utterance expresses deontic modality. The utterances, in which indicative forms are used to introduce laws, do not express urgency in performing the actions. They have the grammatical structure of a statement in order to convey the speaker's knowledge and certainty, not his desire, that the acts will be performed. They express epistemic modality. The direct speech-act performed by these utterances is the act of telling the people what they will do in the future, but indirectly they function as commands. Lyons explains the difference between

¹⁷ Kaddari, M.Z.: *On Deontic Modality in Biblical and post-Biblical Hebrew*. In: *Occident and Orient: A Tribute to the Memory of Alexander Scheiber*. Brill, 1988, p. 252.

commands and statements as follow: "Commands tell the addressee that something is to be made so. Statements tell the addressee that something is so. The difference in illocutionary force between categorical assertions and commands is a function of the difference between 'it is so' and 'so be it'.¹⁸

It is difficult to say that we can make statements about the future, as we are seldom in position to claim knowledge of the future. Human beings can only have beliefs about future events. But when the speaker is God, He is justified in treating the future as known. His utterances may be interpreted as statements. It is, however, better to describe such utterances as predictions rather than statements.

אל + jussive occurs in 1 Sam 9:20, where the speaker is superior, as well,

וְלֹא־תִחַנְּנֹת הָאֲבָרוֹת לְךָ הַיּוֹם שְׁלֹשֶׁת הַיָּמִים אֶל־תִּשֶׂם אֶת־לִבְךָ לָהֶם כִּי נִמְצְאוּ

As for the asses that were lost three days ago, do not set your mind on them, for they have been found.

Samuel expresses his own desire that Saul forget about the asses. He wants him to forget now, since he is about to be anointed as king, and will have more important things to think about.

In Deut 3:26, God expresses his emotions. He is angry and asks Moses to stop speaking to him immediately.

וַיִּתְעַבֵּר יְהוָה בִּי לְמַעַנְכֶם וְלֹא שָׁמַע אֵלַי וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֵלַי רַב־לְךָ אֶל־תּוֹסֵף דַּבֵּר אֵלַי
עוֹד בְּדַבֵּר הַזֶּה:

The Lord was angry with me because of you and would not listen to me. The Lord said to me, "Enough; do not speak to me any more about this matter."

In contrast, לא + indicative forms are used in utterances in which God present laws that must be followed on a regular basis when the people of Israel will arrive in Canaan. The request to act in such contexts is not urgent, personal or emotional.

Ex 23:23-24

כִּי־יֵלֶךְ מַלְאָכִי לְפָנֶיךָ וְהֵבִיאֲךָ אֶל־הָאֲמֹרִי ... וְהִכַּחֲרַתִּיו: לֹא־תִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לְאֱלֹהֵיהֶם

וְלֹא תַעֲבֹדֵם וְלֹא תַעֲשֶׂה כַּמַּעֲשִׂיהֶם כִּי הָרַס הָהָרִסָם וְשָׁבַר תִּשְׁבַּר מִצְבֹּתֵיהֶם:

When my angel will go before you and bring you into the land of the Amorites ... and I will wipe them out. You shall not bow down before their gods or worship them or follow their practices. You must actually demolish them and break their sacred stones to pieces.

As well, in Lev 19:9

וּבִקְצֹרְכֶם אֶת־קְצִיר אֲרָצְכֶם לֹא תִכְלֶה פֶּאת שְׂדֵךְ לְקַצֵּר וּלְקַט קְצִירְךָ לֹא תִלְקַט:

And when you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field, or gather the gleaning of your harvest.

The temporal clauses indicate that the commands must be fulfilled when the Israelites will arrive in Canaan, not at the time of the speech. Which indicates that no urgency is felt or conveyed by the speaker as in the utterances where jussive forms occur.

When an inferior speaker uses אל + jussive, we may not interpret them as commands. In such contexts, אל + jussive forms usually express a suggestion, a plea, a humble request, a cry for help, or a request for a favour. But they consistently

¹⁸ See Lyons: *Semantics*. p. 751.

convey the speaker's will, his sense of urgency and strong necessity, towards the requested action, as in Num 16:15

וַיַּחַר לְמֹשֶׁה מְאֹד וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־יְהוָה אֶל־תִּקַּח אֶל־מִנְחָתָם

Moses became very angry and said to the Lord, "Do not accept their offering."

