TOWARDS A COMPLEX ANALYSIS OF WAYIHÎ + T CONSTRUCTIONS IN BIBLICAL HEBREW

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This study analyses the complex behavioral profile of Biblical Hebrew constructions that are formally characterized by the schematic sequence: wayhi + temporal expression (T) + a wayyiqtol or qatal clause within the corpus of Genesis – 2 Chronicles. More specifically, this schema entails the following construction types: 1) wayhi + T + wayyiqtol, 2) wayhi + T + (Y) X + qatal, and 3) wayhi + T + qatal. In analyzing these constructions, this study utilizes a framework known as Construction Grammar, in addition to other complementary frameworks that fall under the more general rubric of Cognitive Linguistics. The constructions are analyzed according to the following parameters: the formal and semantic profile of the temporal adjunct employed; the discourse pragmatic function and distribution in discourse; and the TAM semantics of the wayyiqtol and qatal verb forms. This empirical analysis reveals that, while sharing a prototypical discourse function, these constructions differ with respect to their distribution in discourse. Moreover, this study shows that the choice to use one construction over another is motivated by the simultaneous interplay of several factors, among which the most relevant are: the morpho-syntactic and semantic properties of the temporal adjuncts; the discourse pragmatic profile of each construction type; the TAM properties of the verb; and the syntactic profile of the wayyiqtol and qatal clauses. Overall, the behavior of the wayhi + T constructions epitomizes the complexity of Biblical Hebrew, in particular, the fuzziness of grammatical categories, their multilevel interconnectivity, and dynamics.

Keywords: Semitic languages, Biblical Hebrew, construction grammar, grammaticalization, discourse-pragmatics, semantics
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1. Introduction

This paper investigates constructions in which a wayihî + temporal expression precedes a wayyiqtol or qatal clause in Biblical Hebrew. More specifically, we aim to provide a grammatical profile of three related but distinct construction types, represented in Figure 1 below, where “T” represents a “temporal adjunct,” and “X” represents a preverbal particle, negator, or constituent.

Figure 1: wayihî + T constructions in BH

Each of the schematic formulations in Figure 1 is a linguistic construction, as defined by the Cognitive Linguistic framework known as Construction Grammar. In broad terms, constructions are conventional form-function (or meaning) pairings that occur at varying levels of complexity and abstraction.\(^1\) Simply put, form and function are inseparable within human linguistic systems. By implication, all linguistic objects (morphological units, words, phrases, morphemes, etc.) are part of a larger constructional system.

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\(^1\) The present study represents a piece of a larger research project in which we thoroughly analyze three additional temporal constructions without wayihî, namely T + X + qatal; T + wayyiqtol; and T + qatal. Due to constraints on space, however, here we restrict our focus to the wayihî + T constructions referred to in Figure 1. The data related to these three remaining constructions will be introduced only when necessary for the discussion of the wayihî + T constructions. Our corpus spans from Genesis to 2 Kings. Additionally, due to a smaller number of cases, the analysis of the wayihî-2 and wayihî-3 constructions was expanded to 2 Chron such that systemic generalizations could be made. We are fully aware that BH exhibits diachronic and dialectal variations. However, as is customary in various linguistic studies of this language, the Biblical corpus is treated holistically as if BH were a unified system.

clauses, sentences, etc.) are constructions, and inversely, a language is fundamentally the inventory of its constructions.\(^3\)

In light of this overarching framework, the complex constructions in Figure 1 are analyzed both in terms of their form and meaning/function. This analysis applies not only to the constructions as a whole, but also to their component parts (i.e. temporal adverbs, verb forms, etc.). Moreover, throughout the study, we draw on a variety of theoretical notions to explain the data. In every case, these notions are consistent with a more general Construction Grammar/Cognitive Linguistic approach to linguistic description.

In particular, we draw on insights from corpus-based empirical research in psycholinguistics and discourse-pragmatics to explain the role of clause-initial temporal adverbs in constructing a coherent mental representation of the discourse.\(^4\) In addition, the analysis of TAM verbal semantics is developed within a cognitive-grammaticalization model in which the total meaning of a verbal form equals a dynamic, qualitative-quantitative semantic map. That is, the meaning is understood as the form’s semantic potential that is composed of a variety of senses with different ranges of prototypicality, and organized along a grammaticalization path, either universal or language-specific.\(^5\)

\(^3\) FRIED, M., ÖSTMAN, J. Construction Grammar: A Thumbnail Sketch. In FRIED, M., ÖSTMAN, J. Construction Grammar in a Cross-Language Perspective, p. 13. In point of fact, Construction Grammar is shorthand for a variety of frameworks, or constructionist approaches, which more or less share important underlying assumptions that make them antithetical to the assumptions held by mainstream generative grammar. These assumptions include: 1) Constructions are learned, form-function pairings, 2) Grammar is monostratal, devoid of transformational or derivational components (i.e. semantics is directly related to the surface form), 3) Constructions are organized into networks of overlapping patterns related through shared properties, and 4) Despite wide-ranging variability across languages, cross-linguistic generalizations are explained by domain-general cognitive processes or by the functions of the constructions involved. GOLDBERG, A. Constructionist Approaches. In HOFFMAN, T., TROUSDALE, G. (eds.). The Oxford Handbook of Construction Grammar, p. 15.


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We begin our study by analyzing each construction type according to three discrete but nevertheless interdependent parameters: the form and semantics of the temporal adjunct employed; the functional profile and pragmatic distribution of each construction type; and the TAM semantics of the wayyiqtol and qatal verb forms, respectively (Section 2). After this analysis is presented, we then offer further discussion and explanation in terms of the functional profile of each construction type, as well as the semantic, pragmatic and syntactic motivations constraining the selection of one construction type over another in particular contexts (Section 3). Lastly, we draw main conclusions and design lines of future research (Section 4).

