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THE SEMANTIC FUNCTIONS OF EMBEDDED CONSTRUCTIONS IN BIBLICAL HEBREW

ABSTRACT

In traditional grammars on the syntax of Biblical Hebrew one often finds sections which describe the various types of clauses, for example, circumstantial, causal, conditional, concessive, comparative, temporal, final and consecutive clauses. These types indicate the functions of embedded phrases and clauses. However, these functions are semantic and not syntactic functions and should actually not be dealt with in sections on syntax together with topics such as relative and direct object clauses. A distinction should be made between the morphological, syntactic and semantic aspects of embedded constructions. Using S C Dik's Functional Grammar theory as a starting point, this article focuses on the semantic functions of embedded constructions and attempts to identify the theoretical possibilities concerning the semantic functions of embedded constructions. It is important to note that not only embedded adverbial clauses, like those mentioned above, have semantic functions, but that other embedded constructions which act as first, second or third argument, as well as satellites, also share these functions. Examples from the Hebrew Bible are given to illustrate the most important possibilities. Consequently, this article does not only make a distinction between the syntactic and semantic aspects which are usually described in the syntax sections of traditional grammars, but also attempts to explain and illustrate those semantic functions of embedded constructions which are not usually dealt with.

1. INTRODUCTION

In traditional grammars on the syntax of Biblical Hebrew one often finds sections which describe the various types of clauses, for example circumstantial, causal, conditional, concessive, comparative, temporal, final and consecutive clauses. These types indicate the functions of embedded phrases and clauses.¹ However, these functions are semantic and not syntactic functions, and should actually not be dealt with in sections on syntax together with topics such as relative and direct object clauses (which are indeed syntactic categories). A distinction should be made between the morphological, syntactic and semantic aspects of embedded constructions.

1 Cf. Davidson (1942:175ff); Gesenius *et al.* (1976:489ff); Williams (1980:80ff); Waltke & O'Connor (1990:632ff); Joüon & Muraoka (1991:589ff).

On the morphological level embedded constructions can be differentiated as phrases or clauses. A phrase does not contain a finite verb, nor is it a complete nominal clause. It may, however, contain an infinite verb, *i.e.* an infinitive or participle. A clause contains a finite verb, or it is a complete nominal clause.

Syntactically speaking, phrases and clauses can fulfil the functions of subject, direct object, indirect object, complement², adjunct³, copula-complement⁴ and attribute.⁵

Using S C Dik's⁶ Functional Grammar theory as a starting point, this article focuses on the semantic functions⁷ of embedded constructions and attempts to identify the theoretical possibilities concerning the semantic functions of embedded constructions. A distinction is made between the syntactic and semantic functions of embedded constructions that are usually described in the syntax sections of traditional grammars. It is not only embedded adverbial clauses that have semantic functions, but other embedded constructions which act as first, second or third argument, as well as satellites, also have these functions. The semantic functions of these embedded constructions, which are not usually dealt with, are also explained and illustrated. Examples from the Hebrew Bible are given below to illustrate the most important possibilities. Note that in the discussion below the names of semantic functions are given in bold and the names of syntactic functions in italics.

Using the parameters of dynamism and control, all predications can be classified as actions, processes, positions or states:

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- 2 A complement is an obligatory non-verbal element in the predicate, for example, the complements of certain intransitive verbs like verbs of being full, living or moving. Strictly speaking, the direct object is also a complement, *i.e.* the complement of a transitive verb.
- 3 An adjunct is an optional non-verbal element in the predicate, which is not selected by the verb and which can be omitted without changing the classification of the verb (transitive or intransitive) and without making the clause ungrammatical or senseless.
- 4 The copula-complement is the complement of the copula. When the copula is not expressed, the copula-complement forms the whole predicate.
- 5 *E.g.* relative clauses.
- 6 Cf. Dik (1997a:114, 118-121, 214, 229-232, 243-245).
- 7 Cf. Kroeze (1996:47-60) for a discussion of the applicability of semantic functions to Biblical Hebrew.

events	action	[+dynamic]	[+controlled]	The boy kicks the ball.
	process	[+dynamic]	[- controlled]	The ball went over the fence.
situations	position	[- dynamic]	[+controlled]	The boy kept the ball in his closet.
	state	[- dynamic]	[- controlled]	The ball stayed in the closet.

