Adverbial Noun Phrases in Biblical Hebrew

Jacques E. J. Boulet
University of Toronto

Canadian Society of Biblical Studies, Regina, SK
May 28, 2018

Abstract

Biblical Hebrew (BH), like English, employs noun phrases (NPs) in certain kinds of adverbials (e.g. I will arrive [next week]). However, it appears that BH allows a wider range of adverbial NPs than English does even though most adverbials in BH are prepositional phrases. And yet, if an NP is neither the subject nor an object of the verb, is it necessarily an adverbial? The basis for this paper is a comprehensive study of Genesis through Deuteronomy which has yielded several hundred examples. Until now the NPs catalogued in this study have tended to be merely listed in taxonomies of 'adverbial accusatives.' But such treatment obscures the fact that some of these NPs have quite different syntactic functions. This paper is meant to offer some first steps toward determining which NPs are adverbial and how their syntax differs from those that are not. 'Adverbial' NPs should first of all be distinguished from arguments and secondary predicates. It also turns out that 'modifier' is a better term for what remains. What have traditionally been called adverbials can be broken down into event-external modifiers, event-internal modifiers, and frame-setting modifiers by assuming an event semantics approach. The benefit of this subdivision is that it allows straightforward analysis of some of the more puzzling 'accusatives.'

Contents

This research was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada | Conseil de recherches en sciences humaines du Canada | Canada

1 Introduction

There is a long tradition that treats Biblical Hebrew noun phrases according to the three Semitic cases: nominative, genitive, and accusative. Within this tradition the accusative case is considered to be a broad category that subsumes every kind of phrase that is in some way 'subordinate' to the verb. As shown in Table 1 of the handout, most grammars divide the accusative case into two major types. Although they vary in their terminology, all recognize that the first category of accusatives is somehow part of the core of the clause, while the second category is somehow peripheral.

Table 1: Basic Categorization of 'Accusatives'

Scholar(s)	**Category 1**	**Category 2**	**Category 3**
Gesenius-Kautzsch-Cowley (1910)	Direct Subordination of the Accusative	Looser Subordination of the Accusative	
Joüon (1947)[1]	Direct Accusative	Indirect Accusative	
Waltke-O'Connor (1990)	Objective Accusative & Double Accusative[2]	Adverbial Accusative	
Arnold-Choi (2003)	Object Accusative	Adverbial Accusative	
Van der Merwe-Naudé-Kroeze (2017)	Complements	Adjuncts	
Boulet	Arguments	Modifiers	Secondary Predicates

This paper summarizes the direction of my dissertation, a project that began with the suspicion that the standard grammars leave something to be desired when it comes to 'accusatives.' In particular, I focus on the second, 'peripheral' category from Table 1 in order to determine what properly belongs there. A systematic approach to this question is shown to be necessary by observing the extent to which the grammars differ on the analysis of individual cases. They disagree on which

1. See also the revision, Joüon-Muraoka (2006), which maintains the same categories.

2. Waltke-O'Connor actually list objective and double Accusatives separately, but without good reason in my opinion since double accusatives are associated with the 'complex transitivity' of certain verbs (§10.2.3a), just as single objects are associated with verbs according to the verb's features (§10.2.1a).

examples belong under category 1 and which under category 2. They also disagree widely on how many subcategories there should be and what they should be called.

Although the title of the paper uses the term 'adverbial noun phrases,' a term familiar from works like Waltke-O'Connor for category 2, I will suggest that this term needs to be reevaluated. There are two main points to this paper. First, close inspection of the candidates for category 2 reveals that some noun phrases belong neither in category 1 nor in category 2. This means that we need at least three categories and not two. I label these categories: arguments, modifiers, and secondary predicates. The second point is that what are traditionally called adverbials are better called modifiers. 'Modifier' is a more general term, while 'adverbials' are considered to be a subtype of modifier.

