



# QOHELETH

A HANDBOOK ON  
THE HEBREW TEXT

ROBERT D. HOLMSTEDT  
JOHN A. COOK  
PHILLIP S. MARSHALL

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# BHIB

**Baylor Handbook  
on the Hebrew Bible**

**General Editor**

**W. Dennis Tucker Jr.**

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Robert D. Holmstedt, John A. Cook,  
and Phillip S. Marshall

BAYLOR UNIVERSITY PRESS



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Waco, Texas 76798

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*Cover Design* by Pamela Poll

*Cover photograph* by Bruce and Kenneth Zuckerman, West Semitic Research, in collaboration with the Ancient Biblical Manuscript Center. Courtesy Russian National Library (Saltykov-Shchedrin).

This title has been cataloged at the Library of Congress  
with the ISBN 978-1-60258-732-8.

The Kindle ISBN for this title is 978-1-4813-0758-1.  
The Web PDF ISBN for this title is 978-1-60258-733-5.

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

If there is any true insight into Ecclesiastes among my writings, it is due to the truly excellent mentorship of Michael V. Fox. Michael didn't just teach me how to read wisdom texts, he taught me the wisdom and rewards of close reading. I am also grateful to the various groups of graduate students at the University of Toronto who studied Ecclesiastes with me and provided feedback on my ideas. I owe a great deal to a rich collaboration with John Cook, this volume being only one of many projects. And finally, I continue to be amazed at and deeply thankful for the longsuffering of Rachel, my beloved, for enduring the hours I spend reading or typing or listening to me talk my way through a difficult passage.

Robert D. Holmstedt, Toronto, July 25, 2017

I am indebted to Michael V. Fox for first guiding me through the Hebrew text of Qoheleth, and I am grateful to the students over the years at Asbury Theological Seminary and Asia Graduate School of Theology (Manila), with whom I in turn have had the pleasure of reading through Qoheleth and discussing its many grammatical and interpretive conundrums. And I am ever thankful for the support and encouragement of my family—for Kathy (אשתי אשר אהבתי), our four boys, Jared, Colin, Tage, and Evan, and our daughters-in-law, Becca and Amantha.

John A. Cook, Wilmore, Ky., July 25, 2017

I wish to acknowledge and thank my Doktorvater, Peter J. Gentry, for igniting in me simultaneously a love for linguistics (applied to biblical languages) and a love for Ecclesiastes. Both of these coincided in this project. As well, several students in the MABL program at Houston Baptist University bravely endured my reading classes in the Hebrew text of

Qoheleth and helped me wrestle with many thorny syntactic issues; I owe them a debt of gratitude. My wife, Cheryl, and our three children, John-Phillip, Kathryn, and Andrew, have patiently waited while I spent many hours of vacation and free time working on this project—thank you! Finally, I wish to thank Robert Holmstedt and John Cook for the invitation to collaborate on this volume. Although we come from varying ecclesiastical backgrounds and hold varying views on how best to analyze parts of Ecclesiastes, we are united in our desire to help others read Hebrew Bible texts informed by the best tools from modern linguistics.

Phillip S. Marshall, Houston, Tex., July 25, 2017

## ABBREVIATIONS

*For abbreviations not listed below, please consult The SBL Handbook of Style.*

- \*           used in three ways: (1) to signal an unattested but reconstructed form (e.g., מְדַעַת\* in 1:1); (2) to signal a *Ketiv/Qere* in the Hebrew text of the commentary; and (3) in the translation to signal the adoption of an emendation.
- ANE       ancient Near Eastern
- BDB       Brown, Francis, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs. 1979. *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew-English Lexicon*. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson.
- BH        Biblical Hebrew
- BL        Bauer, H., and P. Leander. 1922. *Historische Grammatik der hebräischen Sprache des Alten Testaments*. Halle: Max Niemeyer.
- c          common
- Constr   construct
- CP        complementizer phrase
- DCH       Clines, David J. A., ed. 1993–2011. *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*. 8 vols. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic.
- DP        determiner phrase
- EBH       early Biblical Hebrew
- ECM       exceptional case marking
- f          feminine
- GKC       Kautzsch, Emil. 1910. *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*. Trans. A. E. Cowley. 2nd Eng. ed. Oxford: Clarendon.
- HALOT   Koehler, Ludwig, Walter Baumgartner, and Johann Jakob Stamm, eds. 1994–2000. *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*

	<i>of the Old Testament</i> . Translated and edited under the supervision of M. E. J. Richardson. Leiden: Brill.
Hiph	Hiphil
Hith	Hithpael
HNPS	heavy noun phrase shift
Impv	imperative
Inf	infinitive
JM	Joüon, Paul, and Takamitsu Muraoka. 2006. <i>A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew</i> . Rev. ed. SubBi 27. Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute.
Kt	<i>Ketiv</i> : the contextual form in the Masoretic Text of B19a (Leningrad Codex)
LBH	late Biblical Hebrew
m	masculine
MNK	van der Merwe, Christo H. J., Jacobus A. Naudé, and Jan H. Kroeze. 1999. <i>A Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar</i> . Biblical Languages: Hebrew 3. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic.
MSS	manuscripts
MT	Masoretic Text
N	noun
Niph	Niphal
NP	noun phrase
p	plural
pro	pronoun
PP	prepositional phrase
Qr	<i>Qere</i> : the marginal form in the Masoretic Text of B19a (Leningrad Codex)
s	singular
SBH	Standard Biblical Hebrew
WO	Walke, Bruce K., and Michael O'Connor. 1990. <i>An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax</i> . Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns.
V	verb
VP	verb phrase

## INTRODUCTION

The language of the book of Ecclesiastes has long puzzled scholars. After more than three centuries of critical study, terms like “aberrant” (Seow 1997: 11) and “idiosyncratic” (Schoors, 1) continue to be used to characterize the book’s language. The linguistic profile of the book is indeed unique and appears to be a mix of styles, stages, registers, and dialects. For instance, the orthography has been linked with Phoenician, two words (פְּרָדִים and פְּתִיגִים) have often been identified as lexical borrowings from Persian, multiple other lexemes or grammatical features have been labeled Phoenicianisms, Aramaisms, and Grecisms, and some items (e.g., the use of the relative element אֲשֶׁר in addition to the more common שֶׁ) have been associated with “late, vernacular” Hebrew (see Seow 1996 for a concise overview of the linguistic features commonly used in dating the book). With that said, the linguistic profile of every book in the Hebrew Bible is unique, and perpetuating the view that the grammar reflected in Ecclesiastes somehow deviates fundamentally from other examples of ancient Hebrew may well keep us from grammatical insight into the book.

In this volume of the *Baylor Handbook on the Hebrew Bible*, we build on our previous work in ancient (biblical and nonbiblical) Hebrew linguistics and on the book of Ecclesiastes both to present a substantive discussion of the notable grammatical issues one faces in Ecclesiastes and to apply our linguistic model in a verse-by-verse commentary. In the following sections, we offer a brief discussion of structure (§1) and then present the background and terminology necessary for understanding our grammatical analyses (§2), in-depth studies of the pronouns (§3), relative words (§4), and verbal system in the book (§5), and a final section on dating the language of the book (§6).



## 1. Literary Structure

Identifying Ecclesiastes' opaque structure remains a challenge. In the voluminous scholarship on the book, consensus has emerged only concerning the existence of the frame (1:1-2; 12:8-14) that distinguishes the author from the main character—the “I” voice of the book, Qoheleth.<sup>1</sup> Though the positions on the structure within the frame are myriad,<sup>2</sup> we find it useful to think of them in three basic categories: (1) there is no clear structure; the book is compilation of sayings or groups of saying similar to Proverbs (e.g., Lauha); (2) the structure reflects a progression of concepts and themes (e.g., Seow 1997; Longman); the structure is tied to the book's key phrases, such as the mentions of הֶבֶל “vanity,” or the exhortation to enjoy life in 2:24-26; 3:12-13; 3:22; 5:17-19; 8:15; 9:7-10 (e.g., Wright; Rousseau); and (3) Qoheleth's ramblings reflect his disturbed psychological state; the progression and lapses reflect a psychological spiral (Bartholomew).