The concepts of these predication types are important for understanding the definitions of the semantic functions below.

2. SEMANTIC FUNCTIONS

2.1 Agent

A *subject* can have the semantic functions of **agent**, **positioner**, **force**, **processed** or **zero**. An **agent** is the entity that controls an action. A participle phrase, embedded as the *subject* of the main verb, can have the semantic function of **agent**, e.g.:

הִלֵּא בְּבֶטֶן עַשְׂרוֹ עָשָׂהוּ Did not *He who made me in the womb*
make him? (Job 31:15).

The **agent** of a passive clause can be expressed by an *adjunct* clause:

נִמְצְאָתִי לְלֵא בְּקִשְׁתִּי I was found by *them who did not seek me*
(Isa 65:1).

2.2 Positioner

The **positioner** is the entity that controls a position. A participle phrase, embedded as the *subject* of the main verb, can have the semantic function of **positioner**, e.g.:

אֲהַבֵּי ... בְּנִגְדָה נִנְעִי יַעֲמִדוּ *My lovers ... stand aloof from my*
affliction (Ps 38:12).

2.3 Force

The **force** is the non-controlling entity that instigates a process. A *subject* phrase (infinitive construct with suffix) can have the semantic function of **force**⁸:

הֲלֹא זָמַת פִּעֲשָׂה לְךָ Did not *your leaving* (inf. cs. + sf.) *the*
עֲבֹדָה אֵת יְהוָה LORD do this to you? (Jer 2:17).⁹

8 Cf. Dik (1997b:122, 132).

9 Cf. Gesenius *et al.* (1976:347, § 114a).

An infinitive absolute can also act as *subject* phrase with the semantic function of **force**¹⁰:

וּמַדְּיִיכִיחַ הוֹכֵחַ מִכֶּם And what does *reproaching by you* (inf. abs.) reproach? (Job 6:25).

2.4 Processed

The **processed** is the entity that undergoes a process. In the following example a participle phrase is embedded as *subject* of the main verb and has the semantic function of **processed**¹¹:

שׂוֹנֵא תוֹכַחַת יָמוּת He who hates reproach, will die (Prov 15:10).

2.5 Zero

The entity primarily involved in a state has the semantic function of **zero** and can be fulfilled by an infinitival *subject* phrase¹²:

לֹא־טוֹב הָיְתָה הַיָּחַדְתָּם לְבָדוֹ It is not good that the man is alone (Gen 2:18).¹³

The **zero** semantic function can also be fulfilled by a *subject* clause:

טוֹב לְנֶבֶר כִּי־שָׂא עַל בְּעֻקְרוֹ It is good for the man that he bears the yoke in his youth (Lam 3:27).

2.6 Patient

The **patient** (or **goal** in Dik's terms) is the entity that is affected or effected by an agent, positioner, force or processed. A *direct object* clause (in this case an independent relative clause) can have the semantic function of **patient**¹⁴:

עָשָׂה יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר זָכַם The LORD did what he planned (Lam 2:17).

10 Cf. Gesenius *et al.* (1976:339, § 113a): "The infinitive absolute ... speaks of an *action* (or *state*)..." (my italics).

11 Cf. Dik (1997b:122).

12 Cf. Dik (1997b:95, 113, 122, 149, 152, 153, 293, 310, 334, 354).

13 "Not good is the being of man in his separation" (Gesenius *et al.* 1976:347, §114a).

14 Cf. Dik (1997b:90-92, 95, 100, 102, 106, 109, 110-113, 115, 116, 122, 131, 135, 147, 148, 157, 163, 200, 345, 352, 353-355, 364).

The *subject* clause of a passive sentence can also have the semantic function of **patient**:

וַאֲשֶׁר קִלַּל יוֹאֵב And *he whom you curse* is cursed
(Num 22:6).

2.7 Receiver

The **receiver** (or **recipient**) is the entity to whom something is transferred as a possession. In the following example a subordinate nominal clause fulfils the syntactic function of *indirect object* and the semantic function of **receiver**.

