

# Anaphora in Biblical Hebrew: A Generative Perspective

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## Abstract

Anaphora, that is, backwards-referring relations, are well-known in language and include such common items as a variety of pro-forms (it, that, myself, each other) and even adverbs (so). Lesser studied are forward-referring relations, i.e., cataphora. Biblical Hebrew utilises a variety of anaphoric relations, though it lacks a true reflexive anaphor. This study will introduce the investigation of anaphora from a generative syntactic perspective, then proceed to a survey of the features of Biblical Hebrew anaphora, and finally conclude with a discussion of anaphoric complexities that require future attention.

**Keywords:** Biblical Hebrew; anaphora; reflexives; reciprocals; null object anaphora; backwards anaphora; generative syntax

## Introduction

The Greek noun ἀναφορά, derived from the verb ἀναφέρω refers to the activity of “carrying up, carrying back,” or the “reference of a thing to a standard” (Liddell and Scott 1996, 125). The most common items typically used in anaphoric relationship with another item (called the antecedent) are pronouns, as in (1) and (2).

(1) *Benjamin<sub>i</sub>* thought that *he<sub>i</sub>* looked dapper.

(2) *Noah<sub>i</sub>* saw *himself<sub>i</sub>* in the mirror.

The pronoun *he* in (1) is interpreted as coreferential and thus anaphorically linked with Benjamin, the antecedent (coindexation by the *i* subscripts indicate this link). The reflexive anaphor *himself* in (2) presents an important contrast with *he* in (1), since their distribution appears to be complementary: taking Benjamin as the antecedent in both cases, *himself* is not grammatical in (1) while *he* is not grammatical in (2).



For over 50 years, research into the syntax and semantics of anaphoric relations has been central to linguistic inquiry. This has been the case because anaphora is a prime example of syntax constraining semantic interpretation:

the sensitivity of certain anaphoric effects to sentence internal phrasal properties ... is part of the most compelling justification for the claim that the language faculty does not reduce to a generalized conceptual component of intelligence as it interacts with the pragmatic requirements of communication. Thus the existence of rather specific interpretive effects conditioned by syntax provides one of the foremost arguments for the existence of an innate linguistic capacity independent of other forms of cognitive ability. For reasons such as these, the syntactically determined pattern of anaphora appears to be a portal into the internal architecture of the human linguistic faculty. Unless we take the principles involved to lack interaction with the rest of grammar, the grammar of anaphora must reflect the deeper properties of *universal grammar*. (Safir 2004, 4)

A vast amount of research has thus focused on identifying the syntactic principles that dictate the complementary distribution between reflexive and non-reflexive pronouns, illustrated again in (3) and (4), leading in the 1980s to the development of binding theory in the early government and binding framework (Haegeman 1994, 224).

(3) Avigayil<sub>i</sub> hurt herself<sub>i</sub>.

(4) Avigayil<sub>i</sub> hurt her<sub>\*i/j</sub>.

Whereas the reflexive anaphor *herself* in (3) requires Avigayil to be its antecedent, the opposite is true of the pronoun in (4): it is not acceptable if *her* is coreferential with Avigayil. What emerged from this contrast (as well as other contrasts with referential nouns and types of non-overt items) was a paradigm of noun phrase (NP) types (5), based on the primitive features  $\pm$ pronominal and  $\pm$ anaphor (Haegeman 1994, 453), as well as the syntactic conditions that account for their appearance.

(5) The generative paradigm of NP types

	Overt	Non-overt
[+Anaphor, -Pronominal]	reflexives, reciprocals	NP-trace
[-Anaphor, +Pronominal]	pronouns	<i>pro</i>
[-Anaphor, -Pronominal]	<i>r</i> -expressions	<i>wh</i> -trace
[+Anaphor, +Pronominal]	-	PRO

First, note that in this generative paradigm, pronouns and anaphors are distinct: anaphors are limited to reflexives and reciprocals. Second, the distribution of the overt NPs was formulated in terms of three principles: *Binding Conditions A, B, and C*, given in (6):

## (6) Binding Conditions<sup>1</sup>

A: an anaphor must be bound in a local domain

B: a pronoun must be free in a local domain

C: a r(eferring)-expression must be free everywhere

Condition C is uncontroversial and disallows any antecedent for NPs that are neither anaphors nor pronouns, i.e., referential nouns. According to Condition A, the binding constituent for anaphors is the antecedent, which for reflexive and reciprocals must be within the same immediate clause. Condition B, in contrast, specifies that a pronoun's antecedent cannot bind it within the same immediate clause; this accounts for the fact that *her* cannot be bound by *Avigayil* in (4), but *Avigayil* can be the antecedent for *her* in a non-local configuration, such as the subordinate clause in (7) (see also example (1) above).