None of the articulations of the book's structure has gained broad acceptance; moreover, we have not found any particular structural analysis to be thoroughly convincing. Even the notion that there is a structural shift at 6:10, which demarcates the two halves of the book (Seow 1997: 45–46) seems arbitrary (note that the midpoint the Masoretes indicate in the margin of the Leningrad Codex concerns the number of words for copying purposes, not literary design). The only clear structural shift, in our opinion, is marked by the intrusion of the narrator at 7:27. The book is thus structured in two parts, marked at the beginning (1:2) and end (12:8) by the Qoheleth's motto and in the middle by the narrator's intrusion (7:27) (Christianson; Beldman). Although there does not appear to be a rigid pattern between the two halves, the first half of the book seems more oriented to Qoheleth's report of his experiment while the second half seems to wrap up the more general conclusions he draws from this.

Within the two halves of the book, the structure (or lack thereof) suggests to us that the psychological approach may be essentially correct, though the repetition and circling back to previously covered topics may also have explanation within the general wisdom *modus operandi*—to cover an issue from as many perspectives as possible. In this vein, we

<sup>1</sup> Note that throughout this work we refer to the book as Ecclesiastes and the main character as Qoheleth.

<sup>2</sup> See the useful surveys in Wright; Salyer; and Beldman.

could compare the principle behind the multiple dialogue cycles in Job with the apparent redundancy and regression within Ecclesiastes. Just as the author of Job used the cycles to impress the audience with the sense that Job's guilt or innocence had been thoroughly investigated, so Ecclesiastes has Qoheleth return again and again to the problem of toil, gain, death, and utility of wisdom to demonstrate the intractable tensions between what he expects of life in an ordered creation and what he experiences and observes.

For the usability of this volume, we have included smaller section headings in the commentary. The reader should note, though, that these headings are intended to be a *convenience for using the volume* and do not reflect any formal position on a structure within the book.

## 2. Linguistic Background

In our grammatical analysis we follow the approach taken in two previous volumes in the BHHB series: the Ruth volume (Holmstedt 2010) and the Esther volume (Screnock and Holmstedt) as well as numerous subsequent studies by the current authors (see the bibliography), including the syntactic database developed for Accordance Bible Software (see here: <http://www.accordancebible.com/store/details/?pid=HMT-W4.syntax>). In this section, we briefly describe the concepts by which we analyze the grammar of Ecclesiastes (we also suggest the reader consult the linguistic glossary and index at the end of the volume).

### A. Syntactic Components: Constituency

*Constituency* refers to the analysis and determination of the units that combine to create larger structures. Thus, in politics, a constituent is a member of a geographic area served by a particular politician. In linguistics, constituents typically refer to the syntactic units that combine to form a clause. The relationship between these units is not just linear, but also hierarchical (see Jacobson; Carnie 2010). Consider the following clause:

- (1) A friend who read the Bible concluded that Ecclesiastes hates life.

Working backwards from the largest constituent, the entire clause, we can distinguish successively small syntactic units. Thus, *A friend who read the Bible* is the subject noun phrase (NP) of the clause and *concluded that Ecclesiastes hates life* is the verb phrase (VP). Those two constituents can be further reduced; for example, the NP *Ecclesiastes* is the subject of

the VP *hates life* within the complement clause (a constituent) of the verb *concluded*. Further, the NP *life* is the object of the verb *hates*. And the complex subject NP of the main clause, *A friend who read the Bible*, can be similarly reduced into a number of constituents, so that in English, there is almost a one-to-one correspondence between a word and the lowest level of constituency.

Because the hierarchy of some phrases or clauses is not always easy to tease out before the structure is adequately understood—including which groups of words constitute constituents—linguists often use a variety of “constituent tests” to determine constituency (see Carnie 2006: 86–89). Such tests both confirm that this invisible and inaudible concept exists within grammar and give us evidence for discerning precisely what kind of structure we are dealing with in most instances. That is, they drive home the linguistic fact that constituents are a linguistic reality, even though we cannot “see” or “hear” them. In many cases, more than one test may be needed to conclude with some confidence that a particular group of words represents a constituent. Commonly used tests are coordination, replacement (by “do so” for VPs or “one” for NPs), clefting, and pseudo-clefting, though few of these transparently work for Biblical Hebrew (BH). Below we give one example of a constituent test that may have some applicability to Hebrew.

Pronoun replacement is one constituency test that works reasonably well for Hebrew—if a word or group of words can be replaced in a given phrase or clause by a pronoun, that word or group qualifies as a constituent (see Carnie 2006: 86–87). For example, in (1') the group of words *A friend who read the Bible* can be replaced by the pronoun *he*, as we have done in (2).

(1') [A friend who read the Bible] concluded that Ecclesiastes hates life.

(2) [He] concluded that Ecclesiastes hates life.

The grammatical acceptability of the pronoun replacement in (2) suggests that the group *A friend who read the Bible* functions in the clause as a single constituent.

Constituents, starting at the simplest level of words, combine with other constituents to create increasingly larger units, or phrases. When phrasal constituents are formed, the relationship between the smaller constituents within the phrase is hierarchical. That is, one item in a phrasal constituent shares its syntactic identity with (or “projects” its identity to) the entire phrase; this item is considered to be the phrasal

**head.** For instance, in the phrase *A friend who read the Bible* above in (1), the noun *friend* is the phrasal head and so the phrasal constituent is identified as a **noun phrase (NP)**.

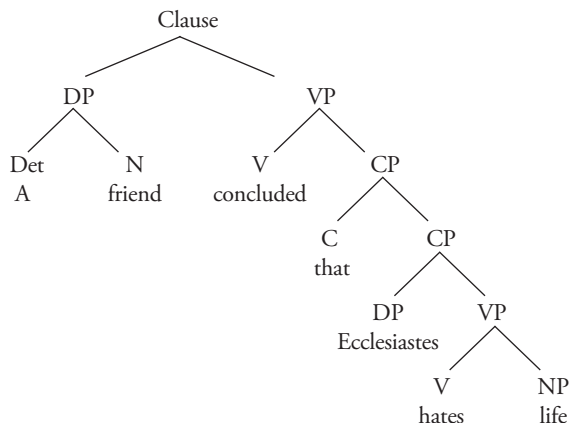
Just as a noun phrase has a noun as its head, so all phrasal types have one constituent that is hierarchically dominant. Verbs project **verb phrases (VP)**, adjectives project **adjective phrases (AP)**, and so on with other lexical categories: adverbs (>**AdvP**), prepositions (>**PP**), determiners (>**DP**).

Constituents continue to combine until they form the highest phrasal level—the clause. The constituent relationships within a phrase or clause are often visually represented by bracketing or tree diagramming. If we bracket (1), the result is given in (3). Note that multiple brackets indicate further levels down in the hierarchy.

- (3) [<sub>CLAUSE</sub> [<sub>DP</sub> A [<sub>NP</sub> friend [<sub>CP</sub> who [<sub>VP</sub> read [<sub>DP</sub> the [<sub>NP</sub> Bible ]]]]]]  
 [<sub>VP</sub> concluded [<sub>CP</sub> that [<sub>DP</sub> Ecclesiastes ] [<sub>VP</sub> hates [<sub>NP</sub> life ]]]].

The tree diagram equivalent of (3), slightly simplified (i.e., eliminating the relative clause modifying the subject for reasons of space), is given in (4).

(4)



Both the bracketing and tree diagramming illustrate the hierarchical syntactic relationships among the words in phrases, though the tree diagramming is more visually explicit. (Note that the “tree” is upside down, since the highest node is the clause, which is the root in the tree metaphor, with the phrases and the nodes the “branches” and “leaves.”)

What both methods of representation make clear is that phrases and clauses strongly tend to be *binary* in nature, that is, consisting of two lower constituents. For example, a DP consists of a determiner and an NP, a VP consists of a verb and its object DP/NP, and a clause consists of a subject and a VP. In fact, within generative syntax, binarity is taken to be a fundamental principle of phrase structure, so that even when a noun has multiple modifiers (e.g., an adjective and a relative clause), the phrase is structured so that there are only ever two branches (see Holmstedt forthcoming for further discussion).

### B. Verbal Valency

Consistent with the hierarchical analysis of constituent structure, we employ the vocabulary and conceptual ideas of valency to analyze the nonverbal constituents within the VP. In terms of vocabulary, throughout this work we classify the nonverbal constituents within the VP as either **complements** or **adjuncts** of the verbal head. Traditionally, complements have been thought of as “required” (grammatically or semantically) by the verbal head, whereas adjuncts are “optional” (see, e.g., WO §10.2a). For example, in the sentence *He hit the ball into left field*, the transitive verb “requires” the NP *the ball*, but the PP *into left field* is optional; the sentence would remain grammatical and have the same basic semantics without the PP. Thus, the former constituent, *the ball*, is regarded as a complement and the latter constituent *into left field* as an adjunct. The traditional approach, however, cannot adequately account for expressions such as *He’s hitting well* (such as in answer to the question about a baseball player, *How’s he playing today?*). In this example, the head verb, *hit*, which is generally regarded as transitive and therefore requires a NP complement, is modified by the adverb *well*, which is arguably an adjunct—i.e., “optional.”

