

Changes of Syntactic Patterns in the Textual Tradition of the Book of Isaiah: A Corpus-Linguistic Approach

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Abstract: Assuming that biblical texts have been reworked and updated during the long period of their history of development and transmission, this paper examines the syntactic changes in the textual tradition of the Book of Isaiah. The first part is devoted to the linguistic variation within the authoritative text of Isaiah and concentrates on the interchange of prepositions in the Masoretic Text. The second part deals with the transmission of the text of Isaiah and pays attention to the differences between the Masoretic Text of Isaiah and the text of Isaiah in the Dead Sea scrolls and the Old Greek Translation, the Septuagint. In both parts, the linguistic patterns gathered from the ETCBC database serve as the starting point for the examination. By computer-assisted registering, sorting, and comparing the various syntactic patterns, one gains insight into the complex history of the Hebrew text of Isaiah.

Keywords: ETCBC corpus, linguistic variation, Isaiah

Introduction

In 2010, the Institute for Religious Studies of Leiden University and the Eep Talstra Centre for Bible and Computer (ETCBC) of VU University Amsterdam embarked upon the project *Bridging Data and Tradition: The Hebrew Bible as a Linguistic Corpus and as a Literary Composition*. In order to bridge the gap between the linguistic data stored in the ETCBC database and the tradition of interpretation of the Hebrew Bible, this project is developing an electronic lexicon in which all verbal patterns used in the Old Testament can be stored. In the end, this lexicon must contain all combinations of Classical Hebrew verbs and the elements that accompany them that are found in the Old Testament. When the lexicon is finished, it will be incorporated in the updated version of the Logos German Bible Society Bundle.¹ As part of this computer software tool, it can help Hebrew scholars, Old Testament exegetes, and Bible translators gain better insight into the meaning and the development of the Old Testament text.

The development of the electronic lexicon of syntactic patterns in the Hebrew Bible presented us with three significant questions:

- Which linguistic categories do we need if we want to build up a lexicon which contains all verbal patterns in the Hebrew Bible?
- What is the best way to gather the linguistic data from the ETCBC database of the Old Testament text, and how should we register, sort, and store these data?
- How should we deal with the linguistic variety in these ancient texts that have been reworked and updated over a long period of time?

These questions make clear that the development of an electronic lexicon based on biblical texts is a complicated undertaking. Besides the linguistic and technical problems with regard to the registration and the storage of the data, we also have to deal with the complexity of the Old Testament texts. Due to the history of development and the transmission of the Hebrew Bible, it is to be expected that the linguistic data of the texts are not fully homogeneous. That means that we should not only pay close attention to the linguistic regularities in

¹ This will be the successor of SESB (2009).

these texts, but also leave room for exceptions. When dealing with these complex texts, it becomes clear why biblical texts are a real challenge for researchers interested in computer-assisted textual analysis. These texts reflect not only the literary background of their authors but also the complex process of their reworking and transmission over a long period of time.

In the following sections we will first consider briefly the above questions concerning the required linguistic categories, the technical support needed to collect data, and the complex history of the Old Testament text. Then we will turn to the text of the Hebrew Bible itself. When discussing the interchange of prepositions in biblical texts, it will become clear that the analysis of syntactic patterns requires a rethinking of the traditional approaches to biblical texts. In traditional exegesis, biblical texts are viewed as unique literary artifacts inherited from cultural and religious history. The main interest of our approach, however, is the linguistic regularities in these texts. Our goal is to find the syntactic rules that underlie these ancient texts. At the same time, we have to be aware that exceptions to these rules may appear due to the complex history of the Old Testament text.