2 Theoretical Assumptions

Before rushing into the matter at hand, it is well to introduce the theoretical assumptions behind this study. The linguistic framework adopted here is the generative Minimalist Program (e.g. Chomsky 1993, 1995, 2000) as realized in conjunction with Distributed Morphology (e.g. Halle and Marantz 1993, 1994; Harley 2012). My take on argument structure combines a valency approach to BH verbs[3] with the syntactic structures proposed by Cuervo (2003, 2015), with modification of the latter to agree with the unified approach to predication proposed by Bowers (1993, 2001).

3 Bare NP Adverbials

3.1 Terminology and Traditional Expectations

An 'adverbial,' as typically understood, is a word or phrase which modifies the verbal action in some way (hence *ad* + *verb(ial)*). In general, adverbials may belong to any category, whether noun phrases, prepositional phrases, or complementizer phrases. The label 'adverbial' should be understood as a descriptor of a phrase's semantic function.

If one is inclined rather to describe the syntax of an adverbial, one may refer to it as an 'adjunct,' reflecting the fact that adverbials are thought to be 'adjoined' to other phrases. Fundamental to the label 'adjunct' is the idea that the adjoined phrase is grammatically optional. The presence or absence of an adjunct does not affect the grammaticality of a clause in the same way that the omission of an 'argument' does. Arguments are regarded here as obligatory participants in a valency pattern of a specific verb.

3. For the valency approach applied to BH see Malessa (2006), Cook (2012a, 2012b, 2014), and Wilson (2014).

Neither arguments nor adjuncts are constrained to any one lexical category. Nevertheless, there is a general expectation that noun phrases ought to be arguments (and not adjuncts) and that arguments are prototypically noun phrases.

3.2 English Adverbial NPs

When considering adverbial noun phrases in Biblical Hebrew, it is instructive to compare potential cases with the stock of adverbial noun phrases in a more familiar language like English. Larson (1985) has found that in English, adverbial noun phrases may belong to one of four basic categories: time, location, direction, and manner. Not only are the semantic types severely limited in English, but even within categories, Larson found that nouns used adverbially in English are restricted to a limited set of lexical items. The following examples show that some bare noun phrases are grammatical as adverbials in English, while others require the use of a preposition.

We may say 'John will arrive [sometime next week],' but not 'John will arrive [that occasion].' We must say 'John will arrive [on that occasion].' Similarly, we may say 'You have lived [someplace warm and sunny],' but not 'You have lived [Germany].' Or again, we may say 'We are headed [that direction],' but not 'We are headed [that course].' Larson found that manner adverbial noun phrases in English are the most limited, being restricted to phrases with the head noun *way*.

Without assuming that Biblical Hebrew must conform to the same restrictions as English, the English data does give us interesting questions to consider. First, should we expect adverbial noun phrases in Biblical Hebrew to be restricted to certain semantic categories like time, location, direction and manner? Second, is it the case that Biblical Hebrew adverbial noun phrases are limited to a specific set of lexical items? To these questions I add this one: is it the case that a noun phrase with prototypically 'adverbial' semantics (say, those belonging to Larson's four categories) is necessarily an adverbial? In what follows I argue that one needs to pay attention to the semantics, not only of the noun phrase under consideration, but also of the verb. It will be shown, for example, that some locative noun phrases are not adverbial at all, but rather the arguments of a verb that selects a location as argument.

3.3 BH Adverbial NPs: A First Pass

As a first pass, let us consider some examples identified as 'adverbial' by Waltke-O'Connor which fit well with Larson's categories, specifically the accusatives of time, manner, and place listed in the upper portion of Table 2 on the second page of the handout. The noun phrase in question is underlined for clarity.

The first example is from Jeremiah 28:16, where the noun phrase הַשָּׁנָה specifies the point in time of the hearing event. It reads as follows:

(1) הַשָּׁנָה אַתָּה מֵת כִּי־סָרָה דִבַּרְתָּ אֶל־יְהוָה
'You (are going to) die this year because you have spoken rebellion against the LORD.' (Jer 28:16) (Waltke-O'Connor 1990, §10.2.2c)

Exodus 20:9 attests another temporal modifier, this time with the noun phrase שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים specifying temporal duration.