Instead of the traditional concepts of “required” or “optional,” we prefer to think in terms of hierarchy and constituent structure: constituents that are complements are more closely tied to their verbal head than are adjunct constituents. We can demonstrate the difference of “closeness” between the verbal head and complements versus adjuncts by the *do-so* test, which is analogous to the pronoun replacement test mentioned above. If we replace the verbal head with *do-so*, the head requires that its complement also be replaced; by contrast, adjunct constituents do not have to be replaced by the stand-in *do-so* expression. For example, in the expression *Bill hit the ball into left field, and John did so into right*

*field*, the *did so* replaces the verbal head and its complement *hit the ball*, while the adjunct *into left field* is unrepresented by *did so*, thus an alternative one can be used, *into right field*. By contrast, we cannot replace only the verbal head without its complement by *do so*, demonstrated by the ungrammaticalness of the following expression: *\*Bill hit the ball into left field, and John did so the bat into the dugout*.

Even though it can be difficult at times to distinguish complements and adjuncts, especially in an ancient language, approaching the distinction in terms of hierarchy and constituent structure demonstrates that there is a real and measurable distinction between these two types of nonverbal VP constituents. In addition, it explains how the examples *He hit the ball against the wall* and *He's hitting well* can both be grammatical: in the second example, in answer to the question *How's he playing today?* about a baseball game, we interpret *He's hitting well* with an implicit complement *the ball*. This is evident from the fact that a follow up question *What's he hitting well?* would be strange in such a context. Many verbs elicit such implicit complements, even apart from contextual indicators. For example, the English *bake* implies baking bread or pastry; *read* implies looking at something legible; and *eat* implies ingesting something edible. If these actions apply to something other than these default complements, an overt expression is required: *Let's bake potatoes*; *I can read your mind*; *Eat my dust!* It is helpful, therefore, to think of implicit complements as of two types: either they are implied by the verb itself (as in the above examples) or they are implied from the context, either generally (as in *the ball* in the exchange about the baseball game), or elliptically, in which we can point to a specific word from the context that is the implicit complement (e.g., *She picked up her book and read (it)*; see אכל “eat” in Gen 3:6).

While recognizing variations in valency patterns for individual verbs, we find it expedient to refer to the verbs at times in the commentary by their typical structures, either as monovalent (one argument: the subject), bivalent (two arguments: the subject and a VP complement), or trivalent (three arguments: the subject and two VP complements). The following examples from Ecclesiastes illustrate these patterns in BH.

- (5) Monovalent (no VP complement)

וְלָמָּה חֲכַמְתִּי

Why have I [<sub>VP</sub> become wise?] (2:15)

- (6) Bivalent (one VP complement: NP, PP, infinitive clause, or direct speech)

הַחַיִּים יֹדְעִים שְׁיָמָתוּ

The living [<sub>VP</sub> know [<sub>COMP</sub> that they will die.]] (9:5)

- (7) Trivalent (two VP complements: NP, PP, infinitive clause, or direct speech)

אֶת־כָּל־זֶה נָתַתִּי אֵלַי

I [<sub>VP</sub> gave [<sub>COMP1</sub> all this] [<sub>COMP2</sub> to my heart]] (9:1)

The system of *binyanim*, especially when they apply to a single root, create contrasting valency patterns. For example, compare the bivalent Qal verb of עָשָׂה (*he did x*; e.g., 2:5-6) with the monovalent Niphal of the same root, נַעֲשֶׂה (*it was done*; e.g., 1:14-15); similarly, compare the bivalent Qal רָאָה (*he saw x*; e.g., 1:14) with the trivalent Hiphil, הִרְאָה (*he showed x y*; e.g., 2:24).

### C. Subordinate Clauses

Most subordinate clauses are clausal adjuncts (some are complements) to a verb (relatives modify a noun) in a higher clause within which the subordinate clause resides (see Holmstedt 2013d). Hebrew subordination is signaled by two methods: the use of subordinators or the type of verb. The subordinators used in Hebrew fall into two categories, subordinating conjunction (e.g., כִּי) and the combination of a preposition and conjunction (כַּאֲשֶׁר), and appear at the front of the subordinate clause. Those used in Ecclesiastes are listed below:

- (8) Subordinators in Ecclesiastes

אִם 'if' (3:12; 4:10, 11, 12; 5:7, 10, 11; 6:3; 8:15, 17; 10:4, 10, 11; 11:3, 6, 8; 12:14)

לִּי 'if' (6:6)

אֲשֶׁר 'that' (1:10, 13, 16; 2:3 [2×], 10, 12; 3:9, 10, 11 [2×], 14, 15, 22; 4:1, 2, 3 [3×]; 4:9, 13, 15, 16, 17; 5:3 [2×], 4, 14, 17 [3×], 18; 6:1, 2 [2×], 10, 12; 7:2, 13, 18, 19, 20, 21 [2×], 22, 26, 28, 29; 8:3, 4, 7, 9 [2×], 10, 11, 12 [3×], 13, 14 [3×], 15 [2×], 16 [2×], 17 [2×]; 9:1, 2 [3×], 3, 4, 6, 9 [3×], 10 [2×]; 10:14, 15; 11:5 [2×]; 12:1 [2×], 2, 6, 7)

שֶׁ 'that' (1:3, 7, 9 [4×], 10, 11 [2×], 14, 17; 2:7, 9, 11 [2×], 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18 [3×], 19 [2×], 20, 21 [2×], 22, 24, 26; 3:13, 14, 15, 18, 22; 4:2, 10; 5:4, 14 [2×], 15 [2×], 17; 6:3, 10 [2×]; 7:10, 14, 24; 8:7, 14 [2×], 17; 9:5, 12 [2×]; 10:3, 5, 14, 16, 17; 11:3, 8; 12:3, 7, 9)

ה 'that'<sup>3</sup> (1:11 [3×]; 2:14, 16 [3×], 26; 3:9, 17 [2×], 21 [2×]; 4:1 [2×], 2 [2×], 3, 9 [2×], 10 [2×], 12 [3×], 14, 15 [2×], 16; 5:11 [2×]; 6:8 [3×]; 7:10, 19; 8:1, 13, 14 [2×], 17; 9:1 [2×], 2 [8×], 3, 4, 5 [2×], 11 [4×], 12, 15, 16; 10:4, 5; 11:5; 12:3, 5)

כי 'because, when, if, that' (1:18; 2:10, 12, 16, 17, 21, 22, 24, 25, 26; 3:12, 14, 17, 19, 22; 4:4, 10, 14 [2×], 17; 5:1, 2, 3, 5, 6 [2×], 7, 10, 17, 19 [2×]; 6:2, 4; 7:3, 6, 7, 9, 10, 12, 13, 18, 22; 8:3, 6 [2×], 7 [2×], 15, 17; 9:3, 4 [2×], 5 [2×], 7, 9, 10, 11 [2×], 12; 10:4, 20; 11:1, 2, 6, 8, 9, 10; 12:3, 5, 13, 14).

Subordination that is signaled by the type of verb used primarily concerns Hebrew infinitives. The “infinitive construct” is often the clitic host for (and complement of) a preposition that overtly marks the infinitival clause as an adjunct of the verb in the higher clause (see, e.g., ללכת in 1:2). These infinitives provide a wide range of subordinate clauses, such as temporal, purpose, and complement. The “infinitive absolute” used as the verb in a VP takes its tense-aspect-mood value from its governing verb and is used to present its clause both as subordinate and as focus-marked (see, e.g., שבוּח in 4:2; see also 4:17; 8:9; 9:11; and the commentary discussions).

#### D. Word Order

Although the basic word order of Hebrew is traditionally understood to be **verb-subject** (see, e.g., WO §8.3b; JM §155k), the discussion has markedly lacked grounding in the analysis of word order in general linguistics (see Holmstedt 2011). We maintain that the general shift in Semitic languages from typologically verb-subject to typologically **subject-verb** order had occurred in Hebrew by the time most of the Hebrew Bible was written down (Holmstedt 2005, 2009a, 2013d; cf. Joüon 1923 §155). More specifically, while some early books (e.g., 1 Samuel) may still reflect a “weak” verb-subject typology, the progression to subject-verb typology occurs through the monarchic and post-monarchic periods of ancient Israel, resulting in a “strong” subject-verb typology by the early postbiblical Hebrew of the Mishnah.