The Concept of Valency

A helpful instrument to categorize the linguistic information in the Hebrew text of the Old Testament is the concept of valency. The term ‘valency’ was introduced by linguists in the 1950s to refer to the various relations between a verb and other elements in a clause. According to [Allerton 2006, 301], ‘Valency is thus to be seen as the capacity a verb (or noun, etc.) has for combining with particular patterns of other sentence constituents.’ In the conception of valency grammar, the verbal predicate is the main element within a clause. All the other clause constituents are governed by this verbal form. It should be noted, however, that the concept of valency is not restricted to verbal clauses. It can also be applied to nominal clauses and to clauses in which the verbal form is elided.

Though the concept of valency is not widespread in Old Testament scholarship, some scholars have brought its significance to the forefront [cf. Oosting 2013, 19-39]. They show that the examination of valency patterns is particularly helpful in understanding the relation between a verbal predicate and the other elements within a clause. Different combinations of elements accompanying the same verb can result in different meanings, which are not always or not sufficiently recognized in traditional Biblical Hebrew dictionaries. Though those lexicons usually register the formal differences between the elements that occur with a verb, they do not explain why different analyses are required. Because their authors were mainly interested in the various meanings of a verb, they have only listed the elements that influence its rendering. A valency lexicon has two important advantages over traditional Biblical Hebrew dictionaries:

- Unlike traditional dictionaries, a valency lexicon registers all the elements that occur with a verb. As a result, this lexicon is able to offer a systematic arrangement of all the valency patterns of a verb.
- Traditional dictionaries usually list only those elements that influence the rendering of a verb. In a valency lexicon, however, the combinations of a verb and the elements that accompany it are distinguished with respect to their appearance and not with respect to their meaning. For that reason, different syntactic patterns are listed separately, even if they seem to have the same meaning.

The Program `val2csv`

In order to collect, register and sort the syntactic data for our valency lexicon, one of our programmers, Ulrik Sandborg-Petersen, has developed a program called `val2csv`. This program enables us to search through the ETCBC database available in the Emdros format at the clause level for verbal forms and their satellites. The results of this query are put in a comma-separated value [csv] file, which contains all the patterns of one verb line by line. This output file can be imported into the office program Excel for Windows or Open Office, so that an analyst can manipulate the data by sorting and filtering the various patterns.

This distributional way of working helps in gaining insight into the various constituents that accompany a verb. The advantage of this approach over classical concordances is that we can easily search for the combination of various lexemes. Furthermore, it enables us to sort the linguistic data not only by their lexical features but also by their syntactic function. The latter helps us to find out why some verbs are construed with different prepositions, while the different combinations of one verb with one or the other preposition seem to have the same meaning. Because we are able to filter and sort the various patterns of one verb, we can, for example, examine whether the variation is due to lexical influence or has to do with differences between biblical books. On the basis of these examinations, we can categorize these patterns, so that they can be stored in a systematic way.

As the starting point for our corpus-linguistic research, we take the textual data and not a linguistic theory. We register the verbs and the elements that actually occur in the text and do not describe them in comparison to a general linguistic model. In doing so, an attempt is made to register the formally recognizable patterns within the Hebrew text before making suggestions for its interpretation. The advantage of this approach is that we get a good overview of the syntactic changes within the Classical Hebrew of the Old Testament.

The Text of the Old Testament

Unlike the critical edition of the New Testament, which is compiled on the basis of many textual witnesses, the scholarly edition of the Old Testament is based on one manuscript, the Leningrad Codex. This manuscript dates from 1009 CE and is the product of rabbinic tradition. Like other manuscripts of the Old Testament, the Leningrad Codex has mainly been written in Classical Hebrew. Only a few chapters and some words have been written in Classical Aramaic. Although the Hebrew text of this scholarly edition reflects the text of one manuscript, it cannot be considered as a cohesive unit. Due to its reworking and transmission over a long period, it is to be expected that we encounter linguistic variation within the Masoretic Text (MT) of the Hebrew Bible.