(2) שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים תֵּעָבֵד
'Six days you may work.' (Exod 20:9) (Waltke-O'Connor 1990, §10.2.2c)

Temporal modifiers are the most common and also the most obvious type, accounting for approximately half of the adverbial noun phrases in the Pentateuch, and the grammars tend to agree on their classification. In general, these either specify the point in time of the action or the duration of an action as already seen in the examples.

Biblical Hebrew also allows noun phrase manner adverbials. A typical example could be called the 'as one' construction which refers to multiple people acting in concert and without divisions, as though a single person . The embedded infinitival clause from Zephaniah 3:9 is such an example.

(3) לְעָבְדוֹ שְׁכֶם אֶחָד
Lit: '...(so that they) serve Him (with) one shoulder.' (Zeph 3:9) (Waltke-O'Connor 1990, §10.2.2e)

The noun phrase שְׁכֶם אֶחָד, 'one shoulder,' modifies the action of service. It is a manner adverbial because it answers the question 'how?'. In context, God is promising to unify the peoples to worship and serve Him as one.

Spatial noun phrases are also common. These may include the location of the action, the distance covered, and the direction of movement. Unlike in English, there is as yet no sign that there is a restriction on noun phrases with spatial semantics that may occur as modifiers. Although in 1 Kings 8:32 we might expect a prepositional phrase like ואתה תשמע בַּשָּׁמַיִם, here, as also attested elsewhere, a simple noun phrase will do for the location of the hearing event.

(4) וְאַתָּה ו תִּשְׁמַע הַשָּׁמַיִם
'And you, listen (in) heaven.' (1 Kgs 8:32) (Waltke-O'Connor 1990, §10.2.2b)

The foregoing examples are meant to introduce the concept of noun phrase modifiers on relatively solid ground. It may not be a coincidence that these correspond to Larson's categories for English. After sifting through other candidates, this paper proposes that Biblical Hebrew allows modifiers of three types: time, manner, and place.

4 Ruling Out Arguments and Secondary Predicates

Many of the noun phrases analysed by the grammars as belonging to category two – the traditional 'adverbial' or the syntactic 'adjunct' – actually belong to category one: these are what I call 'arguments.' Others are neither 'arguments' nor 'modifiers,' but rather 'secondary predicates,' the third category I am proposing in this paper.

4.1 NP Arguments: A Valency Approach

Arguments are the more familiar category, so I begin here. Whereas the traditional grammars list categories of accusative based largely on the semantics of the noun phrase in question, a better approach also considers the semantics of the verb, since the grammaticality of a clause depends in part on the compatibility of the arguments with the verb. The approach I have in mind is called a valency approach, such as the one advocated by John Cook. Valency refers to the 'combining capacity' of a verbal lexeme. According to their basic meaning, verbs combine with arguments in particular patterns. Each pattern for the verb selects a specific number of arguments of specific types.

In general, valency patterns combine with as few as zero and as many as three arguments and are said to be avalent, monovalent, bivalent, or trivalent corresponding to the number of arguments. Some verbs are associated with a single valency pattern, while others may occur in multiple distinct combinations. In Biblical Hebrew, valency applies to the combination of a root and a *binyan*, or 'stem.'

A better understanding of a verb's valency can allow us to identify which phrases are (selected) arguments and which are (optional) adjuncts. In cases where a verb is infrequently attested it may be possible to use close synonyms, to the extent that there are any, for pattern comparison.

Let us start with a common verb, the Hebrew **יׇשַׁב**, meaning 'to sit or stay.' By knowing that the *Qal* of **יׇשַׁב** has a common bivalent pattern meaning 'X stayed (at place) Y,' we can avoid the mistake made by Waltke-O'Connor when they list פֶּתַח־הָאֹהֶל from Genesis 18:1 as an adverbial accusative of place (§10.2.2b).