But a language’s typological word order profile is not the end of the story. Typologically speaking, basic word order is most often identified

<sup>3</sup> On ה as a subordinator, see Holmstedt 2010: 27–31 and 2016: 69–77. Note that the list of examples in Ecclesiastes includes cases in which the article and a preceding preposition have been fused, e.g., הַ, הַ.



as the word order present in “stylistically neutral, independent, indicative clauses with full nouns phrase (NP) participants, where the subject is definite, agentive and human, the object is a definite semantic patient, and the verb represents an action, not a state or an event” (Siewierska, 8; see also Mallinson and Blake, 125). However, this kind of clause may not be identical to the statistically prevalent word order of a given language, due to vagaries of human communication or genre conventions (Siewierska, 11–12).

Recognizing a distinction between basic word order and other derived orders that may be used more frequently is the key to the Hebrew situation. Hebrew narrative especially has a conventional form that utilizes a specific verb type, the past narrative *wayyiqtol*, which forces verb-subject order. Departure from the use of a clause with *wayyiqtol* triggers narrative implicatures like background information or simultaneity. Thus, it is accurate to say that the predominant word order in Hebrew narrative is verb-subject, but it is inaccurate to take this as underived and thus basic order. Rather, the basic, underived order is subject-verb, while a variety of grammatical factors—the placement of a constituent or certain grammatical words at the beginning of the clause, the use of an irrealis verb, the use of the past narrative *wayyiqtol*—trigger constituent movement and thus derivational orders often reflecting verb-subject. The list below summarizes the most common triggers to verb-subject order:

1. subordination (most commonly with *כִּי*, *אֲשֶׁר*, *אִם*, *פֶּן*)
2. clausal negation
3. irrealis verbs (irrealis *yiqtol* or *qatal*, jussives, cohortatives, imperatives)
4. topic or focus-fronting of a nonsubject constituent

The likely explanation for the marked difference between the basic subject-verb order of main clauses and the dominant verb-subject order in subordinate and negated clauses is diachronic. Cross-linguistic studies have demonstrated that syntactic change occurs first in nonembedded (i.e., main clause) structures and only later spreads to embedded structures (Holmstedt 2013d: 21). One indication that Hebrew continued to change during the span in which the Hebrew Bible was written is the different word order profiles we can detect in the different books. For example, finding a greater frequency of subject-verb order infiltrating subordinate, negated, and/or irrealis contexts within a given book (e.g., the subject-negative-verb clause in Eccl 1:15; 4:8; 5:9; 6:3; 8:5; 9:15;

11:4; and Esth 9:28b) strongly suggests a diachronically later linguistic stage (Holmstedt 2013d: 21–23; see below, §6).

Null copula clauses (so-called verbless or nominal clauses) also have the basic order subject-verb (or better, subject–null copula–complement). However, these clauses do not typically invert to verb-subject order when a subordinator or pragmatically fronted constituent precedes the subject. Rather, any divergence from subject–null copula–complement word order is when the subject or copular complement is fronted for topic or focus. Note that we take the Hebrew participle to be the complement of a copula, most often null, though occasionally overt (see Cook 2008). The word order implication is that participles should also have a basic subject-copula-complement[participle] order. Happily, this is indeed the case.

Finally, as copular items, we might expect **יָשׁ** (positive) and **אֵין** (negative) to exhibit subject-verb (or, subject-copula-complement) word order. While this order does occur (e.g., **וְחָלַק אֵין-לָהֶם** in 9:6), it is rare and the overwhelming pattern is either to use a left-dislocation that is resumed by the clitic pronoun on **אֵין** (e.g., **וְהֵימָּן אֵינוּ מְלֵא** in 1:7) or to have the **אֵין** or **יָשׁ** first, followed by the copular subject and then complement (e.g., **יָשׁ אֶחָד וְאֵין שְׁנֵי** in 4:8). The syntax of **יָשׁ** and **אֵין** copular phrase structure has not yet adequately been studied and so remains an important desideratum in Hebrew grammar.

In sum, when constituents are moved from their default position (e.g., subject-verb-complement-adjunct), the reasons are either syntax (i.e., triggered inversion due to subordinating particles), semantics (i.e., irrealis verbs, negation), or pragmatics. Pragmatically motivated constituent movement in BH is for two primary reasons—to signal that a constituent carries either topic or focus information. Though it is possible for a topic-marked or focus-marked constituent to reside in its default position (where it would be marked by an item like focus **גַּם** or prosody) or to be moved to the end of the clause (e.g., extraposition and right-dislocation; see Holmstedt 2014), by far the dominant strategy to signal such discourse information is to raise the marked constituent to the front of the clause (see Holmstedt 2009a: 126–29; 2011: 21–24).

Topic-fronting is used to signal a shift of “aboutness” (i.e., what the following assertions are “about”; the topic being typically the syntactic subject) between known discourse entities or to set the scene’s circumstantial information, such as temporal or spatial PPs. An example of a scene-setting topic is the temporal phrase **כּוּ**-PP in Eccl 5:3,

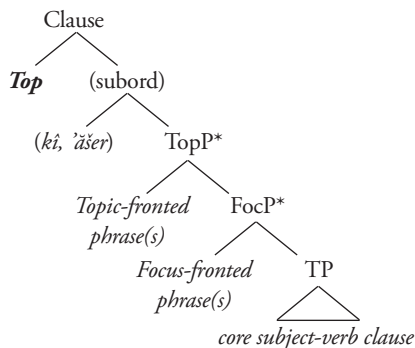
באשר תדר נדר לאלהים אל־תאחר לשלמו. An example of topic for “aboutness” is the subject הארץ in the clause והארץ לעולם עמדת in Eccl 1:4. The fronted position of the PP לעולם before the participle (and null copula) indicates that the DP הארץ is also fronted, likely for focus (see discussion in commentary on 1:4).

Focus-fronting serves to establish a set of related items either from the discourse context or from shared knowledge of the world and then to set the focus constituent over against the other members of the set. The result is often associated with a sense of contrast, illustrated in Eccl 1:2:

- (9) הִבֵּל הַבָּלִים אָמַר קִהְלֵת הִבֵּל הַבָּלִים הַכֹּל הֵבֵל  
 “A total הבל!’ said Qoheleth, ‘A total הבל! Everything is a הבל.’”

Note how the fronted direct speech (part of it, anyway) triggers the raising of the verb אמר in front of the subject קהלת. The reason for the focus-fronting is to contrast the audience’s expected assessment (e.g., “it’s all good”) with the actual assessment given by Qoheleth.

Both topic and focus constituents may be fronted in the same clause, with the topic always preceding the focus, as the tree diagram below illustrates. Additionally, it is possible for there to be more than one of each type, which is what the \*-marking in the tree diagram below represents. Note that the tree also shows where subordinators fit in nonmain clauses, as well as whence “extreme” topic-fronted constituents raise (see Holmstedt 2014 for further discussion).



A final comment on word order in BH concerns the likely diachronic shift from a “weak” verb-subject typology to a subject-verb typology over the course of the centuries represented by the biblical texts. A contributor to this shift may have been the adoption and then abandonment of

the past narrative *wayyiqtol* form (later biblical and postbiblical Hebrew exhibit less frequent use of the *wayyiqtol* so that it is entirely absent in the grammar of rabbinic Hebrew—its only occurrences are in quotations of biblical material). At the core of the shift, though, is a reanalysis of subject fronting (for topic or focus) so that it was viewed as a pragmatically unmarked construction, resulting in a basic subject-verb order. Another participant in this shift is the modal system; for example, the loss of the irrealis *qatal* would strengthen the appearance of a general subject-verb pattern and likely encourage the acquisition of Hebrew as a subject-verb language. See Holmstedt 2013e for a fuller discussion of the shift to subject-verb in ancient Hebrew.

### 3. The Pronouns in Ecclesiastes<sup>4</sup>

This section addresses a noticeably idiosyncratic feature of Ecclesiastes' language—its use of the subject pronoun after a finite verb. Though superficially peculiar, this construction is actually well grounded in standard BH syntax and represents the use of the postverbal subject pronoun אֲנִי to formalize grammatically a literary method to describe Ecclesiastes' thought experiment: he did not do it alone, but with his לִב as a dialogue partner.

#### A. The Problem of Postverbal Pronouns

Certain aspects of the first-person grammar of Ecclesiastes figure prominently in commentary upon the book: the use of the first-person narrative voice and the choice of the first-person pronoun אֲנִי over the longer form אֲנֹכִי. The first-person narrative is not foreign to wisdom literature (see, e.g., Prov 1:10). The use of אֲנִי could either reflect its Hebrew origin as the “marked”<sup>5</sup> pronominal choice to signal higher status or importance (Revell 1995) or the later total displacement of אֲנֹכִי by אֲנִי (see Mishnaic Hebrew); we suspect the latter is more likely (see §6 below on the dating of Ecclesiastes).

