Observations on the Language of the Book of Job

Cristian G. Rata
Torch Trinity Graduate School of Theology, Korea
rata@ttgst.ac.kr

Abstract

The Book of Job is well known for the difficulty of its language from the earliest translations to modern times. This problem has given rise to a series of theories concerning its language and origin. Some of these theories and the responses to them are discussed, including attempts to analyze the language of the book in key articles and monographs. While most of these studies have concentrated on the lexical aspects, what is needed is a sustained effort to analyze the entire grammar of the book of Job. In order to understand the language of Job, it would be more fruitful to attempt a more comprehensive grammatical study, especially one that pays close attention to the verb and textlinguistic issues.

I. The Difficulty of the Language of Job[1]

The Hebrew of the book of Job is arguably the most difficult in the Bible. Through the centuries, commentators have pointed out the challenges that they themselves encountered when trying to make sense of and translate this masterpiece of world literature. While the list of such commentators starts at least as early as Jerome,[2] the following quote

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[1] For a more recent and lengthier discussion about the difficulty of the language of the book of Job, see the work of Y. Hoffman, *A Blemished Perfection: The Book of Job in Context* (JSOTSS 213; Sheffield: Academic Press, 1996), 176-221. Hoffman also discusses the previously suggested solutions for the difficulty of the book (i.e., the book was written in a different Hebrew dialect, or it is a translation from another language), and dismisses them. She acknowledges that the book has a high concentration of *hapax legomena* (far greater than that of the other books of the Bible), a high number of foreign words, homonyms, and many and unique metaphors. These are due to the fact that this is a principally poetic work of art. Hoffman gives literary and psycho-linguistic reasons for the difficulty of the book. See especially pp. 203-212.

[2] Jerome says, "ut si velis anguillam aut merenulam strictis tenere manibus, quanto fortius presseris, tanto citius elabitur." Quoted in A. R. Ceresko, *Job 29-31 in the Light of Northwest Semitic* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1980), 1, from

from Luther makes the point just as well: "Job ist das allerschwerste buch zu vertieren, es hat uns auch am meisten zu arbeiten gemacht..."[3]

In more recent times other statements about the difficulty of the language have been made. It is reported that F. M. Cross claimed that 50% of Job remains unintelligible, and M. Dahood thought that at least 30% of the verses was untranslated.[4] While these statements could be dismissed as exaggerated claims, they clearly point to the perceived difficulty in the language of this book, despite the considerable advances made in the understanding of the Hebrew language and of its cognates.

Basically every scholar who analyzes the book of Job does not fail to mention the difficulty or peculiarity of the book. Thus, F. I. Andersen says that the "language in which Job was written presents many peculiarities" which have baffled scholars.[5] M. Pope points out that the problem of the language has many aspects:

> The problems of Job, however, are not simply lexical, but also morphological and syntactic. The language is ostensibly Hebrew, but with so many peculiarities that some scholars have wondered whether it might not have been influenced by some other Semitic dialect.[6]

R. Gordis notes that in the book of Job "the reader is confronted by a rich and often obscure vocabulary, a unique style, a complex structure, and profundity of thought, all of which make great demands, not only on scholar's learning, but also on his insight...."[7] And L. L. Grabbe chose

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"Incipit Prologus Sancti Hieronymi in Libro Iob," *Biblia Sacra iuxta Vulgatam Versionem* (vol. 1; ed. B. Fischer; 2d ed.; Stuttgart: Wurtembergische Bibelanstalt, 1975), 731.

[3] Quoted in H. Bobzin, *Die 'Tempora' im Hiobdialog* (Lahn: Marburg, 1974), iii, from Luther, *WA* 48, 686.

[4] Ceresko, *Job 29-31*, 1. On Dahood see also D. Wolfers, *Deep Things Out of Darkness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 21.

[5] F. I. Andersen, *Job* (TOTC; Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1976), 56.

[6] M. H. Pope, *Job* (AB; 3d ed.; New York: Doubleday, 1985), xiviii. More will be said later about the explanations offered for the difficulty of the Hebrew in Job. See also E. Dhorme, *A Commentary of the Book of Job* (London: Thomas Nelson, 1967), clxxv. While Dhorme does not make an explicit statement about the difficulty of the language, the fact that he devotes four pages of observations for the language of the book amply testify about its peculiarity. He points out that the author has his own vocabulary, grammar, and special technique of expression.