One of the Bible books where we may find linguistic variation is the Book of Isaiah. It is widely accepted that Isaiah came into being over a period of more than two hundred years. The first part of this book, chapters 1–39, contains references to the Assyrian period (8th century BCE), while in the latter part, chapters 40–66, references to the Persian period (6th century BCE) are found. When analyzing the syntactic patterns of Isaiah, we should therefore not be surprised that the syntactic data in this biblical book are not homogeneous.

Besides the Leningrad Codex, Old Testament scholars also examine other Hebrew manuscripts and ancient versions of the Old Testament. Significant textual witnesses are the Qumran scrolls that were discovered between 1948 and 1955 in caves near the Dead Sea. These scrolls appear to be approximately one thousand years older than the manuscript of the Leningrad Codex. Though many of the scrolls consist of small fragments, there is no doubt that these manuscripts provide important information about the form and the content of the biblical books at the beginning of the Common Era. Furthermore, these scrolls shed light on the process of transmission of biblical texts.

One of the great discoveries was the complete Isaiah scroll in cave one (1QIsa^a). Besides the great Isaiah scroll, an incomplete Isaiah scroll was discovered in cave one (1QIsa^b) and fragments of nineteen other Isaiah manuscripts were found, mainly in cave four [cf. Tov 2008, 43]. Especially for the Book of Isaiah, the Qumran manuscripts are significant textual witnesses. Even though it seems that the text of Isaiah in the Masoretic tradition reflects an older text than the text of 1QIsa^a, the latter manuscript is nevertheless important for our understanding of how the Isaiah text was transmitted at the beginning of the Common Era.

Syntactic Changes in the Hebrew Bible

One of the great challenges of our research on syntactic patterns is why some texts have one valency pattern, while other texts use another one. Is it just a matter of style? Are there lexical reasons why a particular pattern has been preferred? Have some valency patterns changed in the course of time? Are these changes due to the

transmission of the text? In trying to answer these questions, we will focus on the interchange of the preposition 'el (usually rendered 'to') and the preposition 'al (usually rendered 'on') in the textual tradition of the Book of Isaiah.

The interchange of 'el and 'al is a well-known phenomenon in Biblical Hebrew. This phenomenon is frequently mentioned in conventional Biblical Hebrew dictionaries. For example, the Brown-Driver-Briggs lexicon notes: 'There is a tendency in Hebrew, esp. manifest in S[amuel] K[ings] Je[remiah] Ez[ekiel], to use 'el in the sense of 'al ... Conversely, though not with the same frequency, 'al occurs where analogy would lead us to expect 'el' [BDB 41, note 2].

Later biblical researchers claim that the interchange of 'el and 'al has to do with the question of whether a text is relatively old or young. They point out that in late biblical texts and in the Dead Sea scrolls the preposition 'al is increasingly used where the preposition 'el appears in early biblical texts. This thesis is mainly based on the comparison of parallel passages between the books of Samuel and Kings and the books of Chronicles. Samuel and Kings are considered to reflect an older stage of Hebrew than the language that is used in Chronicles. When comparing these parallel passages, it becomes clear that 1–2 Chronicles often have 'al where 1–2 Samuel and 1–2 Kings have 'el [cf. Rooker 1990, 127]. Although there are some exceptions, the dominant tendency is that 'el is replaced with 'al in Late Biblical Hebrew.²

The usual explanation for the modification from 'el to 'al is that late biblical authors were highly influenced by the Aramaic language. In the period after the Babylonian exile, Aramaic was the *lingua franca* of the Middle East; it functioned as the principal medium of communication on an administrative and an international level. In the Aramaic texts of this period, the preposition 'el was only employed in the address formula of letters.³ The preposition 'al, on the other hand, was a common preposition in the Aramaic language of that period. So, it is widely assumed that post-exilic writers, who were used to speaking Aramaic, were inclined to replace 'el with 'al.

