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# THE SENTENCE IN BIBLICAL HEBREW

*by*

FRANCIS I. ANDERSEN

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## PREFACE

Recent advances in linguistic theory and method make desirable a fresh examination of the sentence systems of natural languages. Ancient Hebrew is practically a virgin field for such research. The existing literature contains no systematic treatment of the subject.

I am grateful to the Church Divinity School of the Pacific and to the National Endowment for the Humanities of the United States Government for supporting this project--the former by its generous policy of sabbatical leave, the latter by a grant (#RO-5068-72-155). The findings and conclusions presented here do not necessarily represent the view of the Endowment.

Thanks are due to many persons. To Dr. Anne Draffkorn Kilmer, Chairman of the Department of Near Eastern Languages, University of California, Berkeley, and to Dr. William G. Dever, Director of the William Foxwell Albright Institute of Archaeological Research, Jerusalem, for hospitality in their respective institutions. To the Reverend Esther H. Davis for help in typing. Last and best, to my wife Lois for unfailing encouragement and support.

It is a pleasure to dedicate this study to John Arthur Thompson, my first Hebrew teacher, whose lifelong devotion to biblical studies has been a constant inspiration.

Jerusalem  
October, 1972



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## SYMBOLS AND ABBREVIATIONS

*	Unattested form
+	Obligatory
±	Optional
¶	Paragraph
< >	(enclose) Symbol of a relationship or syntagmeme
A	Apposition
Aj	Adjunctive
Adv	Adverb
Alt	Alternative
Ant	Antithesis
	Antithetical
AV	Authorized (King James) Version
Ch	Chiasmus
	Chiastic
Cir	Circumstantial
Cj	Conjunction
	Conjunctive (Clause or Sentence)
Cl	Clause
Cn	Contrastive
Co	Coordination
D	Discourse
Dc	Declarative
Dj	Disjunctive
Ep	Episode
Eq	Equative
	Equivalent
Ex	Exclamative
Exc	Exclusive
Hb	Hebrew
IA	Infinitive Absolute
If	Infinitive
Inc	Inclusive
Int	Interrogative
L	Locative
M	Modification (Member -- Dik)
Mg	Margin
	Marginal

N	Noun
Nd	Definite noun
Ni	Indefinite noun
Nom	Nominalized construction
	Nominalizer
Np	Proper noun
Ns	Suffixed noun
Nuc	Nucleus
O	Object
OC	Object complement
OT	Old Testament
P	Predicate, Predicator
	Predication
Pc	Precative
Ph	Phrase
Pp	Preposition
Pr	Pronoun
Pt	Participle
Q	Quotation
QV	Quasiverbal
Rel	Relative
Res	Resumption
S	Subject
Se	Sentence
Seq	Sequence
Sub	Subordinate
	Subordination
Sur	Surprise
Sus	Suspended, <i>Casus pendens</i>
Sy	Syntagmeme
T	Tagmeme
Ti	Time
V	Verb
VC	Cohortative verb
VI	Imperative verb
VJ	Jussive verb
VL	Verbless (clause)
VP	Prefixed (imperfect) verb
VS	Suffixed (perfect) verb
Wd	Word
WP	Wāw-consecutive with VP (sequential past)
WS	Wāw-consecutive with VS (sequential future)

## THE transliteration of HEBREW

I apologize to Hebraists for not citing texts in Hebrew characters. Inflation has been hard on books with exotic scripts. The use of transcription should make this study more useful to linguists who do not read Hebrew, and the taxonomy of the Hebrew sentence system is not altogether without interest for universal grammar.