2. The Data: “Behavioral” Profiles of the WAYHÎ + T Constructions

The dataset discussed here consists of the following: Constructions reflecting the form wayihi + T + wayyiqtol, represented in example (1.a) and referred to henceforth as wayihi-1, occur 175x in Gen–2 Kings. By contrast, wayihi-2 constructions reflect the form wayihi + T + (נ +) X + qatal, as in example (1.b) only occur 30x in Gen–2 Chron. (27x in Gen–2 Kings), while constructions of the form wayihi + T + qatal, represented in example (1.c) and referred to as wayihi-3, occur 48x in Gen–2 Chron (26x in Gen–2 Kings).

Note that in an overwhelming majority of wayihi-2 (27/30) constructions, a conjunction precedes the fronted constituent following the temporal adjunct.

This dataset was constructed by searching the Andersen and Forbes Phrase Marker Analysis within Logos Bible Software, version 7. ANDERSEN F. I., FORBES, A. D. The Hebrew Bible: Andersen-Forbes Phrase Marker Analysis.
(1) a. 2 Sam 11:16⁸ (wayhî-1)

וַיְהִ֔י בִּשְׁמ֥וֹר יוֹאָ֖ב אֶל־הָעִ֑יר
וַיִּתֵּן֙ א֣וּרִיָּ֔ה קוֹם אֶל־הַמָּ֖אשֶׁר אֲשֶׁ֥ר יָדַ֔ע כִּ֥י אַנְשֵׁי־חַ֖יל שָֽׁם׃
As Joab was besieging the city, he assigned Uriah to the place where he knew there were valiant warriors.

b. 2 Kings 2:9⁹ (wayhî-2)

וַיְהִ֣י כְעָבְרָ֗ם וְאֵ֨לִיָּ֜וּ אָמַ֤ר אֶל־אֱלִישָׁע֙ שְׁאַל֙ מָ֣ה עֱשֶׂה־לָּ֔ בְּטֶ֖רֶם אֶלָּקַ֣ח מֵעִמָּ֑…
When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, “Tell me what I may do for you, before I am taken from you.”

c. Num 10:11¹⁰ (wayhî-3)

וַיְהִ֞י בַּשָּׁנָ֧ה הַשֵּׁנִ֛ית בַּחֹ֥דֶשׁ הַשֵּׁנִ֖י בְּעֶשְׂרִ֣ים בַּחֹ֑דֶשׁ נַעֲלָה֙ הֶֽעָנָ֔ן מֵעַ֖ל מִשְׁכַּ֥ן הָעֵדֻֽת׃
In the second year, in the second month, on the twentieth day of the month, the cloud lifted from over the tabernacle of the covenant.

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### 2.1. Parameter 1: Temporal Adjunct

#### 2.1.1. The Form of the Temporal Adjunct

The majority of temporal adjuncts in *wayhî*-1 constructions take the form preposition כּ + infinitive construct (56/175 | 33%), as in (2.a), כּ + infinitive construct (21x/175x | 12%), as in (2.b), or a prepositional phrase that expresses a cyclical time of day, month, or year (17x/175x | 10%), as in (2.c).

(2) a. Josh 10:24

...וַ֠יְהִי כְֽהוֹצִיאָ֞ם אֶת־הַמְּלָכִ֣ים הָאֵלֶּ֗ה אֶל־יְהוֹשֻׁ֖אָו וַ֑יֹּאמֶר....

When they brought the kings out to Joshua, Joshua summoned all the Israelites, and said...

b. Gen 35:17

...וַ֥יְהִֽי בְהַקְשֹׁתָ֖הּ בְּלִדְתָּ֑הּ וַתֹּ֨אמֶר לָ֤הּ הַמְיַלֶּ֙דֶת...

When she was in her hard labor, the midwife said to her...

c. Gen 41:8

...וַיְהִ֤י בַבֹּ֙קֶר וַתִּפָּ֣עֶם רוּח֔וֹ...

In the morning, his spirit was troubled...

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Similar to wayhi-1, the majority of adjuncts in wayhi-2 constructions also reflect the form preposition כ + infinitive construct (11x/30x | 37%), as in (3.a), or preposition ב + infinitive construct (6x/30x | 20%), as in (3.b).

(3)  a. 1 Kings 22:32

When the captains of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat, they said...

b. 1 Sam 30:1

When David and his men came to Ziklag on the third day, the Amalekites had made a raid on the Negeb and on Ziklag...

In stark contrast to both wayhi-1 and wayhi-2, however, the majority of adjuncts in wayhi-3 constructions take the form preposition ב + date formula (28x/48x | 57%), as in (4), while only six tokens take the form preposition ב/כ + infinitive construct (12%).

(4) Num 10:11

In the second year, in the second month, on the twentieth day of the month, the cloud lifted from over the tabernacle of the covenant.

2.1.2. The Semantics of the Temporal Adjunct

In addition to the form of the temporal adjunct, we also examined the semantic profile of the adjunct with respect to two parameters. First, we determined

14 See also: Gen. 39:10; Exod 13:17; 1 Sam 13:10; 18:1; 2 Sam 13:36; 17:27–29; 2 Kings 2:9; 4:40; Ezek 11:13; 2 Chron 18:31.

15 See also: Josh 10:11; 1 Sam 23:6; 30:1; 2 Sam 3:6–7; 2 Chron 13:15. The remaining forms include: Adjuncts consisting of a PP involving a date formula: 2 Kings 12:7; 12:7; 17:25; Ezek 1.1. Temporal adjuncts headed by the preposition אַחֲרֵ י: Gen. 22:1; 2 Sam 1:1; 1 Kings 21:1. Adjuncts headed by the PP בְּעֵ ת: 1 Sam 18:19; 1 Kings 11:29. Also see: Gen. 38:29; Exod 12:29; Josh 23:1–2; 2 Sam 1:2.