(7) *Avigayil*<sub>i</sub> thinks that *she*<sub>i</sub> will become a great novelist.

This introduction to anaphora is necessarily brief and incomplete; the literature on the topic is enormous and the issues are complex (e.g., the binding conditions are no longer taken to be accurate since a number of languages exhibit non-conforming patterns; see Huang 2000, 17–38; 2006; Safir 2004, 8–15). Yet, one salient observation emerges from even these few examples. There is a narrow approach to anaphora that addresses the syntactic constraints on anaphors (reflexives and reciprocals) versus personal pronouns within the phrase structure of the immediate clause, and there is a broader approach to anaphora that addresses non-local relationships between personal pronouns (as well as non-referential NPs, such as epithets and similar co-referential items) and their antecedents. The latter, broader phenomena are sometimes referred to as discourse anaphora (Huang 2000, 202–03). Non-local anaphoric relationships have not been a central focus of the generative study, leaving open fascinating questions about the mechanism by which a pronoun is associated with its non-local antecedent, and how this differs from, for instance, how an elided constituent is associated to the ellipsis anchor.

For the study of anaphora in Biblical Hebrew (BH), the issues that appear most relevant are 1) the apparent gaps in BH's NP paradigm (i.e., a missing reflexive pronoun) and 2) how to account for the distribution of non-overt anaphoric items, that is, NP-trace and *pro* in the paradigm in (5). In this preliminary study of BH anaphora, I will set the stage

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1 *Binding* is the formalization of the relationship between an anaphor and its antecedent, specifically the link between the two items and the domain in which this link operates. Thus, A binds B if and only if (i) A c-commands B and (ii) A and B are coindexed (Haegeman 1994, 212). Relatedly, *c-command* is how the locality relationship of the binding domain has been defined: "A c-commands B if and only if A does not dominate B and every X that dominates A also dominates B" (Haegeman 1994, 147).

for future study by surveying the non-controversial features of anaphora in BH and then identifying complicating features that require future attention.

## Anaphora in Biblical Hebrew: An Initial Survey

The vast majority of anaphoric relations in BH are straightforward cases of discourse or non-local anaphora, well represented (8) and (9), both of which exhibit the anaphoric use of overt and non-overt personal pronouns across immediate clause boundaries.

(8) ותָּרָא הָאִשָּׁה ... ותִּקַּח מִפְּרִי וְתֹאכַל וְתַתֵּן גַּם לְאִישָׁהּ עִמָּהּ וַיֹּאכַל  
 “the woman saw ... and (she) took some of its [the tree’s] fruit and (she)  
 ate (it) and (she) gave (it) also to her husband with her and (he) ate (it)”  
 (Gen 3:6)

(9) וְאִיבָהּ | אֲשֵׁית בֵּינֶךָ וּבֵין הָאִשָּׁה וּבֵין זְרַעֲךָ וּבֵין זְרַעָהּ הִוא יִשׁוּפֶךָ רֹאשׁ וְאִתָּהּ תִּשׁוּפֶנּוּ  
 עֲקָב:  
 “Enmity I will set between you and the woman, between your seed and  
 hers; he will bruise you (on) the head and you will bruise him (on) the  
 heel” (Gen 3:15)

Example (8) begins with an overt NP subject, האשה “the woman”, which is then continued in successive clauses by non-overt *pro*; the next subject NP אישה “her husband” is also continued by *pro*. The rich finite verbal morphology of BH allows a pronominal syntactic subject to be unexpressed phonologically; languages like BH are referred to as a *pro-drop* or *null subject* languages (see Naudé 1993; 2013b; Holmstedt 2013).<sup>2</sup> Though BH verbs do not have any inflectional features matching the syntactic object, (8) clearly demonstrates that BH uses some mechanism to license non-overt objects. The use of null subjects and objects in (8) casts into relief the presence of both overt subject and object pronouns in (9) and raises the following questions: 1) what principle accounts for the distribution of overt versus non-overt pronouns, and 2) can one principle account for both the subject and object distribution?