(5) וְהוּא יֹשֵׁב פֶּתַח־הָאֹהֶל כְּחֹם הַיּוֹם
'And he (was) sitting (at) the entrance of the tent during the hot part of the day.' (Gen 18:1) (Waltke-O'Connor 1990, §10.2.2b)

The bivalent pattern in question selects a Doer and a Location. The Location may be either a noun phrase or a prepositional phrase. Either way, it is called for and licensed by the verb. Therefore, פֶּתַח־הָאֹהֶל is an argument, and this despite

the fact that the noun phrase has locative semantics. It takes understanding the verb's semantics to properly categorize it.

The traditional approach to noun phrases causes a proliferation of category terms. The following two examples have been dubbed adverbial accusatives of limitation and of material respectively. However, I maintain that both are better understood as arguments of their respective verbs. It is the verb's semantics that accounts for the idiosyncrasy of the noun phrases it selects. When this is recognized the pool of 'adverbial' or 'modifier' noun phrases is much reduced.

Consider the example from Joshua 7:12, the so-called accusative of limitation.

(6) עֹ֣רֶף יִפְנוּ֮ לִפְנֵ֣י אֹיְבֵיהֶם֒ כִּ֣י הָיוּ֮ לְחֵ֣רֶם

'They will turn (the) nape towards their enemies because they have become *ḥērem*.' (Josh 7:12) (Waltke-O'Connor 1990, §10.2.2e)

In the paper, I argue that the *Qal* of **פנה**, though most often monovalent, meaning 'X turned,' also has a bivalent pattern selecting a Theme and yielding 'X turned Y.' I compare the root **פנה** with other roots in the same semantic range, such as **הפך**, **סבב**, and **שׁוב**. My conclusion is that the noun **עֹרֶף** in Josh 7:12 is an argument and not a modifier.

A similar argument is made for the noun **זָהָב** occuring in Exodus 25:18.

(7) וְעָשִׂ֥יתָ שְׁנַ֛יִם כְּרֻבִ֖ים זָהָ֑ב

'And you shall make two cherubim (out of) gold.' (Exod 25:18) (Arnold-Choi 2003, §2.3.2f)

If we accept that the *Qal* of **עשׂה** has a trivalent pattern meaning 'X made Y out of Z,' then the material **זָהָב** is an argument selected by the verb's semantics. Therefore we have no need for subcategories like 'limitation,' 'material,' or 'instrument' and category two becomes simpler and more coherent. Meanwhile the wide range of noun phrases falling under category one are explained by the equally wide range of verbal semantics which any language must have.

4.2 NP Secondary Predicates

Whereas both arguments and adverbials interact with the verb to describe exactly what sort of event we are dealing with, secondary predicates have a relationship to an argument and not to the verb. I adopt Rothstein's (2011, 1442) definition of secondary predicate with some small modification:

(8) A secondary predicate is a one place, non-finite predicate expression which occurs under the scope of a main verb. Crucially, the secondary predicate shares an argument with the main verb such that the subject of the secondary predicate is either the subject or the direct object of the main verb.

The most common types of secondary predicate mentioned in the linguistic literature are depictives and resultatives, which correspond roughly to accusatives of state and product in the standard grammars. Depictives and resultatives are similar in that they specify the state of one of the arguments. They differ regarding when the state holds. Depictives specify a state that holds while the event of the verb is ongoing, while resultatives specify a state resulting from the event. Secondary predicates may be subject- or object-oriented. For example, the English sentence *Jonathan$_i$ left the party angry$_i$* contains the subject-oriented depictive *angry*. The sentence *Moses painted the lintel$_i$ red$_i$* features the object-oriented resultative *red*.

Consider 2 Kings 5:2:

(9) וַאֲרָם֙ יָצְא֣וּ גְדוּדִ֔ים

'And Aram went out (as) raiders.' (2 Kgs 5:2)

The noun גְּדוּדִים, labelled an 'accusative of state' by Joüon-Muraoka, is a subject-oriented depictive. Its function in the clause is to predicate of the subject אֲרָם that – at the same time that they went out – they were raiders. That is to say, the Arameans went out and they were a raiding party.

