

## THE PRAGMATICS OF THE ‘TENSES’ IN BIBLICAL HEBREW

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### ABSTRACT

In this paper, I present an analysis of the so-called tense forms of Biblical Hebrew. While there is fairly broad consensus on the interpretation of the *yiqṭōl* tense form, the interpretation of the *qāṭal* tense form has led to considerable controversy. I will argue that the *qāṭal* form has no intrinsic semantic value and that it serves a pragmatic function only, namely, signaling to the hearer that the event or state expressed by the verb cannot be tightly integrated into the discourse representation of the hearer, given the speaker’s estimate of their common ground.

### 1. Introduction

The semantic interpretation of the finite verb paradigms or tense forms of Biblical Hebrew is a hotly debated issue. While the classic grammars (Gesenius-Kautzsch 1909<sup>28</sup>, Joüon 1923) describe Biblical Hebrew as a mixed tense-aspect system, others argue that it is a pure tense system (Hetzron 1987), that it is primarily aspectual (Givón 1982; Hatav 1989), or that it is determined by H. Weinrich (1971)’s ‘Sprechhaltungen’ (Schneider 1974) rather than by tense or aspect. The present paper develops an analysis of the Hebrew tense forms that is inspired by Schneider’s Weinrichian analysis of the Hebrew tense forms, Janssen’s (1993, 1994a, 1994b) analysis of Dutch tense forms, and Levinson’s (1990) and Clark’s (1991, 1992) analyses of the interactional nature of language use.

Schneider (1974) applied Weinrich’s (1971) distinction between ‘Besprechen’ and ‘Erzählen’ to the so-called *yiqṭōl* and *wayyiqṭōl* tense forms of Biblical Hebrew, the tense forms typical for conversation and narration

respectively. I will follow Janssen (1993, 1994a) and use the more general and less genre-bound terminology of focal and disfocal referential concern for this opposition.

The main theoretical thrust of this paper concerns the interpretation of the third main finite tense form of Biblical Hebrew, the so-called *qāṭal*. I will argue that a characterization of this tense form as a perfect or anterior aspect is too specific, and that a more abstract function at the level of pragmatics is involved. By means of the *qāṭal* form, the speaker tells the hearer that the event or state denoted by the verb cannot be tightly linked to the hearer's discourse representation, given the speaker's assessment of their common ground. This pragmatic function of the *qāṭal* tense form is similar to the function of the present perfect in Dutch (Janssen 1993, 1994a, 1994b).

The aim of the present paper is twofold. First, I will outline a theory of the Hebrew tenses that explains their use in various cases that are problematic for the standard theories, arguing that the use of the tenses is determined by the pragmatic notions of referential concern and linkage. Second, these analyses are offered in the hope that they will contribute to our understanding of the grammaticalization of pragmatic functions in language in general.

One fundamental assumption underlying the present analysis is that the Masoretic text as we have it is not a linguistic artifact, and that the use of the tense forms is governed by a consistent set of principles. This is not to say, however, that the same set of principles is valid for all Classical Hebrew texts, which are known to be highly heterogeneous as to their place and date of origin and redaction history. The present analysis is based mainly on a set of narrative texts the final redaction of which may be located at roughly the same historical period (Genesis, Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings).

The discussion is structured as follows. Section 2 introduces the notions focal referential concern and linkage. In Section 3, I show that the tenses of Biblical Hebrew can be profitably analyzed using these abstract notions as analytical tools. Section 4 discusses in some more detail the relation between word order and the use of the tenses for negative clauses and clauses with a fronted NP. The last section compares the present theory with three classic analyses of the Hebrew tenses.

## 2. Focal Referential Concern and Linkage

In this section, I introduce the two pragmatic oppositions that are central to my analysis: the opposition between focal and difocal referential concern, and the opposition between tight and loose linkage.

First, consider the opposition between focal and difocal referential concern, developed by Janssen (1993a, 1993b, 1994, 1995) for the analysis of Dutch tense forms. Janssen extends the Bühlerian approach to demonstrative deixis to the analysis of the semantics of the tenses. He argues that speakers partition the stream of events into (not necessarily temporally or sequentially disjoint) regions. Objects in the focal region of referential concern can be denoted by proximal deictics such as *this*, objects in the difocal region of referential concern by distal deictics such as *that*. According to Janssen, events are similarly located in either the region of focal referential concern, or in the region of difocal referential concern. As in the case of the deixis of objects, different grammatical forms are available to the speaker for making explicit in which region of referential concern an event or state is located. In Janssen's analysis of the Dutch tenses, the morphology of the finite verb serves precisely this purpose, the present signaling the same deictic value as the demonstrative *this*, the preterit signaling a deictic value analogous to that of *that*. Thus temporal deixis (present versus past temporal reference) is subsumed under a more general notion of deixis. Under default conditions, temporal deixis and referential concern are strongly correlated. Especially the forms signaling focal referential concern, however, can be used to describe past events that are construed in the speaker's region of focal referential concern. This is the way in which Janssen accounts for the use of the so-called historical present, for instance.

Implicit in Janssen's analyses of deixis is the relation between the use of deictic forms with focal referential concern and the signaling of strong communicative intention. Focal deictics for objects and events demand the immediate attention and reaction of the hearer. In contrast, difocal deictics allow the hearer to relax into a less demanding mode of communication. In this sense the opposition between focal and difocal referential concern is reminiscent of Weinrich's distinction between the relaxed speech mode (Sprechhaltung) of narrating (Erzählen) and the tension of the speech mode of discussing (Besprechen). Both Janssen and Weinrich (1971:28–33) attempt to extend Bühler's (1934) analysis of deixis to the analysis of tense. Similarly, both theories seek to replace the interpretation of tense as involving

temporal deixis (Comrie 1985; Klein 1993) by a more abstract form of deixis. But where Weinrich shifts Bühler's emphasis on the deictic value of the linguistic sign to its communicative intention, resulting in a theory according to which the use of tenses is grounded in the 'genre' of the text in which the clause is embedded, Janssen analyses the tenses strictly as (essentially non-temporal) deictics in his Bühlerian approach to the linguistic value of deictic elements in general. This does not imply, however, that Janssen is not aware of the strong communicative intention of the focal deictic forms. In Janssen (1993a), the notion of focal referential concern is in fact denoted by its communicative function as *actual concern*, defined as demanding the immediate attention and reaction of the hearer. In more recent work, the strong communicative intention of the focal forms is de-emphasized, although the focal present-tense form is still recognized as signaling that the speaker "envisages himself as actually watching (out for) the event at issue" (Janssen 1994:124). Rather than downplaying the strong communicative intent of focal verbal deictics, I will assume that strong communicative intent is signaled by all focal deictics, including demonstratives. For instance, when John tells me how his neighbor's kids are maltreated by their father, I might answer with *that's intolerable*, indicating that I find their situation deplorable. However, when I use the focal deictic, answering *this is intolerable*, I am far more likely to be highly indignant and to commit myself to some immediate course of action. Hence I define a focal deictic as signaling that the speaker views a particular event or entity as located in that region of referential concern with which he is most intimately involved or to which he views himself as committed, resulting in a locution with strong communicative intention.

Whereas the notion of (dis)focal referential concern is closely linked to the illocutionary force in the communicative situation, the notion of linkage is intimately tied up with the recovery of communicative intention. As argued by Clark (1991, 1992) and especially Levinson (1990), it is interactional intelligence that makes language possible as a means of communication. According to Levinson, two kinds of heuristic strategies are critical here. The first strategy, which yields the default interpretation for a (not necessarily) linguistic action based on its most probable stereotypical attributes, need not concern us here. The second heuristic strategy, however, is highly relevant. This strategy guides one to process (not too long) sequences of information as if they were highly structured, even when this is not the case, as shown by intuitive refusal to consider a patterned sequence

as possibly random. It is also operative in discourse, in that it guides hearers to link new information to their current discourse representations. The hearer may assume by default that new information is relevant to the currently most salient knowledge in the common ground established by the participants in a communicative event. In general, this salient knowledge will be the information that has been contributed most recently. Integration of new information with this most prominent knowledge in the common ground of speaker and hearer is what I will refer to as 'tight linkage'. I will assume that tight linkage is the default strategy for updating discourse representations for cooperating language users.

When new information is contributed that is not intended to be tightly linked to the current topic, or when tight linkage is downright impossible, the non-default status of this new information has to be made explicit. In other words, the speaker will use a form expressing loose linkage when she judges that the hearer will be led astray by using context, cotext, and knowledge of scripts and frames to bring the new information to bear on his currently active knowledge. How this is accomplished depends on the speaker's estimate of what the hearer will be able to accommodate. If a radically new topic is to be introduced, an explicit phrase is generally required, such as *Another thing I would like to discuss with you is ...* More often, new topics are still more or less connected with the current discourse representation. In such cases, indefinite reference is a well-known means for introducing new participants and objects into the discourse, and in a language such as English, existential *there* is used to introduce new states and events (Breivik 1981). Perfective and imperfective aspect may provide yet another kind of cue to the information status of new events and states, given the strong correlation between aspect and foreground and background layering of narrative texts in a wide range of languages (Hopper 1979; Hopper and Thompson 1980; Reinhart 1984; Fleischman 1985). Similarly, the present perfect in a language such as Dutch signals that tight discourse integration should not be attempted. Since my analysis of the Hebrew *qāṭal* tense form builds in part on Janssen's (1991, 1993a, 1993b, 1994, 1995) analysis of the Dutch present perfect, I will briefly discuss his theory here.