וּשְׁלַחוּ מְנוּחַ לְאִיִּן כְּבוֹן לֵוִי And send portions *to him for whom*
nothing is prepared (Neh 8:10).

2.8 Location

Location is the place where an event happens, or where a situation takes place. An *adjunct* clause can fulfil this semantic function:

שָׁמַע אֱלֹהִים אֶל־קוֹל הַנַּעַר God listened to the voice of the boy
בַּאֲשֶׁר הָיָה שָׁם *where he was* (Gen 21:17).

A *complement* clause can also have the semantic function of **location**:

וּבַאֲשֶׁר תֵּלְעִי אֶלְיָן And *where you live* I will live (Ruth
1:16).

2.9 Direction

Direction is the entity towards which something moves or is moved. In the example below an independent relative clause functions as a *complement* after a verb of motion and has the semantic function of **direction**:

אֶל־אֲשֶׁר תֵּלְכִי אֵלַי *Whither you go*, I will go (Ruth 1:16).

2.10 Source

Source is the entity from which something moves or is moved. The independent relative clause in the example below functions as an *adjunct* in the main clause and has the semantic function of **source**.

אָתָּם לָכוּ קְחוּ לָכֶם תְּבֵן You, go get straw for you *from where*
מֵאֲשֶׁר תִּמְצְאוּ *you can find (it)* (Exod 5:11).

2.11 Reference

Reference is the second or third term of a relation with reference to which the relation holds. A *complement* clause fulfils the semantic function of **reference** in the example below¹⁵:

וּשְׂמַחְתֶּם... אֲשֶׁר בָּרַכְךָ
יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ
And rejoice ... with reference to the fact
that the LORD your God blessed you
(Deut 12:7).

2.12 Interested party

The **interested party** (**beneficiary** in Dik's terms) is the entity to the advantage or disadvantage of which an action is carried out or a position is maintained. In the example below an independent asyndetic relative clause serves as an *adjunct* with the semantic function of **interested party**:

... לְהַחֲזִיק עִם לִבָּם
שֶׁלֵם אֵלָיו
... to show Himself strong on behalf of
those whose heart is blameless towards
Him (2 Chron 16:9).

2.13 Company

Company is the entity together with whom the predication is brought about. The independent relative clause in the example below functions as an *adjunct* with the semantic function of **company**:

... עִמָּדֵינָא
בְּאִשֶׁר יָנַעַתָּ מִנְעוּרֶיךָ
Stand then ... together with whom you
have laboured from your youth (Isa
47:12, see also vs. 15).

2.14 Instrument

The **instrument** is the tool with which an action is carried out or with which a position is maintained. The independent asyndetic relative clause in the following example is an *adjunct* with the semantic function of **instrument**:

שְׁלַח־נָא בְּיַד-הַתְּשֻׁלָּח
Please send through¹⁶ (him whom) You
will send (Exod 4:13).

15 Cf. Dik (1997b:95, 111, 116, 117, 122, 201).

16 בְּיַד is regarded as a composite preposition like לְפָנַי – cf. KB³ (p. 371, 5by).

2.15 *Manner*

Manner is the way or manner in which an action, position or process is fulfilled. A prepositional phrase (-ל plus infinitive construct) very often expresses this semantic function. In the example below it is, syntactically speaking, an *adjunct*:

כי תשמע בקול יהוה אלהיך לשמר
את כל מצותיו If you listen to the voice of the LORD
your God *by keeping all his*
commandments ... (Deut 13:19).

2.16 *Speed*

Speed is the amount of action or process that is fulfilled per time unit. Below, the infinitive absolute is an *adjunct* phrase with the semantic function of **speed**:

פָּרוּ מַהֲרָא מִן הַדֶּרֶךְ They turned *quickly* (inf. abs.) out of
the way (Exod 32:8).¹⁷

An *auxiliary verb* may also have this semantic function:

מַהֲרָא לָלֶכֶת Go *quickly* (2 Sam 15:14).

2.17 *Role*

Role is the function, authority or capacity by virtue of which an action is executed or a position is maintained. (Dik calls this **quality**.) In the example a preposition plus nominal clause functions as an *attribute*: the preposition phrase (preposition + verbless clause) is in *apposition* to the substantivised participle in the main clause.

