The meaning of the Biblical Hebrew verbal forms – an investigation of the interaction of aspect, linguistic attitude, and event continuity

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This paper is a draft of the first chapters of a doctoral dissertation about the meaning and text linguistic functions of the Biblical Hebrew verbal forms. Important issues in the dissertation are whether the notion of *aspect* lies behind the temporal meanings of the forms, and, as a spin-off from that, how the semantics of the verbal forms affect their usage in different kinds of texts. The text linguistic study is mainly concerned with the question of how the meanings of the verbal forms are correlated with *event continuity*, i.e. the representation of courses of events – a phenomenon that is typical of e.g. narrative and procedural texts, but absent in texts of expository or enumerative character. A third major issue is to investigate to what extent the Biblical Hebrew verbal forms have something to do with Harald Weinrich's concept "linguistic attitude" (*Sprechhaltung*), which refers to the two opposite mental states of tension or relaxation. According to Weinrich, every verbal message evokes one of these attitudes by the listener, and the verbal forms have a key function in this regard. In fact, he claims that this function is more fundamental to the verb than tense. Against this, the thesis put forward in the present investigation is that, if this function is real, it is partly a result of the meaning-functions of the forms, tense included.

The introductory chapters contained in this paper are devoted to presenting the problem, the aim, and the scope of the study, as well as commenting on the state of research. The chapter about the scope of the study centres on the problem of how to differentiate between semantic and pragmatic meaning. This provides the guidelines for, first, which verbal forms to focus on, viz. those whose semantic meaning is most disputed, second, which contexts that have a bearing on their pragmatic meanings, i.e. various text-types, such as narrative-, hortatory-, expository discourse and so on. The text-types are defined along the lines of Robert E Longacre's typology of texts. This chapter also addresses the possible problem that differences in verb usage are present in the material due to diachronic change or poetic licence.

The chapter on the state of research is a description and assessment of the most important theories pertinent to the problems of the temporality of the Biblical Hebrew verbal forms: theories based on tense, aspect, and modality, the *waw*-consecutive theory, and the theory of linguistic attitude. The section about aspect has not yet been written, hence the lacuna in this paper.