Moses expresses a personal and emotional request of God, out of anger, as indicated by the expression *וַיַּחַר לְמֹשֶׁה מְאֹד*.

In Josh 10:6, the Gibeonites were attacked by five kings and felt helpless. They sent word to Joshua to come quickly and help them.

אַל־תִּרְךָ יָדְךָ מֵעֲבָדְיָךְ עָלֵינוּ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מְהֵרָה וְהוֹשִׁיעָה לָנוּ וְעֲזֹרְנוּ כִּי נִקְבְּצוּ אֵלֵינוּ כָּל־מְלָכֵי הָאֱמֹרִי יֹשְׁבֵי הַהָרִים:

Do not withdraw your hand from your servants. Come up to us quickly and save us, and help us; for all the Amorite kings that dwell in the mountains have joined forces against us.

Clearly, the speakers wish to convey an emotional request for an immediate action, as explicitly indicated by the adverb *מְהֵרָה*. Joshua interprets this request as an urgent one and he goes up to help them immediately, as reported in verse 7.

The argument that the indicative forms are typically used when the speaker tells the addressee what he must do or what he will do, not what the speaker wants him to do, is strengthened by the fact that they are used in negative responses to questions. In the following passages, an inferior speaker asks a superior whether to act or not. The negative response is given by *לֹא* + indicative form.

2 Kgs 6:21-22

וַיֹּאמֶר מֶלֶךְ־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל־אֵלִישָׁע פְּרֹאֲחוּ אוֹתָם הָאֶבֶה אֶבֶה אָבִי:

וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא תִכֶּה הָאִשָּׁר שְׁבִית בְּחַרְבְּךָ וּבְקִשְׁתְּךָ אֶתְּהָ מִכָּה

When the King of Israel saw them, he asked Elisha, "Shall I smite them, my father? Shall I smite them?" And he (Elisha) answered, "Do not smite them. Would you smite men whom you have captured with your own sword or bow?"

2 Sam 5:23

וַיִּשְׁאַל דָּוִד בַּיהוָה וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא תֵעָלֶה

And David inquired of the Lord, and he answered, "Do not go up."

The use of *לֹא* + indicative form reflects the fact that the speaker is not emotionally involved in the action. He did not initiate the request, and does not personally feel the urgency of the situation.¹⁹

Since utterances with *לֹא* + indicative imperfect convey the speaker's certainty or knowledge that the act will be performed, they are typically used by superior speakers. In the rare cases, where inferior speakers use such forms, they have a similar function. They convey the speaker's determination and belief that the addressee must not act, and indirectly they present a request of the addressee, as in 2 Sam 21:17

אָז נִשְׁבְּעוּ אַנְשֵׁי־דָוִד לוֹ לֵאמֹר לֹא־חֲצִיא עוֹר אֶתְנוּ לְמִלְחָמָה וְלֹא תִכְבֶּה אֶת־נֵר יִשְׂרָאֵל:

Then David's men swore to him, saying, "Do not go out to battle with us any more, and you will not quench the lamp of Israel."

¹⁹ See also 2 Kgs 2:16.

לֹא תִצֵא and לֹא תִכְבֶּה have the same form, and only the English usage requires different translation. In Hebrew they both convey 'you will not'. Similarly in 2 Sam 18:2-3

וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶל־הָעָם יֵצֵא אִצְּךָ נִסְ-אֲנִי עִמָּכֶם: וַיֹּאמֶר הָעָם לֹא תִצֵּא

And the king said to the people, "I will surely go out with you also." But the people said, "You must not (will not) go out."

A close examination of 1 Kgs 3:26-27, where both indicative and modal forms occur, demonstrates the difference in meaning between utterances in which jussive forms are used and utterances in which indicative forms are used. In verse 26a,b the woman whose son was going to be killed expresses a request not to kill him, אֶל־תְּמִיתְהוּ (לֹא marked the verb as jussive),

וַתֹּאמֶר הָאִשָּׁה אֲשֶׁר־בָּנָה הָחַי אֶל־הַמֶּלֶךְ כִּי־נִכְמְרוּ רַחֲמֶיךָ עַל־בְּנֵהּ וַתֹּאמֶר
כִּי אֲדֹנָי תִּגְדֹּלֶה אֶת־הַיֶּלֶד הָחַי וְהָמַת אֶל־תְּמִיתְהוּ

The woman whose son was alive spoke to the King, for she was filled with compassion for her son, and said to him, "Please, my lord, give her the living baby! Don't kill him!"