According to Janssen (1991, 1993a, 1994), the Dutch present perfect expresses that an event is 'non-salient', and the simple present that an event is 'salient'. Janssen ascribes two properties to 'salient' events. He argues that an event is 'salient' if it is prominently located in the speaker's real or mental field of vision (1993a:759). He also argues that 'salience' implies that

the speaker must be able to place that event in 'an encompassing, close fitting scene' (1993a:760). To illustrate the difference between 'salient' and 'non-salient' events, imagine that you are sitting in your living room, and that the telephone rings. Your husband picks up the telephone and has a short conversation that ends before you have been able to figure out who was at the other end of the line. In such a case, you can use the simple past, as in

- (i) *Wie belde er?*  
 Who phoned there?  
 'Who phoned?'

but not the present perfect, as in

- (ii) *Wie heeft er gebeld?*  
 Who has there phoned?  
 Who has phoned?

to ask who was on the phone. The event of the telephone conversation is so well-embedded in the common ground of you and your husband that the use of a non-salient tense form is inappropriate. If you want to ask the same question the day after the telephone call, the present perfect should be used.

Janssen develops his analysis of the simple past and present perfect from the vantage point of the speaker. To use the simple past, Janssen argues that it is the speaker who should be able to link the event in question to the common ground. Janssen is aware that the hearer should also be able to make sense of what the speaker says, and therefore mentions that the use of the simple past implies that the hearer should be able to tightly link the event to the current situation too — otherwise the hearer will have to ask for a clarification (Janssen, 1993a:760). This seems sensible enough for the simple past in Dutch. Events expressed by means of the simple past satisfy not only the condition of what I call tight linkage. They also denote events or states that are prominently in the minds of both speaker and hearer. Thus, they satisfy Janssen's two defining criteria of 'salience'. A problem arises, however, with respect to 'non-salient' events.

Janssen's definition of 'salience' implies that a 'non-salient' event should not be prominent in the speaker's real or mental field of vision. This implication is obviously wrong.<sup>1</sup> Imagine that you and your husband are sitting in the living room, and that both of you are reading. Suddenly, you

realize that you have not yet told him that you unexpectedly met a good friend yesterday. You vividly remember the funny expression of surprise on her face, and you decide to tell your husband. In such a situation, in which meeting your friend is highly salient to you in the sense that it is prominently in your mind, you nevertheless must use the present perfect when you ask

- (iii) *Weet je wie ik gisteren ontmoet heb?*  
 know you who I yesterday met have?  
 'Do you know who I met yesterday?'

This shows that linkage is the crucial determinant of the choice between the simple past and the present perfect, and not whether an event is salient to the speaker. Linkage is hearer-directed (Clark 1992). That you met your friend may be prominent to you, but it is not at all prominent in the mind of your husband. In order to communicate successfully what is on your mind, you have to keep in mind whether or not your husband will be able tightly to link the new information to what is currently relevant to him. Therefore, you may have to use a form signaling that tight linkage is impossible for him. It is crucial to my analysis of the *qāṭal* tense form of Biblical Hebrew that linkage and 'salience' are carefully distinguished. I will argue that the *qāṭal* tense form cancels the default tacit assumption that tight discourse integration should be attempted. The relative prominence or salience of an event to the speaker is irrelevant.

Another important dissociation is that of linkage and discourse layering into foreground and background. Suspension of tight linkage does not necessarily imply out-of-sequence-hood. By way of example, consider the following example from Dutch.

- (iv) Ga nu maar gauw naar het paleis, zei de duif, maar denk er om: je moet thuis zijn voordat de klok twaalf keer geslagen heeft, want precies om twaalf uur krijg je je oude jurkje weer aan. Toen Assepoester het paleis *binnengekomen was*, werd ze door een lakei naar een prachtige zaal gebracht. (Bruna 1986:11–13)

[Now you should quickly go to the palace, said the pigeon, but keep in mind: you have to be back home before the clock has struck twelve, because at precisely twelve o'clock you

Table 1. The First, Second and Third Person Singular Finite Verb Forms of the *qāṭal*, *yiqṭōl* and *wayyiqṭōl* Tenses of Biblical Hebrew for the Root *šmr*, 'to guard'.

<i>šmr</i>	<i>qāṭal</i>	<i>yiqṭōl</i>	<i>wayyiqṭōl</i>
1 sg c	<i>šāmartī</i>	<i>'ešmōr</i>	<i>wā'ešmōr</i>
2 sg m	<i>šāmartā</i>	<i>tišmōr</i>	<i>wattišmōr</i>
2 sg f	<i>šāmart</i>	<i>tišmēri</i>	<i>wattišmēri</i>
3 sg m	<i>šāmar</i>	<i>tišmōr</i>	<i>wattišmōr</i>
3 sg f	<i>šāmrā</i>	<i>yišmōr</i>	<i>wayyišmōr</i>

Table 2. The Hebrew Tenses as a Mixed Tense–Aspect System: Joüon (1923).

	tense			aspect	
	past	present	future	perfective	imperfective
<i>qāṭal</i>	+	+	+	+	–
<i>qōṭēl</i>	+	+	+	–	+
<i>yiqṭōl</i>	–	+	+	+	+
<i>wayyiqṭōl</i>	+	–	–	+	–

The nature of the problem with which we will be concerned here, the semantic and pragmatic functions of the Hebrew tense forms, can best be introduced by a brief discussion of Joüon's (1923) analysis. As shown in Table 2, Joüon argues that we are dealing with a mixed tense-aspect system. He claims that the main function of the *yiqṭōl* is to express future tense, that the *wayyiqṭōl* is a past tense, that the *qōṭēl* is essentially an a-temporal form expressing imperfective aspect, and that the *qāṭal* marks the perfect. These main lines of Joüon's analysis become somewhat blurred, however, by the addition of a secondary aspectual system to the primary system of deictic tense. For instance, although the *qāṭal* is analyzed as expressing the perfect, a great many cases are discussed where Joüon argues that it expresses past, present or future time reference. Similarly, its aspectual value is stated to be perfective. The final result is a theory with a many to many mapping of meaning to form and form to meaning. In what follows, I hope to show that a more constrained analysis in terms of the notions focal referential concern (Section 3.2) and linkage (Section 3.3) is feasible, and that such an analysis leads to a better understanding of the system underlying the use of the tenses.



### 3.2 Focal Referential Concern in Biblical Hebrew

In Biblical Hebrew, the contrast between focal and disfocal referential concern is borne by the opposition between the *yiqṭōl* and *wayyiqṭōl* verb forms, the *yiqṭōl* signaling focal referential concern and the *wayyiqṭōl* disfocal referential concern. The *yiqṭōl* is found in a wide range of clauses expressing suggestions, advice, volition and even imperative illocutionary force.<sup>3</sup>

- (1) *yīšpōṭi yhwḥ bēnī ūbēnekā*  
he.judges the.lord between.me and.you  
'the Lord will have to judge (*yiqṭōl*) between me and you'  
(Genesis 16:5)
- (2) *wə'attā timšōl bō*  
and.you rule over.it  
'and thou mayest rule (*yiqṭōl*) over it (Genesis 4:7)
- (3) *'ēlkā w'erennū bēterem 'āmūt*  
I.go and.I.see.him before I.die  
'I want to go (*yiqṭōl*) and see (*yiqṭōl*) him before I die (*yiqṭōl*)'  
(Genesis 45:28)
- (4) *šēšet yāmim ta'ābōd*  
six days you.work  
'six days you shall work (*yiqṭōl*)' (Exodus 20:9)

In all these examples, the *yiqṭōl* forms express focal referential concern. It is the tense form typical of conversations, conveying strong communicative intent, signaling that the speaker demands the immediate attention and reaction of the hearer.

It is this strong communicative intent signaled by the *yiqṭōl* that has probably prompted Joüon's suggestion that the *yiqṭōl*'s main function is to express future tense, a 'tense' known to be tightly linked with modality (Lyons 1968). Interestingly, it is impossible to analyze the function of the *yiqṭōl* as either perfective or imperfective. While *ta'ābōd* in (4) and perhaps *timšōl* in (2) can be interpreted as expressing imperfective aspect, *'āmūt* in (3) and *yīšpōṭi* in (1) are more likely to express perfective aspect. Since the *yiqṭōl* allows both perfective and imperfective readings, its semantic function cannot be an aspectual one. Thus Joüon's analysis as summarized in Table 2

describes the range of possible aspectual readings of the *yiqṭōl* without abstraction to its function as distinguished from that of the other tenses.

Finally note that the basic word order in a *yiqṭōl* clause is VSO, as in (1). Because of the frequent use of fronting, other constituents such as subject (2), object, or adverbials (4) are often found preceding the verb. We discuss the issue of word order and tense form in detail in Section 4.

In opposition to the *yiqṭōl*, the *wayyiqṭōl* expresses difocal referential concern. The *wayyiqṭōl* is the narrative tense of the language. It allows the hearer to relax into a less demanding communicative speech mode, its difocal value signaling that the hearer's immediate communicative reaction is not called for. Typically, long chains of *wayyiqṭōl* forms are used to denote events that occur on the time line of the narrative and that constitute its foreground.

- (5) *wayyēlek hanna'ar ... rāmōt gil'ād*  
 and.went the.boy ... to.Ramoth in.Gilead  
 'and the boy went (*wayyiqṭōl*) to Ramoth in Gilead'  
*wayyābō ... wayyōmer ... wayyōmer yēhū ...*  
 and.he.came ... and.he.said ... and.he.said Jehu ...  
 'and he came ...and he said ...and Jehu answered ...'(3×*wayyiqṭōl*)  
 (2 Kings 9:4–5)

Note that the subject need not remain the same throughout such narrative chains. In (5), for instance, the initial subject is the boy, but in the last clause the subject switches to Jehu. For the *wayyiqṭōl* clause, the basic word order is invariably VSO.