For purposes of syntax the finer points of Massoretic phonology are not often pertinent. The original can always be consulted. The system of transliteration used here is a normalized quasi-phonemic representation of the conventional orthography. Variations in spelling due to the inconsistent use of *matres lectionis* have been ignored. All long vowels are represented as  $\bar{v}$ , no matter what their historical development has been; for example, long /o/ is  $\bar{o}$  whether <\*u, <\*aw, <\*â, and whether spelled with or without a *mater lectionis*. In fact the *matres lectionis* are represented only by vowel length, never by consonants, except in the case of a few historical spellings like zō't *this*. This will be noticed particularly in the omission of *matres lectionis* from the ends of words. Thus זֶה *this* is ze not zeh. Dāgēš is shown by doubling the consonant when this is indicated, but the spirantization of stops is ignored as subphonemic. The standard equivalents of the consonants are used. The *ḥaṭef* vowels are shown  $\check{a}$ ,  $\check{e}$ ,  $\check{o}$ , but unfortunately "ø" was not available, and  $\bar{e}$  has been regretfully used for *shewa*.



## INTRODUCTION

## 1.0. TRADITIONAL GRAMMAR

The Hebrew SENTENCE (Se) as the domain of inter-clausal relationships has not been studied systematically on a full scale since the volume on syntax in Eduard König's monumental grammar.<sup>1</sup> The established approach is found too in several briefer works. Thus A. B. Davidson's *Hebrew Syntax* (Edinburgh, 1894) has brief sections on "The Conditional Sentence" (pp. 175-179), "The Conjunctive Sentence" (pp. 184-185), etc. These writers use 'sentence' where we would use 'clause.' The categories are taken for granted, as if the criteria for classification were obvious. Each clause type is illustrated by means of a few selected examples. No attempt is made to establish a general theory of inter-clausal relationships, and the evidence of the texts is not presented in a comprehensive way.

Other presentations of Hebrew syntax above the level of PHRASE (Ph) or CLAUSE (Cl) are only sketches. Even Joüon's *Grammaire de l'Hébreu biblique*<sup>2</sup> (Rome, 1947), with its admirable overall treatment of Hebrew syntax, often has but one page on sentence types to which we devote a whole chapter. The best recent syntax is Carl Brockelmann's *Hebräische Syntax* (Neukirchen, 1956). He devotes Book Three (pp. 130-165) to *Der Zusammengesetzte Satz*. The treatment is brief; for instance, he devotes only seven lines (§§ 142, 159d) to clauses in apposition (Chapter 3 below). The method is essentially a listing of an inventory of clause types, more by reference to their inner structure than to discourse function. So far as the latter is concerned, the categories are assumed, and criteria for their identification are drawn from logic, psychology or etymology.<sup>2</sup>

König's work is still impressive, and a rich source of organized data. In the Second Part of the Syntax he studies first individual 'sentences' (that is clauses) and then *die Satzzusammensetzungen* under two headings--coordination (pp. 489-546) and subordination (pp. 546-620). Clauses in apposition he does not examine, except as asyndetic coordination. This lack is made up partly in Ewald Kuhr, *Die Ausdrucks Mittel der Konjunktionslosen Hypotaxe in der ältesten hebräischen Prosa: Ein Beitrag zur historischen Syntax des Hebräischen: Beiträge*

zur Semitischen Philologie und Linguistik Heft 7 (Leipzig, 1929). Yet even here it is hypotactic clauses as such, not the extended relationships between successive clauses in hypotaxis, that are examined. In effect what Kuhr does is (in our terminology) to study the use of apposition and coordination to realize subordinate relationships. In any case, the method is based on Wundt's *Völkerpsychologie*, and his interests are strongly historical-comparative, as the title indicates.

In English-speaking scholarship the preeminence of S. R. Driver as a Hebraist remains uneclipsed. His great work, *A Treatise on the Use of the Tenses in Hebrew*<sup>2</sup> (Oxford, 1891), and all his commentaries still repay study. But many of the concerns of nineteenth century scholarship no longer motivate us, and many of its presuppositions no longer guide us. From this distance it is possible to see the limitations in this earlier work. In the light of twentieth century linguistics the approach was too metaphysical (grammatical categories are derived from 'ideas'), too psycholinguistic (a variety of clauses may be gathered under a rubric like 'wish'), too etymological (diachronic explanations take precedence over synchronic descriptions). There are excursions into text criticism and sometimes regrettable attempts to correct difficult readings to conform to the regularities of text-book grammar. Each of these concerns is valid in its own way, but they can distract research from the immediate task of describing what is there. Comparison of traditional grammars soon reveals that an agreed theoretical foundation was never laid. Without explicit and methodologically rigorous definitions of basic units and relationships the classification of a linguistic datum remains whimsical, and the same clause will often be described differently by different writers, with no discussion of the reason for doing so. For such reasons we have not considered it profitable to document everything that others have said on a particular construction, nor to enter into debate with existing literature. This would only add to the size of the book, without increasing its substance.

