

Some Considerations on the Problem of Diglossia in Biblical Hebrew*

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Abstract

This article challenges the notion of diglossia, invoked by Gary A. Rendsburg (1990) as one of the parameters of linguistic variation in Biblical Hebrew, from both the methodological and linguistic points of view.

Firstly, thus far the existence of diglossia in Biblical Hebrew has been widely accepted, although no Hebraist has demonstrated the functional specialization between spoken and written Hebrew (*i.e.* low vs. high varieties) in biblical times.

Secondly, among the alleged diglossic isoglosses presented by Rendsburg, 1) gender neutralisation; 2) -ִּשְׁ instead of שְׁ as *nota relationis*; and 3) the proleptic pronominal suffix are discussed.

Finally, by combining the sociolinguistic and pragmatic approaches this survey aims to cast new light on these debated isoglosses.

Keywords

diglossia – Biblical Hebrew – variation in Ancient Hebrew – sociolinguistics – pragmatics – gender neutralisation – -ִּשְׁ and שְׁ – prolepsis

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Introduction¹

According to Ferguson's classic definition (1959), diglossia is the co-existence of two varieties of the same language in one speech community, namely H and L, in Ferguson's terminology. The two varieties have a functional distribution, that is, H is used in domains (namely, prayer, literature, formal speech, and media) different from those (namely, informal speech, and folk-tales) in which L is used.

A number of Hebraists have applied the notion of diglossia to describe the relationship between the written (H) and spoken (L) varieties of BH. In the present study, I will deal with the problem of diglossia in the biblical period, as postulated by Gary Rendsburg (1990) in his monograph *Diglossia in Ancient Hebrew*.

The Hypothesis of Diglossia in Biblical Hebrew and its Limits

Rendsburg's hypothesis proposes that diglossia can be dated back to the biblical period on account of hallmarks shared between BH and MH. Rendsburg regards these features as interference of the spoken variety in the biblical text, since MH is unanimously deemed to have been the spoken variety used by Tannaim, for religious-literary purposes.

Rendsburg's hypothesis of diglossia was anticipated by Abba Bendavid (1951: 69–73), William Chomsky (1964: 161), Jack Fellman (1977: 108), Edward Ullendorff (1971: 249, 255), and Stephen J. Lieberman (1978: 26). Although Bendavid's assumption of diglossia in EBH was completely removed in the second edition (1967–71) of his monograph, Rendsburg (erroneously) concludes that Bendavid's hypothesis "appears less explicitly but certainly implicitly in the book's second edition" (Rabin 1970: 314; Rendsburg 1990: 18 n. 56). Chomsky assumes that there was a functional specialization between the literary and the colloquial varieties even in Jerusalem, in the biblical period. On the basis that MH was the language of oral sources, Fellman, Ullendorff, and Lieberman assume that MH was the colloquial variety of Hebrew in the biblical period, making BH the literary equivalent of classical Arabic. However, none of these studies provide any linguistic or sociolinguistic proof of their assertions.

1 Note the following abbreviations: AH = Ancient Hebrew; BA = Biblical Aramaic; BH = Biblical Hebrew; BKL = Bar-Kokhba Letters; BenS = Ben Sira; CBH = Classical Biblical Hebrew; DSS = Dead Sea Scrolls; EBH = Early Biblical Hebrew; EpH = Epigraphic Hebrew; H = high; IA = Imperial Aramaic; L = low; LBH = Late Biblical Hebrew; MH = Mishnaic Hebrew; TransBH = Transitional Biblical Hebrew; 3Q15 = Copper Scroll; 4QMMT = Halakhic Letter.

Rendsburg's hypothesis caused quite a stir within the scientific community (Edzard 2012), in fact, several Hebraists including Sverrir Ólafsson (1991), Scobie Smith (2000), and, indirectly, Elitzur A. Bar-Asher Siegal (2013) have all cast doubt on it.

Ólafsson rejects Rendsburg's diglossic hypothesis, since dialectal geography² shows the possibility of the existence of a multiplicity of Hebrew dialects, rather than of the diglossic situation in EBH. However, the number of dialects we may identify is at best provisional, since many of them were most likely never written down.

Smith was the first scholar to cast doubt on Rendsburg's theory on the basis of faulty method: 1) the absence of proof that MH is the offshoot of spoken BH; 2) the disregard for EpH documentation that is in synchrony with BH (unlike MH); 3) the uncritical transfer of the functional specialization found in Arabic, Ethiopic and Aramaic to BH, on the basis of their genetic relationship. Furthermore, re-examining three isoglosses identified by Rendsburg, Smith shows that the existence of the same phenomenon in different languages—or varieties of the same language, specifically in Mishnaic literature—is not necessarily motivated by the same cause.

The third methodological objection made by Smith is similar to Bar-Asher Siegal's caution about ancient languages, whose documentation does not provide direct information on their complementary functional use. Following Bar-Asher Siegal, I also do not posit that diglossia existed in the biblical period, since the sources that have reached us do not testify to a functional specialization between the written and spoken varieties of BH. Hebraists thus far have supported the diglossia of BH on the basis that the written/literary variety of a language would have not been equivalent to its spoken variety. However, from a sociolinguistic point of view, the gap between written and spoken varieties occurs both in languages with and without diglossia;³ whereas a diglossic relationship is invoked only in the presence of an undeniably functional specialization.

