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 adverbal 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. 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); Joôon & 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, complement\(^2\), adjunct\(^3\), copula-complement\(^4\) and attribute.\(^5\)

Using S C Dik’s\(^6\) Functional Grammar theory as a starting point, this article focuses on the semantic functions\(^7\) 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.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>events</th>
<th>action</th>
<th>[+dynamic]</th>
<th>[+controlled]</th>
<th>The boy kicks the ball.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>process</td>
<td>[+dynamic]</td>
<td>[-controlled]</td>
<td>The ball went over the fence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>situations</td>
<td>position</td>
<td>[-dynamic]</td>
<td>[+controlled]</td>
<td>The boy kept the ball in his closet.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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.:

\[ \text{Did not He who made me in the womb make him? (Job 31:15).} \]

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

\[ \text{I was found by them who did not seek me (Isa 65:1).} \]

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.:

\[ \text{My lovers ... stand aloof from my affliction (Ps 38:12).} \]

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*:

\[ \text{Did not your leaving (inf. cs. + sf.) the LORD do this to you? (Jer 2:17).} \]

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

\[ \text{הָעַזְּרֵי חֲדֹדֲוָה יִשְׁכַּבּוּ} \quad \text{And what does reproaching by you (inf. abs.) reproach? (Job 6:25).} \]

### 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*:

\[ \text{יֶהוֹרֶם, יְדֻכְּבֹּן נַעֲשֶׂה} \quad \text{He who hates reproach, will die (Prov 15:10).} \]

### 2.5 Zero

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

\[ \text{לֹא אָרָבְרֶה הַנָּעֲשֵׂה לְעַבְדְּךָ} \quad \text{It is not good that the man is alone (Gen 2:18).} \]

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

\[ \text{וּבָא לֵבָבָךְ וּסְיָר אֱלֹהִים מִנָּעֲשֵׂה} \quad \text{It is good for the man that he bears the yoke in his youth (Lam 3:27).} \]

### 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:

\[ \text{הָעַזְּרֵי חֲדֹדֲוָה יִשְׁכַּבּוּ} \quad \text{The LORD did what he planned (Lam 2:17).} \]

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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).

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

\[ \text{And whom you curse is cursed} \]  
(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 fulfills the syntactic function of *indirect object* and the semantic function of *receiver*.

\[ \text{And send portions to him for whom nothing is prepared} \]  
(Neh 8:10).

### 2.8 Location

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

\[ \text{God listened to the voice of the boy where he was} \]  
(Gen 21:17).

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

\[ \text{And where you live I will live} \]  
(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*:

\[ \text{Whither you go, I will go} \]  
(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*.

\[ \text{You, go get straw for you from where you can find (it)} \]  
(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 below:

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:

... 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:

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:

Please send through (him whom) You will send (Exod 4:13).

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16 ἐκ is regarded as a composite preposition like ἐκ - cf. KB (p. 371, 5by).
2.15 Manner

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

֖ ֖ ֖ ֖ ֖ 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:

֖ ֖ ֖ ֖ ֖ They turned quickly (inf. abs.) out of the way (Exod 32:8).17

An auxiliary verb may also have this semantic function:

֖ ֖ ֖ ֖ ֖ 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.

֖ ֖ ֖ ֖ ֖ (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.:

֖ ֖ ֖ ֖ ֖ 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 Kochler & 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* clause:\(^{19}\):

\[
\text{When you till the ground, it will no longer yield to you its strength (Gen 4:12).}
\]

\[
\text{And now, behold, the LORD kept me alive ... this forty-five year(s) since the LORD spoke this word to Moses (Josh 14:10).}
\]

\[
\text{And stay with him a few days until the anger of your brother will have turned away (Gen 27:44).}
\]

**Duration** is a subcategory of time. A nominal *adjunct* clause expresses this function in the example below:\(^{20}\):

\[
\text{I will praise my God as long as I exist (Ps 104:33).}
\]

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

\[
\text{For as often as I speak, I cry out (Jer 20:8).}
\]

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 -ך plus infinitive construct which acts as an *adjunct*:

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18 Compare the idiom 입ך נֵעָלִים נַּעַרְבַּרְבַּרְפֶּל. It seems that 입ך 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 withersoever when the verb in the subordinate clause expresses motion.


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

> לֹא לָכֵן (And he walked along eating) (Judg 14:9).

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

> וְאֵלָה (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 circumstance:

> וְאָמַרְתָּ יְהוָ֑ה (If you are wise, you are wise for yourself) (Prov 9:12).

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

> מַעֲרַכָּתָה יְהוָ֥ה (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:

> תַּעַרְבָּה (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.:

> וְאָלֶ֥ה גַּ֔ם רָאָ֣י בָּֽאָמִ֗ים לֹֽא אֳָ֛לֵיהָ לְאֹ֥הֶל נְֽהָלִ֛ים וְאֵ֤לָה לְכָ֖רִית נְֽהָלִ֗ים אֲרֵ֣א אֳָ֛לֶה אֵ֥לֶ֖ה לְכָֽרִית נְֽהָלִ֗ים (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).

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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.:

- And do to them according to the good in your eyes, only do not do anything to the men of God (Gen 19:8).
- "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:

- Behold, I give you a wise and understanding heart so that there was not one like you before you (1 Kgs 3:12).
- 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 phrase\(^28\):

- And Ahab climbed up to eat (1 Kgs 18:42).

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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 (יְהִי).\(^26\)


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:

And for you the LORD your God
turned the curse into a blessing
*because the LORD your God loves you* (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* clause:

And the dove did not find a resting-place for the sole of its foot and it
returned to him to the ark *because water was on the surface of the whole earth* (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.*

The semantic function of *existence* is fulfilled by an argument expressing the mere existence of the zero-argument. Because existential particles like אֵל and עַד 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 הָיָה (compare the example of an embedded participle with the semantic function of quality below):

Behold, the hand of the LORD (is)
*being 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

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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 function:

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:

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:

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

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 function:

The Lord gave me in the hands of those whom I cannot withstand (Lam 1:14).

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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 fulfill 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.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


