

## Stability and change: the case of habitual expressions in Biblical Hebrew

**THE ISSUE AND CLAIM.** In this paper, we focus on the expression of habituality, seemingly stemming from verbal forms, in two distinct time periods in Biblical Hebrew (BH). We show that despite changes in the constitution of the verbal system over time, the expression of habituality did not alter. Concretely, in both observed systems, all verbal forms may express habituality, and there is no specific dedicated form for that matter (details below). These findings strengthen Dahl's (1985, 1995) observation that forms dedicated exclusively to the expression of habituality are quite rare (but see Filip 2009, 2015). This state of affairs concords with the view that habituality should not be subsumed under tense/aspect (Filip & Carlson 1997, Filip 2009, 2015, Boneh & Doron 2010, 2013), but rather that it is a category in its own right, namely a covert quantificational adverbial operator (cf. e.g. Krifka *et al.* 1995; Boneh & Doron 2010, 2013), whose semantic stability presumably depends on its covertness. Crucially, independent evidence for such an operator comes from e.g. the way indefinite singular NPs scopally pattern in habitual sentences (Rimell 2004, Vogeleeer 2012, Boneh & Doron 2010, 2013). We will therefore advance **a methodological claim that a diachronic study can be useful to confirm a synchronic semantic analysis.**

**BACKGROUND.** The verbal system of Biblical Hebrew is notoriously difficult to define in terms of the exact constitution of its Tense, Aspect and Mood/Modality properties (among many others Joosten 2002, Cook 2012 for recent surveys of the Biblical Hebrew temporal system). Here, we adhere to the view that the system is organized around the aspectual and modal axes, and that tense is secondary (see Givon 1982, Hatav 2014, Sofer 2015).<sup>1</sup> *yiqṭōl*, *qāṭal* and *qōṭēl* share the feature of being non-perfective, in the sense that neither is clearly dedicated to the expression of perfectivity, but the first two can give rise to perfective meanings, whereas *qōṭēl* is only imperfective, with some progressive-like properties (cf. Altshuler's 2014 understanding of a partitive (im)perfective aspect; for an analysis of *qōṭēl* see Boneh *to appear*). The *w*-forms *wəqāṭal* and *wāyiqṭōl*, which are widely considered to be sequential, namely appearing mostly in narrative contexts (e.g. Driver 1892, Gesenius 1910, Hatav, 1997, 2004), give rise to perfective aspect, and it seems that this stands in correlation with their prevalent narrative uses (Cohen 2011, Altshuler 2012). The two differ as to their modality, as do *yiqṭōl* and *qāṭal*.

	<i>perfective</i>	<i>imperfective</i>	<i>undefined</i>
<i>modal</i>	<i>wəqāṭal</i>		<i>yiqṭōl</i>
<i>non-modal</i>	<i>wāyiqṭōl</i>		<i>qāṭal</i>
<i>undefined</i>		<i>qōṭēl</i>	

**Table 1.** The verb system of Classic Biblical Hebrew (synthetic forms)

Later books see the decline in the use of the narrative *w*-forms, starting with the disappearance of the form *wəqāṭal* (Cohen 2013). By the time of Tannaitic Hebrew (from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE), the *w*- forms ceased to be part of the verbal system (Bar-Asher Siegal *in press*), and they did not integrate the verbal system of the revived Modern Hebrew (Boneh 2013, 2016). Table 1 describes the system of classical BH (circ. 8<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> century BCE). In the table, the *w*-forms appear in lighter colors according to the order of their later disappearance from the system (the lighter the form, the earlier it disappeared).

**PATTERNS OF HABITUALITY.** The surveyed corpus contains four books: *Genesis*, *Kings I*, *Ezra & Nehemiah*, *Esther*. The first two belong to Classical BH (circ. 8<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> century BCE); the latter belong to Late BH, dating to the Persian Period (6<sup>th</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C.E). Despite uncertainty as to the precise dating, the two periods present significant linguistic differences

<sup>1</sup> Because of the debatable nature of the BH verbal forms and the shifts in the verbal system discussed in this paper, we refrain from referring to the form according to a semantic-like label, such as e.g. *imperfective*, *modal*. We follow here the convention of describing and naming the BH verb form according to its morphological constitution, where the letter *q*, *t*, *l* serve as place holders for the lexical root inserted into each of the verbal patterns.