In what follows, I shall evaluate the gender neutralisation, *nota relationis*, and prolepsis, as samples of the alleged diglossic features invoked by Rendsburg.

² Ólafsson bases his inference on Garr (1985).

³ Roy Andrew Miller (1967: 138) stated that “probably no language on earth has ever been written as it is spoken”.

Evaluation of a Sample of Alleged Diglossic Features

1 *Gender Neutralisation*⁴

Rendsburg (1990: 35–64) dealt with the gender neutralisation in the 2 and 3 plural independent and suffixed pronouns, suffixed conjugation and plural imperative. For the sake of brevity, I will focus exclusively on the independent and suffixed pronouns.

Rendsburg related the use of the ׀- instead of the ׀- ending to the general phenomenon of gender neutralisation that includes both the ׀- for the ׀- ending and vice versa. Contrariwise, I would divide the feature of ‘gender neutralisation’ in BH into two distinct phenomena: 1. the use of the masculine ending ׀-, instead of the feminine ending ׀-, in the 2 and 3 plural personal and suffixed pronouns; and 2. the use of the ending ׀- instead of ׀- in the 2 and 3 plural personal and suffixed pronouns.

The masculine ending ׀-, instead of the feminine ending ׀-, in the 2 and 3 plural personal and suffixed pronouns:

BH

EBH

Gn 26:18 וַיֵּשֶׁב יִצְחָק וַיַּחְפֹּר אֶת־בְּאֵרֵת הַמַּיִם אֲשֶׁר חָפְרוּ בִּימֵי אֲבִרָהָם אָבִיו וַיִּסְתְּמוּם פְּלִשְׁתִּים

And Isaac dug again the wells of water, which they had dug in the days of Abraham his father; for the Philistines had stopped them;

Ex. 2:16 וּלְכֶנָּה מִדִּיזֶן שִׁבְעַת בָּנוֹת וַתִּבְנֶנָּה וַתִּדְלְנָה וַתִּמְלְאֶנָּה אֶת־הַרְהָטִים לְהַשְׁקוֹת צֹאן אֲבִיהֶן

Ex. 2:17 וַיָּבֹאוּ הָרָעִים וַיִּגְרְשׁוּם וַיָּקָם מֹשֶׁה וַיִּשְׁעֹן וַיִּשְׁקֵן אֶת־צֹאֲנָם

Now the priest of Midian had seven daughters: and they came and drew water, and filled the troughs to water their father's flock.

And the shepherds came and drove them away: but Moses stood up and helped them, and watered their flock;

Lv 26:3 אִם־בְּחֻקֹּתַי תֵּלְכוּ וְאֶת־מִצְוֹתַי תִּשְׁמְרוּ וְעִשִּׂיתֶם אֹתָם

If ye walk in my statutes, and keep my commandments, and do them;

Nu 16:18 וַיִּקְחוּ אִישׁ מִחֶתְתּוֹ וַיִּתְּנוּ עֲלֵיהֶם אֵשׁ וַיִּשְׂמוּ עֲלֵיהֶם קֶטֶרֶת

Every man took his fire pan, put fire on them, and placed incense in them;

4 The label ‘Gender Neutralisation’ refers to the epicene grammatical forms, often the masculine replacing the feminine.

Jdg 21:21 בָּנוֹת־שִׁילֹה

Jdg 21:22 וְהָיָה כִּי־יָבֹאוּ אָבוֹתָם אוֹ אֶחָיִיהֶם לְרֹב אֱלֵינוּ וְאָמְרָנוּ אֲלֵיהֶם הִנּוּנוּ אוֹתָם כִּי לֹא לָקַחְנוּ אִישׁ אִשְׁתּוֹ בַּמִּלְחָמָה כִּי לֹא אֹתָם נָתַתָּם לָהֶם

daughters of Shiloh... and if their fathers or their brothers come and complain to us, we shall say to them, Be gracious unto them... for you did not give them to them;

1Sm 9:20 וְלֹא־תִנּוֹת הָאֲבֹדוֹת לְךָ... אֶל־תִּשָּׂשׁ אֶת־לִבְךָ לָהֶם

And as for your lost jennies... do not be concerned with them;

2Sm 24:12 שְׁלֹשׁ אֲנֹכִי נוֹטֵל עֲלֶיךָ בַּחֲרֹלֶךְ אַחַת־מֵהֶם

I place three things before you, choose one of them;

TransBH

Jr 43:9 קַח בְּיָדְךָ אֲבָנִים גְּדֹלוֹת וּטְמֵנָתָם בַּמָּלֵט

Take large stones in your hands and embed them in mortar;

Ezk 5:6 וְחֻקֹּתַי לֹא־הִלְכוּ בָהֶם

as for my statutes, they did not follow them;

LBH

Is 3:16 יֵעַן כִּי גָבְהוּ בָנוֹת צִיּוֹן... וּבִרְגָלֵיהֶם תַּעֲבֹסְנָה

Because the daughters of Zion are so vain... making a tinkling with their feet;