### 1.1. DISCOURSE GRAMMAR

The main stimulus for the present monograph has come from contemporary linguistics. The last decade in particular has seen spectacular progress all along the line. Pertinent to the task in hand is the emergence from tagmemic circles of a model of language structure capable of handling the functions of clause, sentence and PARAGRAPH (§) in terms of a hierarchy of syntagmemes.

The groundwork of tagmemic theory was laid by Kenneth L. Pike,<sup>3</sup> who has continued to develop the grammar of discourse along hierarchical lines. Robert E. Longacre has forged ahead, exploring the hierarchy of discourse in dozens of languages.<sup>4</sup> I am indebted also to Dr. Joseph Grimes for the idea that alternative surface realizations are a matter of 'staging.'

The strong points of tagmemics are its empirical approach, its respect for living language data, its concern for analytical description rather than generation, its search for units and for classes, its interest in relationships within specific constructions rather than abstract functions as such. All this serves the present study, which is essentially a taxonomy of Hebrew inter-clause constructions. To keep this aim in view has required resistance to temptations to go off into all kinds of theoretical discussion. Simon C. Dik's stimulating study of co-ordination<sup>5</sup> shows how much work has to be done on even such a familiar and apparently straight-forward word as "and." At this stage of the investigation of Hebrew syntax, I have been content to point out a dozen different ways in which "and" is used to join clauses together in that language.

This is only a beginning. An enormous amount of additional work is called for, especially on three fronts. First, the theoretical basis must be strengthened by more careful work on deep grammar. The present quest for language universals will assist this, and open up the way for the investigation of comparative syntax within the Semitic family. Secondly, empirical testing must be expanded to cover all known ancient texts. (Most of our examples come from the Torah, and abundant evidence has not been traced very far.) Thirdly, when the evidence is organized, we must look at the dynamics of structural changes in the sentence repertoire, and higher up the hierarchy, in order to write the history of Hebrew discourse and in particular the history of Hebrew conjunctions. When this work has been done we will be able to return to problems of translation and exegesis, and such knowledge will equip us for the task of literary criticism and for the application of linguistic arguments to the identification of sources and the dating of documents.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> *Historisch-kritisches Lehrgebäude der Hebräischen Sprache mit comparativer Berücksichtigung des Semitischen überhaupt*, ausgearbeitet von Fr. Eduard König. 2. Hälfte, 2. (Schluss-) Teil: Syntax (Leipzig, 1897).

<sup>2</sup> For example *לֵאמֹר* *lest* is treated as an imperative verb joined to the following verb in asyndeton (p. 131), with translations that reflect the original meaning of the putative root. Quite apart from the dubious etymology, this obscures the fact that from a structural point of view *לֵאמֹר* is a conjunction.

<sup>3</sup> For the bibliography of tagmemics see Kenneth L. Pike, "A Guide to Publications Related to Tagmemic Theory," *Current Trends in Linguistics*: Vol. III: Theoretical Foundations, Thomas A. Sebeok, ed. (The Hague, 1966): pp. 365-394; Ruth M. Brend, "Tagmemic Theory: An Annotated Bibliography," *Journal of English Linguistics*, 4 (1970): pp. 7-45.

<sup>4</sup> Most recently in Robert E. Longacre, *Hierarchy and Universality of Discourse Constituents in New Guinea Languages*. Vol. I: Discussion; Vol. II: Texts. (Washington, Georgetown Univer-

sity Press, 1972), where the bibliography will give sufficient guidance to preceding discussion.

<sup>5</sup> *Coordination: Its implications for the theory of general linguistics* (Amsterdam, 1972).