In verse 27 the King orders his servants not to kill the boy, using לֹא + indicative (לֹא תְמִיתְהוּ).

וַיַּעַן הַמֶּלֶךְ וַיֹּאמֶר תִּגְדֹּלֶה אֶת־הַיֶּלֶד הָחַי וְהָמַת לֹא תְמִיתְהוּ הִיא אִמּוֹ:

The King replied and said, "Give her the living baby. And do not kill him. She is his mother."

The use of different verbal forms reflects the difference in the speaker's attitude and perception of the situation. The utterances have different illocutionary force, they are used to perform different speech-acts. The mother's utterance is a humble, personal and emotional request in which she expresses her strong will. The King's utterance is used to announce a verdict. It is a command, a permanent ruling of a judge. Indirectly it is used to express the king's will, but this is not the primary function of the utterance.

3. Third Person Jussive and Indicative Forms

3.1 לֹא + Third Person Jussive Forms

לֹא followed by a third person jussive, and לֹא followed by a third person indicative form demonstrate the same semantic and pragmatic difference as the second person forms. The jussive form typically occurs in contexts where the speaker expresses his desire or hope that an action will not be performed, whereas the indicative forms occur in contexts where the speaker expresses his certainty or knowledge that an action will not be performed.

לֹא + third person jussive may be used by a superior speaker to issue commands, as in Ex 16:19.

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֲלֵהֶם אִישׁ אֶל־יֹתֵרוֹ מִמָּוֶנִי עַד־בֹּקֶר:

Moses said to them, "No one shall leave of it till the morning."

Third person, not the second person form, is used here because the command does not directly address a particular person. The subject is impersonal.²⁰ אל + third person jussive may be used by an inferior speaker to request the addressee not to perform a certain action. Negative requests presented in this manner are usually addressed to a king and express deference towards the addressee. In Ex 8:25 Moses addresses Pharaoh, asking him not to act deceitfully.

רַק אֶל־יִסֹף פָּרַעֲהַ הַחֵל לְבַלְתִּי שַׁלַּח אֶת־הָעָם לְזִבְחַ לַיהוָה:

But let not Pharaoh deal deceitfully any more by not letting the people go to sacrifice to the Lord.

In 1 Sam 22:15, Ahimelech is speaking to King Saul, referring to the King's accusation of conspiracy (in v. 13).

אֶל־יִשֶׁם הַמֶּלֶךְ בְּעִבְדוֹ הָרַב בְּכָל־בַּיִת אָבִי כִּי לֹא־יָרַע עַבְדְּךָ בְּכָל־זֹאת הָרַב קִטָּן אוֹ גְדוֹל:

Let not the King ascribe anything to his servant or any of my father's family; for your servant knows nothing of all this.²¹

אל + third person jussive is also used when the subject of the jussive is a third person, but the negative request is directed to the addressee. The action presented by the jussive is to be carried out by a third person, but the addressee is involved in the action by allowing it to occur. In Josh 7:3, for example, the action is to be taken by the people, but the speakers are asking Joshua (the addressee), or suggesting not to send all the people.

וַיָּשְׁבוּ אֶל־יְהוֹשֻׁעַ וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיו אֱלֹהֵי כְּל־הָעָם כְּאַלְפִים אִישׁ אוֹ כְּשָׁלֹשׁ אֲלָפִים אִישׁ יֵעָלוּ וַיִּכּוּ אֶת־הָעַי אֶל־תִּינֶע־שָׁמָּה אֶת־כָּל־הָעָם כִּי מְעַט הֵמָּה:

They returned to Joshua and said to him, "Let not all the people go up. Two or three thousand men will go up and smite Ai. And do not weary all the people to go there; for they are few."

This use of אל + third person jussive is often found in the phrase אל־יִחַר אַפְּךָ 'let not your anger burn', a phrase used typically by an inferior speaker to avert the anger of a superior.