Recently, Ian Young and Robert Rezetko have cast doubt on that single explanation for the interchange of 'el and 'al. They maintain that the interchange of the two prepositions is due to multiple factors. Furthermore, they emphasize that this phenomenon is hard to examine, because the two prepositions are frequently used in the Masoretic Text of the Hebrew Bible.⁴

'Unfortunately, due to the high frequency of these two prepositions in the Hebrew Bible (more than 11,000 occurrences in the MT) there is not a comprehensive investigation of this issue which takes into account many variations in usage, 'indiscriminate' interchanges in the MT in particular books and in synoptic passages, and also the evidence offered by the ancient versions for fluctuations in the process of textual transmission. It seems that the confusion of 'el and 'al in BH [Biblical Hebrew] is due to multiple factors including scribal modifications in the textual traditions' [Young and Rezetko 2008a, 71-72].

It is worth examining whether the interchange of 'el and 'al is also visible in the textual tradition of Isaiah. We first pay attention to the syntactic changes within the MT of Isaiah and then consider the prepositional changes between the MT of Isaiah and the text of Isaiah in the Ancient witnesses, especially the Dead Sea scrolls.

Syntactic Changes in the Masoretic Text of Isaiah

In discussing the interchange of 'el and 'al in the Masoretic tradition, we concentrate on the combination of these two prepositions with the verb *bṭḥ* in the Book of Isaiah. The verb *bṭḥ* occurs fourteen times in the MT of Isaiah. It has thirteen forms of the simple stem (the qal conjugation), usually translated as 'to trust' or 'to

² Rooker (1990, 127, footnote 4): 'These exceptions, however, in no way diminish the strength of the thesis that there is a clear 'el to 'al shift in LBH [Late Biblical Hebrew].'

³ According to Folmer (1995, 621), the preposition 'el is not attested outside of this formula in Aramaic texts of this period. She states that the use of this preposition in address formulae must be explained as a vestige of its use in older phases of the Aramaic language as a preposition of direction.

⁴ With the help of SESB (2009), we find 5517 occurrences of the preposition 'el and 5869 occurrences of the preposition 'al in the Masoretic Text of the Hebrew Bible.

rely’, and one form of the causative stem (hiphil conjugation), usually rendered as ‘to make one rely’. The verbal forms of the verb *bṭḥ* are construed with three different prepositions: two forms occur with the preposition *’el*, six occur with the preposition *b*, and six forms occur with the preposition *’al*, as the following overview shows:

Lexeme	Verbal stem	Preposition	Isaiah	Translation in the [NRSV 1989]
<i>bṭḥ</i>	qal	<i>b</i>	26:4	‘trust in the LORD forever’
<i>bṭḥ</i>	qal	<i>b</i>	30:12	‘put trust in oppression and deceit’
<i>bṭḥ</i>	qal	<i>’al</i>	31:1	‘who trust in chariots’
<i>bṭḥ</i>	qal	<i>’al</i>	36:5	‘on whom do you now rely?’
<i>bṭḥ</i>	qal	<i>’al</i>	36:6	‘you are relying on Egypt’
<i>bṭḥ</i>	qal	<i>’al</i>	36:6	‘to all who rely on him’
<i>bṭḥ</i>	qal	<i>’el</i>	36:7	‘we rely on the LORD our God’
<i>bṭḥ</i>	qal	<i>’al</i>	36:9	‘when you rely on Egypt’
<i>bṭḥ</i>	hiphil	<i>’el</i>	36:15	‘do not let Hezekiah make you rely on the LORD’
<i>bṭḥ</i>	qal	<i>b</i>	37:10	‘your God on whom you rely’
<i>bṭḥ</i>	qal	<i>b</i>	42:17	‘those who trust in carved images’
<i>bṭḥ</i>	qal	<i>b</i>	47:10	‘you felt secure in your wickedness’
<i>bṭḥ</i>	qal	<i>b</i>	50:10	‘yet trusts in the name of the LORD’
<i>bṭḥ</i>	qal	<i>’al</i>	59:4	‘they rely on empty pleas’