Joüon analyzed the *wayyiqṭōl* as a perfective past. This description has been shown to be too narrow by Booij (1986), who points out that the *wayyiqṭōl* has frequentative uses, both in the Biblical texts (see, for instance, Genesis 31:41) as well as in the Yavneh-Yam ostrakon, an old Hebrew text dating from the 7th century B.C. By itself, this is not a logically compelling argument against the claim that the *wayyiqṭōl* expresses perfective aspect, since perfective aspect may combine with further detailing of the internal temporal constituency of an event by other means, whether derivational, lexical or contextual (Comrie 1976:21–24). Hence it is impossible to disprove the perfective nature of the *wayyiqṭōl*: even instances as 1 Sam. 19:23 and 2 Sam 12:3 (Booij 1986:647), where the *wayyiqṭōl* clearly has an imperfective, durative reading, can always be argued to obtain that reading

from context or perhaps from the Aktionsart of the verb. Nevertheless, Booij has shown that at the least the *wayyiqṭōl* is less prototypically perfective than has often been assumed, considerably weakening the claim that the *wayyiqṭōl* is a perfective. In the analysis developed here, the perfective reading of the *wayyiqṭōl* is analyzed as an implicature of its more basic pragmatic function, namely the signaling of disfocal referential concern.

Before we turn to discuss the expression of linkage in Biblical Hebrew, a second chaining construction should be mentioned. When the *qāṭal* verb form is prefixed by the conjunction *w-* in combination with a shift of the main stress to the last syllable (visible only for the first and second person forms), the verb is underspecified as to illocutionary force. This particular verb form, to which we shall refer as the *wəqāṭal*, is a kind of medial verb that depends on the preceding independent verb for the completion of its own semantic reading.<sup>4</sup>

- (6) *bē'ōd šēlōšet yāmīm yiśśā par'ō 'et rōškā*  
 within three days he.lifts Pharaoh ACC your.head  
 'Within three days Pharaoh will lift up (*yiṭṭōl*) your head'  
*wahāšibkā 'al kannekā*  
 and.he.returns.you on your.place  
 'and he will return you (*wəqāṭal*) to your place'  
*wanātattā kōs par'ō bēyādō*  
 and.you.give cup Pharaoh in.his.hand  
 'and you will give (*wəqāṭal*) Pharaoh's cup in his hand'  
 (Genesis 40:13)
- (7) *bēnē lēkā bayit bīrūšālayim wəyāšabtā šām*  
 build for you house in.Jerusalem and.you.live there  
 'build (imperative) a house for yourself in Jerusalem and  
 live (*wəqāṭal*) there.' (1 Kings 2:36)

In (6), the *wəqāṭal* is the continuation of a *yiṭṭōl* with a modal (future) reading. The *wəqāṭal* takes on the same modal reading and illocutionary force as the initial *yiṭṭōl*. In (7), the *wəqāṭal* continues the imperative 'build', and hence expresses imperative illocutionary force too. Again, the subject may change in these medial chains: in (6) the initial subject is Pharaoh, but in the last clause the subject switches to the addressee, 'you'. This suggests that the *qāṭal* inherits its specification for referential concern from the initial independent verb.

### 3.3 Linkage in Biblical Hebrew

Both *yiqṭōl* and *wayyiqṭōl* indicate that tight linkage is appropriate for the events expressed by the verb. The use of the *yiqṭōl* implies that the speaker assumes that the event denoted by the verb is easily integrated by the hearer in his discourse representation given their common ground. Similarly, by using the *wayyiqṭōl*, the narrator signals that the event expressed by the verb is well-embedded in the unfolding sequence of events in the narrative. In order to convey that an event cannot be tightly linked to the preceding discourse, Biblical Hebrew makes use of the *qāṭal*. I will trace this function of the *qāṭal* for the two conditions of focal and disfocal referential concern.

First consider the *qāṭal* VSO clause, the loose-linkage counterpart of the *yiqṭōl* VSO clause. As an example of how the *qāṭal* is used to introduce events into the discourse that the hearer cannot tightly integrate in his current discourse representation, consider Genesis 37:7, where Joseph recounts one of his dreams.

- (8) *wēhinnē ʾanaḥnū mēʾallēmīm ʾālumīm bētōk haśśāde*  
 and.look we were.binding sheaves in the.field  
 ‘and behold: we were binding (*qōṭēl*) sheaves in the field’  
*wēhinnē qāmā ʾālumīm wēgam niššābā*  
 and.look it.rose my.sheaf and.also it.stood.upright  
 ‘and behold: my sheaf arose (*qāṭal*) and also stood upright (*qāṭal*)’  
*wēhinnē tēsūbbennā ʾālumīm wattištaḥawenā*  
 and.look they.stood.round your.sheaves and.they.bowed.down  
 ‘and behold: your sheaves stood round about (*yiqṭōl*) and bowed down (*wayyiqṭōl*)’ (Genesis 37:7)

Both the threefold use of the interjection *wēhinnē* and the use of the *yiqṭōl* in the third line of (8) show that this stretch of speech signals focal referential concern. At the same time, the use of *wēhinnē* is also an overt signal that events are introduced that are totally new, and that are not easily integrated given the common ground established thus far. An analysis of the progression of verbal forms in (8) reveals that the dream is unfolded very carefully. After an imperfective participial clause that outlines the setting of the events to follow, a *qāṭal* clause is used to introduce an event that is totally unexpected for Joseph’s audience: the rising of a sheaf, an event that cannot be

integrated in the normal frame for harvesting. It is only in the third clause of (8) that the tenses signaling tight linkage are used, first a *yiqṭōl*, indicative of Joseph's effort to impress his brothers with his dream and his wish for them to comment on what he is telling them (serving a function similar to the historical present in English), and finally a *wayyiqṭōl*, allowing the description of his dream to relax into narrative form.

Additional evidence in support of the hypothesis that the *qāṭal* VSO clause expresses loose linkage concerns the use of the *qāṭal* in conditional and counterfactual clauses. In the case of conditional clauses expressing possibilities, one finds both *yiqṭōl* (9), (10) and *qāṭal* (11) forms:

- (9) *'im 'emsā bisdōm ḥāmīšim ṣaddīqīm*  
 if I.find in.Sodom fifty righteous.persons  
 'If I can find (*yiqṭōl*) fifty righteous people in Sodom'  
 (Genesis 18:26)
- (10) *kī yiqrā lākem parō ... wē'amartem*  
 if he.calls you Pharaoh ... and.you.say  
 'if Pharaoh shall call you (*yiqṭōl*) ..., then you shall say (*wēqāṭal*)'  
 (Genesis 46:33–34)
- (11) *'im gullaḥtī wēsār mimmennū kōḥī*  
 if I.am.shaven and.it.leaves from.me my.strength  
 'if I were shaven (*qāṭal*), my strength would leave (*wēqāṭal*) me'  
 (Judges 16:17)

The *qāṭal*, however, is preferred when the condition described in the protasis is less likely to be met. In (10), for instance, the event that the Pharaoh will summon Jacob and his sons is almost certain to take place. Both Joseph and Jacob know this. Not surprisingly, a *yiqṭōl* is used. But in (11), Samson entrusts his treacherous love with the secret of his strength, not knowing that she is out to betray him. From Samson's vantage point, the idea of someone cutting his hair is quite remote. But if an event is remote for the speaker, then the speaker can generally infer that the event must also be remote for the hearer, given their common ground. Again, the use of a verb form expressing loose linkage is called for.

Interestingly, the *qāṭal* is the main option for counterfactuals. In fact, the counterfactuals constitute one of the rare instances where a classic grammar like that of Joüon (§ 167k) commits itself to a nearly categorical statement, describing the *qāṭal* as being 'almost always' used. Why would

this be the case? In general, as the situation outlined in the protasis of the conditional clause becomes less envisageable as a real possibility from the speaker's vantage point, the probability that a *qāṭal* will be used increases. For counterfactuals, as in (12),

- (12) *lū ḥāpēs yhwḥ laḥmītēnū lō lāqaḥ miyyādēnū*  
 if he.prefers yhwḥ to.kill.us not he.accepts from.us  
*‘ōlā*  
 burnt.offering  
 ‘if it had pleased (*qāṭal*) the Lord to kill us, he would not have accepted (*qāṭal*) a burnt offering from us.’ (Judges 13:23)

where the event or state denoted by the verb is entirely hypothetical for both hearer and speaker, and where tight linkage would lead to a realis interpretation instead of to the desired irrealis reading, the use of the *qāṭal* is obligatory.

As a final illustration of loose-linkage in combination with focal referential concern, consider Genesis 18:3:

- (13) *lāmā ze ṣāḥḥā qā sārā*  
 why this she.laugh.sara  
 ‘But why is Sara laughing (*qāṭal*)?’ (Genesis 18:13)

This question is found in a conversation between Abraham and an unnamed visitor, a conversation in which Abraham's wife Sarah is not involved. Sarah, however, had been listening in the background, and had laughed by herself at the promise of a child. Following this, Abraham's visitor asks why Sarah was laughing. Since Sarah has not participated in the conversation — in fact, she is behind the visitor (18:10), outside his field of vision, and she had laughed by herself (18:12) — the *qāṭal* is used: it is the appropriate form to ask an entirely unexpected question about an event that the hearer cannot easily integrate in his current knowledge of the discourse, given their common ground. By way of comparison, consider Genesis 24:31 (*lāmā ta’āmōd baḥūš*, ‘why are you standing outside’) and Genesis 32:30 (*lāmā ze tiš'al lišmī*, ‘why do you ask for my name’). The questions here concern the motivation for an immediately preceding event and a current state of which both speaker and hearer are well aware. Both are clearly part of the common ground of speaker and hearer, so the *yiqṭōl* is used (see also Genesis 24:58).