In all the passages quoted above (in 3.1), the speaker expresses his will that the addressee refrain from performing a particular act. He is not describing future events. The nuances of meaning that the utterances have vary according to the circumstances and the status of the speaker, but in all of them, the speaker's will is clearly expressed.

3.2 לא + Third Person Indicative Forms

לא + third person imperfect forms, like לא + second person imperfect, occur often in contexts where legislation is presented to the Israelites. In such contexts, there is no urgency to carry out the action, as it is continually valid and not necessarily immediate. The speaker is not presenting a personal or emotional request. In Ex 20:3, quoted above, God says, לֹא יִהְיֶה־לְךָ אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים עַל־פְּנֵי. In this utterance, God is telling the people that "it is so" not "so be it". It has a force of a permanently valid

²⁰ See also 2 Kgs 23:18.

²¹ See also 2 Sam 13:33 and 2 Sam 19:20.

command. It conveys God's knowledge that this is what will happen. As well, in Deut 18:1-2

לֹא־יִהְיֶה לַכֹּהֲנִים הַלְוִיִּים כֹּל־שֶׁבֶט לְוֵי חֶלֶק וְנַחֲלָה עִם־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁי יְהוָה
וְנַחֲלָתוּ יַאֲכֻלֹּן:
וְנַחֲלָה לֹא־יִהְיֶה־לָּו בְּקָרֵב אָחִיו

The priests, who are Levites, the whole tribe of Levi, are to have no part or inheritance with Israel. They shall eat the offerings made to the Lord by fire and his dues. They shall have no inheritance among their brothers.

In many cases the laws refer to a hypothetical situation, as in Lev 5:11. Chapter 5 describes what a person must or must not do in different hypothetical situations, which may or may not be relevant to the addressees. It begins with "If a person sins..." or "if a person touches..." etc. In verse 11 God tells Moses how to instruct the Israelites regarding the offerings.

וְאִם־לֹא תִשְׂיֵן יָדוֹ לְשִׁתֵּי תְרִים אוֹ לְשֵׁנֵי בְּנֵי־יוֹנָה וְהֵבִיא אֶת־קָרְבָּנוֹ אֲשֶׁר חָטָא
עֲשִׂיתָ הָאֶפֶה סֹלֶת לַחֲטָאתָ לֹא־יִשֵּׂם עָלֶיהָ שָׁמֶן וְלֹא־יִתֵּן עָלֶיהָ לֶבְנָה

If he cannot afford two doves or two young pigeons, he is to bring as an offering for his sin a tenth of an ephah of fine flour for a sin offering. He must not put oil or incense on it...

The context refers to a future situation, and the subject of the imperfect form is any person of the Israelites. No reference is made to a particular person.

In contrast to the use of לֹא־יִשֵּׂם here, אֶל־יִשֵּׂם in 1 Sam 22:15, quoted above, and in 2 Sam 13:33 express requests that are directed to the addressee, the speaker is emotionally involved, the reference is to the present, and to an actual situation.

Since indicative forms convey the speaker's knowledge and certainty, it is used to express promises. Clearly, when making a promise the speaker wants to convey his certainty, and his commitment, not just the possibility or desire that an occurrence will take place. In Gen 9:11 God promises:

וְהִקְמַתִּי אֶת־בְּרִיתִי אִתְּכֶם וְלֹא־יִכָּרֵת כֹּל־בָּשָׂר עוֹד מִמֵּי הַמַּבּוּל וְלֹא־יִהְיֶה עוֹד מַבּוּל
לְשַׁחַת הָאָרֶץ:

I will establish my covenant with you: Never again will all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood, and never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth.

In Gen 23:6, as well, בְּנֵי־חַת promise:

אִישׁ מִמֶּנּוּ אֶת־קִבְרוֹ לֹא־יִכְלֶה מִמֶּדָּה מִקְבַּר מְתֵדָּה:
None of us will withhold from you his tomb for burying your dead.

Compare the use of the indicative form here following ... אִישׁ לֹא, where the speakers express a commitment, and the jussive form following ... אִישׁ אֵל in Ex 16:19, quoted above, where Moses expresses a command.

3.3 Third Person Jussive Forms

In affirmative sentences, third person jussive forms are typically used to express the speaker's desire or wish that a third party act, or that an event will take place. When used by a superior speaker they have the force of a command, as in Gen 1:3.