16 See 1 Kings 8:54; 15:29; 16:11; Jer 26:16; Esther 5:2; Neh 1:4.

whether the temporal adjuncts indicate a position in time, frequency of time, or a duration of time, as illustrated in (5):18

(5) a. **At two o’clock**, Mary left for Europe. (temporal position)
    b. **For twelve long years**, Mary went to school. (duration)
    c. **Three times a day**, Mary practiced. (frequency)19

The results show that virtually every temporal adjunct in all three construction types expresses a point, or position in time, as opposed to duration or frequency.20 This is significant because, unlike frequency and duration, specifying the temporal position serves to anchor the subsequent events on the narrative time-line, thereby providing a vantage point, or more specifically, the **reference time** for an event (Van der Merwe 1999:96).21 In short, the temporal adjunct in each *wayhi* + *T* construction type functions to specify or update the reference time for the following event or events in the narrative.

Second, we determined whether the temporal adjunct provides a temporal frame for subsequent events that are of a shorter duration than the frame, as in (6.a), or specifies an exact point in time of an event, as in example (6.b).

(6) a. 1 Sam 28:1

**In those days…**

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19 The relevant temporal expressions are marked by a bold style type.

20 Exceptions include: Gen 39.10 (*wayhi*-2) and 1 Sam 18.30 (*wayhi*-3), both of which express frequency of action.

21 Coined by Reichenbach, the concept of “Reference Time” is distinguished from both “Speech Time” (the time of the utterance) and “Event Time” (the time of the event the speaker/writer is describing). REICHENBACH, H. *Elements of Symbolic Logic*. By contrast, reference time is “the time that is being talked about or the temporal standpoint from which the event is considered”. GOLDFAJN, T. *Word Order and Time in Biblical Hebrew Narrative*, p. 46. Note that the reference time and event time may share the same point on the timeline, particularly when simple past tense is used. VAN DER MERWE, C. H. J. The Elusive Biblical Hebrew Term *wayhi*: A Perspective in Terms of its Syntax, Semantics, and Pragmatics in 1 Samuel. In Hebrew Studies, 1999, Vol. 40, p. 95.
b. Num 11:25

At the moment when the spirit rested upon them...

In each construction type, the majority of adjuncts refer to a stretch of time that provides the temporal frame for events that follow. However, the prevalence of this usage is distinct in the three types. Approximately 60% (105x/175x)\(^{22}\) of wayhi-1 constructions provide a temporal frame, with 40% (69x/175x)\(^{23}\) referring to an exact point in time. Similarly, approximately 57% (17x/30x)\(^{24}\) of wayhi-2 constructions provide a temporal frame, with a remaining 43% (13x/30x)\(^{25}\) specifying an exact point in time. By contrast, in wayhi-3 constructions, a temporal frame is activated in approximately 88% (42x/48x)\(^{26}\) with only 12% (6x/48x)\(^{27}\) referring to an exact point in time.

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\(^{27}\) See 1 Kings 8:54; 15:29; 16:11; Jer 36:16; Esther 5:2; Neh 1:4.
2.2. Parameter 2: Discourse Pragmatics

In addition to the temporal adjunct, we also analyzed the pragmatic profile of each construction both in terms of their function and distribution in discourse. That is to say that we carefully considered the points at which these constructions occurred within the narrative plot structure, such as at the introduction or conclusion of a scene or episode, or at thematically salient junctures within a scene or episode, such as the inciting moment, complication, or climax, etc.  

We will discuss their functions in more detail below (cf. Section 3). Nevertheless, it suffices to say here that all three construction types contribute to the structure and organization of a coherent discourse. In particular, wayhi + T constructions prototypically function to specify or update the reference time of an event or series of events, while simultaneously introducing the onset of a new development unit within the narrative.

Furthermore, both wayhi-1 and wayhi-2 constructions are virtually synonymous with respect to their distribution in discourse—an observation supported by the correspondence in the form and meaning of the temporal adjuncts in wayhi-1 and wayhi-2 constructions, respectively (cf. 2.1.1 and 2.1.2 above). Specifically, wayhi-1 and wayhi-2 prototypically occur at lower level thematic junctures within a narrative, often coinciding with the introduction of a new scene within a larger episode, as in (7.a-b), or at thematically salient transition points within a scene, such as the inciting moment/complication (8), turning point or climax (9.a-b), or the conclusion of a scene (10.a-b).

(7) New Scene
a. Gen 8:6 (wayhi-1)

At the end of forty days, Noah opened the window of the ark that he had made.

\( \text{b. 1 Sam 23:6 (wayhi-2)} \)

When Abiathar son of Ahimelech fled to David at Keilah, he came down with an ephod in his hand.

(8) Inciting Moment / Complication
Gen 12:11 (wayhi-1)

When he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai, “I know well that you are a woman beautiful in appearance; [12] and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, ‘This is his wife’; then they will kill me, but they will let you live. 13 Say you are my sister, so that it may go well with me because of you, and that my life may be spared on your account.”]

(9) Turning Point / Climax
a. Num 16:31 (wayhi-1)

As soon as he finished speaking all these words, the ground under them was split apart. [32] The earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, along with their households—everyone who belonged to Korah and all their goods. 33 So they with all that belonged to them went down alive into Sheol; the earth closed over them, and they perished from the midst of the assembly.]
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b. 2 Chron 13:15 (wayhi-2)

...And when the people of Judah shouted, God defeated Jeroboam and all Israel before Abijah and Judah. [The Israelites fled before Judah, and God gave them into their hands. Abijah and his army defeated them with great slaughter; five hundred thousand picked men of Israel fell slain.]

(10) Conclusion

a. Gen 25:11 (wayhi-1)

After the death of Abraham God blessed his son Isaac. And Isaac settled at Beer-lahai-roi.

b. Ezek 11:13 (wayhi-2)

While I was prophesying, Pelatiah son of Benaiah died. Then I fell down on my face, cried with a loud voice, and said, “Ah Lord God! will you make a full end of the remnant of Israel?”