Next consider how loose-linkage is expressed in combination with disfocal referential concern. Typically, events or states belonging to the

background of a narrative text should not be tightly integrated with the current discourse representation. Such events or states interrupt the unfolding sequence of events, and should not be linked as tightly to that sequence as events on the 'time line' of the narrative. In Biblical Hebrew, background events and states are expressed by means of nominal clauses (14), participial clauses (15) and *qāṭal* SVO clauses (16).<sup>5</sup>

- (14) *wayyēšē 'iš habbēnayim mimmaḥānōt pēlišṭīm*  
 he.went.out man between.two from.the.camp Philistines  
 'and a champion left (*wayyiqṭōl*) the camp of the Philistines'  
*golyāt šēmō miggat gobhō šēš 'ammōt wēzāret*  
 Goliath his.name from.Gath his.height six cubits and.a.span  
 'Goliath was his name, from Gath, and his height was six cubits  
 and a span' (1 Sam 17:4)
- (15) *wayyābō'ū šēnē hammal'ākīm sēdōmā bā'ereb*  
 they.came two messengers to.Sodom in.the.evening  
 'and the two messengers arrived (*wayyiqṭōl*) in Sodom in the  
 evening'  
*wēlōṭ yōšēb bēša'ar sēdōm wayyar lōṭ ...*  
 and.Lot sitting in.the.gate of.Sodom and.he.saw Lot ...  
 'and Lot was sitting (participle) in the gate of Sodom, and Lot saw  
 (*wayyiqṭōl*) them ...' (Genesis 19:1)
- (16) *wayyitqāššēr yēhū ... 'el yōrām*  
 he.conspired Jehu ... against Joram  
 'and Jehu conspired (*wayyiqṭōl*) against Joram'  
*wēyōrām hāyā šōmēr bēramōt gi'ad*  
 and.Joram was guarding in.Ramoth Gilead  
 'and Joram had occupied (*qāṭal* + participle) Ramoth in Gilead  
 (2 Kings 9:14)'

The nominal clauses in (14) form part of a much longer description of Goliath running up to verse 8, where the next event on the time line is recounted by means of a *wayyiqṭōl* clause. The basic word order in the nominal clause is subject—predicate. This order is also found for participial clauses such as (15), an example where the imperfective participial clause provides background information concerning the whereabouts of a new

participant in the story, Lot. Note that subsequently Lot is the subject of a *wayyiqṭōl* clause in the foreground of the narrative.

When events rather than states are placed in the background of the narrative, a *qāṭal* clause with the word order SVO is used, generally requiring a pluperfect in the English translation. In (16), for instance, the background information is provided that Joram had placed a garrison at Ramoth in Gilead. The fact that this event had occurred prior to Jehu's decision to conspire against Joram is signaled by the use of an SVO clause with a *qāṭal* verb form.

### 3.4 Foreground and Background

Although the *qāṭal* can be used to express anteriority or perfect aspect, as argued by Joüon (1923), the notions narrative background and loose linkage, and similarly anteriority and loose linkage, should be carefully distinguished. Even in narrative discourse, the loose-linkage and background status do not always coincide. There are clear cases where a *qāṭal* clause is used to express an event that is firmly embedded in the foreground of the narrative. For instance, the *qāṭal* is found following a *wayyiqṭōl* to indicate contrast:

- (17) *wattiššaḳ* 'orpa laḥmōtāh  
 and.she.kissed Orpa her.mother.in.law  
 'and Orpa kissed (*wayyiqṭōl*) her mother in law'  
*wě'rūt dābqā bā*  
 and.Ruth she.clave unto.her  
 'but Ruth clave (*qāṭal*) unto her' (Ruth 1:14)

The subject of the second clause is fronted to signal the contrast between Orpa, who kisses her mother-in-law farewell, and Ruth, who refuses to leave her. The use of the *qāṭal* is in this case motivated by the element of surprise or contra-expectation associated with a contrastive event. Given the preceding events and normal assumptions about one's social obligations in a given cultural setting, the event to be expected by the hearer is that Ruth will also leave her mother in law. Since Ruth's choice to accompany her mother in law is unexpected for the hearer, and as such is difficult to integrate in the reader's discourse representation, a form expressing loose linkage is required. Note that this use of the *qāṭal* gives rise to a formal chiasmic structure for two semantically closely related clauses:



*wayyiqṭōl* Subject  
and Subject *qāṭal*

A second case in which we can trace the expression of loose-linkage by the *qāṭal* concerns clauses with an initial adverbial expression of time or place, as, for instance, Genesis 1:1 and (22) below.

- (18) *bērēšū bārā 'ēlōhīm 'et haššāmayim wə'ēt*  
in.the.beginning he.created God ACC the.heavens and.ACC  
*hā'āreš*  
the.earth  
'In the beginning God created (*qāṭal*) the heavens and the earth.'  
(Genesis 1:1)

Since such adverbial expressions typically establish new frames of reference in time and space, the use of the *qāṭal* appears well-motivated.

A third instance of the non-salience of the *qāṭal* concerns the handling in the narrative of two events that occur simultaneously. Again, the first event is expressed by a *wayyiqṭōl* VSO clause and the second by *qāṭal* SVO clause, resulting as before in a chiasmus:

- (19) *wayyēlek šēmū'el hārāmātā*  
and.he.went Samuel to Rama  
'and Samuel went (*wayyiqṭōl*) to Rama'  
*wəšā'ul 'ālā 'el bētō*  
and.Saul went to his.house  
'and Saul went (*qāṭal*) to his house' (1 Samuel 15:34)

Samuel and Saul simultaneously depart for their respective destinations. Since the *wayyiqṭōl* implies the strict in-sequence-hood of events, it cannot be used for simultaneous events. The use of the *qāṭal* follows immediately. Interestingly, Biblical Hebrew does not have a conjunction for the expression of simultaneity in finite clauses.<sup>6</sup> This suggests that simultaneity is the default implicature of the *qāṭal* in the narrative sequence. A similar use of the *qāṭal* is observed in 1 Kings 18:6, where two *qāṭal* verbs in parallel elaborate on an event expressed by means of a *wayyiqṭōl*.

Perhaps the most interesting examples of the use of the *qāṭal* for events in the foreground of the narrative involve a shift of the narrator's vantage point with respect to the situation established by the preceding *wayyiqṭōl*

chain. A well-known case is the use of the *qāṭal* to introduce (or re-introduce) participants in the narrative. Consider (20):

- (20) *wayyitqabbəšū yaḥdāw ləhillāhēm ‘īm yəhōšua’ ...*  
 they.gathered together to.fight with Joshua ...  
 ‘and they gathered themselves together (*wayyiqṭōl*) to fight against Joshua ...’
- wəyōšbē gib’ōn šām’ū ’et ’ašer ’asā yəhōšua’ ... wayya’āsū*  
 and.inhabitants Gibeon heard ACC REL did Joshua ... they.did  
 ‘but when the inhabitants of Gibeon heard (*qāṭal*) what Joshua had done (*qāṭal*) ..., they did (*wayyiqṭōl*) ...’ (Joshua 9:2–3),

In the preceding verses, it is told how various kings unite against Joshua. In the second clause of (20) the focus shifts from these kings to the city of Gibeon, which decides to try to make peace with Joshua. It is important to observe that the second clause does not provide background information, in which case a translation with a pluperfect would have been appropriate. Instead, it is the initial clause in a new narrative sequence for which the preceding verses serve more or less as a preamble, and for which a translation with a simple past is required.<sup>7</sup>

This use of the *qāṭal* is not restricted to the introduction of new participants. As a case in point, consider 2 Kings 9:10–11.

- (21) *wayyiptaḥ haddelet wayyānos*  
 and.he.opened the.door and.he.fled  
 ‘and he opened (*wayyiqṭōl*) the door and fled (*wayyiqṭōl*)’
- wəyēhū yāšā ’el ’abdē ’adōnāw wayyōmer*  
 and.Jehu went.outside to servants.of.his.lord and.he.said  
 ‘and Jehu went outside (*qāṭal*) to the servants of his lord and said (*wayyiqṭōl*)’ (2 Kings 9:10–11)

The subject of the first two clauses of (21) is a young prophet, who had just anointed Jehu as the new king of Israel. Following the instructions given to him by Elisha, the young prophet fled. The next event in the narrative sequence is that Jehu leaves the room where he had been anointed. While up to the second clause of (21) the prophet is the main participant of the story, he is not mentioned again after having completed his task. The story shifts from the prophet back to Jehu, and it is Jehu whose status as main participant has to be established. This is achieved by using a *qāṭal* SVO clause. For

similar cases see Genesis 8:5 and 2 Kings 9:30.

Two other examples are of particular interest here. Both in Genesis 21:25 and in Genesis 23:19 the *qāṭal* is used in a VSO clause, without any shift in participant status:

(22) *wə'ahārē-kēn qābar 'abrāhām 'et-šārā 'ištō*  
and.after.this he.buried Abraham ACC.Sarah his.wife  
and after this, Abraham buried (*qāṭal*) his wife ... (Genesis 23:19)

(23) *wəhōkiaḥ 'abrāhām 'et-'abīmelek 'al 'ōdōt hammayim*  
and.he.reproved Abraham ACC.Abimelek on well of.water  
and Abraham reproved (*qāṭal*) Abimelek because of a well of  
water (Genesis 21:25)

In the text immediately preceding Genesis 23:19 Abraham has just completed the purchase of a piece of land from a Hittite landowner, in order to obtain a proper burial place for his deceased wife Sarah. The use of a *qāṭal* in (22) itself is motivated by the fact that for the hearer the burial of Sarah is not well-embedded in the preceding event, the negotiation of the purchase of land. Nevertheless, the event of the burial is on the time line of the narrative, and is explicitly marked as such by the adverbial expression *'ahārē-kēn*, 'after this'.