Ps 34:20 רַבּוֹת רָעוֹת צָדִיק וּמִכָּלֶם יַצִּילֵנוּ יְהוָה

Many are the ills of the righteous, but from all of them YHWH saves him;

Qh 10:9 מִסֵּיעַ אֲבָנִים יַעֲצֹב בָּהֶם

He who moves stones will be hurt by them;

Jb 42:15 וְלֹא נִמְצְא נָשִׁים יָפוֹת כַּבָּנוֹת אִיּוֹב בְּכָל־הָאָרֶץ וַיִּתֵּן לָהֶם אָבִיהֶם נַחֲלָה בְּתוֹךְ אֶחָיִיהֶם

And there were no women as beautiful as the daughters of Job in all the land, and their father gave them an inheritance in the midst of their brothers;

Dn 1:5 וְלִגְדֵּלֵם שָׁנִים שְׁלוֹשׁ וּמִקְצֵתָם יַעֲמִדוּ לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ

to nourish them for three years, after which they would stand before the king;

1Ch 10:7 וַיֵּצְאוּ עָרֵיהֶם וַיָּנֻסוּ וַיָּבֹאוּ פְּלִשְׁתִּים וַיֵּשְׁבוּ בָהֶם

and they left their cities and fled and the Philistines came and settled in them;

EpH

This phenomenon is not testable, since, to the best of my knowledge, only the masculine ending ם- is attested in the 2 and 3 plural suffixed pronouns.

DSS

11Q19 48:16 וְלִנְשִׁים בְּהִיּוֹתָמָה בְּנִדַּת טְמֵאתָמָה וּבִלְדָתָמָה אֲשֶׁר לֹא יִטְמָאוּ בְּתוֹכָם

and for women when they are in their menstrual impurity and after giving birth, so that they do not defile in their midst;

11Q19 52: 5 וְלֹא תִזְבַּח לִי שׁוֹר וְשֶׂה וְעִז וְהֵמָּה מְלֹאֹת כִּי תִעֲבֶה הֵמָּה לִי

And you shall not sacrifice to me a cow, or ewe, or she-goat which are pregnant, for they are an abomination to me;

BKL alternation of ם- and ׀-

Mur 43; 44.

MH

Terumot 8:11, 12.

Considering the distribution of the 2 and 3 plural personal and suffixed pronouns ending in ם- instead of the expected ׀- in biblical and extra-biblical texts, it is evident that this is a phenomenon that spans all Ancient Hebrew documentation, namely EBH, TransBH, LBH, the DSS, and sporadically the BKL. Accordingly, I believe that the use of ם- instead of ׀- is an internal development in Hebrew, since it occurs throughout BH, namely EBH, TransBH and LBH (cf. Morgenstern 2007: 52–56).

The ending ׀- instead of ם- in the 2 and 3 plural personal and suffixed pronouns:

BH

TranBH

Ezk 42:14 וְשָׂם יָנִיחוּ בְּגָדֵיהֶם אֲשֶׁר-יִשְׁתְּנוּ בָהֶן כִּי-קֹדֶשׁ הֵנָּה

there they shall leave their vestments with which they minister, for they are holy;

LBH

[Ne 3:15 שליו instead of שלום]

Ru 1:12 וגם ילדתי בנים

Ru 1:13 הלהו תשברנה עד אשר יגדלו הלהו תענגנה

and should also bear sons . . . would you (f. pl.) wait for them until they grew up, would you (f. pl.) shut yourselves up for them;

EpH

This phenomenon is not testable either, since only the masculine ending ם- is attested in the 2 and 3 plural suffixed pronouns (see Gogel 1998: 154–55).

BKL

alternation of ם- and ך-, e.g., Mur 43; 44.

MH

ʾAbot 2:3;

Berakhot 1:8.

The use of the ך- instead of the ם- ending in BH does not appear to be an internal development of Hebrew, but rather an influence of Aramaic, since it does not occur in pre-exilic biblical texts, but rather it is documented only three times in exilic and post-exilic biblical texts, that is Ezekiel 42:14, and Ruth 1:12–13 (cf. Kutscher 1971). Rendsburg, instead, rejects the hypothesis of contact with Aramaic, on account of the paucity of Aramaisms in Ruth only.

To sum up, Rendsburg's label of gender neutralisation hides two distinct phenomena, as shown by the fact that the ם- ending instead of the ך- ending has a distribution of occurrences different from the ך- ending instead of the ם- ending. Furthermore, I agree with Rooker (1990: 78–81) in rejecting the hypothesis of Aramaic interference in the use of the ending ם-, instead of the ending ך-, since the influence of Aramaic would have caused the opposite shift. However, I am not convinced that the use of ם-, for ך- is a diachronic isogloss, since it occurs throughout the biblical texts. Although it is plausible that the uses of ם-, for ך- are slips due to the colloquial variety, there is no evidence of a diglossic relationship between the spoken and written varieties.⁵ On the contrary,

5 Bar-Asher Siegal (2008) has formulated a new hypothesis in order to explain the use of masculine pronouns instead of the expected feminine ones and *vice versa* in the book of Ruth. He noticed that the unexpected forms almost always occur in the direct speech of Naomi, in contradistinction to the prosaic passages and the direct speech of Boaz. Hence, he infers that these are features of the feminine sociolect. I am uncertain that the attractive hypothesis

the occurrences of the ך- instead of the ם- ending in biblical and extra-biblical texts and the correspondence of the Hebrew feminine plural ך- ending with the Aramaic masculine plural ending leave little room for doubt that the ending ך- instead of ם- is due to contact with Aramaic. Finally, the coexistence of the ך- and the ם- endings in the 2 and 3 plural personal and suffixed pronouns in BA requires further investigation.

