

25 Years of the *Journal for Semitics*: An Analysis of Research Topics, Trends, and Shifts

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Abstract

Published in association with the Southern African Society for Near Eastern Studies (formerly the Southern African Society for Semitics), *Journal for Semitics* has been available since 1989. Articles on any topic in Semitics are considered for inclusion, including the linguistic study of Semitic languages, history, literature, and culture. In this, the 25th anniversary of the journal, an empirical analysis has been carried out to determine the status of the publications with regard to trends, institutions, authors, and research areas. Using the database of the South African Bibliographical and Information Network (Sabinet), all articles that have been published in *Journal for Semitics* since its inception in 1989 up to and including the 25th year of publication in 2015 have been analysed. The articles have been analysed according to demographical variables as well as research themes and sub-themes. The demographical variables include year of publication, affiliation of the author(s) and individual contributions as well as the themes and sub-themes that range from Semitic languages through to iconography in ancient and Near Eastern studies. The purpose of this analysis is twofold. First, it will provide empirical examination of the articles that have been published in order for the editors to reflect on the institutional contribution and research areas of these articles, and, secondly, insights will be obtained into opportunities where little research has been undertaken. A further article will be published which reflects the research trends in the journal over five-year time-frames.

Keywords: *Journal for Semitics*; research articles; research trends; research themes

Introduction

Research is a dynamic process, with seemingly random ebbs and flows in terms of topics, trends, and shifts. Researchers choose topics based on a plethora of influences,



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including personal interest, conference themes, and collaborative research efforts. This takes place in contexts such as institutional pressures to “publish or perish” and regulatory issues such as where and how to publish.

To make sense of research trends and shifts is not easy, but it is necessary in order to plan and direct, where needed. This article is an attempt to obtain an overview of topics, trends, and shifts as reflected in one journal, over a 25-year span, by interrelating aspects such as article topics and themes, and authors’ affiliations and output volumes.

The first volume of *Journal for Semitics* (ISSN 1013-8471) was published in 1989. It was conceived as the mouthpiece of the Southern African Society for Semitics (SASSEM). The society was renamed the Southern African Society for Near Eastern Studies (SASNES) during 2002 to reflect the widening of the field to include language and cultural studies. Each volume of *Journal for Semitics* consists of 2 issues, except for a combined Volume 9 (1997, published in 2000) and a combined Volume 10 (1998–2001, published in 2001).

The journal replaced *Semitics*, a series in which 10 volumes were published by the Department of Semitics at the University of South Africa (Unisa) between 1970 and 1989. Professor H. J. Dreyer of Unisa, who edited the final volume of *Semitics*, was appointed the first editor of *Journal for Semitics*, with his colleague Professor T. J. D. Bothma as assistant editor. From the first issue *Journal for Semitics* was published in collaboration with Unisa (Dreyer 1989, 2).

Journal for Semitics was “devoted to the entire field of Semitics: the classical Semitic languages, the general and cultural history of the Ancient Near East, archaeology and iconography, Arabic and Modern Hebrew, Judaica and Islamic Studies” (Dreyer 1989, 1). The hope was expressed that the journal would “provide a communication channel and forum for the discussion of any topic from the wide field of Semitic studies” (Dreyer 1989, 1). This ideal proved to be realistic when one reads through the wide variety of articles published by the journal.

During 1991 the journal was accredited by the Department of National Education, with effect from volume 2/1 of 1990 (Prinsloo 1991, 1). Dreyer was succeeded by Professor J. C. Lübbe of the Department of Semitics at Unisa with Volume 4 (1992, published in 1993). He was assisted by Professor J. P. van der Westhuizen, Professor P. S. Vermaak, and Dr W. C. Van Wyk. In 2004, with Volume 13, Lübbe was succeeded by Professor W. S. Boshoff of the Department of Old Testament (later the Department of Biblical and Ancient Studies) at Unisa. In 2007, with Volume 16, Dr S. I. Cronjé became co-editor.

Journal for Semitics publishes articles submitted by any scholar working in the fields of Semitic languages or ancient Near Eastern studies. It has also become a vehicle for

the publication of dedicated colloquia, conferences (such as the Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale 50, Septuagint Studies, Shir haShirim studies), and conference sessions in the fields of Hebrew language, culture, and historical linguistics.

Methodology

When evaluating textual data, content analysis is considered an appropriate approach (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). Stemler (2001) states that content analysis is a useful tool that can be used to examine trends and patterns that are present in documents.

Data for this research was retrieved from the South African Bibliographical and Information Network (SABINET) database (Sabinet, 2016). The database was accessed through Unisa Library’s online service. A search was carried out from the database using both the current volumes as well as the archived volumes of the journal. Once the data was extracted, it was then cleaned by two different coders. Certain articles were removed due to not fitting the research criteria, e.g., a conference report, a tribute, or an obituary. The final list consisted of 451 articles that were published in the *Journal for Semitics* (JSEM) between 1989 and 2015.

For the purpose of the thematic analysis of this research, that is, the identification of research themes and topics within the themes, each article was first coded according to the theme and then topics within these themes (see Table 1). The coding made use of pre-set codes which are often referred to as *a priori* codes. These codes were compiled and put forward by the two current editors of JSEM. In order to ensure validity of the coding, the two coders independently coded the articles according to the *a priori* codes. The reason for using two coders was to ensure that any coding discrepancy which could arise because of the overlap between research areas was identified and discussed and a consensus reached.

Table 1 lists the classification of the themes for the analysis as well as the topics within each theme.

Table 1: Coding of articles into themes and sub themes

Themes		Sub-themes
1 Semitic languages	1	Arabic
	2	Aramaic
	3	Hebrew
	4	Yiddish
	5	Syriac
	6	Ugaritic
	7	Akkadian
	8	Amarna letters

	9	Qumran/Dead Sea Scrolls
	10	Other languages – Egyptian, Sumerian, Hittite, Ethiopian
	11	Cognitive linguistics
2 Old Testament (Hebrew Bible)	1	Exegesis
	2	Hermeneutics
	3	History
	4	Septuagint
3 Judaica	1	Exegesis
	2	Hermeneutics
	3	History
	4	Philosophy
4 Islamic studies	1	Qur`an studies
	2	Hermeneutics
	3	History
5 Ancient Near Eastern studies	1	Iconography
	2	History
	3	Religion
	4	Geography
	5	Fauna and flora
	6	Literature
6 Archaeology	1	Excavations/Reports
	2	Iconography
	3	Other
7 History of religion		
8 Translation studies	1	Lexicography
	2	Other
9 Computer-aided interpretation		
10 Other	1	Biography
	2	Buddhism
	3	Hare Krishna
	4	Education

Cohen's kappa statistic, κ , is a measure of agreement between categorical variables X and Y. It is a statistic which measures inter-rater agreement for qualitative (categorical) items. For example, kappa can be used to compare the ability of different raters to classify subjects into one of several groups (Viera and Garret, 2005). Ten percent of the articles were randomly selected in order to evaluate the inter-rater agreement using Cohen's kappa (κ) statistical measure (Cohen, 1960). Fleiss (1981) provided guidelines for characterising kappas as follows:

Table 2: Fleiss’s guidelines for kappa effect

kappa	Magnitude of agreement
<0.40	Poor
0.40 – 0.75	Fair to good
>0.75	Excellent

Adapted from Fleiss (1981)

The coding consistency between the two coders was $\kappa = 0.821$ and therefore the inter-rater reliability can be accepted as excellent for the coding of the articles according to the classification in Table 1.

Results

Results for this research are reported in descriptive tables, frequency statistics, and graphs. The articles were analysed descriptively in order to present the basic features of the data, and, together with graphical displays, they describe and summarise the data in meaningful ways in order to find patterns that emerge from the data (Babbie, 2009).

The frequency of a data value is the number of times the variable occurs and for this study the frequency counts are presented in frequency distribution tables or are displayed graphically. The frequency tables show the actual number of observations, the percentage of the observations, and a cumulative frequency. The cumulative frequency is calculated by adding together the sum of all the previous frequencies up to the current point.