The use of the *qāṭal* in Genesis 21:25 can be explained along similar lines. Immediately preceding this verse, Abraham swears to Abimelek not to deal falsely with him or his sons. After this, Abraham brings up the subject of the ownership of a particular well. The introduction of this new topic has to be dissociated from the formal swearing of an oath of friendship, hence the use of a verb form signaling loose linkage.

At this point we may pause to consider the interaction of word order and information status in narrative texts. What the examples discussed thus far suggest is that the likelihood of using the SVO word order for a *qāṭal* clause increases as the new event is less tightly linked with the current discourse representation. For background information, the SVO order is mandatory, as shown in (16). For events in the foreground, we have to distinguish between clauses with and without a change in participant status. For the former clause type we find the SVO order (20, 21), for the latter clause type the order VSO (23).<sup>8</sup> While background status instantiates a high degree of loose linkage, there are more subtle shades of loose linkage receiving expression in Biblical Hebrew for events in the foreground of the narrative. Thus, the notions of

loose linkage and narrative background should be carefully distinguished.

The present analysis suggests that linkage is a matter of degree. Some support for this idea can be found in the use of the conjunction 'āz, 'then'. When followed by a *yiqṭōl*, 'āz occupies the slot of the conjunction *waC-*. Hence the extremely tight sequential linkage signaled by *waC-* is suspended. On the other hand, the use of a *yiqṭōl* indicates that the event should still be closely linked to the foregoing events. However, when 'āz is followed by the *qāṭal*, a weaker form of linkage is implied. This weak kind of linkage is found in Genesis 4:26. Following a list of births, it is stated that 'at that time ('āz) people began (*qāṭal*) to call upon the name of JHWH', an event rather loosely connected with the preceding events. The stronger type of linkage is found in 1 Kings 3:16. After having being granted wisdom in a dream, Solomon conducts burnt offerings in Jerusalem. Immediately following this episode, it is told that two harlots came ('āz *tābōnā*, with a *yiqṭōl* tense) to him for judgement. This episode is introduced by 'āz, probably because the use of *waC-* would inappropriately have suggested that the episode took place at the royal shrine. Note that even though there is no immediate temporal sequentiality, the judgement of the two harlots is thematically closely linked to the foregoing events as an illustration of the extent of Solomon's wisdom. To indicate that a high degree of linkage is involved, the *yiqṭōl* is used.

As a final point, note that just as the notions loose linkage and narrative background are not equivalent, the notions narrative foreground and tight linkage should not be confused. While the *wayyiqṭōl* is predominantly used to denote events that occur on the time-line of the narrative, the function of the *wayyiqṭōl* cannot be narrowed down to the marking of perfectivity or in-sequence-hood. In addition to the argument against perfectivity as the semantic value of the *wayyiqṭōl* advanced in Section 3.2, it should be noted that unbounded states, states without the endpoint property (Hataav 1989), are found with *wayyiqṭōl* forms:

- (24) *wayyihyū bēnē nōaḥ hayyōš'im min hattēbā*  
 and.they.were sons Noah who.came out.of.the.ark  
 'And the sons of Noah, that went forth from the ark, were  
 (*wayyiqṭōl*)'  
*šem wēḥām wāyāpet*  
 Shem and.Ham and.Japheth  
 'Shem, Ham and Japheth' (Genesis 9:18)

- (25) *wayyēhī hebel rō’e šōn wēqayin hāyā ‘ōbēd ’ādāmā*  
 and.he.was Abel keeper of.sheep and.Cain he.was tiller of.ground  
 ‘And Abel was (*wayyiqṭōl*) a keeper of sheep, but Cain was (*qāṭal*)  
 a tiller of the ground’ (Genesis 4:2)

The states described in the above examples do not have the endpoint property and cannot be analyzed as events on the time line. Although the verb ‘to be’ often shows anomalous behavior with respect to tense and aspect systems in many languages of the world, the present analytical framework has the advantage that this use of ‘to be’ is not a counterexample that has to be explained away. In this theory, particular states of affairs that are judged to be of special relevance, requiring tight linkage with the preceding clauses, are not barred from appearing in the *wayyiqṭōl*.

Table 3 summarizes the results obtained thus far. The *yiqṭōl* and the *wayyiqṭōl* are distinguished on the dimension of focal referential concern ([FRC]). Both *yiqṭōl* and *wayyiqṭōl* express tight linkage, in contrast to the *qāṭal*, a tense form otherwise unmarked for focal referential concern. The background reading for the *qāṭal* SVO clause probably arises as the result of the combination of loose linkage and word order (see Section 4). Similarly, the foreground reading of the *wayyiqṭōl* results from the combination of tight linkage, signaled by the *yiqṭōl*, and the chaining conjunction *waC*-.<sup>9</sup> It is only by disentangling the notions foreground, background, perfectivity and imperfectivity, salience and focal referential concern that the use of the Hebrew tenses can be characterized adequately. For completeness, we have added the participle, which expresses imperfective aspect. For its use under [+FRC] see (42) below. Under difocal referential concern the participle will generally occur in the background.

Table 3. *The Pragmatics of the Finite Verb Forms of Biblical Hebrew*

linkage	+FRC	-FRC	narrative function
tight	<i>yiqṭōl</i> VSO	<i>wayyiqṭōl</i> VSO	foreground
		<i>’āz yiqṭōl</i> VSO	foreground
	<i>qāṭal</i> VSO	<i>’āz qāṭal</i> VSO	foreground
		<i>qāṭal</i> VSO	foreground
		<i>qāṭal</i> SVO	ambiguous
		<i>qōṭēl</i> SVO	<i>qōṭēl</i> (SVO)
loose		nominal clause	
		(S Pred)	background

#### 4. Negation and NP-Fronting

The processes of NP fronting and negation present a test case for the theory developed in Section 3. The effects of negation are studied in Section 4.1, and those of topicalization in 4.2.

##### 4.1 *Negation*

When an event on the time line is described by means of the negation of some other event, the *wayyiqṭōl* verb form is replaced by the sequence *wēlō* ('and not') *qāṭal* (VSO). The negation is found immediately in front of the finite verb. By way of an example, consider Genesis 8:8–9:

- (26) *wayyēšallah 'et hayyōnā wēlō māš'ā hayyōnā mānōāḥ*  
 and.he.sent ACC.the.dove and.not she.finds the.dove resting.place  
 'and he sent the dove away (*wayyiqṭōl*) and the dove didn't  
 find (*qāṭal*) a resting place'  
*wattāšob*  
 and.she.came.back  
 'and she returned (*wayyiqṭōl*)' (Genesis 8:8–9).

Note that we are dealing with a true narrative chain in which the event that the dove didn't find a resting place cannot be interpreted as background information. Also note that the order of verb and subject of the underlying *wayyiqṭōl* VSO clause is left unchanged. Other examples of negated events on the time line can be found in for instance Genesis 40:23 and 1 Kings 18:21.

The use of the *qāṭal* rather than the *wayyiqṭōl* can be traced to the necessity of maintaining the distinction between verbal forms with focal and disfocal referential concern. Disfocal referential concern is signaled by phonologically strengthening the copula *w-* when it attaches to a *yiqṭōl*. In clauses with the negation *lō*, however, the negation separates the copula from the verb, bleeding phonological strengthening. If the *yiqṭōl* were maintained in a negated clause with disfocal referential concern, the *yiqṭōl* would no longer reliably signal focal referential concern. Unlike the conjunction 'āz ('then'), which marks sequentiality, *lō* is neutral to narrative in-sequence-hood and tight discourse integration in conversation. Apparently, maintaining the distinction between focal and disfocal referential concern takes precedence over the marking of linkage. If so, the use of the *qāṭal* after *lō* is the means to preserve the distinction between focal and disfocal referential concern.

This explanation of the appearance of a *qāṭal* in (26) is compatible with its basic meaning. Observe that describing some event on the time line as the negation of some other event implies that not the event itself but its negation should be integrated into the addressee's current state of knowledge. The slight distancing involved is compatible with the non-salience of the *qāṭal*, even though it does not lead to the strict requirement of a *qāṭal*: for the expression of focal referential concern the *yiqtōl* can still be used, as in the following example illustrating negation of volition:

- (27) *wayyōmer yhwh 'el libbō*  
 and.said yhwh to his.heart  
 'and the Lord said (*wayyiqṭōl*) to Himself:  
*lō 'ōsīp lēqallēl 'ōd 'et hā'ādāmā*  
 not I.continue to.curse again ACC the.land  
 I will not again (*yiqtōl*) curse the land (Genesis 8:21)

Negative commands, which are of focal referential concern by definition, always require the use of the negation *'al* instead of *lō*:

- (28) *wayyōmer 'al tišlah yādkā 'el hanna'ar*  
 and.he.said not you.send your.hand against the.boy  
 and he said (*wayyiqṭōl*): don't send (*yiqtōl*) your hand against the  
 boy (Genesis 22:12)

The negation *'al*, as an emphatic marker of focal referential concern that requests the immediate attention and reaction of the addressee, removes the slight ambiguity accompanying the use of *lō* with respect to the extent to which a new event or state should be integrated into the addressee's current discourse representation.

The above examples all concerned negation under conditions of tight linkage. Negation of events of which the speaker knows that they are not easily integrated in the hearer's discourse representation is realized by placing *lō* before the verb in a VSO clause.

- (29) *wayyōmer 'elīšā mē'ayin gēhāzī*  
 and.said Elisha from.where Gehazi  
 and Elisha said (*wayyiqṭōl*): from where, Gehazi?  
*wayyōmer lō hālak 'abdekā 'āne wā'anā*  
 and.he.said not he.went your.servant there and.there  
 and he said (*wayyiqṭōl*): your servant has not gone (*qāṭal*) any-  
 where (2 Kings 5:25)

The translation equivalent of the *qāṭal* form here is the present perfect: ‘your servant has not been away’. Gehazi’s answer is a denial of Elisha’s assumption that Gehazi has been away. Since Gehazi knows that his denial of absence is not part of the common ground, tight linkage is inappropriate. For a similar example see Genesis 42:11.