[7] R. Gordis, *The Book of Job* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1978), xvii. See also R. Gordis, *The Book of God and Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 160: "Job has more words of unique occurrence and a richer vocabulary than any other biblical book."

the book of Job for an "exercise" in comparative philology "because of the many philological riddles which still taunt each new exegete who thinks he can mark trails where others have failed."[8]

 The difficulty of the book of Job is also stressed in the more recent analysis started by W. L. Michel, who notes that even the ancient translators were struggling with its language:

> The Hebrew text of the Book of Job has defied efforts of scores of brilliant scholars to unravel its mysteries for more than two millennia. The study of ancient versions and of the Masoretic text reveals that even ancient translators were quite often at a loss to comprehend a text which was already ancient to them. Modern scholars possess a vast amount of information about ancient Semitic languages which their ancient colleagues did not have at their disposal, but they have not fared a lot better. . .[9]

Despite his painstaking study using the Northwest Semitic method,[10] his conclusion after finishing his first volume (chapters 1-14:22) reemphasizes the difficulty of the language of Job in a rather discouraging tone: "It is with a deep sense of frustration that I must report, after years of painstaking study, that it is my conviction that *no methodology has been able to unlock the doors to the mysteries of Job.*"[11]

 The difficulty of the language of the book of Job is also pointed out by the translators of various versions of the Bible. The following quotation from the translators of the *New Jewish Version* (1980) is perhaps representative of the opinion of other translators of the book: "There are many difficulties in the poetry of Job, making the interpretation of words, verses, and even chapters uncertain. The rubric 'meaning uncertain' in this book indicates only some of the most extreme instances."[12] A quick glance over the RSV translation has yielded twenty-five instances noted by the translators where the Hebrew of the book of Job is uncertain or obscure.

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[8] L. L. Grabbe, *Comparative Philology and the Text of Job* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1977), 1.

[9] W. L. Michel, *Job in the Light of Northwest Semitic* (Vol. 1; Rome: Pontifical Institute, 1987), 1. Dr. Michel continues to work on the book of Job mainly by employing the method of the "Dahood school" (personal communication). On this school see the discussion below.

[10] On this method, see section below titled, "Attempts to Analyze the Language of Job."

[11] Michel, *Job*, 9. Emphasis is mine. See also N. C. Habel, *The Book of Job* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985), 22: ". . .there are numerous poetic lines where the intent of the original remains uncertain."

[12] *NJV*, 5. This is also the note in the *JPS* of Job under chapter 3, verse 1.

A more recent and optimistic approach for the translation of the book is provided by D. Wolfers. While he states that the Book of Job is "least well understood of books,"[13] he believes that the problems of translation are due mainly to the fact that the book has been misunderstood and mistranslated with unerring consistency for as far as our knowledge stretches. He believes that the problem is that the translators were not willing to translate what the author wrote. They translated what they thought that the author ought to have written or meant to have written. Wolfers believes that translators along the centuries have "mistranslated." Thus, for him the errors are not in the "corrupt text" of the book, nor in distortions of the grammar, nor in the language of the book, but rather are the result of mistranslations through the centuries. His translation is truly based on the Masoretic text (he resents emendations), and he takes it as a fundamental assumption that the book is written in literary Hebrew, which employs standard Hebrew grammar and syntax, within the constraints of its gnomic form.[14]

Wolfers' attempt to translate the text as it is, without too many presuppositions and preconceived ideas, is innovative. However, he certainly does not solve all the problems of the book by his less critical (uncritical?) method.[15] And the fact that yet another translation is needed to correct the previous "mistranslations" underscores the problem of the language of Job. After all, this is an additional translation of the same book that has seen many dozens of translations (especially in English and German) in the modern age of biblical studies.[16]

II. Theories about the Language and Origin of Job[17]

The acknowledged difficulty of the language has given rise to a series of theories concerning the language and the origin of the book of Job. One theory suggests that the book is a translation from an Aramaic

[13] Wolfers, *Deep Things*, 13.