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2 There are no examples of a null subject with a participial predicate in a non-relative clause. When the subject of a participial clause is pronominalized, it must then be spelled out phonologically, as in Gen 45:26 מִצְרַיִם וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוֹ לֵאמֹר עוֹד יֹסֵף חַי וְכִי־הוּא מִשְׁלַל בְּכָל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם “they told him: Joseph is still alive! Indeed, *he* is ruling over all the land of Egypt!”

Within relative clauses with a participial predicate, when the subject is *not* third person, the pronoun is always overt; when the subject *is* third person, there are only three exceptions out of 30 examples of a null subject in which the relative head is not also the subject of the participle within the relative (i.e., it is not a case of subject relativization): Gen 39:22; Isa 30:24; Eccl 8:14. If the subject of the participle within a relative clause is not coreferential with the relative head, the subject must be overt, whether nominal or pronominal, as in Exod 5:8 וְאֵת־מִתְפַּנֵּת הַלְּבָנִים אֲשֶׁר הֵם עֹשִׂים “the quantity of bricks that *they* were making.”

Though the relatively rich body of literature on discourse-pragmatic analysis/information structure in BH accounts for many phenomena in different ways and does not always agree (see Holmstedt 2009a; 2011; 2014 and literature cited within), on the motivation for using subject pronouns with morphologically rich finite verbs there is little disagreement: overt subject pronouns are used when the antecedent is associated with Topic or Focus (Holmstedt 2013, 266; also Kautzsch 1910, 437–43, Waltke and O’Connor 1990, 294; Joüon and Muraoka 2006, 505–11). Thus, the overt subject pronouns in (9), הוא and אתה, are used either to indicate Topic shift, from the woman’s seed (הוא) to the addressee, the serpent (אתה), or they may carry contrastive Focus marking. Although which reading is best for (9) is arguable, (10) and (11) present clearer examples of overt subject pronouns used to carry Topic and Focus, respectively.<sup>3</sup>

(10) אֶבְלֹי זָרִים בָּחוּ וְהוּא לֹא יָדַע (10)

“strangers will consume his strength, and *he* will not know (it)” (Hos 7:9).

(11) הֲלֹא הוּא אָמַר-לִי אֶחָתִי הִוא וְהִיא-גַם-הִוא אָמְרָה אֶחָתִי הוּא (11)

“did *he* not say to me ‘she is my sister’ and did not *she*, also she, say to me ‘he is my brother’” (Gen 20:5)

The use of הוא in (10) is transparently to signal a switch in syntactic agent, from *strangers* back to *Ephraim*, which had been the topic of the larger discourse (see v. 8). In (11), however, the 3ms pronoun הוא of the first clause followed by 3fs הוא (perpetual *ketiv*) in the second clause is undoubtedly to mark the antecedents of both with Focus.<sup>4</sup>

As a last point in this initial survey of basic anaphora, I will simply point out that anaphoric pronouns are typically coreferential or coindexed with the entity signified by the *r*-expression; this has been true of all the examples adduced so far. However, BH does allow the pronoun to refer back to abstract items, as in (12).

(12) אֲנִי יְהוָה הוּא שְׁמִי (12)

“I am Yhwh. *It* is my name” (Isa 42:8)

In this example, the antecedent for the pronoun הוא is the proper name יהוה, not the divine being the name signifies.

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3 On the non-Topic or Focus use of the subject pronoun in examples like Gen 24:54 וַיֵּאבְדוּ וַיִּשְׂתּוּ הוּא וְהָאֲנָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר-עִמּוֹ וַיֵּצֵא עוֹג מֶלֶךְ-בָּשָׁן הַבָּשָׁן לְקָרְאָתָנוּ הוּא וְכָל-עַמּוֹ לְמִלְחָמָה אֶדְרַעִי “Og, king of Bashan, came out toward us, he and all his people, for war at Edrei,” see Naudé (1999) and Holmstedt (2009b).

