There is a growing need for more adequate theoretical frames of reference to interpret and complement the taxonomies of distributional patterns.¹

Summer 2014 residential research consisted primarily of drilling down on perspectives on understanding interfacing between linguistic structure and rhetorical features of biblical Hebrew poetic discourse. On the one hand, recent studies of discourse and rhetoric (more generally textlinguistics) of biblical Hebrew (both prose and poetry) has been approached through a purely linguistic analysis framed by cognitive linguistic theory geared for explanations regarding reader perception (functional grammar and information structure). On the other hand, discourse and rhetoric has also been approached from a literary perspective (including rhetorical criticism and stylistics) explaining the creative shaping of language (specifically syntax) to serve artistic expression. Both groups claim to ask and answer the same question: how does language function as the means for framing a(n) (artistic) text in such a way that it impacts the reader? In other words, is the text a handmaiden to language or language to literature? Largely influenced by Eep Talstra’s article “Reading Biblical Hebrew Poetry: Linguistic Structure or Rhetorical Device?,”² I have concluded that linguistic analysis must take precedence to rhetorical analysis. This being the case, the ultimately pragmatic result of my summer research has been to adjust my working abstract from one that presupposes rhetorical function of syntax analysis of poetic macro-structure (foregrounding and structural cohesion) to one that analyses the distribution of syntax patterns across all levels of structure (both micro and macro) within a poem as a potential means for identifying macro-structural delimitation markers.


Evaluating Competing Linguistic Theories of Functional Grammar and Generative Grammar as Prospective Theoretical Frameworks for Biblical Hebrew Discourse Analysis

Functional grammar theory is quickly securing its position as the preferred theoretical framework among biblical Hebrew discourse analysts. Functional grammar, also known as dependency grammar, was initially outlined by Lucien Tesnière in his *Éléments de Syntaxe Structurale* (1959). It is now Dik’s grammar that is accepted as the standard functional grammar theory text.

There is a range of difference between functional grammar and generative grammar (also known as transformational grammar, constituency grammar, and most recently popularised as the Minimalist Program and X₁ theory (“X-bar”)). The primary difference being that functional grammar is solely interested in the pragmatic function of language among natural language users (NLUs), whereas generative grammar theory examines language and linguistics as theory in terms of the range of possible constructions within language as well as their limitations. Put more simply, functional grammar investigates how language is *actually* used and generative grammar theory analysis how language *could* be used for the sake of identifying the theoretical principles of “universal language” (UL).

My research centred on dependency syntax theory by means of engagement with Groß and Mel’čuk. Dependency syntax proposes that there is a highly functional and strict system of hierarchy and governance between words. That system of governance within a clause is determined by the finite verb. This means that the finite verb that stands as the lead determiner of all phrase (generative grammar, “constituents”) function. Functional grammar, then, analyses and diagrams the nature of relationships between words as they relate to finite verb within any given phrase.

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As is evident, functional grammar has a direct link to cognitive linguistics. Cognitive approaches have been trending for the past couple of decades among hebraists. Information structure theory, which deals with human perception, is a single branch of cognitive linguistic approaches. Information structure theory has been applied to biblical Hebrew in both lexicology, discourse analysis, and word-order. C. H. J. van der Merwe and E. Talstra’s article “Biblical Hebrew Word Order: The Interface of Information Structure and Formal Features” notes that the application of information structure to biblical Hebrew is just getting started.

As coherence and grounding theory are also related to cognitive linguistics (and therefore functional grammar theory and discourse analysis), I engaged with a number of articles outlining the current landscape of both theories (coherence and grounding) as applied to biblical Hebrew.

The deeper I dig, however, the more I’m taken away from the text and into the strange world of

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cognitive linguistic theory. While developments in cognitive linguistic certainly prove helpful and illuminating, the exegetical payoff to work-required ratio is way out of balance. The commitment required for adding new dimensions to the current landscape of cognitive linguistics and its interfacing with biblical Hebrew at a discourse level is demanding. I believe that new dimensions can be added to understanding the interfacing of language, style and poetic macro-structure without having to submerge oneself in cognitive linguistic theory (more on this below).

**History of Strophic Analysis Framed by Rhetorical Criticism**

P. van der Lugt, J. P. Fokkelman, W. van der Meer, and J. C. de Moor (and some may include David Noel Freedman whose theory is essentially a newer form of syllable counting to demonstrate parallel symmetry among strophes) are the current lead theorists in macro-structural analysis of biblical Hebrew poetry. Interestingly, macro-structural analysis belongs to the field of rhetorical criticism which shares some similarities with structural linguistic theory, but is largely quite different. The field has branched out since its watershed moment which was J. Muilenberg’s Presidential Address delivered at the annual SBL in 1968.

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14 J. Muilenberg, “Form Criticism and Beyond” (SBL)
Van der Lugt offers a thorough literature review of the history of poetic macro-structure analysis (focusing on strophes) that reaches back to the 19th century. Synthesised, almost all approaches are a varied form of simple to elaborate syllable counting to demonstrate a macro-structural symmetry that echoes parallelisms membrorum (semantic parallelism). In other words, theorists largely assumed that literary structural form reflects meaning.