Moreover, in both wayhi-1 and wayhi-2 constructions a few tokens involve some kind of semantic repetition or redundancy. More specifically, the content of a preceding proposition (typically at least the main verb) is sometimes repeated by the temporal adjunct in the wayhi + T construction. The result is a cohesive device referred to in the literature as ‘Tail-Head Linkage’ (=THL), so named because the tail of one clause becomes the head of the next (van Gijn et al. 2014). This occurs for example in the wayhi-2 construction in Gen. 19.17, represented in (11):

35 Also see: Josh 10:11; 1 Sam 13:10; 2 Kings 4:40.
36 See also: Gen 19:29; Num 11:25; Josh 5:8; 10:20; 24:29; Judg 2:4; 15:17; 1 Sam 9:26; 2 Sam 4:4; 2 Kings 4:6; 10:25
37 See also: Gen 39:10; 1 Sam 18:19; 2 Sam 13:36.
Then the people of Judah raised the battle shout. And when the people of Judah shouted, God defeated Jeroboam and all Israel before Abijah and Judah.

In these cases, the wayhî + T construction restates the event time of the previous proposition. This has the pragmatic effect of slowing down the processing of the narrative in order to highlight the importance of what follows. Significantly, virtually every occurrence of THL occurs immediately before the inciting moment or climax of a scene or episode.

Furthermore, only rarely do wayhî-1 and wayhî-2 occur at larger thematic boundaries, such as the introduction of an episode, as in (12):

(12) Gen 38:1

And it happened at that time that Judah went down from his brothers and settled near a certain Adullamite whose name was Hirah.

In contrast to wayhî-1 and wayhî-2, however, the vast majority of wayhî-3 constructions occur at the onset of larger thematic units, as in (13a.), with only a few tokens occurring at lower level thematic junctures, as in (13.b). This distribution is consistent with the findings in 2.1.1, where we observed that the majority of temporal adjuncts in wayhî-3 consist of a date formula of some kind.

(13) a. 2 Kings 18:1

In the third year of King Hoshea son of Elah of Israel, Hezekiah son of King Ahaz of Judah began to reign.

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40 See also: Exod 2:11; Num. 7:1; Josh 1:1–2; Judg. 1:1; 2 Sam 8:1; 11:1; 1 Kings 6:1; 22:2; 2:1; 6:24.

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b. Jer 36:16

When they heard all the words, they turned to one another in alarm, and said to Baruch, “We certainly must report all these words to the king.

2.3. Parameter 3: Verbal Semantics (TAM)

Finally, we turn our attention to the tense-aspect semantics of the verb in each construction type. The analysis of the data reveals that the wayyiqtol form used in wayhî-1 constructions expresses a perfective past value (14.a) in the vast majority of cases (i.e. 169x/175x, which constitutes nearly 96%). In the remaining cases, wayyiqtol conveys the nuance of durative past (14.b) and pluperfect (14.c). In each of the 18 tokens where a static root is employed, wayyiqtol introduces dynamic actions (14.d) rather than states. To be precise, the wayyiqtol form of static roots is interpreted as a perfective past (16x), a pluperfect (1x) or a durative past (1x).
(14) a. Gen 4:3

וַֽיְהִ֖י מִקֵּ֣ץ יָמִ֑ים וַיָּבֵ֨א קַ֜יִן מִפְּרִ֧י הָֽאֲדָמָ֛ה מִנְחָ֖ה לַֽיהוָֽה׃

At the designated time (at the end of the days) Cain brought some of the fruit of the ground for an offering to the Lord.

b. Josh 5:8

וַֽיְהִ֛י כַּאֲשֶׁ֥ר־תַּמּוּ וֹיכָל־הַגּ֖ לְהִמּ֑וֹל וַיֵּשְׁב֥וּ תַחְתָּ֛ם בַּֽמַּחֲנֶ֖ה עַ֥ד חֲיוֹתָֽם׃

When all the nation had been circumcised, they stayed there in the camp until they had healed.

c. Exod 2:11

וַֽיְהִ֣י בַּֽיָּמִ֣ים הָהֵ֗ם וַיִּגְדַּ֤ל מֹשֶׁה֙ וַיֵּצֵ֣א אֶל־אֶחָ֔יו

In those days, when Moses had grown up (or Moses grew old), he went out to his people.

d. Gen 39:19

וַיְהִ֣י אֲדֹנָ֜יו אֶת־דִּבְרֵ֣י אִשְׁתּ֗וֹ אֲשֶׁ֨ר דִּבְּרָ֤ה אלָיו֙ לֵאמֹ֔ר כַּדְּבָרִ֣ים הָאֵ֔לֶּה עָ֥שָׂהּ לֵ֖י עַבְד וַיִּ֖חַר אַפּֽו׃

When his master heard the words that his wife spoke to him, saying, “This is the way your servant treated me,” he became angry.

With respect to the semantics of the qatal form in wayhî-2 constructions, a majority—approximately 77% (22x/30x)—unambiguously convey the sense of a perfective past (15.a).48 In 3 tokens (10%), qatal expresses a pluperfect value (15.b),49 and in an additional 3 (10%), it conveys a stative past value (15.c).50 In general, if a stative root is used, a stative reading is more typical than a dynamic one (i.e. 3x/4x).51

(15) a. Gen 21:11

וַֽיְהִ֗י אַחַר הַדְּבָרִ֣ים הָאֵ֔לֶּ֖ים וְהָאֱ נִסָּ֖ה אֶת־אַבְרָהָ֑ם

After these things, God tested Abraham.

b. 2 Sam 3:6

וַיְהִ֞י בְּבֹ֨א דָוִ֧ד وַאֲנָשָׁ֛יו צִֽקְלַ֖ג בַּיּ֣וֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁ֑י לֵקִ֣יוַעֲמָ פָֽשְׁבֻּ֗וּ אֶל־נֶ֙גֶב֙ וְאֶל־צִ֣קְלַ֔ג

Now when David and his men came to Ziklag on the third day, the Amalekites had made a raid on the Negeb and on Ziklag.