2 -ׁ instead of אָׁ as *Nota Relationis*

The opposition of אָׁ vs -ׁ is central not only in the discussion of diglossic variation, but also for the wider realm of BH linguistic variation, and, therefore, it is still a matter of heated debate.

Rendsburg's (1990: 113–18) hypothesis that -ׁ is a spoken interference in LBH, whereas אָׁ represents the written-literary form, stems from the fact that in the post-exilic documentation אָׁ is found in the DSS and BenS, while -ׁ is documented in 3Q15, 4QMMT, BKL, and MH.

Smith (2000: 41–43) rejects Rendsburg's hypothesis of the diglossic specialization between אָׁ and -ׁ on the basis of EpH documents, which are coeval to BH. In fact, אָׁ occurs in the Arad and Lachish letters that Smith—and Schniedewind (2000) as well—considers representatives of the spoken variety. In my opinion, Smith's and Schniedewind's thesis is plausible, but not decisive. Therefore, it seems preferable to examine the distribution of the two *notae relationis* in the whole AH documentation.

BH

EBH

Jdg 5:7 חָדְלוּ פְּרוֹזוֹן בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל חָדְלוּ עַד שֶׁקָּמְתִי דְּבוּרָה שֶׁקָּמְתִי אִם בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל

The inhabitants of the villages ceased, they ceased in Israel, until that I Deborah arose, that I arose a mother in Israel;

2Kgs 6:11 וַיִּסְעַר לֵב מֶלֶךְ-אַרָם עַל-הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה וַיִּקְרָא אֶל-עֲבָדָיו וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵיהֶם הֲלוֹא תַגִּידוּ לִי מִי מִשְׁלָנוּ אֶל-מֶלֶךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל

Therefore the heart of the king of Syria was sore troubled for this thing; and he called his servants, and said unto them, Will ye not shew me which of us is for the king of Israel?

formulated by Bar-Asher Siegal is actually reliable, since it does not justify all the occurrences in Ruth. Moreover, Bar-Asher Siegal's hypothesis does not provide an explanation for the occurrences of these two phenomena in the other biblical books.

LBH

וַיֹּאמְרוּ אִישׁ אֶל־רֵעֵהוּ לָבוּ וְנִפְלְאָה גּוֹרְלוֹת וְנִדְעָה בְּשָׁלְמִי הַרְעָה הַזֹּאת לָנוּ Jon 1:7
וַיִּפְּלוּ גּוֹרְלוֹת וַיִּפֹּל הַגּוֹרֵל עַל־יוֹנָה

And they said every one to his fellow, Come, and let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this evil is upon us. So they cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonah;

וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיו הַגִּידֵה־נָא לָנוּ בְּאִשֶּׁר לְמִי־הָרָעָה הַזֹּאת לָנוּ Jon 1:8

Then said they unto him, Tell us, we pray thee, for whose cause this evil is upon us;

כְּשֶׁמֶן הַטּוֹב | עַל־הָרֹאשׁ יָרַד עַל־הַזָּקֵן וְקוֹאֲהָרָן שִׁירֵד עַל־פִּי מִדּוֹחָיו Ps 133:2

It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments;

אֶל־תִּרְאוּנִי שְׂאֵנִי שְׁחַרְחֶרֶת שֶׁשָּׁזַפְתָּנִי הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ בְּגִי אֲמִי נִחְרוּ־בִי שְׁמָנִי נִטְרָה Sg Sg 1:6
אֶת־הַכְּרָמִים כְּרָמִי שְׁלִי לֹא נִטְרָתִי

Look not upon me, because I am black, because the sun hath looked upon me: my mother's children were angry with me; they made me the keeper of the vineyards; but mine own vineyard have I not kept;

טוֹב אֲשֶׁר לֹא־תִדָּר מִשְׁתַּדָּר וְלֹא תִשְׁלֵם Qh 5:4

Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay;

הַזֹּאת הָעִיר שִׁיֹּאמְרוּ בְּלִילֹת יָפִי מְשׁוֹשׁ לְכָל־הָאָרֶץ Lam 2:15

Is this the city that men call The perfection of beauty, The joy of the whole earth?

עָשָׂה יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר זָמַם בַּעַע אָמְרָתוֹ אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה Lam 2:17

The Lord hath done that which he had devised; he hath fulfilled his word that he had commanded;

וַיַּעֲזְרוּ עֲלֵיהֶם וַיִּנָּתְנוּ בְיָדָם הַהַגְרִיאִים וְכָל שְׁנַעְמָהֶם כִּי לֹא־לָהֶם זָעָקוֹ בַּמִּלָּחָם 1Ch 5:20
מָה וְנִעְתָּרוּ לָהֶם כִּי־בִטְחוּ בּוֹ

And they were helped against them, and the Hagarites were delivered into their hand, and all that were with them: for they cried to God in the battle, and he was intreated of them; because they put their trust in him;

EpH

use of אָשׁ : e.g. Lachish 3:5; Arad 40:5; Silwan 3:3.

