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mark “only differences in the kind of time, not differences in the order of time”. The ‘imperfect’ yiqtol represents incipiency, the participle qatel continuance, and the ‘perfect’ qatal completion (Driver 1881:3). Driver was then able to explain the occasional use of the qatal for events that had not yet happened, and the yiqtol for habitual past events. Driver did not use the name ‘aspect’ for the imperfect and perfect, but his tenseless view of Hebrew became highly influential, since it was adopted in Cowley’s translation of the standard Hebrew reference grammar (GKC).

Over the last century, Hebraists have begun to incorporate comparative linguistic views of aspect into their theories of the Hebrew verbal system. Aspect is now seen as a cross-linguistic phenomenon, and the definition of aspect used by Driver is no longer defined in terms of ‘finishing’ or ‘completing’ so as to be almost equivalent to tense, but in terms of completeness and progression.

Meanwhile, other attempts to refine Driver’s views kept appearing. McFall’s Enigma of the Hebrew Verbal System (1982) summarized the state of research up to 1954. In 1923, Joüon claimed that the Biblical verb forms marked both tense and aspect. By ‘aspect’ he meant not simply a viewpoint on an action, but something objective about the action itself (1923:291; see also Joüon and Muraoka 1991:355). The qatal conveyed unity and instantaneity of action, as well as past time reference, and the yiqtol plurality and durativity of action, as well as future time.

The difference between qatal and yiqtol was expressed by Gray (1934) in terms of telicity, and by Michel (1960:98, 110, 127) and Kustar (1972:45) in terms of independent versus dependent action. In the 1970s Silverman (1973) and Andersen (1974) brought word order into consideration, still concluding that yiqtol was primarily aspectual, but also carried some tense value.

Recent advocates of aspect tend to include the future and past habitual with the imperfect (Garr 1998). Most recently, Cook (2002) and Andrason (2011) examined grammaticalization of the verbal system, and although Cook retained an aspectual view, Andrason rejected the assumption that qatal and yiqtol are a binary opposition, and has shown the plausibility that the yiqtol began as an aspectual form, then also acquired iterative (such as past habitual) and modal functions over time (2010).

4. Taxis

Revell (1989) and Gropp (1991) argued that the Biblical conjugations marked not absolute tense (i.e., time reference relative to the speaker or narrator), but relative tense (i.e., time relative to the context): qatal and wayyiqtol for past relative to the time of the context (i.e., anteriority), and yiqtol and weqatal for present or future relative to the context (prospective). Past habituels and the future perfect can be expressed by either yiqtol or qatal. Gropp’s model of the non-volitional forms combined sequentiality (conveyed by wayyiqtol and weqatal) with anteriority (conveyed by qatal and wayyiqtol). Recent proponents of tense prominence for biblical Hebrew have nuanced their views in the direction of relative tense theories (Rogland 2003).

5. Text Linguistics

Longacre (1992; 1996) and his supporters (Dawson 1994; Rocine 2000) and the followers of Weinrich (Schneider and Grether 1974; Niccacci 1990; Talstra 1997) pointed to differing uses of yiqtol depending not on aspeclual or temporal considerations, but on text-types such as discourse and narrative. Niccacci maintained that in a verb-initial clause or in a clause carrying the mainline of communication, the verb has “fixed temporal reference,” i.e., absolute tense; but when the clause is not verb-initial, it has relative temporal reference (i.e., relative tense). Longacre formalized a classification scheme for genre based on four parameters: contingent temporal succession, agent orientation, projection, and tension.

6. Modality

Beat Zuber (1986) found a strong (greater than ninety percent) correlation between the Hebrew verb forms and modality when he compared them to the forms in the Septuagint and Vulgate. Greek and Latin indicative forms (excluding the future) translated clause-initial qatal, clause non-initial qatal, copulative conjunctive weqatal, and wayyiqtol. The Greek and Latin modals (including the future) translated...
clause-initial \textit{yiqtol}, clause non-initial \textit{yiqtol}, \textit{we-yiqtol}, and relative/consecutive \textit{weqatal}.

Galía Hatav (1997) argued that past habitu-als and future indicatives are not significantly different from the (other) modals; they both refer to possibilities that are undecided at the reference point in time. Therefore she was able to conclude from her statistical analysis of the narrative and legal material from Genesis through Kings that \textit{qatal} is used for the “perfect” aspect, \textit{yiqtol} for modality without sequentiality, \textit{weqatal} for modality with sequentiality, and \textit{wayyiqtol} for sequentiality without modality.

Jan Joosten (1996; 1999; 2002) argued that the modal/non-modal distinction is not simply between the two forms \textit{yiqtol} and \textit{qatal}, but between the entire modal subsystem and the indicative subsystem. By including the participle in his analysis, Joosten demonstrated that imperfectivity (the actual present and attendant circumstances) is not regularly expressed by \textit{yiqtol}, and that the main uses of \textit{yiqtol} are all modal, if past habitual and future statements are considered modal. The \textit{yiqtol}, \textit{weqatal}, imperative, jussive, and cohortative forms are then modal, and the \textit{qatal}, \textit{gotel}, and \textit{wayyiqtol} are indicative.

7. Post-Biblical Hebrew

Van Peursen (2004) examined the verbal system in Ben Sira, finding only a few differences compared to Biblical Hebrew: \textit{yiqtol} is more commonly used for stative verbs with present reference; \textit{weqatali} occasionally refers to the present, and sometimes \textit{weqatal} appears where \textit{wayyiqtol} is expected.

Penner (2006) summarized the study of the verbal system in the Dead Sea Scrolls, and examined the statistical correlations between form and function to determine if Qumran Hebrew was a tense, aspect, or modal system, concluding that tense and mood models (but not aspect) are plausible. Holst’s work (2008) on verbs in the War Scroll focussed on discourse features, concluding that the functions of the \textit{weqatal} and the \textit{yiqtol} are not obviously different. What distinguishes the two is word order, not tense, mood, or aspect: \textit{weqatal} is clause-initial; \textit{yiqtol} is not. Non-initial \textit{yiqtol} is used to introduce new subject matter.

Segal (1927:150, 153, 156) described Mishnaic Hebrew as a tense-based verbal system, with the “perfect” for the past, the imperfect for the future, and the participle for the present. But M. Pérez Fernández (1999:107) has summarized more recent studies (Bendavid 1967–1971:II, §222; Kutscher 1971:1600; Kutscher 1982:131; Sharvit 1980:110–125; Mishor 1983; Breuer 1986) that recognize the modal functions of the conjunctions within the system of tenses: \textit{qatal} for past activity, \textit{gotel} for the present and future, and \textit{yiqtol} for volitional modality (cohortative, optative, jussive) and in subordinate clauses, also the future. The \textit{yiqtol} corresponds best to a mood rather than a tense.

References


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Verbal System: Biblical Hebrew

As in other languages with a conjugated verb, so in BH (= Biblical Hebrew) different verbal forms express distinct nuances of tense, aspect, and mood. Traditionally, the BH verbal system has been viewed as being organized around a central opposition: qatal (the ‘perfect’) versus yiqtol (the ‘imperfect’); but this analysis has proved wrongheaded. Both historical considerations and a synchronic approach show that the BH system is more complex and cannot be reduced to a mere binary opposition. Precise definition of verbal usage is difficult in any language, all the more so in a dead language, attested in a relatively small corpus, composed of texts created over a period of perhaps one thousand years. But the contours of the system are sufficiently clear.