48 The relevant qatal and wayyiqtol forms are marked in bold.
50 See 1 Kings 11:29; 2 Kings 12:7; 1 Sam 30:1. Additionally, in one case (Gen 39.10), two readings are possible: perfective past and durative past.
51 See 2 Sam 3:6–7; 1 Kings 21:1; 2 Kings 17:25.
52 An exception is Ezek 11:13 where the stative root rather functions perfectly.
c. 1 Kings. 21:1

Some time after this, the cupbearer of the king of Egypt and his baker offended their lord the king of Egypt.

b. Gen 8:13

In the six hundred first year, in the first month, on the first day of the month, (when) the waters had been dried up (were dried up) from the earth, Noah removed the covering of the ark.

Overall, the TAM profile of the verb employed in wayhî-2 constructions differs from the profile exhibited in the wayhî-1 type by allowing for stative uses of static roots and a more extensive use of the pluperfect sense.

The TAM properties of qatal in wayhî-3 constructions are similar to the profile exhibited both by the wayyiqtol in wayhî-1 and qatal in wayhî-2. Like wayyiqtol in wayhî-1, the vast majority—approximately 90% (43x/48x)—of qatal forms in wayhî-3 express a perfective past value, as in (16.a). Moreover, similar to wayhî-1, the pluperfect sense is scarce (16.b), and stative roots commonly yield a dynamic interpretation. To be exact, in 11 unambiguous tokens, the stative root qatal functions as a perfective past (10x) (as in 16.c) or pluperfect (1x). However, like wayhî-2, stative past readings of stative roots are also possible (see 16.d) (3x | 6%).

(16) a. Gen 40:1

Some time after this, the cupbearer of the king of Egypt and his baker offended their lord the king of Egypt.

b. Gen 8:13

In the six hundred first year, in the first month, on the first day of the month, (when) the waters had been dried up (were dried up) from the earth, Noah removed the covering of the ark.

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33 See Gen 14:1; 40:1; Exod 12:41; 12:51; 16:27; 16:22; Lev 9:1; Deut 9:11; 1 Sam 18:30; 1 Kings 8:54; 15:29; 16:11; Isa 7:1; Esther 5:2; 2; Neh 1:4; Chron 24:23.
35 Gen 8:13.
36 See 1 Kings 17:17; Jer 36:16; 2 Chron 24:4. Note that in these all cases, a perfective past interpretation is also admissible. Additionally, in one case (Josh 6:16), qatal communicates the sense of a durative past, although a perfective reading is also possible.
c. 2 Kings 18:1

In the third year of the reign of Israel's king Hoshea son of Elah, Ahaz's son Hezekiah became king over Judah.

d. 1 Kings 17:17

After this the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, was ill.

3. Discussion

3.1. Prototypical Function of the Wayhî + T Constructions

With respect to their function in discourse, each construction serves to specify or update the reference time of an event, or series of events in a narrative, as noted above (cf. Section 2.2). What is more, wayhî + T constructions typically occur in continuous contexts of narrative progression, marked as such by a chain of past perfective verb forms (e.g., wayyiqtol, X + qatal). By placing a temporal adjunct in a clause-initial position, as in wayhî + T constructions, this continuity is interrupted, thereby creating a break or discontinuity in the discourse. This discontinuity, in turn, serves to segment the text into smaller and larger thematic units, helping the reader better processes the discourse and construct a coherent mental representation of the narrative.


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Despite the natural discontinuity created by the initial temporal adjunct, the discourse particle *wayihî* functions as a development marker, explicitly signaling the onset of a new thematic unit within the narrative while also maintaining a degree of continuity with what precedes.⁵⁹ In particular, *wayihî* anchors the following temporal adjunct, which is typically unmarked for tense, to the narrative past timeline of the discourse, thereby signaling that the adjunct refers to a time that is posterior to the time of the previous event. As a result, *wayihî* serves as a cohesive tie to events that precede by offsetting the discontinuity created by the change in reference time. This allows for a degree of continuity to be maintained when an author or editor chooses to specify or update the reference time at points of development within a narrative sequence.⁶⁰

The status and function of *wayihî* as a development marker is substantiated by its evolutionary trajectory. In particular, the discourse marker *wayihî* derives from a full-fledged verb form—the 3rd person masculine singular *wayyiqtol* of the root *hâyâh*—which is still widely reflected in the narrative of the Hebrew Bible.⁶¹ The form *wayihî*, like all *wayyiqtol* forms, derives from an analytic expression composed by the conjunction *wa*, the “short” *yiqtol* (a successor of

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⁶⁰ Along these lines, van der Merwe writes, “In a language that has a specific form of the verb (*wayyiqtol*) to advance events on the time line [sic] (in a narrative), whether it is real time or discourse time, *wayihî* ensures that the continuity of a narrative can be maintained when a narrator, author, or editor needs, or deems it necessary, to update or specify the reference time of an event or events for whatever reason.” VAN DER MERWE, C. H. J. The Elusive Biblical Hebrew Term *ויהי*: A Perspective in Terms of its Syntax, Semantics, and Pragmatics in 1 Samuel. In *Hebrew Studies*, 1999, Vol. 40, pp. 112–113.

⁶¹ According to Harmelink, of the 864 instances of *wayihî* in the Hebrew Bible. *Wayihî* mostly occurs in narrative, with only 6 occurrences in Psalms, while no instances are attested in Amos, Joel, Micah, Nahum, Zephaniah, Malachi, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs or Lamentations. HARMELINK, B. *Exploring the Syntactic, Semantic, and Pragmatic Uses of ויהי in Biblical Hebrew*, pp. 137–147.
Proto-Semitic (PS) \(^\star\)yaqtul\), and an additional element that caused the germination of the performative consonant in the verb.\(^{62}\)

Accordingly, at the initial stage of its evolution in Biblical Hebrew and Canaanite, the temporal expression wayhi + T most likely functioned as a verbal clause with a perfective or non-perfective meaning (durative, iterative, etc.) similar to “it was at/during/when…” or “it happened at/during/when,” respectively, which would be compatible with the reconstructed semantics of the successor of PS yaqtul. However, contrary to the other uses of wayyiqtol, the wayyiqtol of the root hāyāh has undergone a gradual grammaticalization process, losing more of its verbal properties until it eventually became reanalyzed as an uninflected discourse marker. As a result, the original independent temporal clause with verbal wayhi slowly appeared as a preverbal adjunct construction instead.