סֵלֹו לְרֹכֵב בְּעַרְבוֹת
בְּיָהוָה שְׁמוֹ (Prepare a road for) him who rides on
the clouds *as He whose name is THE*
LORD (Ps 68:5).

2.18 *Path/route*

Path/route is the orientation or route of a movement. An *adjunct* clause (in this case an independent relative clause) can fulfil this semantic function, e.g.:

וַיֵּצְאוּ בַּאֲשֶׁר יִתְהַלְכוּ And they went *on whichever (roads)*¹⁸
they could go (1 Sam 23:13).

17 This infinitive absolute could also be interpreted as a mere adverb. However, it is not cited in the dictionary of Koehler & Baumgartner (KB³:524-525) as a separate lexeme.

2.19 Time

Time is the point in time at which, since when or until which a predication takes place; it can also be the duration or frequency of a predication. In the following examples a **point in the timeline** is expressed by an *adjunct* clause¹⁹:

כִּי תַעֲבֹד אֶת־הָאֲדָמָה
לֹא־תִסַּף תִּתְּכֶנָּה לְךָ
When you till the ground, it will no longer yield to you its strength (Gen 4:12).

וַעֲתָה הִנֵּה הִחִיָּה יְהוָה אֹתִי ...
זֶה אַרְבָּעִים וְחָמֵשׁ שָׁנָה
מֵאֵן דִּבֶּר יְהוָה אֶת־הַדְּבָר
הַזֶּה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה
And now, behold, the LORD kept me alive ... this forty-five year(s) since the LORD spoke this word to Moses (Josh 14:10).

וַיִּשְׁבֹּתָ עִמּוֹ יָמִים אָחָדִים
עַד אֲשֶׁר־תִּשְׁוֹב חֲמַת אָחִיךָ
And stay with him a few days until the anger of your brother will have turned away (Gen 27:44).

Duration is a subcategory of time. A nominal *adjunct* clause expresses this function in the example below²⁰:

אֲזַמְרָה לְאֱלֹהֵי כְּעוֹדִי
I will praise my God as long as I exist (Ps 104:33).

Frequency, another subcategory of time, is expressed by a verbal *adjunct* clause in the following example:

כִּי־כַדְוִי אֲדַבֵּר אֲזַעַק
For as often as I speak, I cry out (Jer 20:8).

2.20 Circumstance

The semantic function of **circumstance** is expressed by a second predication taking place at the same time as the main predication.²¹ A **simultaneous event** can be expressed by the prepositional phrase -כִּי plus infinitive construct which acts as an *adjunct*:

18 Compare the idiom הִלֵּךְ בְּדֶרֶךְ . It seems that בְּאֲשֶׁר is usually governed by a verb in the main clause which does not express movement, in which case it has the meaning of *where*. However, it is also sometimes translated with *whithersoever* when the verb in the subordinate clause expresses motion.

19 Cf. Dik (1997b:73, 133).

20 Cf. Dik (1997b:95).

21 Cf. Dik (1997b:73, 84, 155, 156, 334, 353).

וַיְהִי בְּהֵיוֹתָם בַּשָּׂדֶה
וַיִּקָּם קַיִן אֶל-אָבֶל אָחִיו
And it was *during their being in the field* and Cain rose up against Abel his brother (Gen 4:8).

Circumstance can even be expressed by an infinitive absolute phrase that acts as an *adjunct* phrase (if the infinitive absolute is regarded as a verbal adverb or an adverbial verb²²):

וַיֵּלֶךְ הַלֹּךְ אֹכֵל
And he walked along *eating* (Judg 14:9).

It can also be expressed by an asyndetic *adjunct* (or *co-ordinate main*) clause:

הוּא ... בְּאַחֲרֵי בִשְׁפָה
וְיִן יִדְלִיקֵם
Woe unto ... them who stay up late at night *while wine inflames them* (Isa 5:11).

A **real condition** (in this example an *adjunct* clause) is another subcategory of circumstance²³:

אִם חֲכָמָה חֲכַמְתָּ לָךְ
If you are wise, you are wise for yourself (Prov 9:12).