The analysis of the articles is reported under the following headings:

Table 3: Data analysis

Heading
Analysis of articles per year
Analysis of articles per institution
Analysis of articles per individual authors
Analysis of articles according to themes
Analysis of articles according to sub themes

Articles Per Year

The first area of analysis was to determine the actual number of articles that were published in each year since the inception of the journal. Figures 1 and 2 show the frequency counts of articles, and, for ease of visual acceptance, the years have been reported in two different graphs. The first time-period in Figure 1 is from 1989 to 2003 and Figure 2 displays the results from 2004 to 2015. A linear trend line has been

included in each graph to indicate whether there has been an increase or decrease in the number of articles published or whether they have remained at a steady rate.

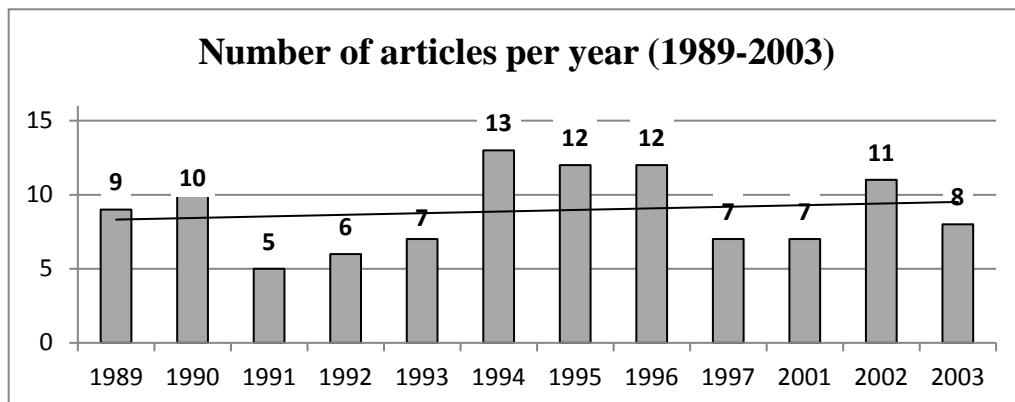


Figure 1: Number of articles per year 1989 to 2003

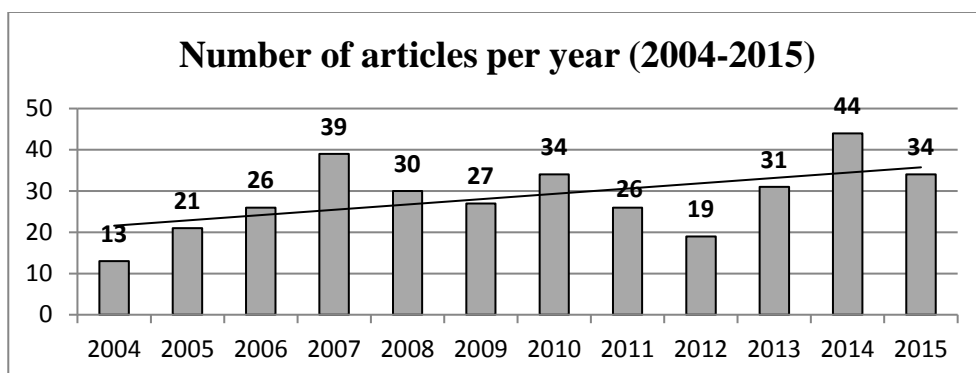


Figure 2: Number of articles per year 2004 to 2014

Figure 1, which shows the number of articles published each year from 1989 to 2003, shows a fairly static trend line. Figure 2 shows that since 2004 the number of articles has been increasing steadily per year except in the case of 2012. In 2007, 39 articles were published, and 2014 produced the highest number of articles (44). The increased number of articles was because special editions of the journal were published in those years. The average number of articles per year from 2004 to 2015 was 30, which is a substantial increase from the average number of articles from 1989 to 2003 which was only nine. From the outset, the journal was published with two issues per volume. During the second half of the 1990s publication of the journal fell behind the date of the volume. This situation was eventually resolved by the publication of Volume 9 (1997) as a single issue during 2000 with seven articles, and Volume 10 (1998–2001) as a single

issue in 2001, also with seven articles. Volume 16, published in 2007, was an exception to the rule of two issues per volume. A special third issue was published with 10 papers read at the 50th Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale held in Skukuza during 2004.

Articles Per Institution

Table 4: Articles by affiliation

Institution	No of articles	Frequency %	Cumulative %
University of South Africa (Unisa)	138	30.5	30.5
Free State (FS)	59	13.1	43.6
North-West University (NWU)	55	12.2	55.8
University of Pretoria (UP)	51	11.3	67.1
University of Stellenbosch (SUN)	41	9.1	76.2
International institutions/Other/Unknown	36	8.0	84.2
University of Johannesburg (UJ)	33	7.3	91.5
Private/other/unknown	19	4.2	95.7
University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN)	14	3.1	98.8
University of the Witwatersrand (Wits)	3	0.7	99.5
Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU)	1	0.2	99.7
University of the Western Cape (UWC)	1	0.2	100

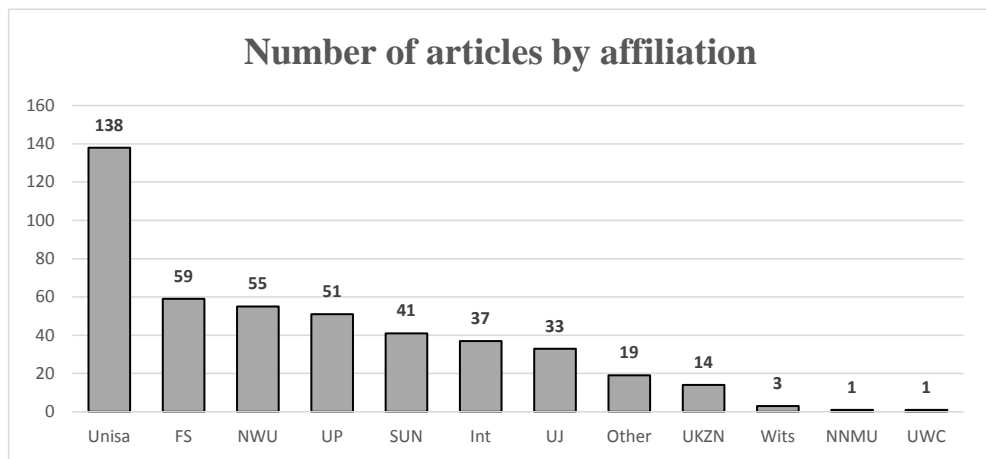


Figure 3: Articles per institution

Table 4 and Figure 3 indicate that Unisa has produced the highest number of articles (n = 138) over the 25 volumes of the journal's publication, which is more than double

the number of articles from the second-ranking institution, the University of the Free State. The University of the Free State (FS), North-West University (NWU), and the University of Pretoria (UP) have published a similar number of articles. It is interesting to note that there have only been two publications from the University of Cape Town since 2010 despite the fact they do have a department of religious studies. Their emphasis, however, seems to be on contemporary Islamic studies and comparative religions (University of Cape Town, 2016). It is also necessary to mention that “international scholars” refers to scholars unaffiliated with a South African university. Several international scholars also published as research associates of South African universities and their contributions are reflected under the relevant universities.