4 I take the Focus on each subject not to establish a contrast with each other, as is more typical, but to work together to establish a contrast with all other possible agents. In other words, Abimelech’s self-defence before God is that he is innocent and should not be punished because it was Abraham and Sarah themselves, and no one else, who made the claim that caused the problem. For elaboration, see Holmstedt (2014).

In summary, for the patterns discussed in this section, Biblical Hebrew anaphora is not atypical. It employs pronouns as discourse anaphors almost ubiquitously. Such pronouns are null when the syntactic features of the clause, specifically the inflectional features of the finite verb, are sufficient for full interpretation. In these finite verbal contexts, the pronoun is overtly manifested when it carries the discourse-pragmatic features of Topic or Focus. In non-finite verbal contexts, such as with participial clauses or null copula clauses, a pronominalized subject is not allowed to be phonologically null since an overt pronoun is necessary to identify the subject. These are the straightforward patterns of anaphora in BH; in the next section I will address the complicating patterns.

## Anaphora in Biblical Hebrew: Complicating Questions

Three aspects of anaphora in BH do not transparently fit the cross-linguistic patterns: reflexive anaphors, forward anaphora (also known as cataphora), and null complement anaphora. I will discuss each of these complexities below.

### Reflexive and Reciprocal Anaphora

In the generative paradigm of NP types, anaphors are distinguished from personal pronouns; whereas the latter represent their NP antecedents in a non-local domain, the former link to their antecedents in a local domain, that is, within the immediate clause. Anaphors fall into two categories: reflexives, which are used when the subject acts upon itself, and reciprocals, which are used when members of a group act upon each other. BH can express reflexivity and reciprocity by using specific verb-related root derivations (i.e., the *nip<sup>al</sup>* and *hitpa<sup>el</sup> binyanim*, respectively), but also has two reciprocal constructions that are closely related: the phrases “each to his brother” and “each to his neighbour”, illustrated in (13).

(13) וַיִּתְמָהוּ הָאָנָשִׁים אִישׁ אֶל־רֵעֵהוּ (13)

“the men looked at *each other* in wonder” (Gen 43:33)

The Hebrew reciprocal construction is a complex NP איש אחיו and איש רעהו (which is quite similar to English “each other”), with the preposition between the two nouns inserted during the derivation of the clause in accordance with the verbal semantics, e.g., אל for the speech verb אמר in Gen 11:3, or the differential object marker (DOM) את for the verb ראה in Exod 10:23. The verb used with the reciprocal is appropriately plural as in (13),<sup>5</sup> unless there is an overt subject that is morphologically singular but semantically collective, such as עם (“people”) (see, e.g., 1 Sam 10:11). In the absence of a collective noun, a singular verb used with the collocations איש רעהו and איש אחיו

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5 See also Gen 11:3, 7; 26:31; 31:49; 37:19; 42:21, 28; 43:33; Exod 10:23; 16:15; 18:7; 32:27; Lev 25:14; 26:37; Num 14:4; Deut 25:11; Judg 6:29; 1 Sam 20:41; 2 Kgs 3:23; 7:3, 6, 9; Isa 9:18; 13:8; 19:2; Jer 22:8; 23:27, 35; 31:34; 34:15; 36:16; Ezek 4:17; 24:23; 47:14; Joel 2:8; Jon 1:7; Mic 7:2; Zech 3:10; 7:9, 10; 8:16; 14:13; Mal 2:10; 3:16; Psa 12:3; Job 41:9; 2 Chr 20:23

are not reciprocal anaphors but subjects and their objects (see, e.g., Exod 21:18 וְהִכָּהּ אִישׁ אֶת־רֵעֵהוּ “(when) a man strikes his neighbour”).<sup>6</sup> Intriguingly, BH allows reciprocals to combine with another NP to form a possessive construction similar to English “they looked at each other’s clothes”, as in (14):<sup>7</sup>

(14) לֹא יִשְׁמְעוּ אִישׁ שְׂפַת רֵעֵהוּ:

“they will not understand each other’s speech” (Gen 11:7)

Where BH apparently departs from the typical cross-linguistic profile and leaves a gap in the NP paradigm is with reflexivity: the biblical corpus provides no evidence of a distinct reflexive anaphor (Waltke and O’Connor 1990, §16.4g, 23.4c). When reflexivity and reciprocity cannot be adequately expressed within the verb itself, BH delegates the task to a prepositional phrases with cliticised pronoun, as in (15) (see Naudé 1997, 2013a).