[14] Ibid., 25-45.

[15] His approach does not solve all the problems, but he makes a convincing case that the text is translatable as it is. He does assume that a small number of errors have accumulated in the transmission of the text, and he also acknowledges a small number of lexicographical anomalies. See Wolfers, *Deep Things*, 501-13.

[16] See Wolfers, *Deep Things*, 21. Some of the most notable translations are by Dhorme, Gordis, Pope, Clines (partial), Habel, etc.

[17] For other insights on the difficulty of the language of Job and on some of the theories about the book, see the treatment of N. Sarna, "Studies in the Language of Job," (PhD diss., Dropsie College, 1955), 1-10. He notes that some authors have professed to find affinities with Arabic, Aramaic, Assyrian and Babylonian, Edomite, Egyptian, Mishnaic Hebrew, and Sumerian.

original.[18] The Aramaic original theory was suggested by H. S. Tur-Sinai. He thought that the original language of Job was Babylonian Aramaic of the sixth century B.C., and the incomplete translation into Hebrew was made in Palestine some generations later.[19] The "Aramaisms" of the book are the result of half-way translation from an Aramaic original.

Though the Aramaic translation theory has not found serious supporters, many scholars have noted the Aramaic influences on the book. Thus, E. Dhorme believes that the author of the poem sometimes uses the Aramaic rather than the current Hebrew word, either to vary the style or because Aramaic has become deeply rooted in his mother tongue. When the poet seeks a synonym, it is Aramaic which supplies him with one. He notes at least twenty-eight cases in which Aramaic alone explains a difficult word in Job.[20] According to Dhorme, the influence of Aramaic is felt even in regard to grammar,[21] and Pope also acknowledges the "strong Aramaic coloring of the language of Job."[22]

It is not my purpose in this introduction to deny or refute the Aramaic influence on the language of the book of Job, but for the sake of balance I will mention two studies that tend to downplay Aramaic influence. N. H. Snaith analyzes forty-one supposed "Aramaisms" from the book, and he finds only four that he would classify as Aramaisms. He thinks that most are possible Hebrew developments, though rare,

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[18] Already in the twelfth century, the Hebrew commentator and grammarian Abraham Ibn Ezra declared that the book of Job is a translated book. But he did not specify from what language. See Gordis, *Book of God and Man*, 209. Note also that Spinoza was inclined to agree with Ibn Ezra on the theory that the book of Job was translated. (This information is from Hoffman, *A Blemished Perfection*, 190).

[19] Pope, *Job*, 1. See also Tur-Sinai, *Job* (Jerusalem: Kiriath Sepher, 1957), xxx-xl. Based on Tur-Sinai's commentary, Hoffman counts some 200 words which he interprets on the basis of Aramaic. See Hoffman, *A Blemished Perfection*, 197. Pope, *Job*, 369-75, finds sixty-eight Arabic, five Ugaritic, forty-four Akkadian, and twenty Aramaic words.

[20] See Dhorme, *Job*, clxxvii. He also explains three words by using Assyrian, Arabic, and Aramaic, and fifty-three words by using Akkadian. Arabic alone is used to explain thirty-seven words in Job.

[21] Note for example the use of נֶּשְׁיִ in Job 4:21 and the use of הֵן 'if' instead of אִם. See Dhorme, *Job*, clxxviii.

[22] Pope, *Job*. L. R. Gordis, *Book of God and Man*, 162-63, also sees a high frequency of Aramaisms in the book of Job. For him, these Aramaisms support the conclusion that the book was written in a period when Aramaic was widely used for conversation. He ends up suggesting a date between 500 and 300 B.C. (Gordis, 216-18).

and others clearly appear in other Semitic languages and so these words could be common Semitic.[23]