Van der Lugt has developed his own schema for identifying macro-structural breaks in poems. His criteria are (1) verbal repetitions, and (2) transition markers (“a special group of words and grammatical forms that mark turning points within a Hebrew poem; cf. the Greek word stropè, which means ‘turn’”\(^\text{15}\)). With this, van der Lugt validates “verbal repetitions” as a criterion for delineating sections thereby indicating the linguistic-rhetoric interface yet largely avoids serious engagement with linguistic theory. This demonstrates the strange gap between rhetorical criticism and structural linguistic theory.

J. P. Fokkelman has processed a massive amount of data within his own theoretical framework for analysing strophic structures in biblical Hebrew poetry. Fokkelman’s work, like many before him, centres on syllable counting. At the same time, “In Fokkelman’s view, finding the correct boundaries for the colon and the verse line (bicolon or tricolon) is the first requirement for a sound prosodic analysis.”\(^\text{16}\) Fokkelman also argues that syntactic analysis is not the defining characteristic of colometric constraints. “Fokkelman emphasises that ‘meaning and sense are and will always be of primary importance, however fascinating figures may be at times’.”\(^\text{17}\) This is quite strange in that it dismisses the works of O’Connor, Collins, Berlin, and others when these theorists lead the field in analytical colometric theory. Fokkelman insists that colometry is best explained in terms of metre. For a macro-structure theory that heavily depends on sound colometry to dismiss leading theorists in colometric studies is cause for concern.

\(^{15}\) Lugt, *Cantos and Strophes in Biblical Hebrew Poetry With Special Reference to the First Book of the Psalter* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 77.

\(^{16}\) P. van der Lugt, *Cantos and Strophes*, 57.

\(^{17}\) Ibid, quoting Fokkelman, 57.
Conclusion

In light of investigation, the struggle still lays in the relationship between linguistic and rhetorical analysis. This is a natural struggle for interdisciplinary approaches. Should literature be studied as language, or language as literature? Where do the boundaries lay and how do the two interact? Determining the most methodologically sound approach is precisely the challenge. Do we begin with linguistic analysis and move into rhetorical analysis, or vice versa? Are we linguists or literary theorists?

Thankfully, Eep Talstra’s aforementioned article sets out to answer precisely these questions.18 Talstra, being fully versed in both modern linguistic theories (generative and functional grammars) as well as movements in rhetorical criticism, strongly argues that linguistic analysis must come first and that any propositions concerning rhetorical function of literature must be based in sounds linguistic analysis. Talsta concludes with these suggestions:

Give priority to the analysis of poetic texts in terms of rhetorical or semantic analysis and simultaneously demanding for more syntactic analysis of poetry creates a paradox. When the textual analysis is approached in terms of rhetorical design, it becomes impossible to allow syntax its proper place as a part of the linguistic system.

Syntactic or text-grammatical analysis of poetry can be performed in terms of general grammatical categories, without making a priori assumptions about a separate grammar for poetic texts. Poetry shows preferences in its selection grammatical forms from general grammar. It differs with prose texts in its selections, but not in its grammatical system.

When neglecting grammar, rhetorical or stylistic analysis tends to freeze a text into an artistic, but static picture. Giving priority to a text-grammatical analysis allows for access to the text as a discourse, as a communicative process.

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Text-grammatical analysis can help clarify exactly how rhetorical or stichometrical techniques enhance the structure and the performance of a text. Further research is needed to analyse the relationship between categories of grammar and categories of rhetorics.¹⁹

Talstra’s point is strong and thereby convincing. With this approach in mind, I’m considering a bit of a shift. My working abstract was centred on the proposition that syntactic parallelism can be defined as repeated patterns of syntactic deviation with a dual rhetorical function of foregrounding and structural cohesion. The concern here is that conclusions about rhetorical function (structural cohesion and foregrounding) may be premature in light of ongoing studies in coherence and grounding theory (directly related to cognitive linguistics) as well as other dimensions of rhetorical analysis. With this in mind, tightening up my abstract means giving priority to a syntactic analysis that “can help clarify exactly how rhetorical or stichometrical techniques enhance the structure and performance of a text.”²⁰

Such an approach can be situated in the broader scope of functional grammar theory in the sense that there is a text-linguistic assumption that proposes a high-level of structural governance at work in biblical Hebrew poetry not only on the micro-level but also on the macro-level. What we’re talking about is the “syntax of macro-structure” in the sense that there are presumably distinct relationships between strophes and stanzas. The questions is whether or not these relationships are marked in the text. This is a question that many rhetorical analysts have asked and have also claimed to answer, but with a serious neglect of critical engagement with linguistic theory. My research does not seek to answer this question directly but rather indirectly. Rather, I’m considering proposing that the analysis of the poem-wide distribution of repeated syntactic patterns could possibly reveal text-grammatical discourse markers indicating macro-structural shifts within the poem. Again, van der Lugt as identified verb repetition as transition markers between strophes and stanzas (“cantos”), however, my sense is that there is a more elaborate

¹⁹ Ibid., 21.

²⁰ Ibid.
system at work that could be detectable through an evaluation of the distribution of syntax patterns.

With this, the need for an evaluation of syntax analysis that moves beyond the sentence as the largest unit of language is being addressed through an analysis of the distribution of poem-wide syntactic patterns. At the same time, the need to address the impact of style on syntax structures at a discourse level is also being engaged with such a study.

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