<sup>4</sup> This section has been adapted from Holmstedt 2009b; the reader should consult that study for the critical review of previous proposals concerning the 1cs pronoun in Ecclesiastes.

<sup>5</sup> Markedness theory developed out of the Prague School of linguistic analysis. The basic concept is, given two similar constructions, the one occurring more often and in a greater number of environments is unmarked while the one that occurs less often and in restricted environments is marked.

A third aspect of the first-person grammar that has not received due attention is the use of a first-person subject pronoun with a finite verb, an example of which is given in (10).

- (10) דִּבַּרְתִּי אֲנִי עַם-לִבִּי לֵאמֹר אֲנִי הִנֵּה הִגַּדְתִּי וְהוֹסַפְתִּי חֲכָמָה עַל כָּל-אִשָּׁר-  
הָיָה לִפְנֵי עַל-יְרוּשָׁלַם וְלִבִּי רָאָה הַרְבֵּה חֲכָמָה וְדַעַת:  
 “I spoke, I to<sup>6</sup> my לִבִּי: ‘I—look—I made myself great and added wisdom (to myself) over any who was before me over Jerusalem.’ And my לִבִּי has (also) seen much wisdom and knowledge” (1:16).

Set within the context of the Hebrew Bible, there are two features that distinguish Ecclesiastes’ use of the subject pronoun: its presence and its syntactic placement. The first-person pronoun אֲנִי occurs 21 times in conjunction with a finite verb in the book. The book only has 81 first-person verbs within its 222 verses, so that more than one out of four verbs has a subject pronoun. A quick comparison with the rest of the Hebrew Bible, summarized in table 1, suggests that Ecclesiastes differs from the rest of the Hebrew Bible in its use of the 1cs pronoun as well as itself in the use of second and third-person subject pronouns.

The chart highlights a number of striking facts. First, the frequency of first-person pronoun with finite verbs is considerably higher in Ecclesiastes than in the rest of the Hebrew Bible. Second, Ecclesiastes’ use of 1cs subject pronouns differs from its use of second and third-person subject pronouns. Third, the position of the 1cs pronouns is opposite the dominant pattern elsewhere: Ecclesiastes overwhelmingly places the 1cs pronoun *after* the verb whereas the subject pronoun in other biblical books typically *precedes* the verb. The much more common preverbal placement of the pronoun in the Hebrew Bible is illustrated in (11).

- (11) כִּי-יֵאָדָהָהּ עַמְּךָ וְזֶה-לֶךְ הָאוֹת כִּי אֲנִי שְׁלַחְתִּיךָ בְּהוֹצִיאֲךָ אֶת־הָעָם מִמִּצְרַיִם  
תַּעֲבֹדוּן אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים עַל הָהָר הַזֶּה  
 “Because I will be with you and this will a sign for you that I have sent you: when you take the people out of Egypt you shall honor God upon this mountain” (Exod 3:12).

<sup>6</sup> As HALOT (s.v. דִּבֵּר) indicates, the verb דִּבֵּר allows a number of prepositions to mark the person to or with whom the speaking is occurring: לְ-, אֶת, אֵל, and עִם are the most common, but בְּ- is also used; see, e.g., Num 12:6, 8; 1 Sam 25:39; Hos 1:2; Hab 2:1; Zech 1:9, 13-14; 2:2, 7; 4:1, 4-5; 5:5, 10; 6:4; Song 8:8. Since a one-sided conversation is what takes place in Ecclesiastes, we translate the preposition as “to” rather than “with.” See also below, n. 16.

**TABLE 1**  
Finite Verbs with Subject Pronouns in Ecclesiastes  
and the Hebrew Bible

	<i>Ecclesiastes</i> (222 vv. in B19a)	<i>Rest of Bible</i> (22,991 vv. in B19a)
1cs finite verbs	81	6,924
1cs pronouns w/finite verb	22 2 preverbal <sup>7</sup> 20 postverbal <sup>8</sup>	482 412 preverbal 70 postverbal
1cp finite verbs	0	1,032
1cp pronouns w/finite verb	0	31 26 preverbal 5 postverbal
2nd person finite verbs	39	6,861
2nd person pronouns w/finite verb	1 (preverbal) <sup>9</sup>	330 296 preverbal 34 postverbal
3rd person finite verbs	311	38,533
3rd person pronouns w/finite verb	5 4 preverbal <sup>10</sup> 1 postverbal <sup>11</sup>	561 468 preverbal 95 postverbal

<sup>7</sup> 1:12, 16 (2nd occurrence).

<sup>8</sup> 1:16 (1st occurrence); 2:1, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15 (2×), 18, 20, 24; 3:17, 18; 4:1, 4, 7; 5:17; 7:25; 8:15; 9:16.

<sup>9</sup> 7:22. Although 7:22 includes both an overt subject pronoun and mention of the **לָב**, the second-person address makes it clear that Ecclesiastes is not speaking about himself or his **לָב**, and thus this verse is not relevant for the “אֲנִי וְלָבִי” argument. Even so, the function of the subject pronoun in 7:22 is worth examining: the overt, preverbal pronoun likely marks focus, communicating a contrast between the addressee and the servant mentioned in the preceding verse, e.g., כִּי גַם־פְּעָמִים רַבּוֹת יָדַע לְבָבְךָ אֲשֶׁר, “your **לָב** knows that also you [vs. your servant, from v. 21] have cursed others.”

<sup>10</sup> 3:14, 7:29, 8:15, 10:10.

<sup>11</sup> 9:15.

In summary, while in general the use of the subject pronoun in the Hebrew Bible is a marked grammatical feature—relatively rare and used to signal a “topic”<sup>12</sup> or “focus,”<sup>13</sup> in Ecclesiastes it is strikingly frequent with the 1cs verbs. Moreover, the postverbal placement of the 1cs pronoun in Ecclesiastes contrasts both with the preverbal placement of second- and third-person subject pronouns in that same book and of all subject pronouns in the Hebrew Bible as a whole. All of this raises two closely related questions: Why is the 1cs pronoun used so much in Ecclesiastes and Why is it consistently placed postverbally? To answer these questions requires that we investigate features of the Hebrew pronominal system in general.

### B. Hebrew as a “Pro-drop” Language

BH is a prototypical example of what is called a “*pro*-drop” or “null-subject” language (Naudé 1991, 1993; Holmstedt 2013b). The finite verbs are inflected with morphologically rich affixes (i.e., the verbal affixes are portmanteau morphs, carrying a bundle of person, number, and gender agreement features). In most languages with rich verbal morphology, overt subject noun phrases and pronouns are absent more often than not; i.e., they are “dropped.” The subject noun phrases and overt subject pronouns are in complementary distribution with a covert/null pronoun (*pro*). The *pro*-drop status of BH explains why the Hebrew Bible—from early to late literature—exhibits numerous clauses lacking an overt subject, as in (12) and (13).

- (12) כֵּן תִּכְעֹסֶנָּה וְתִבְכֶּה וְלֹא תֹאכַל

“thus *pro* (= Peninah) would vex her and *pro* (= Hannah) would weep and *pro* (she = Hannah) would not eat” (1 Sam 1:7).

- (13) וַיְבִיאֵם אֶרֶץ-שִׁנְעָר בֵּית אֱלֹהֵיו

“and *pro* (= Nebuchadnezzar) brought them (to) the land of Shinar, (to) the house of his gods” (Dan 1:2).

<sup>12</sup> We take topic to isolate one among multiple known entities in the discourse or to set the scene (e.g., with temporal or locative phrases). See Holmstedt 2009a, 2014 for further discussion.

<sup>13</sup> We take focus to identify a constituent to be in a contrastive relationship with possible alternatives. A constituent is typically presented as carrying focus by syntactic position, intonation, or specific focus items (e.g., Heb רַק “only”). See Holmstedt 2009a, 2014 for further discussion.

While it is most common for an overt subject noun phrase or pronoun to be dropped when the agent/patient subject of the verb is the most recently used verbal subject, the examples in (12) and (13) illustrate that even a distant subject may be filled by *pro* if the referent is apparent from the context. In (12) the previous agentive subject to be mentioned (in v. 6) is Yhwh, but it is contextually clear that Peninah was the agent of vexation for Hannah. It is also clear that Hannah was the one who wept and not Peninah, even though Hannah has not been explicitly identified as an agent since v. 5. In both cases, the identity of the agent is sufficiently easy to reconstruct based on the context so that the use of overt subject noun phrases is unnecessary. Similarly, in (13) the last explicit agentive subject in the context is אֲדֹנָי “the Lord,” but it is contextually clear that Nebuchadnezzar is the agent of the exile, making an overt noun phrase or pronoun to mark the shift between agents unnecessary.