The following *adjunct* clause is an **unreal condition**, also a subcategory of circumstance²⁴:

לֹא הִחַיְתִּים אוֹתָם
לֹא הָרַגְתִּי אוֹתְכֶם
If you had kept them alive I would not kill you (Judg 8:19).

A **concession** is another form of circumstance. In the example below this function is fulfilled by an *adjunct* phrase:

וְלִמְשָׁאֲתִי תִדְרוּשׁ
עַל-דַּעְתְּךָ (כִּי לֹא אָרָשָׁע)
And You search for my sin *although* You know (that I am not wicked) (Job 10:6-7).

An **exception** is also a subclass of circumstance. An *adjunct* clause may fulfil this semantic function, e.g.:

וְהָיְתָה הָעִיר חֲרָם ה' וְכָל-אֲשֶׁר-בָּהּ לַיהוָה
רַק רַחֵב הַמַּיִתָּה הַזֹּאת
הִיא וְכָל-אֲשֶׁר אִתָּהּ בְּבַיִת
And the city will be a ban to the LORD, it and everyone who is in it, *except that Rahab, the prostitute, will live, she and everyone who is with her in the house* (Josh 6:17).

22 Cf. Gesenius *et al.* (1976:341, §113h-k).

23 Cf. Dik (1997b:95, 132, 136, 137, 395, 396).

24 Cf. Dik (1997b:396).

A **restriction** is the last subclass of circumstance. Due to the fact that the same conjunctions may be used co-ordinately and subordinately in Biblical Hebrew, restrictive and exceptive clauses may be regarded either as co-ordinate main clauses or as subordinate *adjunct* (or *disjunct*²⁵) clauses, e.g.:

וַעֲשׂוּ לָהֶן כַּטּוֹב בְּעֵינֵיכֶם
 רַק לְאֲנָשִׁים²⁶ הָאֵל
 אֶל-הַעֲשׂוּ דָבָר
 And do to them according to the good
 in your eyes, *only do not do anything*
to the men of God (Gen 19:8).

אִתָּהּ אֶתְּנֶנְךָ לְאִשָּׁה
 אֵךְ הַגִּידְתִּי לְבָרְחָנִי
 Her I will give to you as wife, *only be*
for me a son of bravery (1 Sam 18:17).

2.21 Result

The **result** is a second predication that is brought about as the result or consequence of the main predication. It may be expressed by an *adjunct* clause or phrase:

הִנֵּה נֹתַתִּי לְךָ לֵב חָכָם וְגִבּוֹן
 אֲשֶׁר קִמּוּדָה לְאִתְּךָ לְפָנַי
 Behold, I give you a wise and
 understanding heart *so that there was not*
one like you before you (1 Kgs 3:12).

מִנְדָּעוֹ יָתַן לְמֹלֶךְ
 לְמַעַן שִׁמָּא אֶתְּמַקְדָּשִׁי
 וְלִחְלַל אֶת־שֵׁם קָדְשִׁי
 He gave (some) of his offspring to
 Molech *so that he defiled my*
sanctuary and profaned my holy Name
 (Lev 20:3).²⁷

2.22 Purpose

The **purpose** is a second predication that a controller aims to bring about with the main predication. It may be expressed by an *adjunct* phrase²⁸:

וַיַּעֲלֶה אַחָאָב לֶאֱכֹל
 And Ahab climbed up *to eat* (1 Kgs
 18:42).

25 A disjunct is an element of a clause which does not form part of the subject or predicate, but which is loosely connected to the clause as a whole, e.g. exclamations, addressees and modal words like "surely."

26 This form is regarded as a plural noun in the construct state combined with an enclitic mem (לְאֲנָשִׁים).

27 -לְ plus infinitive construct usually indicates purpose; however, cf. BHRG (1999:305, §40.13), Williams (1980:87, §526).

28 Cf. Dik (1997b:150).

2.23 Reason

Reason is a second predication that gives the motive of the controller of the main predication. It may be expressed by an *adjunct* clause:

וַתִּפֶּן יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לָךְ	And for you the LORD your God
אֶת־הַקְּלָלָה לְבִרְכָה	turned the curse into a blessing
כִּי אֲהַבֶּךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ	<i>because the LORD your God loves you</i>
	(Deut 23:6).