(15) וַיַּעַשׂ־לּוֹ בְּתֵימָם בְּעִיר דָּוִד

“he [David] made for *himself* houses in the city of David” (1 Chr 15:1)

The context of the clause in (15) unambiguously indicates that the subject, *David*, performed the activity in relation to himself rather than a distinct third-person entity. In contrast, the nearly minimal pair counterpart in (16) shows the same PP used with what is contextually a clear non-reflexive meaning: the subject, Eliashib, performed the action not for himself but for another person, Tobiah.

(16) וַיַּעַשׂ לּוֹ לְשֵׁבֶתָהּ גְדוֹלָה

“he [Eliashib] made for *him* [Tobiah] a large room” (Neh 13:5)

Thus, BH complicates its own NP paradigm by employing the same pronominal form both as a personal pronoun ([-anaphor, +pronominal] and as a reflexive anaphor ([+anaphor, -pronominal]). The overlap begs for some sort of formal constraint distinguishing the two functions. This is precisely what van der Merwe, Naudé, and Kroeze propose in their revised reference grammar:

The position of the syntactic antecedent of a pronominal suffix determines the nature of the pronominal suffix. If the syntactic antecedent occurs in the same clause as the pronominal suffix, the pronominal suffix has a reflexive (anaphoric) nature and is usually translated with *self* (*himself*, *herself*, etc.). (2017, 299, §36.1.6.2)

Though technically accurate, what they do not make explicit is that the identification of the antecedent is both a crucial and a non-syntactic operation. Yes, the reflexive pronoun in (15) occurs in a local domain, as we expect; but so does the same pronoun used non-

6 See also Exod 21:14; 22:6, 9; 33:11; Lev 7:10; Deut 22:26; 1 Sam 14:20; 1 Kgs 8:31; Isa 3:6; Jer 46:16; Ruth 3:14; 2 Chr 6:22

7 See also 2 Sam 2:16; Jer 5:8; 19:9; Ezek 33:26; Zech 8:17; 14:13.

reflexively in (16). For the latter example, its non-reflexive interpretation occurs when it is associated with a non-local antecedent.

Though the examples in (15) and (16) use the verb עשה and the preposition ל with the cliticised pronoun in question, an examination of numerous other verbs as well as other prepositions confirms that, while verbal semantics are relevant, the BH pronoun generally allows either pronominal or reflexive readings in appropriate contexts. Consider the representative examples in (17) to (22).<sup>8</sup>

(17) וְכָתַב לָּו אֶת־מִשְׁנֵה הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת  
 “he<sub>i</sub> shall write for *himself*<sub>i</sub> a copy of this law” (Deut 17:18)

(18) וַיִּכְתֹּב אֵלָיו אֶת־שָׂרֵי סֻכּוֹת  
 “he<sub>i</sub> wrote for *him*<sub>j</sub> the officials of Succoth” (Judg 8:14)

(19) וַיָּבֵא אֶתָּהּ אֵלָיו אֶל־הַתְּבֵבָה  
 “he<sub>i</sub> brought it back to *himself*<sub>i</sub>, to the ark” (Gen 8:9)

(20) וַיָּבֵא לוֹ יַיִן  
 “he<sub>i</sub> brought *him*<sub>j</sub> wine” (Gen 27:25)

(21) וַיִּקְבְּצוּ עָלָיו אַנְשֵׁים  
 “he<sub>i</sub> gathered to *himself*<sub>i</sub> men” (1 Kgs 11:24)

(22) לְבֹו יִקְבְּצוּ אִיִּן לוֹ  
 “*his mind*<sub>i</sub> gathers iniquity to *itself*<sub>i</sub>” (Ps 41:7)<sup>9</sup>

Though many verbs, such as נתן, occur in the biblical corpus without a reflexive pronoun, this is likely an accident of history and corpus, since there is nothing inherent in the verb that would prohibit a person giving himself or herself something.