The two examples in (12) and (13) demonstrate that an overt subject noun phrase or pronoun is often lacking in BH and yet the lack is syntactically licensed. Our explanation of (12) and (13) also illustrates how the identification of *pro* is related to the discourse: in Hebrew *pro* is used when its ability to access its antecedent within the discourse is high, the referring noun phrase subject is used when the accessibility is low, and an overt pronoun is used when the antecedent is marked for topic or focus.

Ecclesiastes exhibits the same *pro*-drop syntax as the rest of the Hebrew Bible, as (14) demonstrates.<sup>14</sup>

- (14) וְנָתַתִּי אֶת־לִבִּי לְדָרוֹשׁ וְלַתּוֹר בְּחִקְקָהּ עַל כָּל־אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשֶׂה תַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם  
 “and *pro* (= I) set my לֵב to seek and to investigate with wisdom concerning all that happens under the sun” (1:13).

When the overt subject 1cs pronoun is used with a finite verb in Ecclesiastes, we expect, then, that it is signaling that the 1cs referent (the speaker) is marked for topic or focus. But why does it use the unusual postverbal placement of the 1cs pronoun?

<sup>14</sup> For 1cs finite verbs without accompanying subject pronouns, see 1:13, 14, 17 (2×); 2:1, 2, 3, 4 (3×), 5 (2×), 6, 7, 8 (2×), 9 (2×), 10 (2×), 11, 15, 17, 18, 19 (2×), 20; 3:10, 12, 14, 16, 22; 4:1, 15; 5:12; 6:1, 3; 7:15, 23 (3×), 27, 28 (3×), 29; 8:9, 10, 14, 16, 17; 9:1, 11, 13; 10:5, 7. The same hold true of second- and third-person pronouns: the overt pronouns occur with finite verbs many fewer times (1:13; 3:14; 7:22, 29; 8:15; 9:15; 10:10) than the verb with null *pro* (too many to list).



### C. Subject Pronoun Syntax

By far the dominant order when pronouns are used with finite verbs is pronoun-verb (by at least four-to-one, with all pronouns), not verb-pronoun as we have in Ecclesiastes. Moreover, since an overt pronoun in a pro-drop language marks the subject with topic or focus status, the expected (and statistically dominant) position is initial, i.e., located somewhere in the clausal area preceding the final position of verb, as in (15), repeated from (11).

- (15) כִּי־אֶהְיֶה עִמָּךְ וְזֶה־לְךָ הָאוֹת כִּי אֲנִי שְׁלַחְתִּיךָ בְּהוֹצִיאֲךָ אֶת־הָעָם מִמִּצְרַיִם  
תַּעֲבֹדוּן אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים עַל הַהָר הַזֶּה

“Because I will be with you and this will a sign for you that I have sent you: when you take the people out of Egypt you shall honor God upon this mountain” (Exod 3:12).

With that said, Hebrew clause structure does allow for postverbal focus constituents, as the constituents preceded by רק and גם in (16) and (17) demonstrate.

- (16) וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוּדָה לְשִׁמְעוֹן אָחִיו עֲלֵה אִתִּי בְּגוֹרְלִי וְנִלְחַמָּהּ בְּכַנְעֲנִי וְהִלַּכְתִּי גַם־  
אֲנִי אִתְּךָ בְּגוֹרְלֶךָ

“and Judah said to Simon, his brother: Go up with me into my allotment and let us fight against the Canaanite, then (I) shall go, I, too, with you into your allotment” (Judg 1:3).

- (17) וַתִּפֹּל שֶׁבַּא וַתִּקְחֵם וְאֶת־הַנֶּעָרִים הָכּוּ לְפִי־חֶרֶב וְאַמְלָטָה רַק־אֲנִי לְבָדִי  
לְהַגִּיד לָךְ

“and Sheba fell (upon the livestock) and took them and they killed the servants by sword and (I) escaped, only I alone, to tell you” (Job 1:15).

Postverbal focus on the verbal subject, whether with pronouns or noun phrases, is much less frequent than preverbal focus. It is possible that this highly marked combination of the overt pronoun and the postverbal placement, which is unusual and thus syntactically marked (if not disruptive, similar to interjections and vocatives), is used for an even higher degree of focus-induced contrast than the more common preverbal focus. This is certainly suggested by the addition of the focus words גם and רק before the subject pronouns in (16) and (17).

An additional syntactic wrinkle in the use of subject pronouns is represented by examples like (18) and (19).

(18) וַיִּשְׁתּוּ הוּא וְהָאֲנָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר־עִמּוֹ

“and *pro* (they) drank, he and the men that were with him” (Gen 24:54).

(19) וַיַּכְבֵּד לִבּוֹ הוּא וְעַבְדָּיו

“and *pro* (he) hardened his לב, he and his servants” (Exod 9:34).

This type of construction is most often described as a way to highlight some feature of the subject, whether indicating a shift from a singular agent to a group, specified by the coordinate subject, as in (18), or emphasizing the primary agent-hood of the first constituent in the coordinate phrase, as in (19) (Revell 1993). This may be so, but it is not clear that the coordinate phrases are actually the syntactic subjects in these clauses since an overt subject of the verb may also appear (20).

(20) וַיֵּצֵא עֹגׁ מֶלֶךְ־הַבָּשָׁן לִקְרֹאתָנוּ הוּא וְכָל־עַמּוֹ לַמִּלְחָמָה אֲדֵרַעִי

“and Og, the king of Bashan, went out to meet us, he and all his people, for battle at Edrei” (Deut 3:1).

In (20) the coordinate phrase הוּא וְכָל־עַמּוֹ cannot be the syntactic subject since that position is already filled by the overt noun phrase עֹג מֶלֶךְ־הַבָּשָׁן. Nor can the coordinate phrase be right-dislocated, since it is positioned before another prepositional phrase adjunct לַמִּלְחָמָה (see Holmstedt and Jones 2016). The phrase הוּא וְכָל־עַמּוֹ is instead an extraposed appositive to the syntactic subject, whether overt or null (see Naudé 1999; Holmstedt 2009c for an alternative hypothesis). When the syntactic subject is *pro*, the verb is often singular, even though the appositive is a compound NP that is plural. In accordance with the nature of apposition (Holmstedt and Jones 2016), the function of the appositive is to clarify the full extent of the semantic subject. When the subject is overt, the appositive not only clarifies the full extent of the semantic subject but also signals that that overt subject, which is resumed by the pronoun in the compound appositive, is the more salient (active) agent of the verb.

We thus have two grammatical explanations for the postverbal 1cs pronoun in Ecclesiastes: it may be to carry a postverbal focus on the subject or it may be within a compound appositive to the syntactic subject used to clarify the full set of verbal agents. Which grammatical construction (of perhaps both?) best explains the Ecclesiastes data is the remaining piece of the puzzle.

*D. A Syntactic Solution and a Literary Explanation*

In order to consider the grammatical options carefully, we must consider the full range of 1cs pronoun data in Ecclesiastes as a unified set, which is the purpose of table 2.

TABLE 2  
The Use of the 1cs Subject Pronouns in Ecclesiastes

Col 1: Verb + Pro	Col 2: Verb + Pro-PP	Col 3: Other
פָּנִיתִי אֲנִי רָאִיתִי אֲנִי שָׁבִיתִי אֲנִי יָדַעְתִּי גַם־אֲנִי חָכַמְתִּי אֲנִי שָׁנֵאתִי אֲנִי שִׁבַּחְתִּי אֲנִי אִמַּרְתִּי אֲנִי	(2:11, 12) (2:13, 24; 4:4; 5:17) (4:1, 7) (2:14) (2:15) (2:18) (8:15) (9:16) דִּבַּרְתִּי אֲנִי עָם־לִבִּי אִמַּרְתִּי אֲנִי בְּלִבִּי	(1:16) (2:1, 15; 3:17, 18) סָבוּתִי אֲנִי וְלִבִּי סָבוּתִי אֲנִי לִי־אֵשׁ אֶת־לִבִּי (7:25) (2:20)

In the first column are the occurrences of the 1cs subject pronoun without any coordinate phrase. In the second column the 1cs pronoun is immediately followed by a preposition and the noun **לֵב** “heart, mind.” The third column presents what we consider to be the key to solving the problem: the first example has a singular verb followed by the 1cs pronoun coordinated with **לֵב** by the simple conjunction -ו-, the second example has **לֵב** as the verbal complement of an embedded infinitive following a finite verb and the 1cs pronoun.