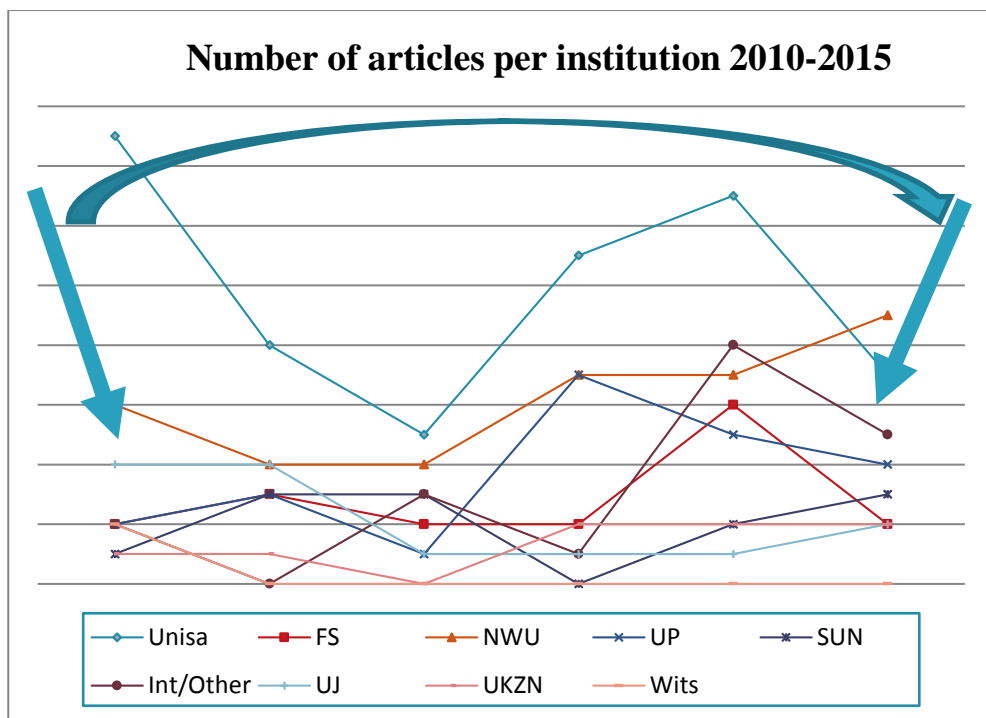


Figure 4: Number of articles by institution from 2010-2015

Figure 4 shows the number of articles from each institution from 2010 to 2015. This graph reveals a number of interesting facts. First, as expected, Unisa has consistently provided the highest number of published articles per year except in 2015, when NWU had nine articles compared to the seven from Unisa. In addition, it clearly indicates that the number of articles from international authors jumped substantially from 2013 to 2014. This can be attributed to the special edition of the journal in 2014 which attracted

an increased number of submissions from international institutions. This increased trend in international articles has continued into 2015.

It is more appropriate to look at the percentage of articles published by each institution rather than the raw numbers, as the total number of articles from each year differs substantially (see figures 1 and 2).

Table 5: Percentage of articles from each institution from 2010 to 2015

Year	Unisa	FS	NWU	UP	SUN	Int/other	UJ	UKZN	Wits	Total
2010	44.1	5.9	17.6	5.9	2.9	5.9	11.8	2.9	2.9	100
2011	30.8	11.5	15.4	11.5	11.5	0	15.4	3.8	0	100
2012	27.8	5.6	22.2	5.6	16.7	16.7	5.6	0	0	100
2013	36.7	6.7	23.3	23.3	0	0	3.3	6.7	0	100
2014	29.5	13.6	15.9	11.4	4.5	18.2	2.3	4.5	0	100
2015	21.9	6.3	28.1	12.5	9.4	9.4	6.3	6.3	0	100

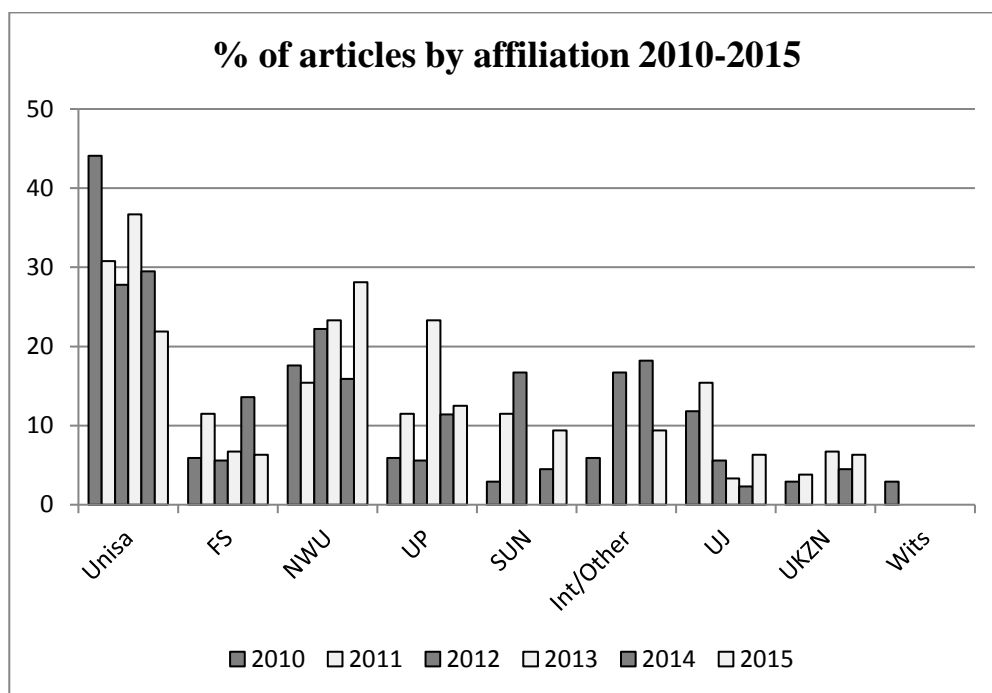


Figure 5: Percentage of articles by affiliation 2010 to 2015

Table 5 provides information regarding the percentage of articles that have been published from 2010 to 2015 by authors from each institution and is graphically presented in Figure 5.

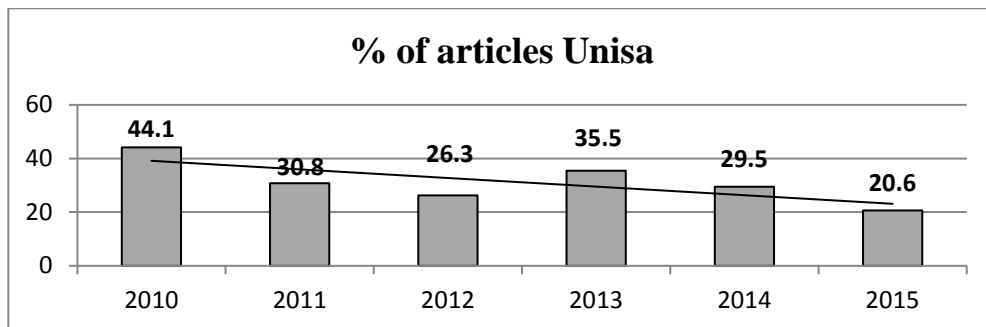


Figure 6: Percentage of total articles from Unisa

Figure 6 indicates that the percentage of articles that have been published by authors from Unisa have shown a downward trend since 2010. This is in alignment with the policy of South Africa’s Department of Higher Education (DHET) which limits the number of articles that can be published by authors of an institution in any one issue to 25 percent. The other 75 percent therefore need to be authored by researchers not affiliated to Unisa. Historically most of the articles that were published in JSEM were written by Unisa staff which is not surprising since Unisa has the largest contingent of scholars in the fields of biblical and ancient Near Eastern studies in South Africa and employs the most academic staff of all the South African universities (CHET, 2013). Due to these restrictions, authors from other universities are increasing their publications in JSEM, most notably from North West University (see Figure 7).

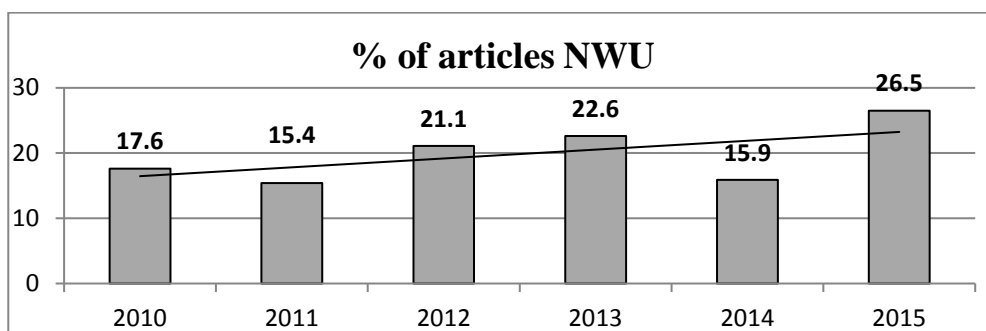


Figure 7: Percentage of articles from North-West University

The trend line for articles published from NWU shows an upward movement. In 2015, for the first time, NWU produced the most articles, overtaking Unisa. The DHET has a policy of financially rewarding institutions for publications in journals they accredit.