The negation of events in the background of the narrative takes the expected form ‘and Subject not *qāṭal*’:

- (30) *wayyāšūbū kol yiśrā’el hā’ay wayyakkū ’ōtāh lēpī hereb*  
 and.returned all Israel Ai and.they.hit her with.edge of.sword  
 ‘and all Israel returned (*wayyiqṭōl*) to Ai and smote it (*wayyiqṭōl*)  
 with the edge of the sword’

*wayyēhī kol- hannōpēlīm ... šēnēm ’āsār ’elep ...*  
 and.it.was all who.fell ... two ten thousand ...  
 and it came to pass (*wayyiqṭōl*) that all who fell ...numbered  
 12,000 ...

*wīhōšūa’ lō hēšīb yādō ...*  
 and Joshua not drew back his.hand ...  
 for Joshua had not drawn back (*qāṭal*) his hand ... (Joshua 8:25–26)

The last clause of (27) explains how the victory recounted in the previous clauses had been obtained. Note that the word order is exactly that of the corresponding positive clause. For other examples see, for instance, Genesis 42:23 and Joshua 8:14.

Interestingly, the *qāṭal* SVO clause is not restricted to the background of narrative texts. As a case in point, consider Genesis 38:8,

- (31) *hēn ’adōnī lō yādā’ ’ittī mā babbayit ...*  
 look my.master not knows with.me what in.the.house ...  
 ‘look, without me, my master does not know (*qāṭal*) what happens  
 in his house’

*wē’ēk ’e’ēše hārā’ā haggēdōlā hazzōt*  
 and.how I.do the.evil the.big the.this  
 ‘how then could I do (*yiṭṭōl*) this great evil’ (Genesis 39:8–9)

where Joseph refuses to have intercourse with the wife of his owner. Here the SVO *lō qāṭal* clause, with *yādā* a stative verb, spells out the motivation for the refusal stated in the next clause by means of a *yiṭṭōl*. The motivation for the refusal can be analyzed as providing background information that



should make the refusal itself understandable, and that as such is not meant to elicit an immediate reaction from the addressee. Since the motivation clause is not the answer to the preceding invitation, tight linkage is impossible. Hence, the use of *hēn* ('see') as an explicit marker of rupture of linkage in combination with the *qāṭal*.

Finally consider Genesis 31:32:

- (32) *wěḷō yādā ya'āqōb kī rāḥēl gēnabtām*  
 and.not knows Jacob that Rachel she.stole.them  
 'but Jacob didn't know (*qāṭal*) that Rachel had stolen (*qāṭal*) them'  
 (Genesis 31:32)

This sentence is found after Jacob had unwittingly sentenced his wife Rachel to death, and should probably be understood as a side remark by the narrator directed at his addressees, allowing them to solve the incongruity of Jacob's behavior. Although side remarks supplying background information as such normally require the SVO word order (as in Genesis 42:23), the use of the VSO word order here may serve to approximate the focal referential concern of the *yiqṭōl* VSO clause, as the clause expresses highly informative background information that is crucial to the understanding of the narrative.

Table 4. *The Pragmatics of the Finite Verb Forms of Biblical Hebrew and Negation*

linkage	+FRC	examples	-FRC	•	examples
tight	<i>ʿal yiqṭōl</i> VSO	28			
	<i>lō yiqṭōl</i> VSO	27	<i>lō qāṭal</i> VSO		26
	<i>lō qāṭal</i> VSO	29, 32			
	<i>lō qāṭal</i> SVO	31			
loose			<i>wěḷō qāṭal</i> SVO		30

Table 4 lists the negated counterparts of the clause types summarized in Table 3. Note that the *lō qāṭal* VSO clause is ambiguous: it may either express focal referential concern and non-salience or disfocal referential concern and salience. For all examples known to me, the context will resolve this ambiguity: the latter reading is marked by the conjunction *wě-* and forms

part of a chain of *wayyiqṭōl* verbs, while the former reading will be found in direct speech, often introduced by *wayyōmer*, ‘and he said’, and mostly without the conjunction *wě-*.

#### 4.2 NP-Fronting

In order to study the effect of NP-fronting on the expression of focal referential concern and salience, NP-fronting should be carefully distinguished from left-dislocation. In a language like Biblical Hebrew, which is known only from the written record and for which no data on intonation is available, the only evidence to distinguish the two concerns the presence or absence of case marking on the sentence-initial constituent. In Biblical Hebrew, the clause-external left-dislocated constituent is back-referenced by means of pronominalization. The following examples show left-dislocation of respectively the subject, the direct object, the indirect object and the possessor.

- (33) *hā'iššā 'ašer nātattā 'immādī hī nātnā lī min hā'ēš*  
 the.woman REL you.gave with.me she gave to.me from the.tree  
 ‘the woman that you have given (*qāṭal*) beside me, she has given  
 (*qāṭal*) me from the tree’ (Genesis 3:12) (Subject)
- (34) *wəkol habbē'ērōt 'ašer ... sittēmūm pēlišīm*  
 and.all the.wells REL ... they.stopped.them Philistines  
 ‘and as to all the wells that ..., the Philistines stopped (*qāṭal*)  
 them’ (Genesis 26:15) (Direct Object)
- (35) *kī ze mōše ... lō yāda'nū mā hāyā lō*  
 for this Moses ... not we.know what is to.him  
 for as to this Moses, we do not know (*qāṭal*) what happened to him  
 (Exodus 32:1) (Indirect Object)
- (36) *šāray 'išṭekā lō tiqrā 'et šēmā šāray*  
 Sarai your.wife not you.call ACC her.name Sarai  
 as to Sarai, your wife, do not call (*yiqṭōl*) her name Sarai  
 (Genesis 17:15) (Possessor)

Left-dislocation provides yet another illustration of the fact that the notions background and loose linkage are not equivalent. Clauses with left-dislocation are not excluded from appearing on the time-line. Consider (34), for instance. Here, a *wayyiqṭōl* VSO clause is reshaped into a sequence of the

conjunction *wě-*, the left-dislocated object NP and the *qāṭal* verb, which is in turn followed by the subject NP. The clause is found in a narrative which tells how Isaac became a very wealthy man, and how this roused the envy of the Philistines. Out of spite the Philistines destroyed Isaac's wells, subsequently asking him explicitly to leave the country. The destruction of the wells is an event in the sequence of events that lead to Isaac's expulsion. The use of a *qāṭal* rather than a *wayyiqṭōl* form follows from the semantic value of the *qāṭal* and the discourse function of left-dislocations: Left-dislocations establish new topic domains that have to be carefully introduced to the hearer, and that cannot be tightly linked to the preceding discourse.<sup>10</sup> Note, however, that the *qāṭal* is not the only possible tense to follow left-dislocations. Focal referential concern may take precedence over linkage, in which case the *yiḳṭōl* may appear, as in (36).

In contrast to left-dislocated NPs, fronted NPs are case marked and form an integral part of the clause. In (37), the PP *lēkā*, 'to you', has been fronted, while the NP *hā'āreṣ*, 'the land', is a left-dislocation.

- (37) *hā'āreṣ ... lēkā 'ettēnennā ūlēzarekā*  
 the.land ... to.you I.give.it and.to.your.seed  
 'as to the land, to you I am giving it (*yiḳṭōl*) and to your  
 descendants' (Genesis 28:13)

How does NP-fronting interact with the expression of focal referential concern and linkage? First consider the *yiḳṭōl* VSO clause. Either the subject or the object can be fronted:

- (38) *'īm 'ebed yiggaḥ haššōr 'ō 'āmā*  
 if slave it.gores the ox or slave.girl  
 'if the ox gores (*yiḳṭōl*) a slave or slave girl'  
*keseḅ šēlōšim šēqālīm yittēn lādōnāw*  
 silver 30 shekels he.gives to.its.owner  
 'he must give (*yiḳṭōl*) 30 shekels silver to its owner'  
*wēhaššōr yissāqēl*  
 and.the.ox it.must.be.stoned  
 'and the ox shall be stoned (*yiḳṭōl*)' (Exodus 21:32)

In the first and second clauses of (38) the object is fronted, while the subject is fronted in the third clause. The basic word order is found in the first verse of the entry in the codex pertaining to oxen (*kī yiggaḥ šōr 'et 'iš ...*, 'when an

ox kills a man ...'), which introduces the topic and discusses the general case. Specific subcases are introduced by topicalization of the possible victims. The use of the *yiqṭōl* is probably motivated by the prescriptive illocutionary force of these laws.

Next consider NP-fronting under conditions of loose linkage. First consider some examples of direct speech. Again, both subject and object may undergo fronting.

- (39) *wattōmer hā'iššā hannaḥaš hišš'panī*  
 and.she.said the.woman the.serpent he.beguiled.me  
 and the woman said (*wayyiqṭōl*): the serpent has beguiled (*qāṭal*) me  
 (Genesis 3:13) (Subject topicalized)
- (40) *wayyōmer laggō'ēl ḥelqat hassāde ... mākrā no'omī*  
 and.he.said to.the.kinsman piece.of land ... she.sells Naomi  
 and he said (*wayyiqṭōl*): Naomi is selling (*qāṭal*) the piece of land ...  
 (Ruth 4:3) (Object Topicalized)

As an example of fronting of the subject, consider (39), Eve's answer to the Lord God's question 'what have you done'. The answer is evasive: the serpent is fronted for contrast to indicate that it rather than Eve is responsible for the eating of the forbidden fruit. Since the serpent's role is, as far as Eve knows, unknown to her addressee, she uses the *qāṭal*. A similar analysis applies to (40), where the fronted object occurs at the head of the very first clause of a conversation of Boaz with his rival kinsman concerning the family obligations with respect to Naomi. By topicalizing 'the piece of land', Boaz immediately reveals the reason for this formal meeting with his kinsman. Since this topic is unknown to his addressee, a verb form expressing loose linkage is required. (For other examples with topicalization of the object see Genesis 37:32 and 2 Kings 22:8).