My personal study of the so-called "Aramaisms" in the book of Job was done by using the Targums and the Peshitta as controls.[24] I analyzed eighty-two words whose Aramaic character has already been suggested by previous scholars (e.g. Driver, Dhorme, Wagner, etc.), or have been detected by me personally. Out of these eighty-two words, I have concluded that thirty can be classified as Aramaisms, and perhaps another thirty are possible Aramaisms. However, it is important to note that the book of Job has a very high number of *hapax legomena,* and so it is possible that many words that we consider "Aramaisms" were simply common Semitic or genuine Hebrew. But we lack the necessary information to verify this.[25] Many words that I classified as "Aramaisms" are due to the fact that the Hebrew word was a *hapax legomena* or very rare, and some dialect of Aramaic helped to clarify the meaning of that word (and the context).[26] Since Dhorme explains about fifty-three words using Akkadian and thirty-seven using Arabic, these statistics tell us more about our lack of lexical data for the Hebrew language than about the influence of other languages or dialects upon it. Since the book of

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[23] This is my count after analyzing Snaith's discussion of the forty-one Aramaisms. See N. H. Snaith, *The Book of Job: Its Origin and Purpose* (London: SCM Press, 1968), 104-11. Also Wagner's summary of the evidence in quantitative form, on p. 145, does not bear out the claim that Job is aramaized like post-exilic writings. See Andersen, *Job*, 61 n. 1. From my personal analysis, Wagner's quantification has many questionable Aramaisms. See the discussion above and also the analysis of S. R. Driver and G. B. Gray, *The Book of Job* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1958), xivi-xlvii. E. Kautzsch, *Die Aramaismen im alten Testament*, (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1902), 101, finds thirty-two Aramaisms in the book.

[24] Cristian G. Rata, "A Study of the Aramaic Lexical Element in Job Using the Targums and the Peshitta as Controls," a paper submitted to professor Paul Dion in the NMC department of the University of Toronto in the spring of 2000 for the course, NMC 1303Y: The Book of Job.

[25] Also note that my definition of "Aramaisms" is very inclusive. Thus, I consider as "Aramaisms": 1) words that were preserved in a recognizable Aramaic form; 2) terms that are rare in Hebrew, but very common in Aramaic (this is a question of statistics; e.g. אתה is probably a genuine Hebrew development, but it is much more common in Aramaic); 3) terms whose meaning in Hebrew was established from Aramaic where they were attested more abundantly (e.g. כפן "hunger"); and 4) words which either the Targums or the Syriac did not need to "translate", but they use an identical root (even if some of the radicals evolved, e.g. צ > ט) and are clearly not common Semitic (or are not common in both Hebrew and Aramaic). This last category was usually used in combination with 2) and 3).

[26] But note that Dhorme explains some fifty-three words using Akkadian. See Dhorme, *Job*, clxxvi.

Job is understood as a masterpiece of Hebrew poetry (really as "the masterpiece") that uses a highly elevated language, the use of rare words that do not appear elsewhere in the Bible (which has a rather limited vocabulary) should not be surprising.

Another translation theory suggests Arabic as the original language of the book. The first modern scholar to suggest this possibility was F. H. Foster, though he is cautious to present this only as a hypothesis.[27] Another supporter of the Arabic theory is found in A. Guillaume.[28] He believes that the lack of success in elucidating the more obscure passages of the book is due to "the centuries long failure to perceive that the book was written by a poet whose language was impregnated through and through with Arabic."[29] He goes on to suggest that the historical evidence provided by an inscription of Nabonidus helps to pinpoint the exact location and time of the book. The book was written in the Hijaz in the later part of the sixth century B.C.[30] One problem with this, as with the Edomite theory below, is that we know nothing of a community which developed literature in the Hijaz in the sixth century B.C.[31]

The "translation theories" have not found a favorable acceptance in the scholarly community, and rightly so. Here Wolfers is right to point out that the "wonderful thing about translations is that they are always clearer than the originals." He continues:

> The translator is obliged to choose between pairs of ambiguities, to find some lucid way of expressing the deepest obscurities, to make decisions and to incorporate them in a version. The extreme opacity of the Hebrew Book of Job, the very argument which has led these writers to assume

[27] See F. H. Foster, "Is the Book of Job a Translation from an Arabic Original?" *AJSL* 49 (1932-33): 21-45. He comes up with nine points that suggest Arabic as the background of the book, but excludes the Elihu chapters where "the Arabic atmosphere is wholly lacking." Note that according to Foster, several early Protestant scholars believed the book to be from an Arabic original (p. 21). He does not give the names and references of these scholars.