Institutions are therefore contracting researchers to write articles in order to bolster their research outputs, the effect which can be seen in the output of universities with a smaller full-time staff component.

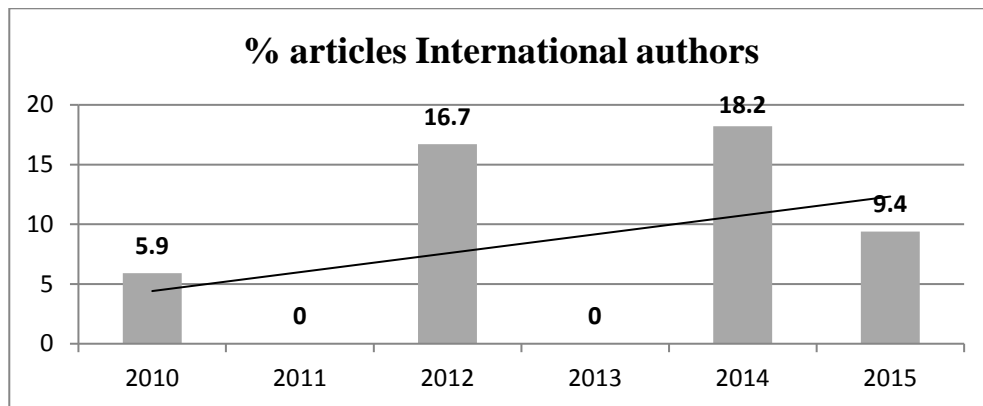


Figure 8: Percentage of articles from international/other authors

Figure 8 indicates that although the trend line shows an increase in publications since 2010 for international authors, there does not seem to be consistency. In some years (such as 2011 and 2013) there were no international publications, while in 2012 and 2014 almost 20 percent of the publications were written by international authors.

The other institutions, besides the three that have been graphically presented above, show an erratic dispersion of the number of articles published. In most of these cases, this tendency is due to the small number of authors affiliated to these institutions. In order to illustrate this more effectively, Table 6 shows the weighted publication for each institution based on the number of active authors over the full 25-year period.

Table 6: Weighted number of publications by institution

Institution	No of articles	No of authors	Weighted average
Unisa	138	50	2.8
FS	59	21	2.8
NWU	55	18	3.1
UP	51	30	1.7
SUN	41	23	1.9
INT	37	35	1.1
UJ	33	11	3.0

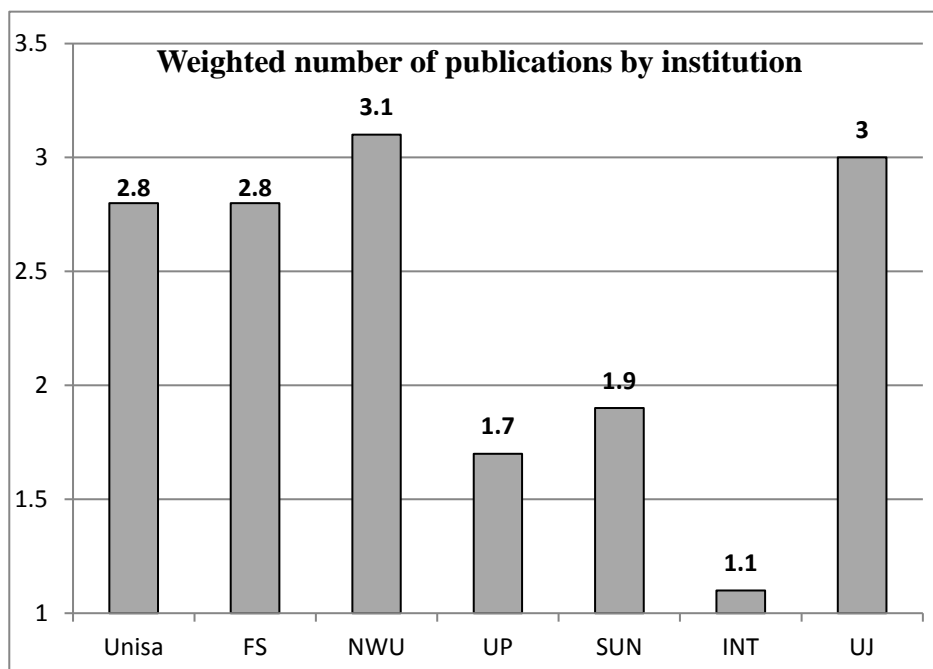


Figure 9: Weighted number of publications by institution

Figure 9 illustrates the significant difference between the weighted average number of publications per institution. This means that institutions such as NWU and UJ have produced more publications from fewer authors. If these authors are no longer writing articles for various reasons (e.g., retirement, changing faculties, or moving to another university), this will affect the level of publications from these institutions. From Figure 9 it can also be seen that most of the international authors have only published one article in JSEM.

Articles Per Individual Author

Two hundred and thirteen (213) authors have contributed to the 25 volumes of the journal which indicates an average of 2.1 articles per author ($451/213=2.1$). Some authors have written multiple articles spanning many years. Figure 10 shows the highest producers of articles in the journal and the years in which they published.

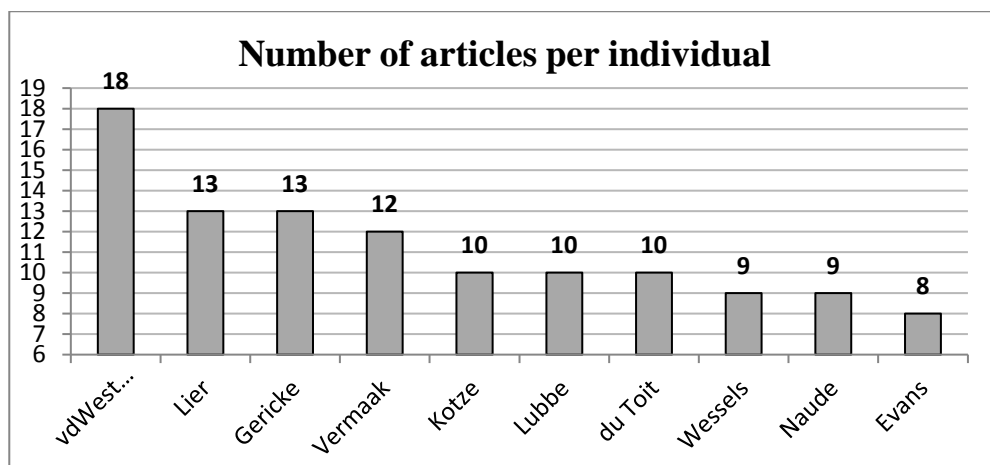


Figure 10: Articles per individual

Figure 10 indicates that the highest number of articles per individual author is 18, written by Professor J. P. J. van der Westhuizen, who was a professor of Semitic languages at Unisa. This is followed by Dr G. Lier from the University of Johannesburg and Dr J. Gericke from North-West University. Other authors who have contributed a significant number of articles are Professor P.S. Vermaak (12), Dr Z. Kotze (10), Professor J. Lübbe (10), Dr J. du Toit (10), Professor W. J. Wessels (9), Professor J.A. Naudé (8), and Dr A. Evans (8). These figures do not take into account any additional articles that these authors might have co-authored with other colleagues or students.