At the center of the grammatical puzzle stands Qoheleth’s **לֵב**. In Ecclesiastes<sup>15</sup> the **לֵב** is used differently than elsewhere in the Hebrew

<sup>15</sup> The noun **לֵב** occurs forty-one times in Ecclesiastes: 1:13, 16 (2×), 17; 2:1, 3 (2×), 10 (2×), 15 (2×), 20, 22, 23; 3:11, 17, 18; 5:1, 19; 7:2, 3, 4 (2×), 7, 21, 22, 25, 26; 8:5, 9, 11, 16; 9:1, 3, 7; 10:2 (2×), 3; 11:9 (2×), 10. It is used as a syntactic subject (1:16, 2:3, 10, 23; 5:1; 7:3, 4 [2×], 22; 8:5, 11; 9:3; 10:2 [2×], 3; 11:9), as an NP complement (1:13, 17; 2:10, 20; 7:7, 21; 8:9, 16), within a PP complement (3:11; 7:2; 9:1), within a noncomplement PP (1:16; 2:1, 3, 15 [2×]; 3:17, 18; 9:7; 11:10), as the NP clitic host of a bound noun (i.e., the “nomen rectum” of a “construct phrase”) (2:22; 5:19; 7:26; 11:9), and as a conjunct in an adjunct phrase (7:25). There are clear cases in which **לֵב** is used in its more typical sense as one’s inner self; notably these are all in reference to a **לֵב** that is not Qoheleth’s specific one: 2:22, 23; 3:11; 5:1, 19; 7:2, 3, 4 (2×), 7, 21, 22, 26; 8:5, 11; 9:3, 7; 10:2 (2×), 3; 11:9 (2×), 10. There are

Bible. Rather than לִב used with verbs of speaking to express the idiom for internal speech (i.e., someone thinking or speaking to himself), it is used as a full-fledged character in Ecclesiastes. To wit, the second-person imperative instead of the expected first-person jussive in 2:1 suggests strongly that Qoheleth treats his לִב as an external conversation partner. There is no internal monologue in Ecclesiastes (contra Christianson, 19–97; Salyer, 175; and many others). Rather, Qoheleth uses his לִב to observe himself investigating and testing the potential solutions to life's essential conundrum (contra Fox 1999: 78; Christianson, 195). The לִב here is personified as an experiment partner distinct from himself (so also Fox 1999: 267).

It is in 1:16, given in (21), that Ecclesiastes first uses the postverbal phrase including the first-person pronoun אֲנִי to reinforce *grammatically* that the experiment was carried out in partnership by Qoheleth and his לִב.

- (21) דִּבַּרְתִּי אֲנִי עִם-לְבִי לֵאמֹר אֲנִי הִנֵּה הִגַּדְתִּי וְהוֹסַפְתִּי חֲכָמָה עַל כָּל-אִשָּׁר-  
 הָיָה לִפְנֵי עַל-יְרוּשָׁלַם וְלִבִּי רָאָה הַרְבֵּה חֲכָמָה וְדַעַת  
 “*pro* (I) spoke, I with<sup>16</sup> my לִב: ‘I—look—I made myself great and  
 added wisdom (to myself) over any who was before me over  
 Jerusalem.’ And my לִב has (also) seen much wisdom and  
 knowledge” (1:16).

Moreover, in v. 16 Qoheleth establishes that in addition to both parties engaging in the actual experiment, he and his לִב discussed their findings afterwards. Note how Qoheleth distinguishes what is true about just him, by using אֲנִי within the quote, and what is true of his לִב apart from him: his לִב had also seen much wisdom in the course of the experiment.

In 2:1 Qoheleth addresses his לִב in the second person, which establishes the personification of Qoheleth's לִב in the book. Qoheleth does not directly address his לִב anywhere else in the book (the second-person

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also verses in which Qoheleth references his לִב but does not include the 1cs pronoun since he apparently intends no contrast or does not need to highlight the collaborative nature of the experiment: 1:13, 17; 2:3, 10, 15; 8:9, 16; 9:1.

<sup>16</sup> Elsewhere -כִּי prepositional phrases are spatial or temporal adjuncts when collocated with the verb אָמַר. Qoheleth, however, is manipulating the idiom אָמַר בְּלִב, and so the nuance of the preposition must be taken from context. Here in 2:1 and also in 2:15; 3:17, 18, the preposition -כִּי marks the goal (“with X”) or the indirect object (“to X”) of the speech activity. Also see above, n. 6 for a discussion on the collocation of דִּבַּר and ב.

address in the remainder of the book is apparently aimed at Qoheleth's audience), but he does admit in 2:20 that he tried to influence the conclusions that his לִבִּי was drawing—his לִבִּי was not drawing the same negative conclusions about the value of his life's toil (2:10).

There certainly are cases of the 1cs verb when the 1cs pronoun is not overt—it is a grammatically optional strategy and thus Qoheleth is not compelled to use it to produce well-formed statements. What table 2 helps to show is that Qoheleth's pattern is to use the וְאֲנִי-plus-לִבִּי construction when he engages his לִבִּי in conversation (1:16, 2:1, 15; 3:17, 18) or when he and his לִבִּי take action together (7:25). He omits the pronoun more often than not, which is expected.<sup>17</sup> After the first instance of the וְאֲנִי-plus-לִבִּי construction in 1:16, Qoheleth repeats it to remind his audience that the experiment was carried out by the twosome. When he does not want to emphasize that the pair were engaged together, he omits the pronoun. And, finally, Qoheleth uses the 1cs pronoun but omits mention of his לִבִּי (the left column in table 2) when he wants to mark himself for focus. Once he has established that he and his לִבִּי carried out the experiment together, he is able to use the 1cs pronoun alone to identify the majority of experiences and conclusions as *his* rather than his לִבִּי's.

In its ancient Near Eastern (ANE) wisdom literature context, this literary device is similar to the personification of the *ba* in the Egyptian text *The Dispute Between a Man and His Ba*.<sup>18</sup> Seow notes this as well, but does not recognize it as an interpretative key to the book:

[The personification of the “heart” (Eg. *ib*) or “soul” (Eg. *ba*)] is a literary device used in Egyptian pessimistic literature. So one reads in *The Complaints of Khakheperre-Sonb*: “He said to his heart: ‘Come, my heart, that I may speak to you, and that you may answer me . . . I speak to you, my heart, answer me! A heart that is approached must not be silent’” (see Gardiner, *Admonitions*, p. 105, line 1; p. 108, lines 5–6). A similar device is found in *The Dispute Between a Man and His Ba* (AEL I, pp. 163–69). Such texts typically present conflicting positions assumed, respectively, by the physical

<sup>17</sup> For a main clause finite verb without the postverbal pronoun וְאֲנִי and collocated with לִבִּי as a complement or adjunct, see 1:13, 17; 2:3, 10, 15; 8:9, 16; 9:1. For a main clause finite verb without the postverbal pronoun וְאֲנִי or לִבִּי as a complement or adjunct, see 1:12, 14, 16; 2:2, 4–9, 17; 3:10, 12, 14, 16, 22; 4:15; 6:3; 7:15, 23; 8:9–10, 14, 17; 9:11, 13; 10:5, 7.

<sup>18</sup> See Holmstedt 2009b for more on the comparison between Ecclesiastes' use of לִבִּי and the *ba* in *The Dispute Between a Man and His Ba*.

self and the heart or the soul. So, too, Qohelet speaks “with” (*im*) his heart. Certainly the heart is personified in 2:1-3. (Seow 1997: 123; see also Shupak, 104, n. 13; 107, n. 9)

Based on the pronoun syntax and the use of the לֵב, it seems clear that Ecclesiastes has employed the basic literary presentation of the book on the ANE model much more closely than previously thought. The author has cast the book as the character Qoheleth’s report of a probing dialogue between two investigators, the primary voice of the book, Qoheleth himself, and the silent voice of his לֵב. The two pursue different, even opposing, lines of inquiry and so strengthen the scientific nature of the experiment. Without testing more than one path in life, Qoheleth’s experiment—and thus the book’s argument—would be transparently facile.