DSS

sporadic occurrences of אָשׁ in the scrolls; and regular use of אָשׁ in 3Q15, 4QMMT, and BKL;

BenS

use of אָשׁ ; sporadic occurrences of אָשׁ : e.g. 31:16d;

MH

use of אָשׁ ; occurrences of אָשׁ in biblical quotations, e.g., Sotah 9:5 from Dt 21:3.

The *nota relationis* אָשׁ occurs frequently in EBH, EpH, the DSS, and BenS; whereas אָשׁ occurs occasionally in EBH—mainly in poetry and in alleged northern sections—and in BenS. Within some LBH texts, אָשׁ and אָשׁ coexist, with אָשׁ being used more commonly in 1–2 Chronicles, Psalms, Qoheleth, Jonah, and Lamentations; and אָשׁ being used more commonly in Song of Songs. Moreover, אָשׁ does not occur at all in 3Q15, and BKL. Finally, אָשׁ is rare in 4QMMT, and it is limited to biblical quotations and early liturgical texts in MH (Holmstedt 2013: 298).

In the following I will discuss the diglossia, invoked by Rendsburg in order to explain their complex distribution in AH, together with the other variationist parameters—namely diachronic (Segal 1927: 42; Hurvitz 1972: 40–41; Kutscher 1982: 32; Schoors 1992: 54–56, 221–24; Sáenz-Badillos 2007: 103; Joüon, Muraoka 2009: 108), diatopic (Segal 1927: 42; Dahood 1952: 44–45; Kutscher 1972: 40–41; 1982: 32; Rabin 1979: 74–75; Isaksson 1987: 161; Davila 1990: 82; Schoors 1992: 54–56, 221–24; Schniedewind, Sivan 1997: 328–30; Joüon, Muraoka 2009: 108; cf. Young 1995),⁶ diaphasic (Segal 1927: 42; Kutscher 1982: 32; Fredericks 1988:

6 Young has cast doubts on the supposed northern origin of אָשׁ in the Elijah-Elisha narratives in 1 and 2 Kings. Firstly, the alleged northernism could be a literary device for foreign speech (e.g., the speech of the king of Arameans in 2Kg 6:11), instead of a real northern trait. Secondly, the northernism hypothesis was not formulated on the basis of any external evidence, since only אָשׁ is documented in EpH documents. Thirdly, it seems improbable that a single northern dialect, with features such as אָשׁ , existed in opposition to a single southern dialect (allegedly corresponding to CBH). In the light of the situation of Northwest Semitic dialects and the evidence offered by BH, it would be more appropriate to hypothesise a

102–3, 106–7, 110, 114–15, 119, 146–48, 256–57; Rendsburg 1990: 113–18; Qimron 1992: 355; Schniedewind, Sivan 1997: 328–30; Joüon, Muraoka 2009: 108), and contact with Aramaic⁷—, identified so far by other Hebraists, since they are closely correlated.

It is highly probable that $\text{-}\psi$ was not a calque on Aramaic, but rather one of the forms of the *nota relationis* that belonged to the repertoire of the Hebrew language before the process of standardization imposed in EBH. There is no reason to consider the variationist parameters invoked regarding $\text{-}\psi$ as mutually exclusive. Hence, it seems probable that before the process of standardisation, which introduced the dominant use of אֲשֶׁר , there were several ways of expressing the *nota relationis*: asyndeton $\text{-}\psi$; וְ/זוֹ/זֶה ; and probably also אֲשֶׁר . Moreover, on the basis of the dialectal *continuum* described by Garr (1985), I posit that the variation in the expression of the *nota relationis* in BH is a manifestation of the dialectal situation of Hebrew, of which we know only fragments: EpH, BH, DSS, and MH, each of which is in turn fragmented. Hence, I believe that $\text{-}\psi$ belongs to a different dialectal group than EBH. During the pre-exilic period, אֲשֶׁר was used mainly in the prose of EBH; while other forms were used in poetry for the sake of richness in vocabulary, and in EBH sections with a northern background as a literary device. After the Exile, EBH underwent gradual changes in all realms: verbs, nouns, pronouns, and conjunctions. Hence, in post-exilic extra-biblical documentation, אֲשֶׁר is documented in literary works that imitate EBH, while $\text{-}\psi$ is found in works, both literary and non-literary, that use the form of the *nota relationis* that was more common in their dialect at the time of their composition.

linguistic continuum, rather than features in binary opposition. Young draws the conclusion that $\text{-}\psi$ could be a trait belonging to a group of dialects different from CBH and, therefore, is used in the Bible as a mark of non-standard, foreign speech.