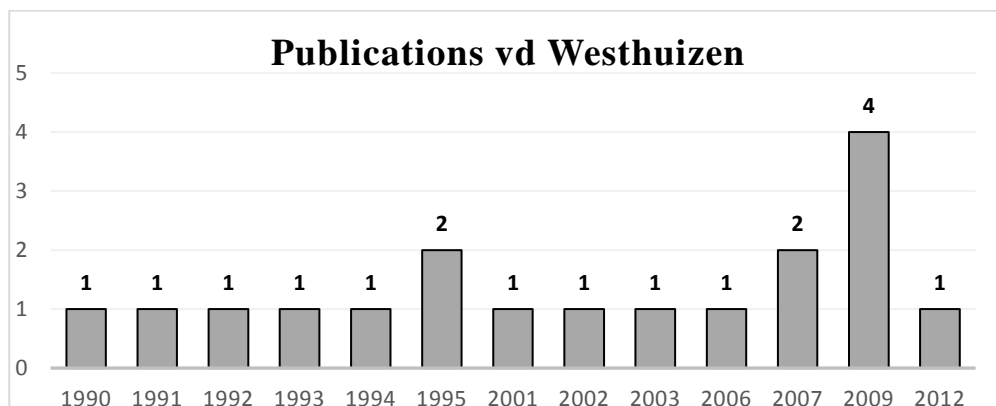


Figure 11: Analysis of articles by Professor van der Westhuizen

Figure 11 shows the publication history of Professor van der Westhuizen, the author who has published the most articles. It shows that he published 18 articles between 1990 and 2012. In 2009, Professor van der Westhuizen published four articles. It is interesting to note, however, that he did not publish any articles for the years 1996 to 2000. Another

finding is that 17 of the 18 articles published by Professor van der Westhuizen address the theme of Semitic languages. The only other author who has published 3 or more articles in a single year is Dr G. Lier. Figure 10 above ranks the most prolific authors and figures 11 to 15 depict graphically the number of articles and the years in which the first five ranked authors have published.

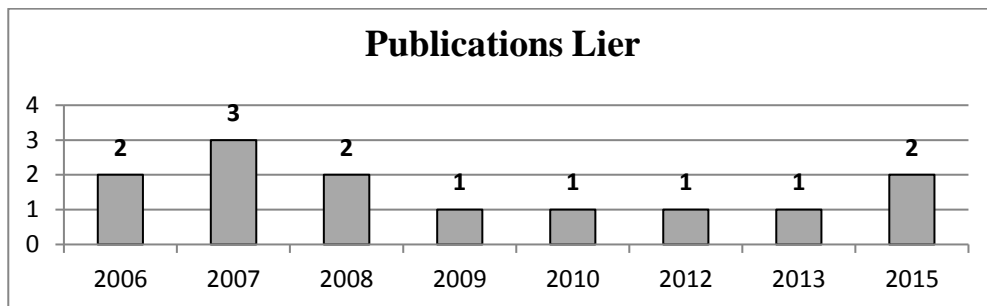


Figure 12: Analysis of articles by Dr G. Lier

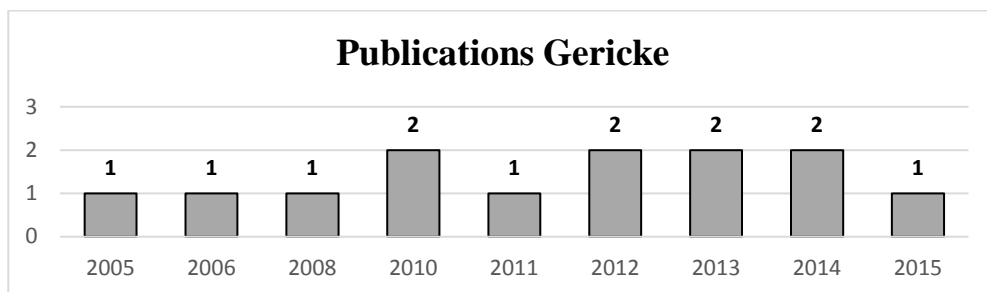


Figure 13: Analysis of articles by Professor J. Gericke

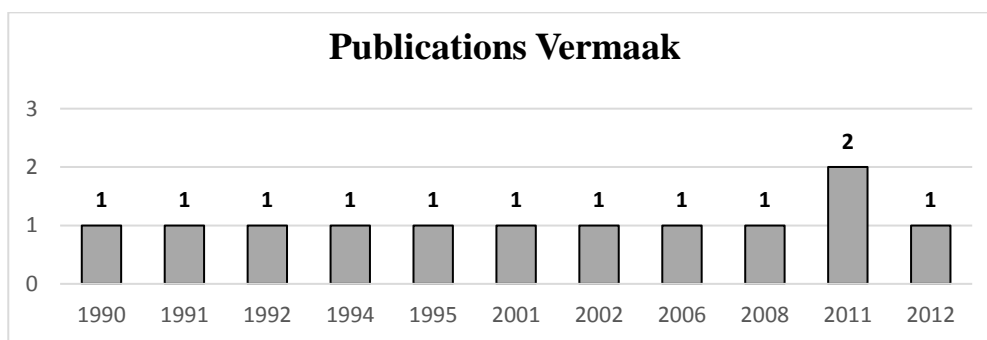


Figure 14: Analysis of articles by Professor S. Vermaak

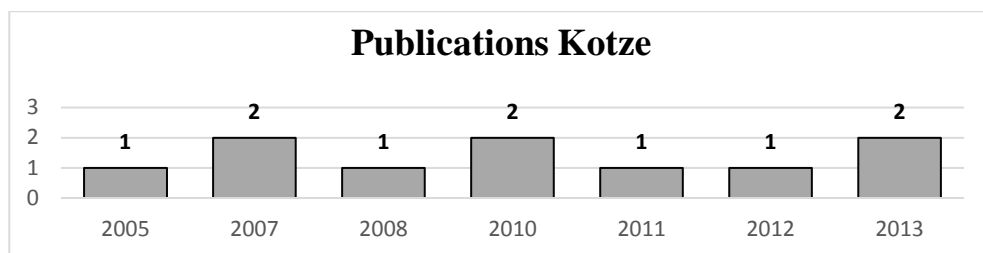


Figure 15: Analysis of articles by Dr Z. Kotze

Articles According to Themes

For the purpose of this analysis, each article was coded according to themes that were identified by the two current editors of the journal. Each theme was further coded into sub-themes or topics (see Table 1).

Table 7: Frequency of themes

	Theme	No. of articles	%	Cumulative %
1	Semitic languages	77	17.1	17.1
2	Old Testament (Hebrew Bible)	212	47.0	64.1
3	Judaica	27	6.0	70.1
4	Islamic studies	22	4.9	75.0
5	Ancient Near Eastern studies	59	13.1	88.1
6	Archaeology	12	2.7	90.8
7	History of religion	5	1.1	91.9
8	Translation studies	28	6.2	98.1
9	Computer aided interpretation	1	0.2	98.3
10	Other	8	1.7	100.0
	Total	451	100.0	

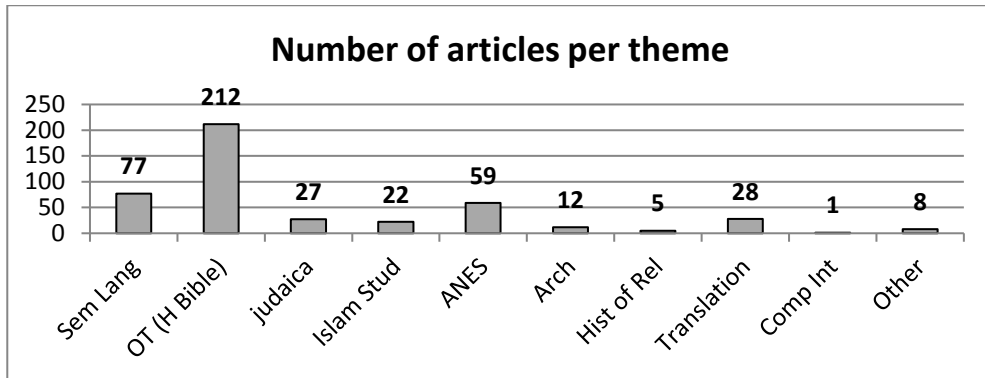


Figure 16: Number of articles published per theme

Figure 16 shows that the most common theme for articles in JSEM has been Old Testament (Hebrew Bible), which accounts for almost half of the published articles (47 percent). Just over 17 percent of the articles address the theme of Semitic languages and around 13 percent of the articles fall under the theme of ancient and Near Eastern studies.