The above survey of syntactic patterns of the verb *bṭḥ* in Isaiah shows two things:

1. Apart from Isaiah 59:4, the combinations of the verb *bṭḥ* with the preposition *’el* or *’al* (usually translated as ‘to rely on’) all occur in the first half of Isaiah, chapters 1–39.
2. The combination of the verb *bṭḥ* with *’el* and the combination with *’al* are alternately used in Isaiah 36. In verses 5, 6, and 9 we find the combination of *bṭḥ* with *’al*, while in verses 7 and 15 the combination of *bṭḥ* with *’el* occurs.

The latter two occurrences have one thing in common. In both cases the preposition *’el* is followed by the divine name *Yhwh* (the tetragrammaton), usually translated as ‘the LORD’:

Isaiah 36:7 ‘we rely on the LORD our God’

Isaiah 36:15 ‘do not let Hezekiah make you rely on the LORD’

It seems no coincidence that in both cases in which the preposition *’el* is used, it precedes the name of the LORD. This observation is supported by comparable constructions in other biblical books. Besides the occurrences in Isaiah 36:7 and 15, the combination is also found in the parallel texts of 2 Kings 18:22 and 30. Furthermore this combination occurs in Psalms 4:6; 31:7 and Proverbs 3:5. An exception to this rule, however, is the combination of the verb *bṭḥ* with the prepositional phrase *’al Yhwh* in Proverbs 28:25. The constructions outside of Isaiah are as follows:

Lexeme	Verbal stem	Prepositional phrase	Biblical text	Translation in the [NRSV 1989]
<i>bṭḥ</i>	qal	' <i>el Yhwh</i>	2 Kings 18:22	'we rely on the LORD our God'
<i>bṭḥ</i>	hiphil	' <i>el Yhwh</i>	2 Kings 18:30	'do not let Hezekiah make you rely on the LORD'
<i>bṭḥ</i>	qal	' <i>el Yhwh</i>	Psalms 4:6	'put your trust in the LORD'
<i>bṭḥ</i>	qal	' <i>el Yhwh</i>	Psalms 31:7	'but I trust in the LORD'
<i>bṭḥ</i>	qal	' <i>el Yhwh</i>	Proverbs 3:5	'trust in the LORD with all your heart'
<i>bṭḥ</i>	qal	' <i>al Yhwh</i>	Proverbs 28:25	'whoever trusts in the LORD'

This overview makes clear that the interchange of the prepositions '*el*' and '*al*' with the verb *bṭḥ* in Isaiah is probably based on a linguistic practice. In those cases where the preposition preceded the divine name *Yhwh*, the biblical authors preferred the combination with '*el*' over the combination with '*al*'. At the same time, it is observed that an exception to this rule appears in Proverbs 28:25. Due to the complex history of development of the Hebrew Bible, it should not come as a surprise that we encounter linguistic irregularities in the biblical texts.

The exceptional case in Proverbs 28:25 can be explained in two different ways. It is possible that the author of this text was not familiar with the linguistic rule proposed above. But it is also possible that the preposition has been changed in the process of textual transmission. The latter suggestion can be illustrated by a comparable case in the textual tradition of Isaiah. When looking at the combination of the verb *bṭḥ* with the preposition '*el*' or '*al*' in 1QIsa^a, 1QIsa^b, and the Septuagint (LXX), we see that 1QIsa^a corresponds to the MT in all cases, except for Isaiah 36:7. In this text, the great Isaiah scroll has '*al Yhwh*' for '*el Yhwh*':

