The Menzerath-Altmann Law and Ancient Hebrew: Does the Bible Break the Law?

In this paper, I explore the application of the Menzerath-Altmann law (MAL) to Ancient Hebrew. The MAL is named after Paul Menzerath and Bariel Altmann and was proposed first in 1928 and later developed in 1980. Essentially, the MAL is a linguistic law that states an increase in the size of a linguistic construct corresponds to a decrease in the size of its constituents. An example of this is: the longer a word (measured in syllables), the shorter the syllables (measured in sounds). For this paper, I examine the sentence, clause, phrase, and word levels to determine if Ancient Hebrew conforms to the MAL. My corpus is comprised of the Masoretic Text of the Hebrew Bible as well as the War Scroll and the Community Rule. I utilize the Eep Talstra Centre for Bible and Computer (ETCBC) database of the Hebrew Bible and Dead Sea Scrolls as my source for data. While the application of the MAL has been studied in numerous languages, to my knowledge there is no published material focused on this law and Hebrew. The conclusions of this paper will thus be important both for general quantitative linguistics as well as Ancient Hebrew studies.