In summary, the author of Ecclesiastes uses an ingenious grammatical device to signal that the fundamental shape of the book is a dialogue between the character Qoheleth and his personified לֵב. Qoheleth directs his לֵב “to know” wisdom and test the high moral ground for the experiment, while he sets himself to “knowing” foolishness, even if it means walking down some of the less seemly paths of life, all for the sake of determining אִי־זֶה טוֹב לְבִי הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה.

The I-and-my-לֵב strategy appears mostly in the first two chapters of the book and while the basic cooperative nature of the experiment is not jettisoned, the author invokes it infrequently in the rest of the book. As a literary convenience this differs little from the monarchic-Solomonic persona that is also dropped after chapter 2: once well established as a part of the audience’s reception filter, the continued mention of such literary strategies is often uneconomical and even a distraction.

#### 4. The Variation of וְ and אֲשֶׁר in Ecclesiastes<sup>19</sup>

In no other biblical book is the distribution of וְ and אֲשֶׁר like that in Ecclesiastes (68× vs. 89× respectively). To put this in perspective, while there are about 5,500 אֲשֶׁר clauses in the Hebrew Bible, there are only 139 occurrences of וְ. Of these, 68 are in Ecclesiastes, 32 are in Song of Songs,<sup>20</sup> 21 are in various Psalms from Psalm 122 onward, and the

<sup>19</sup> This section has been adapted from Holmstedt 2013a; see also Holmstedt 2016.

<sup>20</sup> See Holmstedt 2016 for lists of all the relevant data mentioned from the biblical and nonbiblical sources.

remaining 18 are scattered in the Hebrew Bible, literally, from beginning to end. The distribution of **אשר** and **ש** in nonbiblical texts is somewhat similar. In epigraphic texts from the first millennium, there are 30 clear occurrences of **אשר** and none of **ש**. The Hebrew text of Ben Sira contains 29 cases of **ש** (and also 67 of **אשר**). In the Qumran nonbiblical texts, **ש** (including **של**) occurs 145 times, but 124 of these are in just 2 texts: 57 in the Copper Scroll [3Q15] and 67 in 4QMMT<sup>B,C</sup> [4Q394–99]; the remaining 21 examples are so spread out that no one text uses **ש** more than twice. The Bar Kokhba period texts from Nahal Hever and Wadi Murabbaʿat contain 118 occurrences of **ש** and none of **אשר**. Finally, **ש** dominates in the Mishnah, where **אשר** is used only 69 times, and all in biblical quotes or allusions (Segal, 42; Pérez Fernández, 50).

This distribution raises a host of questions, for the status of **ש** in general and its use in Ecclesiastes in particular. Scholars have suggested that the distribution in general and Ecclesiastes' use in particular reflects one or a combination of the following causes: dialect, style, register, and diachrony. The various proposals for the variation between **ש** and **אשר** in the Hebrew Bible were examined in Holmstedt 2013a and 2016. A brief summary of those findings follow.

The dominant proposal through the twentieth century was that **ש** reflected either a northern Hebrew origin or at least the influence of the northern dialect. This was ultimately connected to the almost certainly etymological origin of Hebrew **ש** from Akkadian *šu* (see Holmstedt 2007, 2016). The most reasonable pathway for this etymological connection from Akkadian to the biblical data is generally taken to include two intermediaries: northern Canaanite (e.g., Phoenician) and northern Hebrew. This seems plausible, that **ש** became the relative word of choice by change and diffusion within some Hebrew grammar in the north, from which it influenced some southern Hebrew grammar, particularly after 722 BCE, so that eventually it replaced **אשר**, the process and final result of which we see in Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs, respectively (see, among others, Gordon; Kutscher, 32, §45; Davila 1990; Rendsburg 2006). One problem with a simple northern-to-southern dialectal explanation is the complete absence of **ש** from any epigraphic text with a northern provenance. A second problem with this explanation, as Rendsburg notes, is that **אשר** is used in biblical texts often identified as northern in origin, e.g., Judges 5–8 and Hosea (1990: 114–16). For these two reasons, a *single* northern-to-southern explanation by itself is inadequate (more on this below).

Sensing the inadequacy in the dialectal explanation, some sought a sociolinguistic explanation, which takes two forms. The first is diglossia, a situation in which a language community uses a formal (high) variety for written media and a colloquial (low) variety for all normal discourse (Rendsburg 1990: 116–17; on diglossia in general, see Ferguson). The difficulty with a diglossic analysis of **אשר** and **ש** is that users in a diglossic situation do not mix the high and low varieties (Ferguson, 336; Kaye, 120). Thus, if the variation between **ש** and **אשר** reflects an intentionality, then the salient linguistic distinction is not diglossic variety but simply style (Young; Davila 1994).

Whereas dialectal differences in the textual evidence represent a linguistic accident—the differences reflect the separate origins of the contrasting linguistic forms—stylistic differences are not accidental. That is, characters are often distinguished by their speech in a range of genres, from plays to novels and other types of narrated literature (e.g., James Joyce's works). Speech may color the characters as old or young, educated or not, wealthy or poor, respectful or rude, local or foreign (for biblical examples, see Rendsburg 1996). This literary technique is not simply aesthetic, though: the differences are used to engage the reader and encourage the construction of a reader identity vis-à-vis the characters. While a stylistic explanation is compelling for a few of the **ש** and **אשר** variations (see Holmstedt and Kirk), it provides little guidance for Ecclesiastes or even Ben Sira, the two books that have a nearly equal use of both words (contra Davila 1994; Shlesinger). The nagging problem with the stylistic variation argument, at least for **ש** and **אשר**, is the lack of a clear pattern. For example, the variation between **ש** and **אשר** is not explained by the “lowbrow-highbrow” proposal: the variation occurs indiscriminately, sometimes in the same verse and in adjacent and parallel clauses: 1:10; 2:12; 3:14, 15, 22; 4:2; 5:4, 14, 17; 6:10; 8:7, 14; 10:14; 12:7.

The dialectal style and register analyses are inadequate, and the grammar of **ש** and **אשר** shows no noticeable divergences (both are used to nominalize clauses, mostly relative clauses but also some complement clauses, whether of verbs or prepositions). This leaves a diachronic explanation. Given that the great bulk of Hebrew texts in the Bible witness the use of **אשר** to the exclusion of **ש**, and also given that the Mishnah exhibits nearly the opposite case, the use of **ש** and the relegation of **אשר** to biblical quotations and allusions, it seems on the surface a logical proposal that the book of Ecclesiastes represents a middle point on this continuum of language change. Similarly, the many Aramaic-like features



and Mishnaic-like features in the book have been adduced to support this relative placement of Ecclesiastes.

Without getting into the technical linguistic details (see Holmstedt 2012, 2013a, 2016), the likeliest diachronic story unfolds like so: by the end of the second millennium or early first millennium BCE, Hebrew used as its primary nominalizer the item אִשָּׁר, which reflects the grammaticalization of a noun for “step, footstep.” In roughly the same period (Middle Assyrian), the Phoenicians themselves may have adopted the etymologically distinct nominalizer ʔ from Assyrian, perhaps especially during Tiglath-Pileser I’s (1114–1076 BCE) aggressive attention to northern Syro-Palestine. A dialect of Hebrew was similarly affected either at this time or three centuries later (due to intensity of contact with the Phoenicians during the Omride period), which may explain why ʔ appears in Judges 5.

The rare occurrences of ʔ in 2 Kings and Jonah, which are placed in the mouths of northerners or foreigners (Holmstedt 2006; Holmstedt and Kirk) suggest that ʔ was a marginal interpretable item for Hebrew speakers and used to signal “foreignness” in exilic (2 Kgs) and postexilic (Jonah) works. It is not until the Hellenistic period and the books of Ecclesiastes and Ben Sira that we see the change from אִשָּׁר to ʔ truly take hold with the latter’s complete diffusion by the Mishnaic period (see Holmstedt 2016: 93–101 for a fuller discussion of the historical realities that are likely behind the replacement of אִשָּׁר by ʔ).

## 5. The Verbal System in Ecclesiastes<sup>21</sup>

### *A. Introduction*

The verbal system in ancient Hebrew, as in most languages, is a central component of the grammar, intersecting with numerous other grammatical features. As a result, the verbal system of Ecclesiastes has been of interest to scholars for as long as the language of the book has been an object of study. Not only is an understanding of the Hebrew verb forms in Ecclesiastes crucial for the philological/exegetical task, but the characteristics of the book’s language have played an important role in constructing a history of the Hebrew language.

Dependent to some small degree on textual decisions, there are about 200 verbs that occur 700 times in total in the book of Ecclesiastes. The interpretation of these forms is addressed in the commentary. In

<sup>21</sup> This section has been adapted from Cook 2013.