enough to be considered distinct (Hornkohler 2013, Hurvitz 1998, Hurvitz 2013). The findings are summarized in Table 2. Centrally, the following facts emerging from the table that span both periods will be exemplified and discussed in the talk:

**A.** There are no dedicated habitual forms in Biblical Hebrew:

**A1.** All verbal forms are attested to some extent or other, including perfective habituals, exemplified here with the perfective form *wāyiqṭōl*:

- (1) *ha-lō hugaḏ la-'adōni ēṭ ṣṣer 'ašīṭī bə-hāroḡ 'izebel ēṭ nəbī'ēy yhw h wa-'aḥbi mi-nəbī'ēy yhw mē'ā iṣ ḥāmišīm ḥāmišīm iṣ bam-m 'ārā wā-'aḳalkālēm<sub>wāyiqṭōl</sub> leḥem wa-māyim.*

Was it not told my lord what I did when Jezebel slew the prophets of the Lord, how I hid an hundred men of the Lord's prophets by fifty in a cave, and **fed** them with bread and water? (1Kings 18: 13)<sup>2</sup>

In this example, Obadiah relates to Elijah that he hid a hundred prophets and then habitually nourished them, during the period they were in hiding: a delimited habit.

**A2.** The periphrastic form *hāyā qōṭēl* is never attested with episodic occurrences (Doron 2006, Sofer 2015). One may wonder then, whether *hāyā qōṭēl* is a dedicated habitual form, akin to *used to* in English (Comrie 1976). But the fact that this form appears with positional verbs and thus gives rise to a non-recurring occurrence, suggests otherwise.

- (2) *way-yiwā 'ēṣ ha-meleḳ rəḥab 'ām ēṭ ha-zqēnīm ṣṣer hāyū 'ōmḏīm<sub>hāyā qōṭēl</sub> ēṭ pnēy šlōmō 'aḥīw bi-həyōṭo ḥay lēmōr 'ēḳ 'atem nō 'āšīm lēhāšīḥ ēṭ hā-'ām ha-ze dāḥār*

And king Rehoboam consulted with the old men, that **stood** before Solomon his father while he yet lived, and said, How do ye advise that I may answer this people? (1Kings 12: 6)

This example can be very understood as conveying a static non-iterative reading. Therefore, this form is more general, and in fact expresses stativity, of which habituality as a particular case (cf. Katz 2003). See Binnick (2005), (2006) and Boneh & Doron (2010), (2013) for similar view on English *used to* and the Modern Hebrew cognate of *hāyā qōṭēl*, respectively.

**B.** Despite the availability of perfective forms (1), clearly imperfective forms are much more widely attested than any other. This concurs with the prevalent views in the literature on the grammatical encoding of habituality, attributing it to imperfective forms on the account of their assumed intertwined aspectual and modal properties (Comrie 1976, Bonomi 1997, Lenci & Bertinetto 2000, Ferreira 2005, a.o.). Interestingly, in both time periods, the imperfective-modal forms are the most prevalent: *yiqṭōl* in the early books (Gesenius 1910: 315, Joosten 2012, Hatav, 1997, 2004, 2014) and *qōṭēl* in the later ones. Thus, despite the change in the verbal systems due, among other things, to the gradual disappearance of the *w*-form (e.g. Boneh *to appear*), imperfective forms are always the most frequent ones, irrespective of the actual imperfective form in a given verbal system.

	Early books		Late books	
<i>yiqṭōl</i>	32	42%	7	12%
<i>qōṭēl</i>	21	27%	29	51%
<i>wəqāṭal</i>	16	21%	0	0%
<i>hāyā qōṭēl</i>	5	6%	3	5%
<i>wayaḥi qōṭēl</i>	1	1.3%	3	5%
<i>qāṭal</i>	1	1.3%	5	9%
<i>wāyiqṭōl</i>	1	1.3%	10	18%
<b>Total</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 2.** Distribution of habitual forms early and late books

**IN CONCLUSION.** We portray a picture that confirms a Q-adverbial status to the covert operator giving rise to habituality and explain how it interacts with the verbal forms, being attached around the AspP projection (cf. Boneh & Doron 2010, 2013, Sofer 2015), all this based on the stable patterning of habitual expressions across verbal systems.

<sup>2</sup> English translations: King James Version.

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