In summary, BH does have a morphological reflexive strategy, but it overlaps with the non-reflexive use of the pronoun and, unlike English *-self* form and other languages with distinct reflexive items, there do not appear to be simple syntactic criteria by which the reflexive and non-reflexive functions are distinguished (e.g., Binding Conditions A and B). Rather, the identification of the reflexive anaphor in BH is partially delimited by syntax (no reflexive occurs non-locally) and then further identified by recourse to the discourse context. This therefore depends on how the anaphor (pronominal or

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8 Exodus 5:19 is the sole example found for the use of the DOM אה in an anaphoric expression. For the reflexive anaphor with speech verbs, BH uses לב and לבב with the appropriate cliticised pronoun within PP (typically ב, as in Gen 17:17, but also others, like א, as in Gen 8:21).

9 Although rare, this example in Ps 41:7, in which the reflexive anaphor does not occur immediately after the verb, indicates that the PP and cliticised pronoun need not attach to and raise with the verb to have a reflexive reading.



reflexive) is coindexed with its antecedent, a process that must exist at the level of interpretation (i.e., logical form, or LF) since there does not seem to be any specific syntactic operation that accomplishes this.

### Backwards Anaphora

Backwards anaphora, also known as cataphora, is anaphora in which the anaphor precedes the antecedent sometimes, as in (23).

כאשר הוא ישוב מול המחשב, דני מאושר (23)

“when *he*<sub>i</sub> sits in front of the computer, *Dani*<sub>i</sub> is happy” (Doron 2013)

Traditional grammatical description sometimes labels the rare examples like (24) and (25) as cataphora; these constructions are also sometimes called prolepsis.

עוֹנוֹתָיו יִלְכְּדוּ אֶת־הָרָשָׁע (24)

“his iniquities will trap *him*, the wicked person” (Prov 5:22)<sup>10</sup>

הַנֶּה מִטָּתוֹ שֶׁל־שְׁלֹמֹה (25)

“hey—*his* litter, that belonging to Solomon” (> “Solomon’s litter” (Song 3:7; see also 1:6, 8:12)

The question is whether these are really like (23), that is, examples of an anaphoric pronoun preceding its antecedent. For the three examples like (25), all in the book of Song of Songs, the cliticised pronoun is not a case of anaphora but is part of an agreement construction, also known as clitic-doubling; this agreement pattern begins in very late BH and continues into rabbinic Hebrew but is also frequent in later Aramaic and Syriac (see Doron 2013). For the handful of examples like (24), the pronoun is simply anaphoric: in all the examples excepting (24) the NPs with which the pronouns are coreferential are already introduced in the immediately preceding discourse. And for (24), though הרשע “the wicked person” is not explicit in the preceding verses, the use of the wicked as discourse entity serving as a foil for the righteous is explicitly present in 2:22; 3:25, 33; 4:14, 19 and presumably available throughout the discourse. Rather than cataphora, these examples are better analysed as anaphoric pronouns with clarifying appositive NPs (particularly apropos in the case of (24) due to the discourse distance from the last overt use of the antecedent).<sup>11</sup>

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10 See Exod 35:5; 2:6; Lev 13:57; 2 Sam 14:6; 1 Kgs 21:13; 2 Kgs 16:15; Jer 9:14; Ezek 3:21; Ps 83:12; Prov 5:22; Eccl 4:12; 1 Chr 5:26. See Joüon and Muraoka (2006: §146e2).

11 Joüon and Muraoka (2006, §146e1) identify a number of cases of a subject pronoun followed by a coreferential NP that may seem to be cataphoric: 1 Chr 9:26; 26:26; 27:6; 2 Chr 28:22; 32:12, 30; 33:23; Ezra 7:6; Neh 10:38. But in each case that this occurs the *r*-expression has been mentioned in the preceding discourse. Thus, the pronoun in these examples is anaphoric, not cataphoric, and the following NP is appositive. This is also the case with many of the small number of complement pronouns followed by a coreferential NP, such as in Eccl 4:12 וְאִם־יִתְקַפּוּ־הָאֲחָדִים הַשְּׂנִיִּים יַעֲמְדוּ־נִגְדָו “if

The absence of clear cases of anaphora, like the Modern Hebrew and English example in (23), is unexpected in BH given the reasonably sized literary corpus. Be that as it may, and even in contrast to the patterns of some English translations, BH examples like that in the rewritten clause in (26) do not exist.