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי אוֹר וַיְהִי־אוֹר:

And God said: "Let there be light", and there was light.

Second person form cannot be used, because the command refers to the light, which cannot be addressed directly.²²

In Judg 7:3 and Deut 20:5-8, as well, jussive forms are used to express commands.

Judg 7:3

מִי־וְרָא וְחָרַד יָשָׁב וַיִּצְפֹּר מִהָר הַגִּלְעָד

Anyone who is fearful and afraid, let him return and depart from Mount Gilead.

Deut 20:5-8

מִי־הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר בָּנָה בַּיַּת־חֲדָשׁ וְלֹא חֲנָכוֹ יֵלֶךְ וַיָּשָׁב לְבֵיתוֹ ... וּמִי־הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר־נָטַע כֶּרֶם וְלֹא חָלְלוֹ יֵלֶךְ וַיָּשָׁב לְבֵיתוֹ

Whoever has built a new house and has not dedicated it, let him go and return to his house...
And whoever has planted a vineyard and has not yet eaten of it, let him go and return to his house.

In situations where the speaker does not have the power or the ability to impose his desire upon the doer of the action, the speaker's desire must be interpreted as a wish. The speaker cannot assume that the person or entity that is requested to act will carry out the action. He can only wish and hope that it would indeed occur, as in 1 Kgs 8:57,

יְהִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ עִמָּנוּ כַּאֲשֶׁר הָיָה עִם־אֲבוֹתֵינוּ אֶל־יַעֲקֹב וְאֶל־יִשְׁשָׁנֻוּ:

May the Lord our God be with us as he was with our fathers; may he never leave us nor forsake us.

As well, in Gen 30:24,

וַתִּקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמוֹ יוֹסֵף לֵאמֹר יוֹסֵף יְהוָה לִי בֶן אֲחֵר:

She named him Joseph, saying, "May the Lord add to me another son."

Third person jussives are also used when the speaker expresses a wish that an occurrence will take place, but he is not requesting any particular person or entity to carry out his wish.²³ Such expressions are: 'יהי לך' 'May you have'²⁴, 'יהי יהוה אליהך' 'May the Lord your God be blessed'²⁵, and 'יחי המלך' 'Long live the king'.²⁶

3.4 Third Person Indicative Forms

In contrast to the passages where jussive forms are used, third person indicative forms are typically used in utterances where the speaker is committed to the truth of the proposition, and presents it as an occurrence, which, in his opinion, will certainly take place in the future. The addressee does not perceive such utterance as a request,

²² Lyons argues that utterances such as "Let there be light" are traditionally described as a third person imperative, but their illocutionary force is of demands. Demands are like commands and requests in that they are inherently restricted to the future tense. Demands, however, are not necessarily addressed to those upon whom the obligation of fulfillment is imposed. See Lyons: *Semantics*. p. 751.

²³ Jussive forms are used to express wishes with reference to the future. Wishes with regard to the past are expressed lexically, by words such as מִי־יִתֵּן (as in Ex 16:3) or לוֹ (as in Num 14:2; 20:3).

²⁴ Gen 33:9 and 2 Kgs 2:10.

²⁵ 1 Kgs 10:9.

²⁶ 1 Sam 10:24; 2 Sam 16:16; 1 Kgs 1:25, 31, 34, 39; 2 Kgs 11:12.

or as the speaker's desire or wish. It is understood as a prediction or a statement about a future occurrence. The difference in usage is related to the speaker's belief and attitude towards the content of his utterance. Jussive forms, as described above, have a volitional force, and they occur where the speaker expresses his desire or wish with reference to the future, but with no knowledge or certainty regarding the outcome of his utterance. This argument supports a claim made by J. Joosten that the long form of the prefix conjugation (*yiqtol*) basically expresses non-volitive modality. In his view, *yiqtol* is part of the modal system, but within this system, it is opposed to forms expressing volition: the jussive, imperative and cohortative.²⁷ In Gen 18:18, God expresses a promise or a commitment.

וְאָבְרָהָם הָיָה יְהוָה לְגוֹי גָדוֹל וְעָצוּם וְנִבְרָכְךָ בּוֹ כָּל גּוֹי הָאָרֶץ:

Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation and all nations of the earth will be blessed through him.