The process experienced by the original locution \([\text{wa} + A + \text{yaqtul}]\) of the root hāyāh and its grammaticalization into an indeclinable discourse marker wayhi is common cross-linguistically.

First, inflected verbs, or entire analytical constructions built around such an inflected verb, commonly develop into particles. This may be illustrated by consecutive particles ya(a) in Kxoe (from yàá ‘come’), kisha ‘then’ in Swahili (i-ki-isha ‘if it is finished’), or ti ‘and’ in Moré (from ti ‘go (to)’).\(^{64}\) In such cases, analytical inflectional constructions are progressively grammaticalized into non-inflected, possibly synthetic forms. That is, a construction develops holistically as a group of its composite parts causing such parts to lose their original meaning and class properties. At the end, an input complex becomes a single indivisible particle.\(^{65}\) Second, a relatively frequent subtype of this grammaticalization scenario concerns forms of the verb ‘be’ as illustrated by an introductory particle es que in Spanish and a question particle est-ce que in French (both built around the present tense of the verb ‘be’ ser and être, respectively) or a goal particle by in Polish (derived from an optative form of the verb byti ‘be’). Being grammaticalized as full-fledged particles, the input verbs have lost their verbal properties. For example, in the above-mentioned

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\(^{62}\) KIENAST, B. Historische Semitische Sprachwissenschaft; ANDRASON, A. El sistema verbal hebreo en su contexto semítico: una visión dinámica [The Hebrew Verbal System in its Semitic Context: A Dynamic Perspective].

\(^{63}\) The abbreviation A stands for a particle that caused the doubling of the prefix consonant in wayyiqtol. The exact origin of this is still debated in Hebrew and Semitic scholarship.


\(^{65}\) HOPPER, P., TRAUGOTT, E. C. Grammaticalization.
constructions the reflexes of the verb ‘be’ cannot be inflected. Third, copulative constructions derived from the verb ‘be’ may develop into discourse markers that signal narrative continuity in naturally discontinuous contexts. 66 An example that corresponds most to wayhî in Biblical Hebrew is found in the Mande language of Vai. In Vai, a verbal analytical construction à mu ‘it was’ developed into ámu / ámo ‘and, then’ and indicates continuity in narrative discourse. 67 This evolution is a case of “a more […] process whereby […] verbs are grammaticalized into markers used to structure narrative discourse”. 68

However, even though highly advanced, the grammaticalization of an original analytical verbal construction *[wa + A + yhî] into a synthetic discourse marker wayhî is incomplete. First of all, the de-fientivization of wayhî in Biblical Hebrew is ongoing, as evidenced by the fact that wayhî maintains various verbal properties. For example, its form is identical to the 3rd ms.sg. of the short yiqtol found both in wayyiqtol and in the “jussive”. Genuine verbal uses of wayhî are not only attested but also common. In 458 out of 864 instances (approximately 53%) in the Hebrew Bible, wayhî functions as a verb, agreeing with its subject in person, number, and gender. 69 The morphological relationship of the particle wayhî with the root hāyāh and its verbal forms is likewise evident. 70 The marker wayhî always occurs clause initially—it may never be preceded by other particles. This property distinguishes it from the remaining particles, which can themselves be headed by other particles (i.e. particles can accumulate), and links it to the wayyiqtol gram itself, which typically occupies a clause-initial position.

A second reason that the evolution of wayhî into a full discourse marker is incomplete (albeit advanced) concerns the tendency for highly grammaticalized particles to become more facultative in discourse. In other words, the degree to which a particle has become grammaticalized is proportional to its optionality, with highly grammaticalized particles becoming increasingly more discretionary in discourse. And indeed, this is what we observe in BH, where the rare occurrence of T + wayyiqtol and T + X + qatal (6x and 14x,

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70 This may explain various translations of this construction as “it was” or “it came to pass”.

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3.2. Motivation for the Sub-types

The selection between wayhî-1, wayhî-2 and wayhî-3 is motivated by several factors. These include the morpho-syntactic and semantic properties of the temporal adjuncts; the discourse pragmatic profile of each construction type; the TAM properties of the verb; and the syntactic profile of the wayyiqtol and qatal clauses.

3.2.1. Temporal Adjunct

The properties of the temporal adjunct provide the first motivational constraint for the use of each wayhî + T construction, respectively. From a morpho-syntactic perspective, if the temporal adjunct is an infinitive construct (headed by a preposition), wayhî-1 and wayhî-2 are typically used. By contrast, if the adjunct is a date formula headed by a preposition בּ, wayhî-3 is preferred.

With respect to the semantics of temporal adjunct, wayhî-1 and wayhî-2 are used with adjuncts that provide the temporal frame for subsequent events, or those that specify the exact point in time for an event. By contrast, wayhî-3 rarely takes an adjunct that specifies an exact point in time.

3.2.2. Discourse Pragmatics

From a discourse pragmatic perspective, all three construction types function to specify or update the reference time, while simultaneously signaling a development shift in the discourse. The distinction between them, however, concerns the level of discourse at which the development shift occurs. In particular, wayhî-1 and wayhî-2 constructions are prototypically used to mark a development shift at lower level thematic junctures, either at the start of a new

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scene within a larger episode, or at thematically salient transition points within a scene. Moreover, the type of adjuncts used in each construction also seem to motivate the particular pragmatic function in each case, with framing adjuncts typically marking the start of a new scene, while adjuncts expressing an exact point in time typically signal thematically salient junctures within a scene. Lastly, in some contexts, *wayhi*-1 and *wayhi*-2 involve the use of THL, a device used to pragmatically highlight the inciting moment or climactic event that follows.