(26) בְּצַלְמוֹ עָשָׂה אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָדָם (unattested)

“in *his*<sub>i</sub> own image *God*<sub>i</sub> created man” (Gen 9:6\* NRSV, for MT בְּצַלְמוֹ

אֱלֹהִים עָשָׂה אֶת־הָאָדָם )

In light of the absence of cataphora with an overt anaphoric pronoun, it is all the more surprising to encounter apparent cases of cataphora with a non-overt pronoun, as in (27):

(27) שָׁמַר וְשָׁמַעְתָּ אֶת כָּל־הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי מְצַוְּךָ

“keep \_\_\_ and hear all these words that I am commanding you today”

(Deut 12:28)<sup>12</sup>

As with the supposed cataphoric examples in (24) and (25), we must probe whether the relatively infrequent cases of missing or non-overt objects in (27) are really anaphoric at all. It is doubtful that they are really cataphoric, in light of the absence of overt cataphora in BH. In fact, in each case I have encountered, there is an identifiable antecedent in the preceding discourse context, which suggests that if anaphora is involved it is non-overt discourse anaphora. Yet, further questions arise for examples like (27): if the notion of “words that God has commanded” (see, e.g., Deut 10:2, 4; 11:18) is the intended discourse antecedent, why is it not overt, but non-overt or deleted for the bivalent verb שָׁמַר, whereas it is overt in the very next clause? And why does neither clause use an overt pronominal anaphor? At this point we can reasonably set aside the issue of cataphora, which does not seem to exist in the BH corpora, and turn to these questions, which bring us to the vexing problem of missing objects.

### Null Object Anaphora

Previously, I avoided addressing the nature of the missing objects in example (28), repeated from (8).

(28) וַתִּרְאֵהָ אִשָּׁה ... וַתִּקַּח מִפְרִיָּו וַתֹּאכַל וַתִּתֵּן גַּם־לְאִישָׁהּ עִמָּהּ וַיֹּאכַל

“the woman saw ... and (she) took some of its [the tree’s] fruit and (she) ate (it) and (she) gave (it) also to her husband with her and (he) ate (it)”

(Gen 3:6)

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someone overpowers him, the one, (then) the two can stand against him.” The NP the “one” or “lone person” has already been introduced in the preceding verse, thereby making the clitic pronoun anaphoric and the repetition of “the one” appositive.

12 See also Deut 7:12; 16:12; 22:15; 26:16. I am indebted to John Cook for pointing out these examples.

In a 1991 study of BH non-overt objects, Creason likened missing objects to the use of non-overt pronouns in subject position (i.e., *pro*-drop), even though the BH verb does not have rich inflectional features that allow for the identification of the antecedent like it has for the subject. However, he concluded that two discourse factors constrain their use: 1) the antecedent must be active or semi-active in the discourse, and 2) the antecedent must be a peripheral or minor discourse entity with not further role in the episode in question (Creason 1991, 28). This may explain many of the cases, like those in (28), but it does not account for the missing object followed by the full NP object in (27) or cases like (29).

- (29) וְאֶת־מֶלֶךְ הָעֵי תָלָה עַל־הָעֵץ עַד־עֵת הָעֶרֶב וּכְבֹּוא הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ צָוָה יְהוֹשֻׁעַ וַיִּרְדּוּ אֹתָהּ  
 נִבְלְתוּ מִן־הָעֵץ וַיִּשְׁלִיכוּ אוֹתָהּ אֶל־פֶּתַח שַׁעַר הָעִיר  
 “the king of Ai (he) hung on the tree until the evening time and when the sun set, Joshua commanded \_\_\_ and (they) took down his corpse from the tree and cast it at the opening of the city gate” (Josh 8:29; also 10:27)

Example (29) presents a veritable anaphoric chaos. The verse begins with an overt and fronted object NP and a null subject and continues in the second main clause with the overt NP יהושע coreferential with the preceding non-overt subject anaphor and a missing object for the verb צוה that clearly cannot be coreferential with the preceding overt object NP מלך העי. Moreover, the non-overt subject pronoun of the third clause is not anaphoric with the preceding subject יהושע; this is clearly signalled by the plural morphology of the verb ירדו. Finally, the fourth clause includes an overt object pronoun אותה, which is anaphoric with the preceding object NP נבלתו. Yet, for this maelstrom of overt and non-overt subject and objects, the clause is interpretable, which suggests that whatever the operative principles are for BH anaphora, they are not unknowable. As a first step, we can say that Creason’s solution is not sufficient: the reasonable antecedent for the bivalent verb צוה is ישראל, which occurs two verses earlier (Josh 8:27). While ישראל is the non-overt object following צוה, this discourse entity is not only active in the remainder of the episode, it is the agent of the following two verbs.