[28] Pope, *Job,* xlix n. 55a. See also A. Guillaume, *Studies in the Book of Job,* 1-5 and 95. A. Khana also believes that the book of Job was influenced by the Arabic language. See Hoffman, *A Blemished Perfection,* 189-90.

[29] Guillaume, *Studies,* 1.

[30] See Guillaume, *Studies,* 3 and his argumentation from the text and historical background 6-14.

[31] So Andersen, *Job,* 60. It can be noted also that it is possible to claim an Arabic etymology for almost any problem in the Hebrew text, but such an approach many times lacks the necessary controls to be useful. See Michel, *Job,* 2. It can be noted again that Guillaume's approach is mainly lexical; he does not discuss grammar to support his assumption. Gordis, *Book of God and Man,* 210, finds the arguments for the Arabic and the Aramaic origin for the book of Job unconvincing.

> an original in another tongue, is the most powerful reason for rejecting their contentions. Besides this, there is pervasive presence of word-play - punning - in the Hebrew text. Except fortuitously, word-play cannot be translated.[32]

A theory as old as the Septuagint is that the book of Job has an Edomite background. Indeed, the Edomite connections of the story, together with its setting and the provenience of the characters, has led critics such as Voltaire, Herder, and Renan to suggest that the poem echoes the famed wisdom of Edom (1 Kgs 4:30).[33] R. H. Pfeiffer went a step further and suggested that the poet author was an Edomite.[34] According to Pfeiffer, only two possibilities exist for the nationality of the author. He was either a Jew living in Jerusalem, in southern Judah, on the border with Edom near the desert, or in Egypt, or he was an Edomite.[35] The most obvious problem with this theory is that it is speculative, since we do not have the data to verify this suggestion. We do not have enough linguistic material that can be classified as Edomite to be able to do a meaningful comparison with the book of Job.[36]

Recent scholarship generally agrees that the book of Job is written in literary Hebrew, but at the same time it is aware of peculiarities

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[32] Wolfers, *Deep Things,* 29. Gordis, *Book of God and Man*, 211, also argues that a translation would be more clear and intelligible than the original. Hoffman, *A Blemished Perfection*, 199-200, makes a similar point.

[33] Pope, *Job*, xlviii.

[34] Ibid. See also R. H. Pfeiffer, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (New York: Harper & Brothers), 670.

[35] Pfeiffer, *Introduction*, 680.

[36] See also Andersen, *Job*, 60. Gordis, *Book of God and Man*, 212, considers the Edomite theory as "wholly unwarranted." On Edomite inscriptions (there are a few from the 7th and 6th centuries) see J. R. Bartlett, *Edom and the Edomites* (JSOTSS 77; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989), 209-31. The language of the Edomites was later replaced by Aramaic. On the language of Edom it is useful to consult W. R. Garr, *Dialect Geography of Syria-Palestine, 1000-586 B.C.E.* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1985). Generally it may be said that the language revealed in the inscriptions is similar to the comparable Hebrew epigraphic texts. Some notable differences are: 1) the use of the Hiphil of ברך (vs. the Piel of other Semitic languages), 2) the diphthong *aw* was not reduced in the 7th century while *ay* perhaps was reduced (as in Ammonite), and 3) possible assimilation of *nun* before a laryngeal (see מעדר - in an ostracon from Umm el-Biyara). For these points see Garr, *Dialect Geography*, 43; I. Young, "The Diphthong **ay* in Edomite," *JSS* 37 (1992): 27-30; and H. Misgav, "Two Notes on the Ostraca from Horvat 'Uza," *IEJ* 40 (1990): 215-17. Other useful articles are by I. Beit-Arieh, "A Literary Ostracon from Horvat 'Uza," *Tel Aviv* 20 (1993): 55-65. See also I. Beit-Arieh and B. Cresson, "An Edomite Ostracon from Horvat 'Uza," *Tel Aviv* 12 (1985): 96-101.

present in the book.[37] A recent study of the book of Job by Edward L. Greenstein concentrates on the "dialectal coloring" found in the book.[38] The author points out poetic effects from Phoenician, Akkadian, and Aramaic (mainly from this language), and he also adds Qedemite/Arabic linguistic coloring. Greenstein makes the following remarks from his analysis of the book:

> Rather than seek an answer to the question of foreign linguistic elements in the poetry of Job in the area of dialectology, others of us seek to understand the phenomenon in the realm of poetics. We find it both more in keeping with the literary character of the book, as well as more meaningful, to interpret the foreign elements by suggesting a poetic function. I shall account for the manifold adaptations of foreign, and especially Aramaic, features in the poetry of Job by way of two general factors. On the one hand, the use of non-Hebrew elements in Job functions as the poet's manipulations of Hebrew do—to achieve a variety of structure-producing and meaning-enhancing effects. On the other hand, as Ginsberg has explained, the repeated use of non-Hebrew features lends the poetic dialogues an air of foreignness—which is particularly appropriate with regard to Job and his companions, who are all apparently Transjordanian figures.[39]

It is clear that Greenstein's explanation is similar to that of Y. Hoffman.[40] They both see the use of foreign language in the book of Job as serving a variety of poetic functions. The Joban poet has created poetic effects by means of language drawn from Phoenician, Arabic, Akkadian, and especially Aramaic.[41]

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[37] See especially the recent detailed discussion by Hoffman, *A Blemished Perfection*, 176-221.

[38] E. L. Greenstein, "The Language of Job and Its Poetic Function," a paper presented at the Institute for Advanced Studies of the Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 6 November 2001. An earlier version of this study was presented at the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, Nashville, 20 November 2000. A copy of the paper presented in Jerusalem was emailed to me by Dr. Greenstein.

[39] Ibid., 3. Greenstein refers to the following article of H. L. Gingsburg, "Job, The Book of," *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 10:120.

[40] See note 1.

[41] Greenstein, "Language of Job," 6.

Following a comment by S. A. Kaufman[42] and an earlier statement by N. H. Tur-Sinai,[43] Gary Rendsburg has suggested that the author of the poem of Job wrote in Hebrew, "but he coloured his Hebrew with Aramaic and Arabian elements to indicate the foreign nature of the characters."[44] He believes that we are not dealing with late language or foreign authors, but rather with intentional stylistic representations of Transjordanian speech on the part of Hebrew authors within Hebrew texts. In the book of Job we have examples of "style-switching," where linguistic markers are used to identify the characters as Transjordanians, and to convey the foreignness of Job and his interlocutors.[45] This theory would be supported if it could be shown that the speeches of God do not contain this "style-switching," but he notes that he has not conducted a detailed study to test this hypothesis.[46] According to the study conducted by Greenstein, the claim that the speeches of God in Job are not characterized by a noticeable use of Aramaic is "wholly unsubstantiated."[47] This remark is supported by my own studies.[48] These facts together with the observation of Greenstein that Aramaic is intermixed mildly but routinely throughout, so that the speakers do not make any sudden shifts, argue against this proposal made by Rendsburg.[49]

[42] See S. A. Kaufaman, "The Classification of the North West Semitic Dialects of the Biblical Period and Some Implications Thereof," in *Proceedings of the Ninth World Congress of Jewish Studies*: Panel Sessions: Hebrew and Aramaic Languages (Jerusalem 1988), 54-5.

[43] It seems that N. H. Tur-Sinai formerly believed that the author of the poem put in the mouth of Job and his friends, natives of Aram and Edom, expressions from the language of the East. He later changed his view by suggesting that the book of Job was a translation from Aramaic. See N. H. Tur-Sinai, *Job*, xxx-li and 111.

[44] G. Rendsbug, "Linguistic Variation and the Foreign Factor in the Hebrew Bible," in *Israel Oriental Studies* 15 (ed. Shlomo Izre'el and Rina Drory; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995), 179.

[45] Ibid., 179-80.

[46] Ibid., 180-81, thinks that "style-switching" does not carry over to God's speeches in chapters 38-42, but he admits that he has not conducted a detailed study to test this hypothesis. What we know is that in God's speeches the distribution of *hapax legomena* is much higher than in the speeches of any of the other participants. See Hoffman, *A Blemished Perfection*, 328, Appendix XVI.

[47] Greenstein, "Language of Job," 24 n. 45.

[48] In my personal study I have found five sure Aramaisms in this section (God's speeches) of the book of Job.