Lexeme	Verbal stem	MT	1QIsa ^a	1QIsa ^b	LXX	Isaiah
<i>bṭḥ</i>	qal	' <i>al</i>	' <i>al</i>		<i>epi</i>	31:1
<i>bṭḥ</i>	qal	' <i>al</i>	' <i>al</i>		<i>epi</i>	36:5
<i>bṭḥ</i>	qal	' <i>al</i>	' <i>al</i>		<i>epi</i>	36:6
<i>bṭḥ</i>	qal	' <i>al</i>	' <i>al</i>		<i>epi</i>	36:6
<i>bṭḥ</i>	qal	' <i>el Yhwh</i>	' <i>al Yhwh</i>		<i>epi</i>	36:7
<i>bṭḥ</i>	qal	' <i>al</i>	' <i>al</i>		<i>epi</i>	36:9
<i>bṭḥ</i>	hiphil	' <i>el Yhwh</i>	' <i>el Yhwh</i>			36:15
<i>bṭḥ</i>	qal	' <i>al</i>	' <i>al</i>	' <i>al</i>	<i>epi</i>	59:4

The reading of the MT is supported by the parallel text in 2 Kings 18:20, which also has '*el Yhwh*'. In light of the linguistic practice described above, it is likely that the MT saved the older reading in Isaiah 36:7. It could well be that the copyist of 1QIsa^a changed '*el*' into '*al*' here under the influence of the combination of the verb *bṭḥ* with the preposition '*al*' in verses 5 and 6 (two times). That would mean that the copyist of 1QIsa^a was influenced stronger by the immediate context of the verbal clause than by the supposed linguistic practice. The change from '*el*' into '*al*' in the textual tradition of Isaiah 36:7 shows that some prepositional changes may well be due to the process of textual transmission. This conclusion brings us to the second point, namely the differences between the two prepositions in the textual tradition of Isaiah.

Syntactic Changes in the Textual Tradition of Isaiah

Besides the variation of syntactic patterns within the MT of Isaiah, it has also been observed that there are syntactic shifts between the text of Isaiah in the Masoretic tradition and in the Ancient Witnesses. The comparison of the syntactic changes of these texts may shed light on the influence of the transmission process on the text of Isaiah. In examining the transmission of the text of Isaiah, we focus on the alternation between *'el* and *'al* in the MT of Isaiah and the Isaiah scrolls discovered in Qumran.

The usual explanation is that, due to Aramaic influence, the Qumran scrolls increasingly use the preposition *'al* where the preposition *'el* appears in the Masoretic tradition. That argument is frequently used for explaining why 1QIsa^a reads the preposition *'al* where the Masoretic Text has the preposition *'el*. For example, Hugh Williamson notes with regard to the change from *'el* into *'al* in Isaiah 2:2: 'The form in Isaiah is usually preferred, the use of *'al* being thought to reflect Aramaic influence' [Williamson 2006, 169].

There is no doubt that the writer of 1QIsa^a was familiar with the Aramaic language, because the copyist frequently employs Aramaic forms [cf. Kutscher 1974, 187-215]. The question, however, is whether this Aramaic influence explains the changes from *'el* into *'al* in the textual tradition of Isaiah. In order to answer this question, it is necessary to make an inventory of all cases where the MT of Isaiah has *'el* and 1QIsa^a has *'al* and vice versa. Then we can see whether 1QIsa^a prefers to read *'al* for *'el*. A survey of all these changes is presented below:⁵