Turning to NP-fronting in narrative clauses with difocal referential concern, consider the fronting of the direct object for the *wayyiqṭōl* VSO clause. A typical example is Genesis 40:21–22.

- (41) *wayyāšeb 'et śar hammaškīm 'al maškēhū*  
 and.he.returned ACC chief of.the.butlers on his.butlership  
 and he returned (*wayyiqṭōl*) the chief butler unto his butlership  
*wayyittēn hakkōs 'al kap parō*  
 and.he.gave the.cup on hand.of Pharaoh  
 and he gave (*wayyiqṭōl*) the cup into Pharaoh's hand  
*wə'et śar hā'ōpīm tālā*  
 and.ACC chief of.the.bakers he.hanged  
 but he hanged (*qāṭal*) the chief baker (Genesis 40:21–22)

The main events recounted here are the restoration of the chief butler to his former position and the hanging of the chief baker. The fronting of the chief baker in the third clause brings about a chiasmic structure

*wayyiqṭōl* Object  
 and Object *qāṭal*

where both the change in word order and the change of verbal form serve to emphasize the contrast in the fate of the two royal officers. As in the case of (17), the *qāṭal* denotes an event in the foreground of the narrative that occurs simultaneously with the events in the preceding clauses.

I have discussed a number of examples involving fronting of subject and object NPs. However, fronting is an extremely productive process in Biblical Hebrew, and this raises the question whether the hypothesis of a single basic ordering of the verb and its arguments should not be abandoned in favor of a theory in which word order is regarded as more or less free. There are a number of facts which argue against the latter position. In the first place, the constituent order for the *wayyiqṭōl* clause is always VSO. In the second place, the patterning of a single constituent before the verb (SVO, OVS and PP VSO) together with the occurrence of VSO clauses suggests that a process of NP-fronting is at stake here rather than some (highly marked) process of verb-fronting. In the third place, we may argue that if NP-fronting is responsible for the pre-verbal constituents, these constituents should be absent under the conditions for which it is known that fronting is blocked, namely when some other constituent occupies the preverbal slot (the COMP position in generative grammar, or the P1 position in Functional Grammar (Dik 1978:175)). As expected, relative clauses invariably take the

VSO order, which immediately follows from the fact that the relativizer *ʾāšer* blocks fronting of other constituents.<sup>11</sup>

If correct, this analysis of fronting may shed some light on the *qāṭal* SVO clause. Rather than representing a basic word order, the *qāṭal* SVO clause is best analyzed as originating from a VSO clause by NP-fronting. If we were to analyze the *qāṭal* SVO clause as displaying a basic word order of the language, we would expect that fronting of the object should be possible. This, however, is not the case. In fact, there is an interesting asymmetry between the *qāṭal* SVO clause on the one hand, and the participial clause on the other. In the case of participial clauses, the order OSV is not unknown:

- (42) *ʾet ʾāḥay ʾānōkī mēbaqqēš*  
 ACC my.brothers I am.seeking  
 ‘I am looking (*qōṭēl*) for my brothers’ (Genesis 37:16)

For other examples see Gesenius-Kautzsch (1909<sup>28</sup>, § 142, footnote 3). If we assume that the basic word order for participial clauses is SVO, such clauses must have a freely accessible P1 position. In (42) this position is occupied by ‘my brothers’. In the case of the *qāṭal* SVO clause, however, the P1 position is occupied by the subject, barring fronting of the object. The single exception known to me from narrative prose is 2 Kings 5:13.

- (43) *wayyiggēšū ʾabādāw ... wayyōmrū*  
 and.they.approached his.servants ... and.they.said  
 ‘but his servants approached him (*wayyiqṭōl*) ...and said (*wayyiqṭōl*):’  
*ʾābī dābār gādōl hannābī dibber ʾēlekā*  
 my.father word great the.prophet he.spoke to.you  
 ‘my father, if the prophet had bid (*qāṭal*) thee do some great thing’  
*hālō taʾāše*  
 QUESTION.not you.do.it  
 ‘would thou not have agreed to do it (*yiqtōl*) it?’ (2 Kings 5:13)

The exceptional OSV order in the first clause of the rhetorical question is probably due to a reanalysis of the protasis along the lines of the participial clause, a reanalysis prompted by topicalization of the main point of the argument (*dābār gādōl*) in a counterfactual *qāṭal* clause expressing the motivation (cf. (31)) for a question.

We are now in the position to understand why the *qāṭal* SVO clause is

ambiguous with respect to the foreground – background distinction discussed in Section 3.4. On the one hand, a *qāṭal* SVO clause may be the result of NP-fronting, for instance for the expression of simultaneity. Like the *wayyiqṭōl* VSO clauses from which they can be considered to be 'derived', they form part of the foreground of the narrative. On the other hand, the reason for fronting the subject may be to bring the clause in line with the basic Subject–Predicate word order of the stative (nominal) or imperfective (participial) clause types, clauses which, due to the combination of loose linkage and disfocal referential concern with imperfective aspect in the case of the participial clause and with stativity in the case of the nominal clause are especially well suited to figure in the background of the narrative. From this perspective, the fronting of the subject in a *qāṭal* clause can be viewed as a strategy to assimilate a clause type that typically encodes events to clause types that typically encode states. Note, however, that we are again dealing with a strong tendency rather than a perfect correlation: Imperfective aspect can be combined with focal referential concern, as shown by (42) above.

Table 5. NP-Fronting, Focal Referential Concern and Linkage

SAL	+FRC	examples	-FRC	examples
tight	NP <i>yiqṭōl</i> X	37, 38		
			NP <i>qāṭal</i> X	41
loose	NP <i>qāṭal</i> X	39, 40	NP <i>qāṭal</i> X	20
	O S <i>qōṭēl</i>	42	NP <i>qāṭal</i> X	27

Table 5 summarizes the analysis of NP-fronting presented here. Note that the NP *qāṭal* X clause is ambiguous with respect to the dimension of focal referential concern. This follows from the fact that the *qāṭal* itself is unmarked with respect to this opposition. Note that the present theory predicts that in order to topicalize the object in a clause that functions in the background of a narrative a participial clause has to be used. Since clauses in the background of the narrative already require the 'S *qāṭal* O' word order, no position is free for the topicalized object. Hence a participial clause, for which the basic word order is 'S *qōṭēl*', is required.

## 5. Discussion

In Section 3.1 I briefly discussed Joüon's (1923) theory of the tenses of Biblical Hebrew. The main thrust of his analysis, namely that the *qōṭēl* expresses imperfective aspect, that the *yiqṭōl* and *wayyiqṭōl* are in opposition along lines of temporal deixis, and that the *qāṭal* expresses the perfect, is rather similar to the analysis developed here, although I have made use of more abstract semantic notions of focal referential concern and linkage as more precise analytical tools. In this section I compare the present theory with three other analyses of the tenses of Biblical Hebrew, an analysis in terms of tense, Hetzron (1987), an analysis in terms of aspect, Givón (1982), and an analysis along the lines of Weinrich (1971), namely Schneider (1974).

*Table 6. A Tense System in Biblical Hebrew: Hetzron (1987)*

	initial position	non-initial position
past	<i>wayyiqṭōl</i>	<i>qāṭal</i>
non-past	<i>wəqāṭal</i>	<i>yiqṭōl</i>

Hetzron (1987) argues that the Hebrew verb forms constitute a tense system along the lines of Table 6. Non-initial contexts are those in which a noun, adverb, conjunction or negation precedes the verb. An analysis along aspectual lines is explicitly rejected. Hetzron's analysis and the theory developed here agree on the point that the distinction between the *wayyiqṭōl* and the *yiqṭōl* is an important one. This is to be expected, since the opposition between focal and disfocal referential concern has been developed as an alternative to the traditional opposition between non-past and past.

The main points of difference with the present analysis concern functions of *wəqāṭal* and *qāṭal*. Instead of analyzing the *wəqāṭal* as an independent verb, we have argued that it has the properties of a medial verb that is itself unmarked for 'tense'. More important, however, are the difficulties that arise when the *qāṭal* is interpreted as a past tense. Although a past tense analysis covers many cases, the use of a *qāṭal* in (29) and (33) shows that the analysis has to be broadened to cover the present perfect, and, for instance in the case of (13), (31) and (40), the simple present. Also note that the existence of a non-negligible number of examples in which the *qāṭal*



occupies the initial position in the clause is glossed over (see (8) and Genesis 8:13; 22:20; 30:18; 30:23; Genesis 31:1; Genesis 48:11). This weakens the explanatory value of the initial position with respect to what mechanism governs the choice between the rival past and non-past forms.

Table 7. A Tense–Aspect–Modality System in Biblical Hebrew: Givón (1982)

<i>(way)yiqṭōl</i>	<i>qāṭal</i>	<i>qōṭēl</i>
foreground	background	background
same subject/topic	new subject/topic	
punctual aspect	anterior aspect	non-punctual aspect

Givón (1982) presents an analysis of the Hebrew tenses within a framework according to which there are four major constellations of tense, aspect and modality properties. He argues that *wayyiqṭōl* and *yiqṭōl* express the unmarked category, which is used for past-action–present-state, that the *qāṭal* marks the anterior–perfect–pluperfect constellation and that the participle gives expression to non-punctual–continuous–habitual events (see also Table 7). Givón's fourth tense–aspect–modality constellation (future–conditional–irrealis–imperative) is argued to be expressed both by *yiqṭōl* (and imperative) and *qāṭal*. In the case of the *yiqṭōl* it is claimed to give rise to the well-known modal readings of this tense, while in the case of the *qāṭal* the combination with anterior aspect is argued to produce the counterfactual–unrealized interpretation.