[49] Greenstein, "Language of Job," 24 n. 45.

III. Attempts to Analyze the Language of Job[50]

The difficulty of the language of the book of Job and the desire to understand better this masterpiece of literature have led to a series of studies especially aimed at the language of the book. Thus, already at the end of nineteenth century, H. J. Weber wrote an article in which he intended to gather material for the construction of a grammar of the book of Job.[51] This article[52] is basically an analysis of 183 words[53] that he considers ἅπαξ γεγραμμενα. He analyzes these words and suggests definitions based mainly on the context and other cognate languages, but he does not discuss syntax, verbal usage, or any other features of the grammar. The analysis is strictly lexical.

In 1926, Dhorme published what is considered one of the best commentaries on the book of Job of the twentieth century.[54] His analysis is that of a scholar well trained in the classics, but also in Semitic languages and literature. In his commentary he devotes about four pages to the language of the book of Job.[55] He notes that most of the terms peculiar to the book of Job are to be explained by reference to Hebraic or Semitic common roots (and he does that throughout the book by using mainly Akkadian, Arabic, and Aramaic). He also points out that Aramaic influences even the grammar of the book,[56] but this discussion takes less than a page. It is clear that his main concern is lexical; he does not attempt a systematic analysis of the grammar of the book.

One of the most complete treatments of the language of the book of Job is found in Nahum Sarna's 1955 Ph.D. thesis at Dropsie College. His study is mainly concerned with the grammar of the book (pp. 22-106), but he also discusses the lexical (pp. 107-135). In the grammar

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[50] Note that there were many studies done on particular passages on the book of Job along the centuries. The purpose of this section is not to discuss all the contributions to the book of Job, since that could well be a thesis by itself. I am noting the most important works which attempted to deal with all, or most of the book.

[51] See H. J. Weber, "Material for the Construction of a Grammar of the Book of Job," *AJSLL* 15/1 (1898): 1-32.

[52] Note that this article was supposed to be the first in a series of two (?), but the second one never appeared (to my knowledge).

[53] Weber says 180 in his article, but he analyzes 183 under the heading ἅπαξ γεγραμμενα.

[54] See the evaluation of F. I. Andersen (who still calls it a 'classic') in the preface of the 1984 edition, E. Dhorme, *A Commentary on the Book of Job* (trans. H. Knight; New York: Thomas Nelson, 1984), 1.

[55] See Dhorme, *Job,* clxxv-clxxix. This commentary spends by far the most space discussing the language of the book.

[56] See n. 20.

section, he starts by analyzing the "tenses" (pp. 22-42), and then he proceeds to discuss some verbal forms (pp. 42-54). The rest of the grammar section deals with the relative pronoun שׁ, the definite article, the prepositions, the *lamedh* of reinforcement, the enclitic *–m*, the particle *'ay*, the "pleonastic" *waw*, interjections, the negative with יֵשׁ, and the schematization of the numerals.[57]

Sarna begins by noting that the "sequence and function of the tenses constitute one of the most vexing problems presented by the poetry of Job."[58] He thinks that there is a variety of sequence, and the combinations are not inherently functional.[59] The perfect and the imperfect interchange without any apparent difference in tense while significance and the order of sequence is not important. He lists twenty-five cases where the perfect is followed by a simple imperfect, and twenty-seven cases where the imperfect is followed by simple perfect.[60] He continues his study by analyzing the unusual effect of the so-called *waw* consecutive.[61] There are at least twelve cases in Job where the consecutive imperfect follows a perfect, and is used as a frequentative or present tense, exactly as though it were punctuated as a conjunctive *waw* (7:6, 9, 20; 11:11; 12:18 etc.). After the simple imperfect, the consecutive imperfect (*waw* consecutive) has a frequentative or present tense meaning (more than nineteen cases). Sarna concludes that the evidence from Job establishes "beyond doubt that the presence of the so-called consecutive *waw* does not determine tense. There is no difference in signification between the conjunctive and consecutive *waw*...."[62]

Nahum Sarna also points out that one of the major characteristics of the verbal system in poetry (especially in Job) is the use of *yqtl* as the "regular and common verbal form."[63] From the evidence in Job, he concludes that the "*yqtl* represents a variety of tense meanings which have to be inferred from the context and which, as had been shown above, are not all dependent upon the presence or absence, or punctuation of the *waw*."[64]

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[57] My interest is in his analysis of the verbal system, and this is summarized here.