The imperfect indicative form is strengthened by the preceding infinitive absolute, which never precedes a jussive form. A promise or a statement, not a wish, is also expressed in Gen 1:29.

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים הִנֵּה נָתַחֲתִי לָכֶם אֶת־כָּל־עֵשֶׂב זֶרַע זֶרַע ... וְאֶת־כָּל־הָעֵץ ... לָכֶם יְהוָה לְאֹכְלָהּ:

God said, "Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed . . . and every tree . . . they will be yours for food."

An indicative form is used in Gen 28:20-2, where Jacob makes a vow and promises,

אִם־יְהִי־הוּא אֱלֹהִים עִמָּדִי ... יְהוָה יְהוָה לִי לֵאלֹהִים: וְהָאֶבֶן הַזֹּאת אֲשֶׁר־שָׁמַחַתִּי מִצִּבְחָה יְהוָה בַּיִת אֱלֹהִים

If God will be with me . . . then the lord will be my God. And this stone which I have set up as a pillar will be God's house.

In Gen 29:34, Leah expresses her certainty that her husband will become attached to her. She even introduces the reason for her conviction: The fact she gave birth to three sons.

וַתֵּהָר עוֹד וַתֵּלֶד בֵּן וַתֹּאמֶר עֵתָה הִפַּעַם יִלְוֶה אִישִׁי אֵלַי כִּי־יִלְדַתִּי לוֹ שְׁלֹשָׁה בָנִים

She (Leah) conceived, and when she gave birth to a son, she said, "Now this time my husband will become attached to me, because I have borne him three sons."

In contrast, in Gen 30:24, quoted above, Rachel said אַחַר לִי בֵן אַחַר יְהוָה לִי בֵן אַחַר using a jussive form, since she can only wish for that happen.

In Gen 22:8, following Isaac's question, "Where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" Abraham wants to assure Isaac, and to express his confidence in God, saying,

אֱלֹהִים יִרְאֶה־לוֹ הַשֶּׁה לְעֹלָה בְנִי

God will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.

Clearly, Abraham wants Isaac to believe that this is certainly going to happen, not that Abraham is expressing a wish. In making a promise the speaker assumes that the utterance is interpreted as the undertaking of an obligation.

²⁷ Joosten, J.: *The Long Form of the Prefix Conjugation Referring to the Past in Biblical Hebrew Prose*. HebStud 40, 1999, p. 15-16.

Summary

The fact that jussive and indicative forms of the imperfect may be used to perform the same speech act does not imply that they have the same meaning. Although both forms may be used to express commands, the contexts in which they occur indicate that in Biblical Hebrew they had different meanings. Jussive forms characteristically occur in interpersonal discourse, whereas the indicative forms occur more often in contexts where laws and regulations are presented. Jussive forms typically express personal and urgent requests. Indicative forms convey the speaker's commitment toward the content of the sentence, his knowledge and certainty with regard to the performance of the action, and indirectly they may express the speaker's will. Indicative forms convey nuances of meanings that are close to predictions and statements.

The difference between utterances, in which these forms occur, is close to the distinction between deontic and epistemic modality. Jussive forms are typically used for expressing deontic modality (wishes, commands and other expressions of volition). The indicative forms, although they may be used for either deontic or epistemic modality, are typically used for epistemic modality.

Abstract:

In Biblical Hebrew there are two distinct imperfect forms of the 2m.s. and 3m./f.s: the short form, known as 'jussive' and the 'long' or 'indicative' imperfect form. In order to determine the semantic and pragmatic functions of these forms, this study examines and analyses the contexts in which they occur within a modern theoretical linguistic framework.

This study is based on the assumption that morphologically distinct verbal forms carry different meanings, and that it is unlikely that a speaker can use any kind of verbal form to perform any kind of speech-act.

Although both jussive and indicative forms may be used to express commands, the contexts in which they occur indicate that in Biblical Hebrew they had different functions. Jussive forms characteristically occur in interpersonal discourse. They typically express deontic modality: personal and urgent requests or commands, wishes and other expressions of volition. Indicative forms occur more often in contexts where laws and regulations are presented. They convey nuances of meanings that are close to predictions and statements. Although they may be used for either deontic or epistemic modality, indicative forms are typically used for epistemic modality.

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