- 7 A number of Hebraists, including Hadas-Lebel (1977), Sáenz-Badillos (2007) and Schniedewind (2013), maintain that $\text{-}\psi$ results from contact with Aramaic. In sharp contrast, Huehnergard (2006) and Pat-El (2012b: 324–26) argue against Akkadian influence on $\text{-}\psi$. Huehnergard suggests that $\text{-}\psi$ stems from אֲשֶׁר as a consequence of phonological reductions. Pat-El, instead, dismisses the idea that $\text{-}\psi$ is a loanword from Akkadian (and, indirectly, a calque from Aramaic), on the basis of its syntax. Compared to the corresponding forms in Akkadian and Aramaic, both of which can mark possession either alone or in combination with another preposition, $\text{-}\psi$ has a reduced syntax because it cannot mark possession when it appears alone, but only when it occurs in combination with the preposition $\text{-}\bar{\text{ל}}$. Another reason for rejecting the hypothesis that $\text{-}\psi$ originates from Akkadian or Aramaic is Mor's (2009: 321–23) remark that the genitive marker $\text{\$-l}$ shows a different syntax than that of the corresponding Aramaic form *dil-*.

In conclusion, I cast doubt on Rendsburg's hypothesis regarding the *nota relationis*,⁸ since the documentation at our disposal offers no information about the diglossic use of the *nota relationis* -שְׁ, providing only clues of diatopic, diachronic and diaphasic variation. Since we are examining pieces of literature, it is more prudent to invoke genre and literary device than colloquial or diglossic interference. Further investigation into the literary strategies in BH, in the vein of Holmstedt and Kirk,⁹ is highly recommended.

3 *Proleptic Pronominal Suffix*

In BH there are numerous instances of the prolepsis of the pronominal suffix with the verb followed by an object either directly or preceded by -לְ.

BH

EBH

Ex 2:6 וַתֵּרְאֶהוּ אֶת־הַיֶּלֶד
she saw him—the child

1Sm 21:14 וַיִּשְׁנֵהוּ אֶת־טַעְמוֹ
he changed it—his demeanor

TranBH

Jr 27:8 לֹא־יַעֲבֹדוּ אֹתוֹ אֶת־נְבוּכַדְנֶאצַּר מֶלֶךְ־בָּבֶל
they will not serve him—Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon

Ez 34:2 וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵיהֶם לְרֵעִים
and say to them—the shepherds

LBH

Dn 11:11 וַיִּלָּחֶם עִמּוֹ עִם־מֶלֶךְ הַצָּפוֹן
he shall fight with him—the king of the north

1Ch 5:26 וַיִּגְלֵם לְרֵאוּבֵנִי וְלִגְדֵי וְלַחֲצִי שִׁבְט מְנַשֶּׁה
he deported them—Reuben, Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh

8 Probably it is not coincidental that Rendsburg did not include the variation between אָשָׁר and -שְׁ among the diglossic isoglosses in his entry on diglossia in the *Encyclopedia of Hebrew Language and Linguistics*.

9 Holmstedt and Kirk (forth.) examined the use of אָשָׁר vs -שְׁ in Jonah. They posit that the opposition between אָשָׁר and -שְׁ represents a literary device for expressing identity.

In BH, the prolepsis of the pronominal suffix is attested also with the synthetic and analytical genitive, but to a lesser extent than with the verb.

BH

TranBH

Jr 52:20 מִשְׁקָל לְנֹחַשָׁתָם כָּל־הַבָּלִים
the weight of the bronze of them—all the vessels

LBH

Sg Sg 3:7 מִטָּתוֹ שְׁלֹשׁ־לֹמֶה
the litter of him—Solomon

Ezr 2:62; Ne 7:64 כְּתָבָם הַמִּיתִיחִשִּׁים
the register of them—the genealogies

Ezr 9:1 כְּתוּעַבְתֵּיהֶם לְכַנְעָנִי הַחִתִּי הַפְּרָזִי הַיְבוּסִי הָעַמֹּנִי הַמֹּאבִּי הַמִּצְרִי וְהָאֲמֹרִי
according to the abominations of them—the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites

2Ch 31:16 הַתִּיחֶשֶׁם לְזָכָרִים
the genealogy of them—males

As shown above, the proleptic pronominal suffix occurs throughout BH, *i.e.* in EBH, TranBH, and LBH. With regards to extra-biblical sources, the proleptic pronominal suffix is uncertain in EpH (Garr 1985: 168); it seems very infrequent and at times questionable in the DSS (Muraoka 2000: 199–200; *cfr.* Baasten 2004); contrariwise it is very frequent in MH (Segal 1927: 191–93; Pérez Fernández 1999: 19; Haber 2013).

EpH

Gezer Calendar I.1 ירחו אסף the two months of it—gathering;
II. 1–2 ירחו זרע the two months of it—sowing (Cross, Freedman 1952: 47 n. 11);
Arad 17:2 ביתה אלישב the house of him—Elyshab (Cross 1970: 305 n. 3);
Beit Lei A 2 לוי לאלהי ירושלם his—of the God of Jerusalem (Naveh 1963: 84).