2.24 Cause

Cause is the semantic function that expresses the cause for the occurrence of a predication, which is not ascribed to any of the participants. It may be fulfilled by an *adjunct* clause²⁹:

וְלֹא־מָצְאָה הַיּוֹנָה מְנוּחַ	And the dove did not find a resting-
לְכַף־רַגְלָהּ	place for the sole of its foot and it
וַתָּשָׁב אֵלָיו אֶל־הַתֵּבָה	returned to him to the ark <i>because</i>
כִּי־מַיִם עַל־פְּנֵי כָל־הָאָרֶץ	<i>water was on the surface of the whole</i>
	<i>earth</i> (Gen 8:9).

2.25 Existence

The *copula-complement* or *predicate* of a nominal clause can have the semantic function of **existence**, **identity**, **class**, **quality** or **possessor**.³⁰

The semantic function of **existence** is fulfilled by an argument expressing the mere existence of the zero-argument. Because existential particles like *יש* and *אין* usually are not replaced by phrases or clauses, the semantic function of existence usually cannot be expressed by embedded constructions. However, an example could be where the head of the *copula-complement* phrase is a participle of the verb *היה* (compare the example of an embedded participle with the semantic function of quality below):

הִנֵּה יַד־יְהוָה לְעָלְיָהּ בְּמִקְנֶיךָ	Behold, the hand of the LORD (is)
	<i>being</i> upon your cattle (Exod 9:3).

2.26 Identity

The semantic function of **identity** is fulfilled by an argument expressing the identity or species of the zero-argument. In the example below a

29 Cf. Dik (1997b:95, 132, 135, 136).

30 The subject of a nominal clause always has the semantic function of **zero**.

copula-complement phrase (or actually, a *predicate* phrase because the copula is not expressed) fulfils this semantic function³¹:

פִּי דַמְדַם לְךָ אֱלֹהִים My mouth is the one that speaks to
you (Gen 45:12).

2.27 Class

The semantic function of **class** is fulfilled by an argument that designates the class of which the subject is a member. In the example a substantivised participle phrase which acts as *copula-complement* fulfils this function:

וַיְהִי לּוֹ נֹשֵׂא כְלִים And he was a bearer of weapons for
him (1 Sam 16:21).

2.28 Quality

Dik calls this semantic function **property assignment**. It is an argument expressing the quality or characteristic of the zero-argument. A participle that acts as *predicate* (or *copula-complement*) can be regarded as an embedded **quality** predication, because the participle is a verbal adjective – plain adjectives usually express quality:

הָמָּה עֹלִים They were going up (1 Sam 9:11).

מָחָר אַתָּה מוּסָה Tomorrow you will be killed (1 Sam
19:11).

2.29 Possessor

A term expressing the owner of the zero-argument or another element has the semantic function of **possessor**. It is usually expressed by means of the *postconstruct* (*somek, nomen rectum*) which is an attribute. In the example an *attribute (postconstruct)* clause fulfils this function³²:

נָתַנִּי אֱלֹהֵי בִידֵי
לֹא אֶיכָל קוּם The Lord gave me in the hands of
those whom I cannot withstand (Lam
1:14).

31 Cf. Dik (1997b:293-297).

32 Cf. Dik (1997b:273, 373).

3. CONCLUSION

The examples listed above indicate that all the semantic functions – perhaps with the exception of existence – can be fulfilled by embedded constructions. Further research should be done to indicate which functions can be fulfilled only by either phrases or clauses and which can be fulfilled by both, and whether the embedded functions can be either arguments or satellites or both. Research should also be done to test the finer details of the definitions of the semantic functions – examples should be found to prove that embedded constructions can fulfil all the detailed characteristics of these functions and to make adaptations to the definitions where necessary. Every semantic function should be researched to ascertain whether actions, positions, processes and states can be embedded in that role and, if not, which of these predication types could be embedded having that semantic function. The possible predication types of the matrix predications (main clauses) should also be examined with reference to every embedded semantic function.

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