Similarly, consider 1 Kings 18:32:

(10) וַיִּבֶן֙ אֶת־הָאֲבָנִ֔ים מִזְבֵּ֖חַ בְּשֵׁ֣ם יְהוָ֑ה

'And he built the stones (into) an altar in the name of the LORD.' (1 Kgs 18:32)

The noun מִזְבֵּחַ predicates of the object אֶת־הָאֲבָנִים that when the building action was complete, the stones were now an altar. That is, Elijah worked on the stones and the stones became an altar.

Secondary predicates have their own distinct syntactic structure, which I discuss in the paper. It is important that each category be defined in clear syntactic and semantic terms to show why they are distinct.

5 Three Types of Locative 'Adverbial' NP

5.1 An Event Semantics Approach to Modifiers

In this final portion of the paper I assume a Neo-Davidsonian event semantics, which means simply that I assume that propositions can be treated as introducing an 'event' or 'eventuality' into the discourse that can be referred to and modified.

5.2 The Syntax and Semantics of Locative Modifiers

I also follow Claudia Maienborn in distinguishing between modifiers that apply to the whole event, to some part of the event, and to the entire proposition. Each of these

three types has its own site of adjunction corresponding to its semantic contribution.

5.3 Locative NP Modifiers in BH

What was traditionally called 'adverbial' should instead be referred to by the more general term 'modifier.' The reason for this is that some modifiers can be shown to modify the event as a whole – this is the Event-External Modifier – while others modify only a part of the event by way of modifying the verb – this is the Event-Internal Modifier. The former could be informally termed *ad-eventive* and the latter *ad-verbal*. From now on, therefore, I restrict the term 'adverbial' to the latter subcategory, the Event-Internal Modifier.

If we consider 1 Kings 8:32 again, we may note how הַשָּׁמַיִם specifies a location for an event of hearing. There is nothing about the location that affects what sort of event it is. It is an event of hearing whether it takes place in heaven, in the temple, or in a closet. The phrase הַשָּׁמַיִם is therefore an Event-External modifier.

By contrast, there is the case of Genesis 3:15:

(11) הוּא יְשׁוּפְךָ רֹאשׁ וְאַתָּה תְּשׁוּפֶנּוּ עָקֵב

'He will wound you (on the) head and you will wound him (on the) heel.' (Gen 3:15) (Waltke-O'Connor 1990, §10.2.2d)

This is admittedly a challenging case, and one might want to argue that רֹאשׁ and עָקֵב are arguments in a trivalent pattern of the verb. However, these nouns can be understood as locative modifiers in the Event-Internal sense. The head and heel are the surfaces of contact for the action of striking or wounding. That is, the locations are part of the descriptions of these two distinct events. The first is an event of wounding on the head, which is not at all the same as the second, which is an event of wounding on the heel.

Finally, consider הַכִּסֵּא in Genesis 41:40:

(12) רַק הַכִּסֵּא אֶגְדַּל מִמֶּךָּ

'Only (with respect to) the throne will I be greater than you.' (Gen 41:40)

Arnold & Choi label this noun phrase an 'adverbial accusative of specification.' However, it fits well with Maienborn's third type of locative modifier, the Frame-Setting Modifier. A frame-setting modifer restricts the domain of a proposition to a specific location. Maienborn's test for frame-setting modifiers is to check whether omitting the locative changes the truth value of the proposition. And indeed, if we reduce the clause to אגדל ממך 'I am *or* will be greater than you,' we see that it is no longer true. In the context Pharaoh is asserting that Joseph has the full authority of Pharaoh – that is, they are equals – in every respect except for the throne. Only Pharaoh has right to the throne and at the throne Pharaoh's word supersedes that of Joseph.

6 Conclusion

In summary, then, the heading 'Category 2' in Table 1 can be much simplified. Instead of proliferating many idiosyncratic terms on the basis of a noun's semantics, it is more reasonable to restrict the subcategories to ones that can be defined according to syntactic structure and according to whether they modify the whole event, only part of the event, or the entire proposition. The three subcategories proposed here are Event-External Modifiers, Event-Internal Modifiers, and Frame-Setting Modifiers. As it stands, Biblical Hebrew modifiers seem to belong to three basic types – time, manner, and place – and these correspond well with Larson's findings for English.