In contrast to *wayhi*-1 and *wayhi*-2, *wayhi*-3 constructions are prototypically used to mark a development shift at higher level thematic junctures, often at the start of a new episode. This difference in pragmatic distribution also explains why the vast majority of *wayhi*-3 constructions entail a date formula, an adjunct which is prototypically used to set the temporal frame for larger thematic units.

3.2.3. TAM Semantics

The TAM semantics of the inflected verb serve as an additional motivating constraint for selecting one type of *wayhi* construction over another. Even though *wayhi*-1 and *wayhi*-2 are highly similar with respect to the form and meaning of the temporal adjuncts and their respective discourse pragmatic profiles, their use is, to some degree, prompted by the particular temporal-aspectual information conveyed by their respective verb forms. Crucially, only the qatal form in *wayhi*-2 and *wayhi*-3 can convey stative past senses, while the wayyiqtol in *wayhi*-1 invariably conveys a dynamic sense. Moreover, when a pluperfect sense is to be expressed, the qatal form in *wayhi*-2 and *wayhi*-3 is preferred.

This behavior is fully analogous to the general TAM profile of wayyiqtol and qatal found in narrative. That is, from a semantic perspective, the two grams are both similar, but nevertheless distinct in narrative passages. The similarity derives from the fact that both grams can express the sense of a perfective past, both being largely compatible with that semantic domain. However, the two

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72 This overlap is superficial. Even though wayyiqtol and qatal both express the sense of a perfective past, they usually do that in different syntactic environments. Wayyiqtol typically appears clause initially being in principle incompatible with situations where other elements would precede it, e.g. fronting, negation, subordinate clauses (i.e. after conjunctions and complementizers), and in the company of particles and discourse markers. In all such environments, where the verb does not appear clause initially, qatal is regularly employed. For details see ANDRASON, A. The Complexity of Verbal Semantics – An Intricate Relationship between QATAL and WAYYIQTOL. In *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures*, 2016, Vol. 16(4), pp. 1–96.
grams also differ in that qatal can communicate the past stative function in contrast to wayyiqtol, which usually fails to do so. Moreover, the qatal is typically compatible with the pluperfect value, while this sense is exception for wayyiqtol. For a comparison, in narrative fragments of the book of Genesis, wayyiqtol typically expresses the sense of a perfective past (93.5%). In 6%, it communicates the meaning of a durative past, while in a remaining 0.5%, it is found with a taxis sense of a pluperfect. In equivalent contexts, qatal is commonly used to convey perfective past (48.3%), pluperfect (35.9%) and stative past (15.4%) senses.

These differences between wayyiqtol and qatal stem from the distinct stage of semantic development each verbal gram occupies along the resultative path of grammaticalization. Wayyiqtol is an “older” gram located at a more advanced stage on the path, therefore specializing in the sense of (narrative) perfective past. By contrast, qatal is a “younger” gram and therefore less advanced, allowing for stative and pluperfect senses, which are taxis equivalents of the present perfect in discourse.

As explained in section 3.1, wayyiqtol derives from an analytical expression built around the successor of PS *yaqtul. This means that even though the exact form of wayyiqtol is a Hebrew innovation, the element yiqtol (from *yaqtul) is an “old” verbal gram. It is widely accepted that *yaqtul had already been grammaticalized as a paradigmatic perfect, perfective and/or past at the Proto-Semitic period. That is, it was entirely fientivized as a full-fledged “tense” before the Semitic languages were fragmented. Therefore, in the earliest attested languages of the Semitic family, such as Akkadian and Amorite, its successors appeared as fully fientive grams, central to the respective verbal systems. In fact, the verbal status of *yaqtul most likely descends to the Afro-Asiatic


75 This contrast in the advancement is also visible in that qatal is extensively used as a present perfect in discourse. For details see ANDRASON, A. El sistema verbal hebreo en su contexto semítico: una visión dinámica [The Hebrew Verbal System in its Semitic Context: A Dynamic Perspective]; ANDRASON, A. The Complexity of Verbal Semantics – An Intricate Relationship between QATAL and WAYYIQTOL. In Journal of Hebrew Scriptures, 2016, Vol. 16(4), pp. 31–33.
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In contrast, qatal is a “younger” verbal gram. Qatal developed from an analytical locution composed of the element *qatVl- and a personal pronoun. In Proto-Semitic, the element *qatVl- was a resultative participle (or a verbal adjective). Most likely it was used in combination with personal pronouns yielding predicative verb-less clauses, instead of constituting a genuine verbal tense. This type of construction is still attested in Akkadian where parsaka—the successor of the PS *qatVl- construction—was used as a semi-nominal (pseudo-verbal), intransitive and/or de-transitive resultative proper and stative verb. However, already in Akkadian, personal pronouns were regularly agglutinated to the original participle, which demonstrates a more advanced grammaticalization stage. Likewise, certain transitive uses suggest its further progress along the grammaticalization path. Nevertheless, the genuine verbal status of qatal was only achieved in classical Semitic languages, such as Biblical Hebrew, Arabic, Ugaritic, or Ge‘ez.

Lastly, it should be noted that the overall frequency of the use of a wayyiqtol form (wayhi-1) in the wayhi + T constructions is far greater than that of the qatal form (wayhi-2 and wayhi-3). In the analyzed corpus, wayyiqtol is found 178 times, while qatal is used only 55 times. That is, the presence of wayyiqtol is approximately three times more common than the use of qatal in the wayhi + T constructions. This is generally consistent with the behavior of wayyiqtol and


qatal in narrative, where wayyiqtol is significantly more frequent. For instance, in Genesis, wayyiqtol is nearly five times more common in narrative than qatal.