Givón's theory and the analysis given here agree that there is a fundamental opposition between *yiqṭōl* and *wayyiqṭōl* on the one hand and the *qāṭal* on the other. The main point of difference is perhaps that in my analysis his semantic analysis in terms of anteriority is developed into the pragmatic notion of linkage. This revision is required to account for such examples as (21), (22) and (23) where the *qāṭal* does not have anterior aspect and does not disrupt the narrative sequence. Similarly, (40) shows that the *qāṭal* need not have a perfect reading in direct speech.

A second difference concerns the fact that the opposition between *yiqṭōl* and *wayyiqṭōl* is glossed over. This is a direct consequence of the fact that past–action and present–state are brought together in his unmarked tense–aspect–modality constellation. To my mind, it is advantageous to allow the unique phonology of the *waC-* conjunction in the *wayyiqṭōl* to speak for

itself and to recognize a principled distinction between the *yiqṭōl* (present state, and various modal readings that typically fall under the notion focal referential concern) and the *wayyiqṭōl* (past-action).<sup>12</sup>

In Schneider's (1974) analysis, the main opposition between the tenses is again that between *wayyiqṭōl* and *yiqṭōl*. Following Weinrich (1971), he distinguishes between narrative and discursive speech modes (*Sprechhaltungen*), arguing that the main tenses of these speech modes are the *wayyiqṭōl* and *yiqṭōl* respectively. This part of his analysis is in agreement with Hetzron's past versus non-past opposition, and the distinction between focal and disfocal referential concern developed in the present paper. The *qāṭal* is analyzed as neutral with respect to the narrative-discursive opposition. It is said to express the anterior function, requiring translation with the pluperfect in narrative and the perfect in discursive speech modes. However, Schneider acknowledges that the *qāṭal* has other uses that do not fit his theory, namely those cases where the *qāṭal* is best translated with a simple present. He analyses such cases as (44) and (45):

- (44) *hinnē nātattī 'et hā'āreš bēyādō*  
 see I.give ACC the.land in.his.hand  
 'behold, I give (*qāṭal*) the land in his hand' (Judges 1:2)
- (45) *wayya'an wayyēdabber 'ēlāw 'iṣ hā'ēlōhīm*  
 and.he.replied and.he.said to.him man of.God  
 'and he replied (*wayyiqṭōl*) and said (*wayyiqṭōl*) to him: man of God,'  
*kō 'āmar hammelek mēhērā rēdā*  
 thus he.says the.king quickly come.down  
 'thus sayeth (*qāṭal*) the king: come down (imperative) quickly'  
 (2 Kings 1:11)

as performatives, locutions realizing the action they express (Austin 1976), for which the anterior perspective has been reduced to zero. Unfortunately, a performative analysis does not apply to 2 Kings 1:11 (Talstra 1982) or to (13) and (40), while it should also be noted that performatives may appear in the *yiqṭōl* form (see e.g. (37) and Genesis 21:24). Interestingly, the use of the *qāṭal* in (44) and (45) is motivated by its basic function: the expression of delinking. In the case of (44), the event of giving itself is not well-embedded in the speech situation. It is a promise that the future event of victory will take place. In the case of (45), the use of the *qāṭal* is motivated by the fact that the king himself is not speaking, but his envoy.

There is one other important point on which the analysis developed here differs from that of Schneider. Following Meyer (1972 § 92.4, cf. also Hetzron's non-initial position), Schneider classifies clauses with a topicalized subject or object, as well as clauses with left-dislocations, as nominal clauses with a complex predicate. All nominal clauses, irrespective of the complexity of their predicate, are then argued to belong to the background of the narrative (Schneider § 44.2.1.2). In contrast, I have argued that it is only the *qāṭal* SVO clause which has the background function by implicature. Examples such as (21), (34) and (41) show that topicalization and left-dislocation are processes that operate independently of the foreground-background layering of the narrative.

Having completed my analysis of the tense forms of Biblical Hebrew, I conclude with two final remarks. First, my analysis may shed some light on why the *qāṭal* is ubiquitous in poetry, a genre that I have not considered here. Probably, the language of poetry is not directly comparable to that of the narrative texts I have studied here, as the poetic texts have retained features of older stages of the language that have been lost in the (younger) narrative texts. Nevertheless, it is a striking property of poetic language that events and states are often evoked rather than brought into relation to each other and carefully embedded in the developing discourse representation. From this perspective, intensive use of the *qāṭal* is to be expected.

Second, if my analysis is correct, the *qāṭal* is a tense form that has a pragmatic function without having a semantic value of its own. To my knowledge, this is exceptional for verb forms. Perfective and imperfective aspect may contribute to the foreground and background layering of the clause, but they also have their own intrinsic semantic value. The same holds, for instance, for the present perfect in Dutch. In addition to signaling loose linkage, the use of this tense form always also implies the termination of the event or state expressed by the verb. In the case of Biblical Hebrew, the absence of a semantic value for the *qāṭal* may be the result of language loss. At the time of the final redaction of the Biblical texts as we now know them, Hebrew no longer was a living language. Possibly, the 'conventional' semantics of the *qāṭal* form had been lost by then, in contrast to its pragmatic function, grounded as that was in the more fundamental requirements of human interaction itself. This conclusion would be in line with Givón's (1979) hypothesis that the pragmatic mode of human communication is phylogenetically prior to the syntactic mode, and with Levinson's (1990:12)

claim that “language didn’t make interactional intelligence possible, it is interactional intelligence that made language possible as a means of communication”.

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### NOTES

1. It might be argued that this implication does not follow from Janssen’s theory, because this theory claims that notions such as actual concern and salience apply only to finite verb forms. Therefore, *heeft* in *heeft gebeld* (‘has phoned’) expresses both the actual concern and the salience of some unspecified event, while *gebeld* specifies the event of a phone call that is neither of actual concern nor of disactual concern, and for which neither salience nor non-salience come into play (1993a:760). There are two reasons why this analysis is unattractive. First, assigning events to auxiliaries comes dangerously close to the introduction of semantically empty events to account for pragmatic phenomena. The circumstance that the Dutch present perfect happens to be periphrastic rather than derivational in nature is an insufficient ground for introducing an empty event category. Second, if the finite verb expresses focal referential concern and salience, then the finite auxiliary *heeft* in the above example expresses that at least the vacuous event is salient. Since the nonfinite main verb does not fall under the ‘scope’ of salience, the implication is that the verb phrase must express salience. This leads to a contradiction, as the present perfect is explicitly claimed to express non-salience.
2. The transcription used here gives a broad indication of the Masoretic text. Matres Lectionis have not been transcribed, nor has the spirantization of the non-emphatic plosives been indicated.

3. Morphologically, the *yiqṭōl* is closely related to the imperative: the latter is obtained from the former by deletion of the inflectional prefix: *qṭōl* < *yi+qṭōl*.
4. See Foley and van Valin (1984) for a typology of chaining constructions.
5. For ease of exposition, clauses with the word order S V PP where the PP is a case marked argument of the verb are also referred to as SVO clauses.
6. The most common option for explicit marking of simultaneity is to use the preposition *k-*, 'as, like', which attaches to the infinitive.
7. For completeness, it should be noted that the *qāṭal* SVO clause is not the only clause type used to introduce new participants into the discourse. Especially the participial 'SVO' clause, which also expresses non-salience, is often used for this purpose (see (15) and Genesis 23:10;24:15).
8. Hawkins (1994) presents a strong case that syntactic weight takes precedence over information structure in determining word order. However, for clauses with equal syntactic weight pragmatic ordering considerations are found to influence constituent order. Since the syntactic weight for the subject NP's in (21) and (23) is equal, the difference in word order can in this case be traced to a difference in the degree of linkage.
9. See Comrie (1985:26–27) for a similar argument that sequentiality is not part of the meaning of the perfective, and that foreground and background status follows from the use of perfective and imperfective aspect by implicature only.
10. Most translators have interpreted (34) as background information, which does not make sense at all. The present analysis finds some support, however, in Speiser's (1980) translation of Genesis 26:13–15: "The man grew richer all the time, until he was very wealthy. He acquired flocks and herds, and a large retinue; and the Philistines were envious of him. So the Philistines stopped up all the wells that his father's servants had dug — back in the days of his father Abraham — and filled them up with earth."
11. It is of interest to note that Joüon (1923, § 155k) disagrees with Gesenius-Kautzsch (1909<sup>28</sup>, § 142) with respect to the latter's claim that the basic word order is VSO. According to Joüon, the basic order is SV for clauses without, and VS for clauses with 'particule', a category in which he includes the exclamation *hinnē* and the negation *lō*, in addition to the relativizer 'āšer and particles proper such as *kī* or *pen*. The question particle *ha-* should be added to this list, see, for instance, Genesis 8:8: *lir'ōi hāqallū hammayim mē'al pēnē hā'ādāmā*. On the other hand, the negation *lō* and the exclamation *hinnē* should be removed, since they do not occupy the P1 position, never blocking fronting.
12. A minor point of disagreement concerns the fact that subject changes in *wayyiqṭōl* sequences are far more common than Givón acknowledges, see, for instance, (5). Hence the opposition between old topic and new topic in Table 7 does not harmonize so well with the opposition between *qāṭal* and *wayyiqṭōl* as is suggested by Table 7.

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