The noun phrases considered here that are not modifiers have been classified either as arguments or as secondary predicates. The wide variation in semantics attested for 'accusative' noun phrases is largely a result of verbal selection. Arguments are those phrases required by the semantics of a verbal valency pattern.

Accounting for secondary predicates demands a third distinct category, matched by distinct syntax and semantic representation. Secondary predicates are, as the name suggests, a second predicate in a clause which predicates something about one of the arguments of the verb, either a subject or object. Noun phrases previously labelled adverbial accusatives of state and of product are in fact depictive and resultative secondary predicates.

References

Arnold, Bill T., and John H. Choi. 2003. *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bowers, John. 1993. "The Syntax of Predication." *Linguistic Inquiry* 24 (3): 591–656.

———. 2001. "Predication." In *The Handbook of Contemporary Syntactic Theory,* edited by Mark Baltin and Chris Collins, 299–333. Malden: Blackwell.

Chomsky, Noam. 1993. "A Minimalist Program for Linguistic Theory." In *The View from Building 20: Essays in Linguistics in Honor of Sylvain Bromberger,* edited by Kenneth Hale and Samuel Jay Keyser, 1–52. Cambridge: MIT Press.

———. 1995. *The Minimalist Program.* Cambridge: MIT Press.

———. 2000. "Minimalist Inquiries: The Framework." In *Step by Step: Essays on Minimalist Syntax in Honor of Howard Lasnik,* edited by D. Michaels and J. Uriagereka, 89–155. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Cook, John A. 2012a. "Valency: The Intersection of Syntax and Semantics." Paper Presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature. Chicago, IL, November 17.

———. 2012b. "Valency: The Intersection of Syntax and Semantics." `https://ancienthebrewgrammar.wordpress.com/2012/12/05/biblical-hebrew-valency/`.

———. 2014. "Verbal Valency in Biblical Hebrew and the Case of **מלא**." Paper Presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature. San Diego, CA, November 22.

Cuervo, María Cristina. 2003. "Datives at Large." PhD diss., MIT.

———. 2015. "Causation without a CAUSE." *Syntax* 18 (4): 388–424.

Gesenius, Wilhelm, E. Kautzsch, and A. E. Cowley. 1910. *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar.* 2nd English ed. Oxford: The Clarendon Press.

Halle, Morris, and Alec Marantz. 1993. "Distributed Morphology and the Pieces of Inflection." In *The View from Building 20: Essays in Linguistics in Honor of Sylvian Bromberger,* edited by Hale Kenneth and Samuel Jay Keyser, 111–176. Cambridge: MIT Press.

———. 1994. "Some Key Features of Distributed Morphology." *MIT Working Papers in Linguistics* 21:275–288.

Harley, Heidi. 2012. "Semantics in Distributed Morphology." In *Semantics: An International Handbook of Natural Language Meaning,* edited by Claudia Maienborn, Klaus von Heusinger, and Paul Portner, 3:2151–2172. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Joüon, P. Paul, and T. Muraoka. 2006. *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew.* Roma: Pontificio istituto biblico.

Larson, Richard K. 1985. "Bare-NP Adverbs." *Linguistic Inquiry* 16 (4): 595–621.

Malessa, Michael. 2006. *Untersuchungen zur verbalen Valenz im biblischen Hebräisch.* Assen: Van Gorcum.

Rothstein, Susan. 2011. "Secondary Predicates." In *Semantics: An International Handbook of Natural Language Meaning,* edited by Klaus von Heusinger, Claudia Maienborn, and Paul Portner, 2:1442–1262. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton.

Van der Merwe, Christo H. J., Jackie Naudé, and Jan H. Kroeze. 1999. *A Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar.* Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press.

Waltke, Bruce K., and M. O'Connor. 1990. *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax.* Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns.

Wilson, James Douglas. 2014. "Verbal Valency in Biblical Hebrew: An Analysis of the Valency of עבר." Master's thesis, Asbury Theological Seminary.