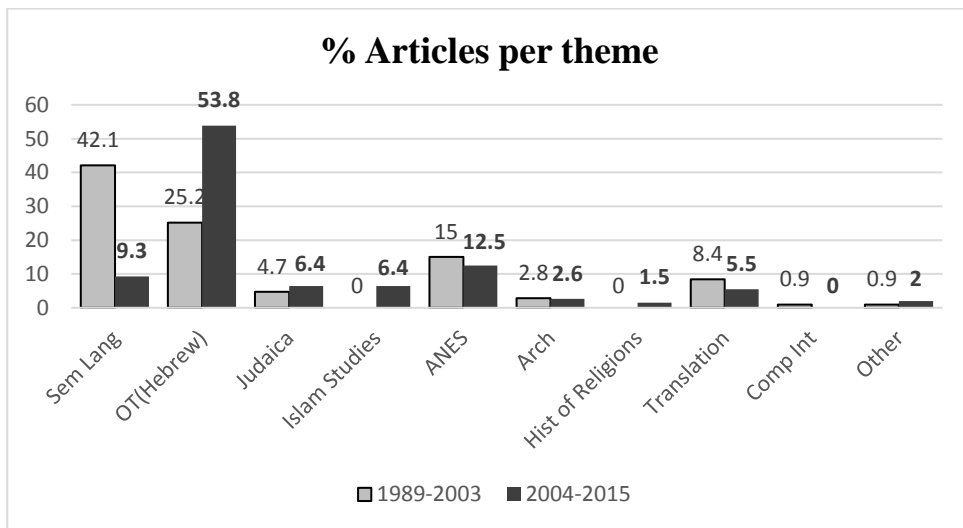


Figure 17: Percentage of articles published per theme

Figure 17 shows the percentage of articles published under each theme for the two time periods, 1989 to 2003 and 2004 to 2015. It shows that the percentage of each theme has remained fairly consistent over the two time periods except in the case of Semitic languages and Old Testament (Hebrew Bible). Up until 2003, the theme of Semitic languages accounted for just over 42 percent of the total publications, while the theme

of Old Testament (Hebrew Bible) enjoyed just over 25 percent of the publications. For the period 2004 to 2015, this picture changed substantially with the reverse effect being noted. Semitic language publications dropped from 42.1 percent to 9.3 percent and Old Testament (Hebrew Bible) increased from 25.2 percent to 53.8 percent of the total publications. This is illustrated in figures 21 and 22 below.

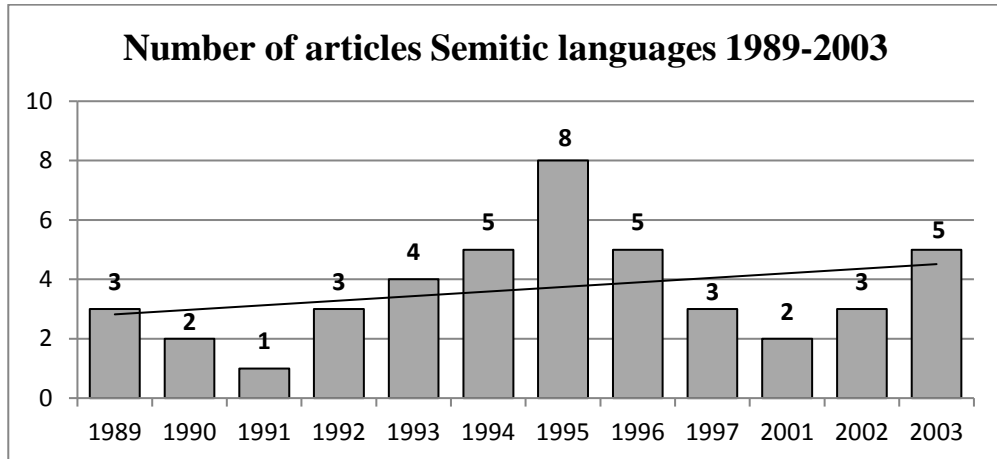


Figure 18: Semitic languages 1989 to 2003

The trend line for the period 1989 to 2003 shows a fairly static and even number of articles. 1995 saw the highest number of articles and there were no articles on Semitic languages in the years 1998, 1999, and 2000 due to the fact that the journal was not published in these years.

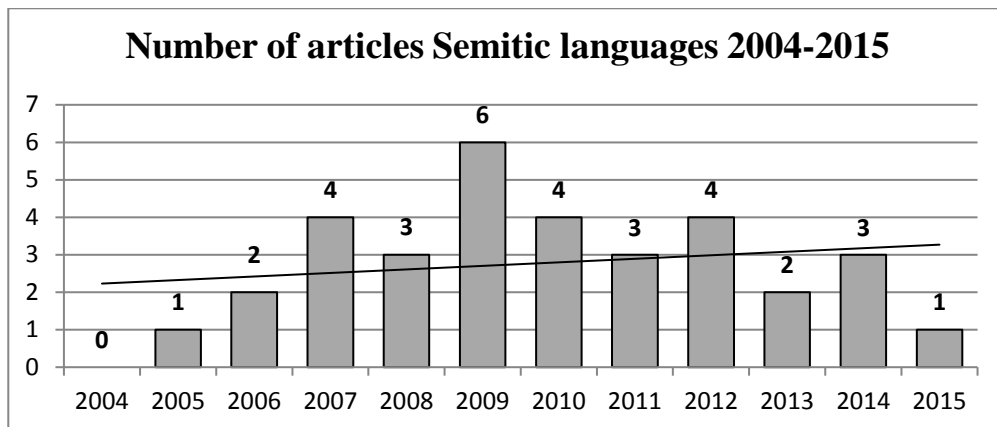


Figure 19: Semitic languages 2004 to 2015

For the period 2004 to 2015, the trend is once again rather static, showing a slight increase over the years. However, this needs to be looked at in terms of the overall number of publications in those years. Therefore, although the number of publications in Semitic languages remained fairly constant, the percentage that they represent has dropped substantially. It would be prudent to take note of the fact that Professor van der Westhuizen (see Figure 11) authored 17 articles out of the total of 77 articles under the theme of Semitic languages over a long time-span, and that he has now retired. This could indicate that Semitic languages could show a further decrease in the number of publications in the future.

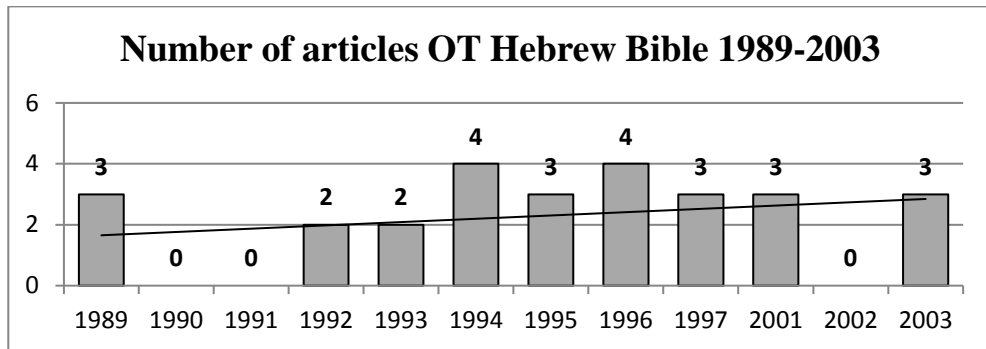


Figure 20: Old Testament Hebrew Bible

For the period 1989 to 2003, the number of articles on the theme of the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible) ranged between nil and four with no one year being substantially different to the others, except in the case of 1990, 1992, and 2002, during which no articles were published.

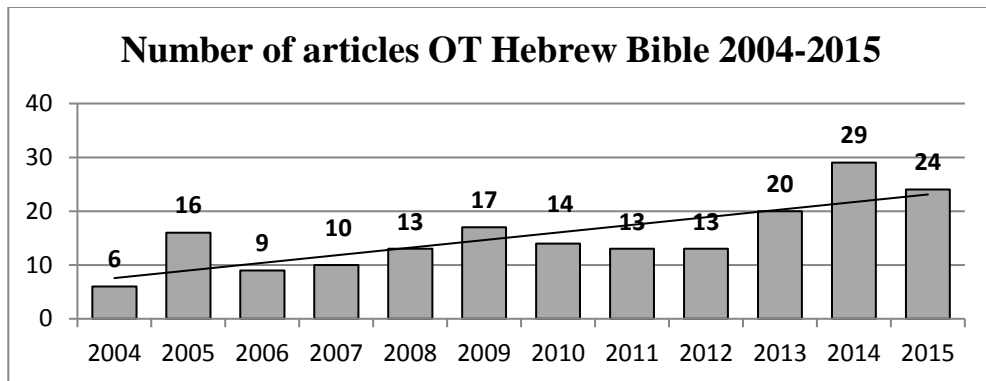


Figure 21: Number of articles published on theme of Old Testament/Hebrew Bible 2004–2015

Figure 21 indicates that there has been a steady increase in the number of Old Testament (Hebrew Bible) articles, particularly since 2013. In 2014 there were 29 articles out of 44 (66 percent) that addressed this theme.