Isaiah	MT	1QIsa ^a	1QIsa ^b	4QIsa ^c	4QIsa ^e	4QIsa ^f	Change from MT to 1QIsa ^a
2:2	<i>'el</i>	<i>'al</i>			<i>'el</i>	<i>'el</i>	<i>'el</i> → <i>'al</i>
3:8	<i>'el</i>	<i>'al</i>					<i>'el</i> → <i>'al</i>
10:20	<i>'al</i>	<i>'el</i>					<i>'al</i> → <i>'el</i>
14:2	<i>'al</i>	<i>'el</i>			<i>'al</i>		<i>'al</i> → <i>'el</i>
17:8	<i>'el</i>	<i>'al</i>					<i>'el</i> → <i>'al</i>
22:5	<i>'el</i>	<i>'al</i>					<i>'el</i> → <i>'al</i>
22:11	<i>'el</i>	<i>'al</i>		<i>'el</i>			<i>'el</i> → <i>'al</i>
22:15	<i>'al</i>	<i>'el</i>				<i>'el</i>	<i>'al</i> → <i>'el</i>
29:12	<i>'al</i>	<i>'el</i>					<i>'al</i> → <i>'el</i>
30:16	<i>'al</i>	<i>'el</i>					<i>'al</i> → <i>'el</i>
30:16	<i>'al</i>	<i>'el</i>					<i>'al</i> → <i>'el</i>
31:1	<i>'al</i>	<i>'el</i>					<i>'al</i> → <i>'el</i>
31:4	<i>'al</i>	<i>'el</i>					<i>'al</i> → <i>'el</i>
36:7	<i>'el</i>	<i>'al</i>					<i>'el</i> → <i>'al</i>
36:12	<i>'el</i>	<i>'al</i>					<i>'el</i> → <i>'al</i>
37:9	<i>'al</i>	<i>'el</i>					<i>'al</i> → <i>'el</i>
37:21	<i>'el</i>	<i>'al</i>					<i>'el</i> → <i>'al</i>
46:7	<i>'el</i>	<i>'al</i>	<i>'el</i>				<i>'el</i> → <i>'al</i>
53:1	<i>'al</i>	<i>'el</i>	<i>'el</i>				<i>'al</i> → <i>'el</i>
56:6	<i>'al</i>	<i>'el</i>	<i>'al</i>				<i>'al</i> → <i>'el</i>

⁵ The linguistic data are based on Ulrich's (2010) study on the biblical Qumran scrolls. Apart from the occurrences in Isaiah 31:4 and 37:21, Ulrich notes all the changes between the two prepositions. Pulikottil (2001, 217) offers an incomplete list of the alternation between *'el* and *'al* in the MT of Isaiah and 1QIsa^a. He lists only thirteen examples in Appendix 2.

60:5	'al	'el	'el				'al → 'el
65:6	'al	'el					'al → 'el
65:7 <i>Ketiv</i> ⁶	'al	'el					'al → 'el
65:7 <i>Qere</i>	'el						
66:20	'al	'el	'al				'al → 'el

This overview shows that there are nine cases where 1QIsa^a has 'al for 'el and that there are fifteen cases where 1QIsa^a reads 'el for 'al (including the *Ketiv* reading in Isaiah 65:7). From a distributional point of view, it is therefore hard to accept that the changes from 'el into 'al in the Qumran scrolls are due to Aramaic influence. The number of cases where 1QIsa^a reads 'al for 'el is smaller than the number of cases where 1QIsa^a has 'el for 'al. That means that the general assumption that in late Biblical Hebrew the preposition 'al is increasingly used where the preposition 'el appears in Early Biblical Hebrew, is not tenable here. It seems that the changes between the MT of Isaiah and 1QIsa^a require other, more specific, explanations.

One of the possible explanations is that the change from one preposition to the other has been influenced by the immediate context. When registering the combinations of one verb with two different prepositions, it becomes clear that in those cases 1QIsa^a usually employs only one preposition:

Lexeme	Verbal stem	MT	1QIsa ^a	1QIsa ^b	4QIsa ^f	Isaiah	Translation
š'h	qal	'al	'al			17:7	'to look to'
š'h	qal	'el	'al			17:8	'to look to'
bw'	qal	'el	'el	'el	'el	22:15	'to go to'
bw'	qal	'al	'el		'el	22:15	'to go to'
ntn	qal	'el	'el			29:11	'to give to'
ntn	niphal	'al	'el			29:12	'to be given to'
'lh	qal	'al	'al			36:10	'to march against'
'lh	qal	'el	'el			36:10	'to march against'
lwh	niphal	'el	'el	'al		56:3	'to be joined to'
lwh	niphal	'al	'el	'al		56:6	'to be joined to'

With regard to these examples, two remarks can be made:

1. In the MT of Isaiah, the prepositions 'el and 'al are used interchangeably. The combinations of a particular verb with the preposition 'el and with the preposition 'al seem to have the same meaning. In the great Isaiah scroll, on the other hand, particular verbs are construed either with the preposition 'el or with the preposition 'al, except in Isaiah 36:10, where 1QIsa^a agrees with the Masoretic Text.