DSS

4Q365 frg 12b iii 2 (= MT Ex 39:1) כֹּאשֶׁר צִוָּהוּ יְהוָה אֶת מֹשֶׁה as the Lord commanded him—Moses;

11Q19 66 4 (=MT Dt 22:25) **האשה את האיש** the man met her—the woman;

4Q252 I 4 (=MT Gn 7:11) **בו ביום ההוא** on it—that day;

MH

Avot 2:3

Since the proleptic pronominal suffix is an isogloss that BH shares with MH, Rendsburg considered this feature to be a diglossic isogloss, rather than an Aramaism. However, viewing the prolepsis in a wider perspective may cast new light on this matter. The prolepsis of the pronominal suffix is documented in cognate languages, namely Akkadian; Phoenician; IA, including BA; Syriac; and Neo-Arabic dialects. For the sake of brevity, I will not deal with Akkadian (Kahn 1988: 163–64), and Phoenician (Dupont-Sommer 1948: 171; 1949: 126; Honeyman 1948: 54; Garr 1985: 167).

In IA, including BA, the prolepsis of the pronominal suffix in the analytical genitive and in the verb followed by an object either directly or preceded by **ל** is a common construction (Muraoka, Porten 1998: 215–18; 233–34).

The use and function of the proleptic pronominal suffix in the analytical genitive has been studied thoroughly by a number of linguists (Kaddari 1969; Khan 1988; Diem 1986; Pat-El 2012*b*: 105–15), but in the present study I will focus only on Folmer (1995: 304–12), who provided the greatest contribution to the question of the relationship between the prolepsis and the salience.

Folmer analysed the IA documentation in the wake of Garr (1990: 226–27), drawing the conclusion that the prolepsis in the analytical genitive denotes a relationship felt as inalienable and salient.

Daskyleion 1.1 *ʾlh šlmh zy ʾlnp br ʾšy* “these are the image(s) of PN”;

Aḥiqar 1.89 *pgʾhm zy [ʾn]šʾ* “the meeting of the [individ]ual [=mankind] (TAD C)”;

Behistun II.10.16.26.42 *bʾlh zyʾhwrmd* “with the protection of Ahuramazda”.

Kutscher (1970: 356–57) stated that the prolepsis of the pronominal suffix in a verb followed by an object in IA is due to the influence of Akkadian. In sharp contradistinction, Khan (1988: 163–64) denies the Akkadian influence, since the proleptic pronominal suffix with a verb is rare both in Akkadian and in IA.

In Syriac, the prolepsis with analytical genitive and the verb followed by an object is very common, the former being widely used in elevated registers (Nöldeke 1904: 177–79; Healey 2011: 648).

Rendsburg (1990: 129–30) strengthened his assumption of the diglossic nature of the prolepsis in BH on the basis of Neo-Arabic dialects. In fact, according to Rendsburg, in Neo-Arabic dialects, the analytical genitive with the proleptic pronominal suffix is a low register trait, since it is part of the isoglosses of Neo-Arabic dialects, rather than of Classical Arabic. However, the proleptic construction is not regularly used in Neo-Arabic dialects, as can be seen from the examples given by Rendsburg. From the survey carried out by Eksell (1980), in fact, it is clear that the analytical genitive with the proleptic construction is infrequent in Neo-Arabic. Consequently, Rendsburg based his assumption on a feature that rarely occurs in Neo-Arabic dialects. Moreover, it should be borne in mind that prolepsis fulfils different semantic, pragmatic and socio-linguistic needs in every Semitic language in which it is documented. On the contrary, I agree with Rendsburg that the prolepsis in BH did not result from contact with Aramaic, but rather it belonged to the repertoire of the Hebrew language shared with the cognate languages. Pat-El (2012b: 114) showed that in Aramaic the use of prolepsis increased diachronically, affecting increasingly more categories: analytical genitive and extra-posed objects and subjects in IA; prepositional phrases in Middle Aramaic, in addition to those included in IA; and the verbal object as well in Late Aramaic. It is evident that Middle and Late Aramaic are not relevant for BH in terms of contact. Accordingly, I draw the conclusion that prolepsis belonged to the repertoire of the Hebrew language shared with the cognate languages, and increased in post-biblical Hebrew as a result of the Aramaic influence of reinforcement (*appui* in Malkiel's [1978–81: 40–41] terminology).

From a pragmatic viewpoint, I believe that in BH the phrases with the proleptic pronominal suffix are marked constructions.

BH

Ex. 2:6 וַתִּפְתָּח וַתֵּרְאֶהוּ אֶת־יִלְדָּהּ וְהִנֵּה־נֶעֱר בִּכָּהּ וַתַּחֲמֹל עָלָיו וַתֹּאמֶר מִי־לִדִּי הֶעֱבָרִים זֶה

Opened it, and saw the child—a boy, crying!—and she felt compassion for him and said, “This is one of the Hebrews’ children”.

I suggest that the phrase ‘saw the child’ is marked with the proleptic pronominal suffix at morpho-syntactic level, because of its salience at the discourse level. The background information displays its importance:

Ex. 2:2–5 וַתֵּרֶה הָאִשָּׁה וַתֵּלֶד בֶּן וַתֵּרֶא אֹתוֹ כִּי־טוֹב הוּא וַתַּעֲפֹנְהוּ שְׁלֹשָׁה יָרֵחַם וְלֹא־יָכְלָה עוֹד הָעַפְנָנוּ וַתִּקְחֵלֹהּ תַּבַּת גָּמָא וַתַּחֲמֶרָה בַּחֲמֶר וּבְזֹפֶת וַתִּשֶׂם בָּהּ אֶת־הַיֶּלֶד וַתִּשֶׂם בְּסוּף עַל־שֵׁפֶת הַיָּאָר:

וַתַּעֲבֹד אֶחָדָם מִרְחָק לְדַעַה מִהֵי עֵשֶׂה לוֹ:
וַתֵּרֶד בַּת־פַּרְעֹה לָרְחֹץ עַל־הַיָּאֵר וְנִגְרָתֶיהָ הִלְכָת עַל־יַד הַיָּאֵר וַתֵּרָא אֶת־הַתִּבְיָה
בַּתוֹךְ הַסּוּף וַתִּשְׁלַח אֶת־אֲמָתָהּ וַתִּקְחָהּ

Ex. 2:2–5 The woman became pregnant and gave birth to a son. When she saw that he was a healthy child, she hid him for three months. But when she was no longer able to hide him, she took a papyrus basket for him and sealed it with bitumen and pitch. She put the child in it and set it among the reeds along the edge of the Nile. His sister stationed herself at a distance to find out what would happen to him. Then the daughter of Pharaoh came down to wash herself by the Nile, while her attendants were walking alongside the river, and she saw the basket among the reeds. She sent one of her attendants, took it.

In addition, it is not surprising that the marked form, namely the proleptic pronominal suffix, became regular in MH, since Rosén (1975) successfully demonstrated that between the two personal pronouns אָנֹכִי and אֲנִי with different degrees of predicativity in the Pentateuch, the marked form, אֲנִי, prevail over the non-marked form, אָנֹכִי, which fell into disuse in MH.

Finally, it seems rash to attribute diglossic function to the prolepsis in BH on the basis of both internal and external sources. In BH there is no information about its complementary functional use (namely, H vs L varieties), but rather about its pragmatic function. In the Dead Sea documents, the proleptic pronominal suffix occurs in the analytical genitive in which the second element is a proper name, and its occurrences are very few (Mor 2016: 320–21). On the other hand, in MH it is very common, as in IA. In *Ivrit* the proleptic pronominal suffix in the analytical genitive is a feature of elevated register. Hence, it seems hazardous to transfer the sociolinguistic function from one language to another when ‘working with no data’ (Golomb 1987).

Conclusion

In the present study, I re-evaluate Rendsburg’s hypothesis of diglossia in BH. I cast doubt on the functional distribution between the written and spoken varieties (H and L, respectively) of BH, and, consequently, on the alleged diglossic isoglosses identified.

In the vein of Bar-Asher Siegal’s caution in invoking diglossia in Rabbinic Hebrew, I noticed that neither the biblical text nor the external documentation inform about the operativeness of diglossia in BH. Rabin (1973: 29–30; 1976:

1012–13) stated that there is no information available about spoken Hebrew in Judah at the time of the monarchy, but there is evidence that, by the 6th century BCE, the gap between spoken and written varieties had increased. Firstly, the picture depicted from the 6th century onward by Rabin does not provide proof of the existence of a functional distribution according to the H-L hierarchy of the written and the spoken varieties. Secondly, in the light of the recent research on diglossia (Kloss 1966; Fishman 1967; Spolsky 1983; 1991; 2011; Ferguson 1991; Zerhusen 1995; Schiffman 1998; Watt 2000; Ong 2015a; 2015b; cf. Rendsburg 1990; 1991; 1996; 2013), it is inadequate to posit the hypothesis of bipolar diglossia, namely the H vs L variety. On the contrary, the notion of diglossia should be described as a gradient cline in which one variety/register (Schiffmann 1998) shaded into another according to the accumulation (*addensamento*, *i.e.* thickening in Berruto's [1987: 27–42] terminology) of their linguistic traits as well. Therefore, it would be more appropriate to call it multiglossia or poliglossia, than diglossia. Finally, on account of the fragmentary documentation at our disposal, I would describe the sociolinguistic situation of BH as a mixture of dialects, in line with Ólafsson's, Garr's (1985) and Qimron's (2000) studies on BH; dialects in Syria-Palestine from 1000 to 586 BCE; and BH, DSS and MH, respectively.

Since there are neither textual evidence nor theoretic foundations for the diglossia hypothesis, it is obvious that the isoglosses identified by Rendsburg cannot be considered as diglossic features. Furthermore, through the re-evaluation of three alleged diglossic hallmarks—namely, gender neutralisation, *nota relationis*, and *prolepsis*—, I have shown that, in order to cast light on the motivation of an isogloss, its occurrence and its function throughout the documentation of AH should be examined, and, where necessary, a comparison should be made with its occurrence and function in the cognate languages. The re-evaluation of the three isoglosses offers explanations different from diglossia, but to a certain extent compatible with colloquialisms in Driver's (1970) terminology (although this is difficult to prove with the documentation at our disposal).

In conclusion, in the light of Rosén's (1975) research on the salience related to the two personal pronouns אֲנִי and אַתָּה, it would be highly desirable to conduct a survey on the biblical doublet אַתָּה/וְהוּא vs אַתָּה¹⁰ which Rendsburg regarded as diglossic variants, from the pragmatic perspective.

10 As regards the doublet אַתָּה vs אַתָּה, reliable results can hardly be expected on the basis of biblical evidence, since אַתָּה is attested only once in the Bible, *i.e.*, Jer 42:6.

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