## THE SENTENCE IN HEBREW

### 2.0. DEFINITION OF SENTENCE

The term SENTENCE (Se) has been used in linguistics in several different ways. The traditional definition of a sentence as "a complete thought expressed in words" fell on evil times when description of language data began with forms rather than ideas. It was easier to observe a sound than a thought, and it was impossible to tell when a thought was 'complete.'

As a unit in the phonological component of a language, sentence is the name for a set of elements whose distinctive identity is marked by phonological features. Each element in the set is a sentence. The contrastive-distinctive features of a phonological sentence, while language-specific in detail, are characteristically melodies of tones and stresses, with certain contours having particular importance as signals of sentence termination. Segments of speech with such melodies are often uttered in complete isolation from other speech, or in conversation as the alternating contributions of individual speakers. Unfortunately we know nothing whatever about these matters, so far as biblical Hebrew is concerned, for it is a dead language. There is a reasonable presumption, however, that the complex Masoretic systems (there are two quite distinct ones)<sup>1</sup> preserve some of the traditions of living speech, for the scriptures never ceased to be read. The systems are unfortunately of little value, for they are geared to written texts, they reflect liturgical artificiality and the units of 'verses' and subverses bear only partial correspondence to sentences as grammatical units.

As a unit in the grammatical component of a language, a sentence may be defined as a construction that is grammatically complete or self-contained; that is, the grammatical functions of all the elements in a given sentence can be described in terms of relationships to other elements within the same sentence.

Such definitions take us somewhere, but they do not take us very far. The set of sentences for any language, identified as units in speech by phonological criteria, is likely to include a variety of construction types from the grammatical point of view, ranging from a single word to an extended text. (We use TEXT to refer to any given specimen of a language, spoken or

written.) Grammatical completeness, as a *sine qua non* of sentence identity, may prove as hard to establish as completeness of thought. If we can identify parts of a sentence as elements of that sentence, then these ingredients, in their own way, will have some measure of internal integrity that permits their isolation. A WORD (Wd), a PHRASE (Ph), a CLAUSE (Cl) has its own internal structure or completeness. And few sentences, however complete within themselves, are likely to be as entirely without relationships to their context as the definition requires. Bloomfield's famous definition--"a sentence is an independent linguistic form, not included by virtue of any grammatical construction in any larger linguistic form"--if applied strictly, would identify the unit we call DISCOURSE (D). Most sentences function within larger discourse of some kind, to say nothing of the non-linguistic behavioural context. Grammatical completeness is therefore a matter of degree, and cannot be made an absolute criterion for the identification of sentences.

Nevertheless the definitions are not without value. Many phonological sentences are able to stand by themselves in speech because they have some measure of grammatical completeness. Hence the need to distinguish the kinds of grammatical relationship that have their realization within the structure of a sentence as such from the kinds of grammatical relationship that operate between sentences in larger chunks of discourse.

While their hierarchies have their own characteristic structural features, the phonological and the grammatical components of a language are likely to have some measure of congruence. Together with the semantic component, they have such an ineluctably concomitant operation in the one thing that any language is, that they cannot be separated, even though they can be talked about separately. But the hierarchies are not isomorphic. Hence sentence, as a unit in each component--a meaning complex, a grammatical construction, a sound pattern--needs an appropriate definition in terms of the features of that component, and we should know what we are doing when we bring together the results of these definitions.<sup>2</sup>

## 2.1. THE CLAUSE AS A SENTENCE ELEMENT

We can stalk the sentence from another direction by talking first about the clause as a unit in the grammatical component of a language. Many languages afford constructions which contain two parts which can be described as the TOPIC and the COMMENT. Again, many languages afford constructions which, in terms of formal grammatical features, can be described as made up of a SUBJECT (S) and PREDICATE (P). It often happens that the topic is realized as the subject, while the predicate realizes some comment on the topic. Readers of linguistic literature will know at once that we are already on slippery ground, but we do not intend to explore the familiar yet treacherous frontier between meaning and form in this regard. We accept for the time being subject and predicate as mutually self-defining co-occurring grammatical functions whose forms of realization are specific for