⁶ The reading of *Ketiv* ('what is written') represents the preposition that is found in the main text of the MT of Isaiah 65:7; the reading of *Qere* ('what is read') represents the preposition that is printed in the margin of the Masoretic Text. The phenomenon of marginal readings does not occur in the biblical scrolls of Qumran (cf. Tov 2008, 201).

2. It is striking that all of the changes between *'el* and *'al* concern the preposition of the second pattern. One gets the impression that in most cases an attempt was made to bring the second pattern into line with the previous pattern of the same verb. An exception to this rule is the dissimilarity between Isaiah 56:3, 6 in the MT and in 1QIsa^b where it seems that the first pattern was brought into line with the latter one.

The two examples discussed above show that the traditional approach to the interchange of *'el* and *'al* has serious shortcomings. The observation in Classical Hebrew dictionaries that there is a tendency in particular biblical books to use *'el* in the sense of *'al* and vice versa is not specific enough. The first example made clear that in some cases the interchange of the two prepositions has to do with the lexeme that follows the preposition. If in Biblical Hebrew the verb *bṭḥ* is used to express that someone relies *on the LORD*, one usually finds the preposition *'el*.

The second example shows that the interchange of *'el* and *'al* in the textual tradition of Isaiah does not support the widely accepted thesis that late biblical writers preferred the preposition *'al* over the preposition *'el* due to Aramaic influence. It is more likely that some changes between the MT of Isaiah and the Isaiah scrolls discovered in Qumran have to do with the transmission of the biblical text. One can imagine that the copyist of 1QIsa^a has tried to smooth out the biblical text by bringing different syntactic patterns into conformity with each other. In doing so, the author of the great Isaiah scroll made the biblical more readable for its readers.

The outcome of this research thus supports the thesis of Young and Rezetko that the interchange of *'el* and *'al* in Biblical Hebrew is due to multiple factors including scribal modifications in the process of transmission.

Conclusions

Building up an electronic valency lexicon forces us to reconsider the traditional approaches to biblical texts. The main interest of classical exegesis is the unique literary character of these ancient documents. The goal of our corpus-linguistic research, however, is to find the linguistic regularities that are present in these texts.

The first innovation of our approach towards traditional methods is that we try to register the syntactic patterns in a systematic way. Unlike conventional Biblical Hebrew lexicons, we do not present a list of the various elements that influence the rendering of a verb, but instead we try to offer a systematic arrangement of all syntactic patterns of a particular verb.

Furthermore, the large number of syntactic patterns makes it difficult to obtain an overview of all syntactic changes. For that reason, classical exegetes usually concentrate on particular parts of the Hebrew Bible. The advantage of our research, which is based on a morphologically encoded text of the Old Testament, is that we are able to collect these patterns from the ETCBC database and that we can manipulate these data by sorting and filtering them.

Finally, our method does not restrict itself to one manuscript. Though the current database only consists of the Hebrew text in the Masoretic tradition, we can also include other Hebrew and Greek manuscripts in our database. By taking into account as many texts and textual witnesses as possible, we are able to examine the syntactic variation in the textual tradition of Isaiah. In our examination we do not have to concentrate on one solution, as traditional exegetes usually do, but instead we can look for explanations in terms of lexical influence, language development and textual transmission. In doing so, we are able to gain further insight into the complex history of biblical texts.

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