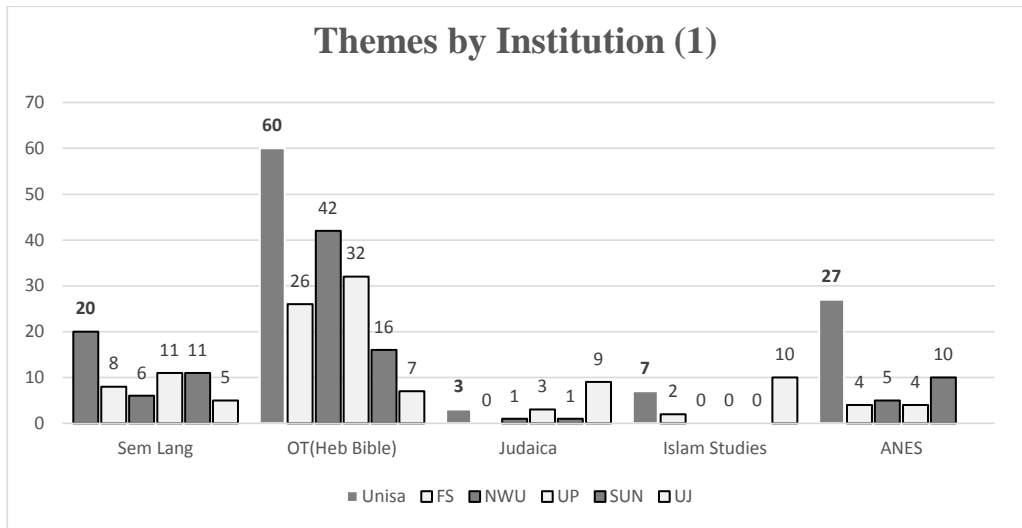


Figure 22: Themes by institution (1)

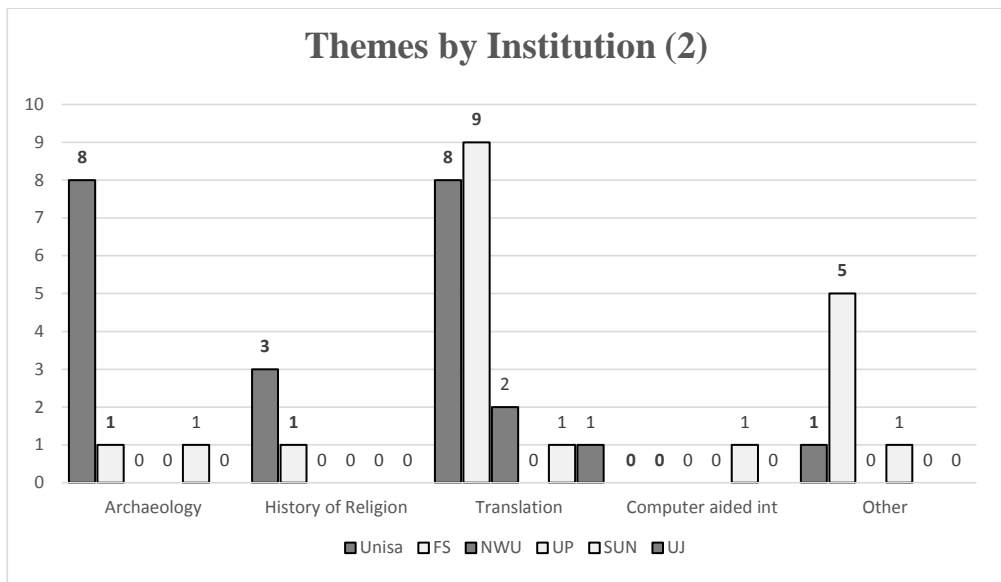


Figure 23: Themes by institution (2)

Figures 22 and 23 clearly display the trend that all the institutions publish most prolifically under the theme of Old Testament (Hebrew Bible). These figures also show that Unisa has the most publications under the theme Ancient and Near Eastern studies. Of the 27 articles that have been published under this theme, Professor S. Vermaak (Unisa) authored 11.

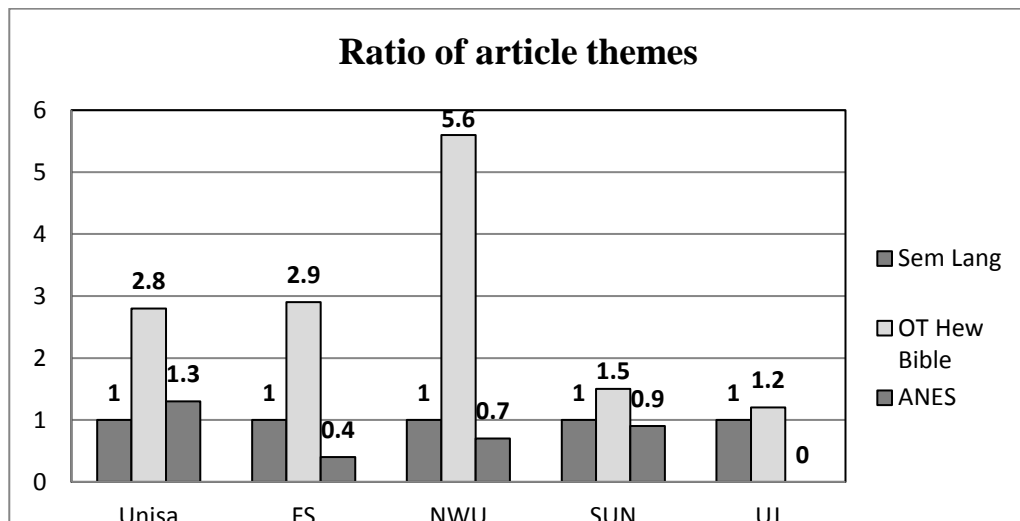


Figure 24: Ratio of themes

Figure 24 shows the ratio of the three top themes (Semitic languages, OT (Hebrew Bible), and ancient Near Eastern studies) to each other, according to the various institutions. Using Semitic languages as the base, it shows that for each Semitic language article that was published by Unisa, there were 2.8 as many Old Testament articles and 1.3 times as many ANES articles. The most interesting finding from this graph (Figure 24) is the ratios from the authors at NWU. For each Semitic language article written by an author from NWU, there have been 5.6 articles addressing the theme of Old Testament (Hebrew Bible). It would therefore be prudent to take note of this finding in the light of the fact that NWU is currently the institution with the highest number of articles being published.

Another finding from figure 24 shows that the theme of ANES is being approached mainly by authors from Unisa and SUN. There have been no articles from UJ on this theme and very few from FS.

Topics Within Themes (Sub-themes)

Each of the ten themes that have been discussed thus far has been broken down further into sub-themes or topics within the theme (see Table 1). The three themes with the

highest number of publications, Semitic languages, OT (Hebrew Bible), and ANES and their sub-themes are analysed in figures 25, 26, and 27.