In a very recent study, Cook took a different approach. Taking cues from Erteschik-Shir, Ibnbari, and Taube (2013), Cook proposed that missing objects in BH patterned as cases of Topic-drop. Crucially, he identified two semantic features that constrained the use of non-overt pronominal anaphora for objects: animacy and specificity. He concluded that most of the examples he accumulated in Genesis through Deuteronomy were discourse topics that were low on the scale of animacy and non-specific. Prototypical examples are those that involve a null antecedent modified by a partitive מן PP, as in (30), or a non-specific NP, as in (31).

- (30) וַיִּקַּח מֵאֲבָנֵי הַמָּקוֹם וַיִּשֶׂם מֵרֵאשֵׁיתוֹ  
 “he took (some) of the stones of the place and placed (them) at his head”  
 (Gen 28:11)

וְלָקַחְתָּ אִשָּׁה לְבְנִי מִמִּשְׁפַּחְתִּי ... וְאִם-לֹא יִתְּנֶנּוּ לְךָ וְהָיִיתָ נָקִי מֵאֲלֹתַי: (31)

“you must take a wife for my son from my family . . . and if they do not give (a wife) to you, you are free from my oath.”

The Topic-drop analysis assumes that the non-overt syntactic item in the object position is a null pronoun, like *pro*-drop in the subject position. If so, this null pronoun should behave like any other pronoun, except that it is unpronounced. This is certainly a better proposal than Creason’s, but there is at least one more possibility.

In a recent study on object drop in Modern Hebrew, Landau (2018) argued against the object *pro* analysis in favour of argument ellipsis. Though the grammatical link between a discourse anaphor and its antecedent and an ellipsis constituent and its anchor must be similar at some deep level, it has been pointed out that the two options produce different semantic options. In particular, what has been observed is that ellipsis allows “sloppy identity,” as in the BH example in (32):

וַיִּחַזַק דָּוִד בְּבִגְדָיו \*וַיִּקְרַעֵם וְגַם כָּל-הָאֲנָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר אִתּוֹ: (32)

“David seized his clothes (\*Qr) and tore them and also all the men who were with him [tore clothes]” (2 Sam 1:11)

The ellipsis in (32) allows a sloppy identity reading in that the men in the second clause could be interpreted as tearing their own clothes (which is likely what was intended) or tearing David’s clothes along with him (less likely, but still grammatical). In contrast, pronouns—overt or non-overt—force a “strict identity” interpretation. Consider the Modern Hebrew examples in (33) and (34) (Landau 2018, 4):

גיל ניקה את השולחן שלו אחרי שיוסי ניקה (33)

“Gil cleaned his table after Yosi did” = “sloppy”

גיל ניקה את השולחן שלו אחרי שניקה אותו (34)

“Gil cleaned his table after Yosi cleaned it” = “strict”

In (33) the ellipsis of the object allows ambiguity in its intended anchor: the referent of the deleted object can either be Gil’s table or Yosi’s table. But as (34) demonstrates, a pronoun forces a single identification: Yosi can only have cleaned Gil’s table, i.e., the previous object.

Though the BH example of ellipsis in (32) demonstrates that BH, like Modern Hebrew and many other languages, allows sloppy identity conditions, what will only be clarified by further study of missing objects is whether the BH examples support a non-overt anaphora analysis (i.e., Topic-drop using *pro*) or an argument ellipsis analysis.

## Conclusion

Anaphoric relations are integral to discourse construction and so are ubiquitous in the biblical corpus. While BH exhibits some anaphoric patterns, both in local and non-local contexts, that transparently conform to cross-linguistic expectation, other patterns open intriguing questions: why does forward anaphora not occur (and an exhaustive study is needed to confirm my preliminary results)?, why does BH have a reflexive gap in the NP paradigm and does the reflexive use of the pronoun fill all expected reflexive contexts?, and how might we fully account for the variety of missing objects in BH? These remain question for continued research in this central area of BH grammar.<sup>13</sup>

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