To conclude, even though the choice between wayhî-1, on the one hand, and wayhî-2 and wayhî-3, on the other, may sometimes be motivated by the respective semantics of the wayyiqtol or qatal verb—e.g. the capacity for qatal to convey pluperfect and stative senses—this is the exception rather than the rule. That is, both wayyiqtol and qatal forms commonly exhibit an equivalent temporal-aspectual sense, viz. perfective past, in all three construction types. Crucially, the use of qatal does not invariably move the temporal reference back, as claimed by Harmelink (2011:270) citing Hatav (1997:80). Although in general, qatal may express anteriority in the past, this is not a rule. In the case of the wayhî-2 and wayhî-3 constructions, such a use is indeed far from prototypical.

3.2.4. Syntax

Finally, syntactic constraints pertaining to both the wayyiqtol and qatal clauses provide an additional point of motivation for the selection of one construction type over another, particularly with respect to wayhî-1 and wayhî-2.

As previously explained, the discourse pragmatic profiles of wayhî-1 and wayhî-2 constructions are virtually synonymous. The primary factor motivating the use of one over the other pertains to the word order of the verbal clause (albeit verbal semantics may also play a role). More specifically, the wayhî-1 construction is used when the verb stands first in its clause, while wayhî-2 is employed when the verb is preceded by a constituent (24x), a negative particle (4x), or a discourse particle (2x). This behavior of wayhî-1 and wayhî-2 constructions harmonizes with the distribution of wayyiqtol and qatal in narrative and reflects the origin of wayyiqtol, which derived from an analytical locution where *wa likely marked the clause boundary.

The similarity of wayhî-1 and wayhî-2 constructions is also visible in that both entail a type of י exhibited in the verbal clause. In wayhî-1, י surfaces as an indissoluble part of the verb (wayyiqtol), while in wayhî-2, it precedes the fronted constituent (י-X-qatal).

81 Here we treat the temporal adjunct as, at least originally, belonging to the wayhî clause.
82 The status of these reflexes of י are however different. See further below.
All of this means that \textit{wayhî-1} and \textit{wayhî-2} may, to a degree, be two variants of the same meta-construction. They were either developed from or reflect a similar template—an analytical locution built of the predecessor of the \textit{wayhî} temporal phrase, and a verbal clause composed of the conjunction *\textit{wa} and the main verb.

\textit{Wayyiqtol}, including the verbal clause in the \textit{wayhî-1} type, has its origin in the sequence *\textit{[wa + A + yaqtul]}. The two morphemes *\textit{[wa + A]} that originally preceded the *\textit{yaqtul} form were agglutinated into the verb, gradually becoming indissoluble from it. In contrast, the verbal clause in the \textit{wayhî-2} type derives from *\textit{[wa + X + qatal]}. Here, the previously mentioned development into a synthetic form did not take place. The primary reason for this being that, while the morphemes preceding the verb in \textit{wayhî-1} constructions were constant, \textit{wayhî-2} constructions allowed for a variable—that is, an optional fronted element.\footnote{Indeed, this is consistent with typological grammaticalization patterns in which the development from analytic to synthetic constructions tends to develop faster with consistently linear constructions that can be analyzed as a holistic unit. The constant elements become gradually incorporated as affixes into the hosting element. In contrast, with variably interrupted patterns, this type of grammaticalization is slower or does not take place at all.}

Alternatively, the \textit{\textit{\textit{ו}}-X-qatal} sequence was generated only after *\textit{[wa + A + yaqtul]} developed into the indissoluble gram \textit{wayyiqtol} which originally did not allow a fronted element. In such cases, by analogy to \textit{wayhî-1}, the variant \textit{wayhî-2} was derived by using the “younger” qatal gram which could easily be headed by constituents and/or particles.

4. Conclusion

This study offers a description and explanation of the complex grammatical profiles of three interdependent constructions types, all of which are characterized by an initial \textit{wayhî} + temporal adjunct. The complexity of their respective profiles derives from the fact that each construction is a composite structure comprised of multiple parts that are all motivated in varying degrees by syntactic, semantic and discourse pragmatic constraints. Additionally, the \textit{wayhî} + T constructions are dynamic outcomes of constantly evolving components which transgress rigid categorial boundaries. For example, we have argued that, 1) as part of \textit{wayhî} and \textit{wayyiqtol}, \textit{\textit{ו}} experiences the evolution from a conjunction into an indissoluble tense-aspect marker; 2) \textit{wayhî} and \textit{wayyiqtol} forms are developing from analytic to synthetic; 3) the \textit{wayhî} verbal form has
reached a late stage in its grammaticalization processes as evinced by its pervasive use as a discourse (development) marker; and 4) the wayhi + T constructions are evolving from (dependent) clauses into phrases—i.e. parts of clauses. Although all these processes are highly advanced, it is likely that none are complete.

Given the linguistic complexity of the data presented here, it is our contention that a comprehensive grammatical description of the wayhi + T constructions can only be achieved by models that replace neatness, simplicity and stasis with more sophisticated notions of fuzziness, multilevel interconnectivity, and dynamics. The complexity underlying language also means that any analysis can always be expanded by introducing new parameters and/or by connecting the studied phenomenon to other, perhaps more distant, components of a grammatical system. This is evident in the present study, as we did not, or could not, answer all the questions related to the wayhi + T constructions. Most importantly, the present paper did not examine the properties of the three other temporal constructions in Biblical Hebrew (T + X + qatal; T + wayyiqtol; and T + qatal) and their systemic relationship to the wayhi + T constructions. An in-depth discussion of these two issues is, in our view, necessary for a more holistic understanding of the wayhi + T constructions and their place in BH grammar. It will, therefore, constitute one of the research activities conducted by the authors of this article in the near future.

REFERENCES


Crucially, even synchronic models must be dynamic if the realistic picture of the BH language is to be provided.


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