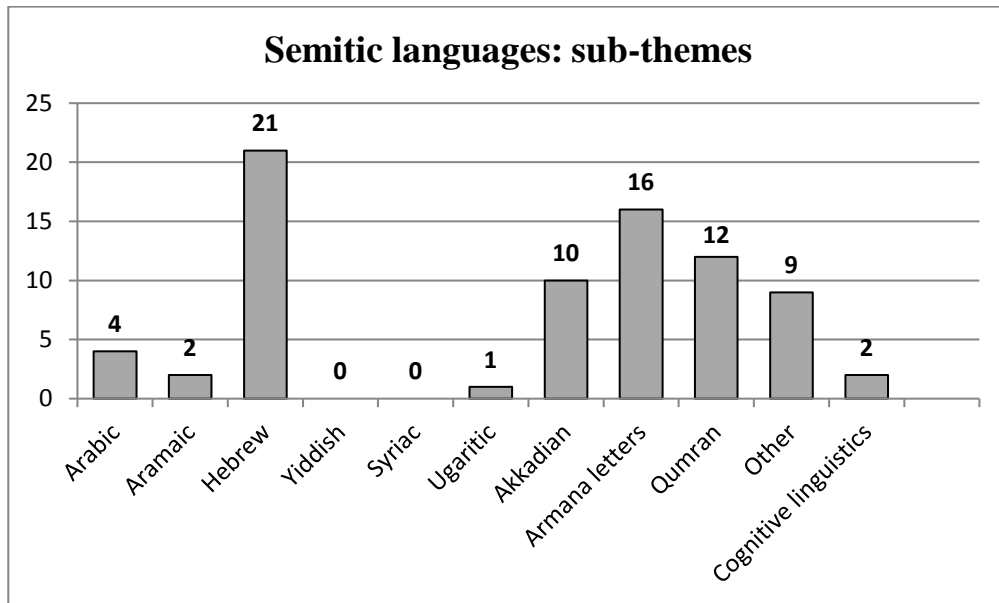


Figure 25: Semitic languages topics

The most popular topic under Semitic languages is Hebrew, followed by the Armana letters. There have been no articles written on Yiddish and the Syriac languages. All the articles on the Armana letters were authored by Professor van der Westhuizen.

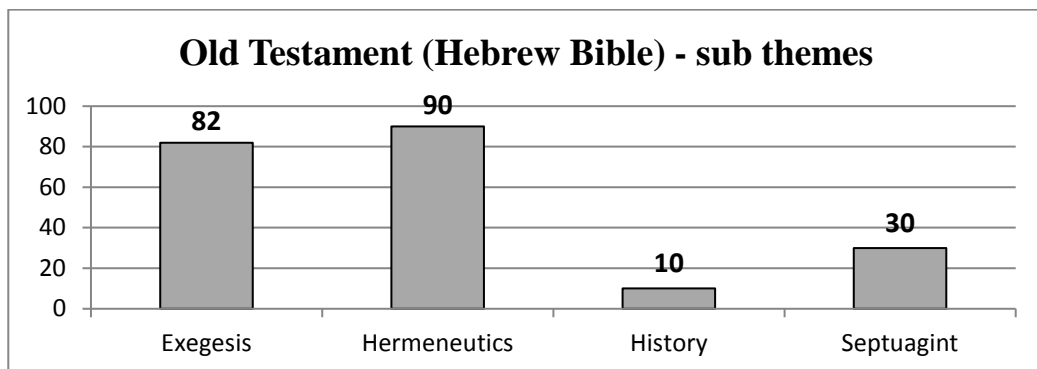


Figure 26: Old Testament (Hebrew Bible) topics

There is an almost even split of the number of articles written under the theme of Old Testament (Hebrew Bible) between the topics of exegesis (focusing on textual matters) and hermeneutics (interpretation of texts) (n=82 and 90 respectively). Only 10 articles have been published on the history of the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible).

The ratio of hermeneutical articles to those focussed on exegesis under the theme of Judaica differs from that in the theme the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible). In this case, there are almost three times as many articles on hermeneutics. The sub-themes of Qur'an studies, hermeneutics, and history all have a similar number of articles that have been published.

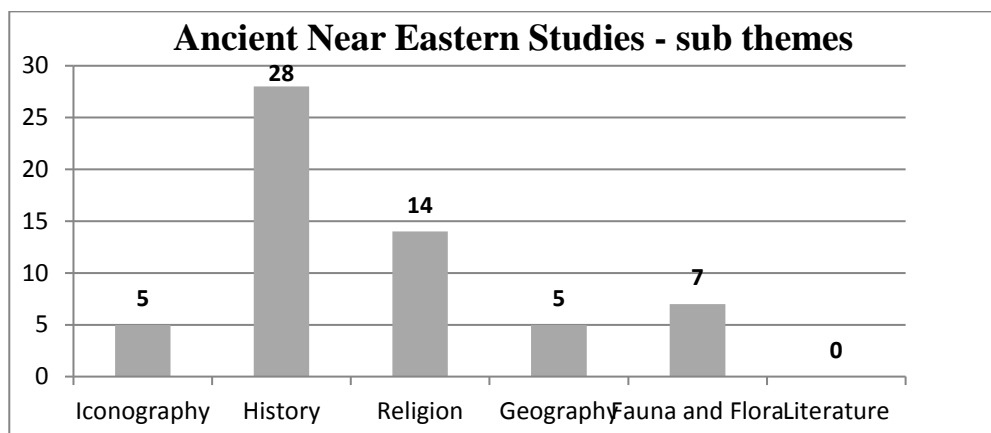


Figure 27: Ancient Near Eastern Studies: sub-themes

The sub-theme for Ancient Near Eastern Studies that has attracted the highest number of publications is that of the history of the ancient Near East which accounts for almost half of the publications. The religions of the ancient Near East constitute almost a quarter of the publications, while the other sub-themes have featured in only a small number of publications.

Discussion

This longitudinal overview brought to the fore some valuable insights regarding topics, trends, and shifts. In terms of articles per year, there is a steady increase. This is in line with the pressure on academics to “publish or perish”, fuelled by their institutions which are seeking research outputs for the sake of status and income. The number of articles published is part of the performance indicators of academic staff, and they therefore heed the call.

In terms of articles per institution, there have also been shifts over time. It is to be expected that the institutions with the highest number of academic staff will produce the

most articles. Institutions are under pressure to increase their research output. The peculiar situation in South Africa, where universities are funded by the state for articles published in reputable and accredited journals, is perhaps the reason behind this. In some cases, temporary or retired staff are hired to publish articles, which has led to some smaller universities surpassing the outputs of larger institutions. The peculiar South African situation where universities are funded by the state for articles published in reputable and accredited journals, is the reason behind this.

An additional motivation is the stipulation by the state that only 25 percent of articles per published issue may originate from one university, resulting in a more even spread of articles from different institutions. The reason for this stipulation is probably to prevent an institution from creating an in-house journal purely for the sake of article publication. However, the rigid enforcement of this rule does not take into account the reality of faculty size. A university with a staff component four times that of another still may only publish 25 percent of articles in a particular volume, thereby disadvantaging the institution as well as the academics. A better solution would be to link faculty size to the allowed percentage of articles. This can be done easily by including the faculty size figures in each volume, for the administrators to take note of.

In terms of articles per individual author, the common human reality is that some people are more prolific authors than others. This will always be a reality. However, these authors are now also being disadvantaged and hampered by the rigid system of allowed percentages. They have to look for publishing space elsewhere, which is not easy in the light of a worldwide shortage of space for articles. This reality is one of the prime causes for the existence of predatory journals, apart from the fact that such journals exist simply to make a profit. If reputable journals can publish good articles without being subjected to one-dimensional rules and regulations, this would support instead of stifle good academic research.

In terms of articles analysed according to themes and sub-themes, a shift can be seen to the publication of more articles with an Old Testament theme. This is interesting, because there are dedicated, reputable and accredited Old Testament journals available in and outside of South Africa. This is a factor to be addressed in a subsequent article but suffice to say something in the editorial policy and practice of JSEM makes it a journal of choice, in comparison with other journals that do not attract as many articles.

The issue of themes and sub-themes is of such importance that a separate article is necessary to attend to this aspect. This will follow shortly.

To conclude, it suffices to say that a longitudinal overview of research published in one journal does provide valuable insights. Research seemingly driven by atomistic interests of researchers does aggregate into meandering streams linked to external forces and influences, even though still maintaining academic freedom of some sort.

The most important insight is, however, that managerial and regulatory interventions, even though probably well-meant, are impacting negatively on good research outputs in the discipline. Rules are never able to address and cover a complex reality and should therefore be open to inputs by the people working at ground-level in the field.

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