[58] Sarna, *Language of Job*, 22.

[59] This observation was already made by Ibn Ezra. See Sarna, *Language of Job*, 22 n. 1.

[60] Sarna, *Language of Job*, 22-23.

[61] Ibid., 23-28.

[62] Ibid., 27. He brings evidence to support this point from other passages from early Hebrew poetry (cf. Psalm 18 and 2 Sam 22).

[63] Ibid., 28. The discussion about the *yqtl* is found below.

[64] Ibid., 30-31. He thinks that this picture of the *yqtl* is characteristic of the earliest Hebrew poetry and is also paralleled in Canaanite poetry. Thus the

This preference for *yqtl* is a poetic archaism (Canaanite poetic tradition) and so is its use to express past time without the *waw*. There is detected an anomalous situation where *yqtl* with the consecutive *waw* may express present tense, while the simple *yqtl* can express not only a past frequentative (definitely past time, but unsure if there is continuity or repetition), but even completed action. He gives more than thirty-nine examples where *yqtl* is used as a past frequentative, and more than fifteen examples where it expresses completed action in the past. The past time element is maintained even with conjunctive *waw* (eight cases). Thus, for Sarna, the *yqtl* is the usual narrative tense in Job which may accurately be described as "omnitemporal," but is predominantly used as a preterite, as in Canaanite and East Semitic.[65]

There are twenty-five cases of the jussive in place of the imperfect, where the context could not possibly support a jussive meaning (more than any other book).[66] Sarna believes that these cases parallel the usage in Ugaritic, where the jussive with or without *waw* can express the same meaning as the imperfect form, and may even indicate past time. Therefore, these verbs are jussive in form but not in meaning. They are to be explained as archaisms after the pattern of early Canaanite poetry.

The rest of his verbal analysis is spent trying to show that in the book of Job we have evidence for the use of third masculine (singular and plural) imperfect form with *t-* preformative, just as in the Canaanite dialects. His analysis is drawing heavily from Canaanite parallels (Canaanisms).[67]

In 1969 A. C. M. Blommerde published a monograph which is "chiefly concerned with some of the grammatical peculiarities which either have been discovered for the first time in Ugaritic or Phoenician and afterwards also in Hebrew, or which were already known in Hebrew, but have received renewed attention under the impulse of Northwest Semitic studies."[68] His study tries to shed new light on a series of passages from Job by applying the grammatical principles derived mainly from the study of Ugaritic and Phoenician. The book has two main sections: the first section describes Northwest Semitic grammar, and the

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preference for *yqtl* in Job is to be regarded as a poetic archaism, a stylistic device developed in Job to its highest form of expression.

[65] Ibid., 33. Sarna does not give us any statistical information here, and does not explain his comparison with Canaanite and East Semitic.

[66] Ibid., 34. He relies on G. R. Driver, *Problems of the Hebrew Verbal System* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark , 1936), 9-31 and 132-44. Driver adduces sixty instances, twenty-five of which are in the book of Job.

[67] Ibid., 53.

[68] A. C. M. Blommerde, *Northwest Semitic Grammar and Job* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1969), 1.

second section applies this grammar to various texts in the book of Job (following the order of the biblical text). He discusses orthography, phonetics, pronouns, nouns, verbs, prepositions, adverbs and particles, and even syntax.[69]

This is the second study[70] of which I am aware that gives more than a cursory amount of space for the analysis of the verb (five pages) and syntax (two pages). But his analysis is based on observations from Northwest Semitic which he later applies to the text of Job. He does not systematically study the verbal system in Job, but rather applies grammatical principles deduced from Northwest Semitic to what he considers to be relevant passages in Job. The same is true of syntax. However, this is one of the main studies that makes some contribution toward the understanding of the verbs and syntax of Job.[71]

In 1969, D. N. Freedman, recognizing the problems concerning the composition, authorship, and provenance of the book, and the unusual character of the vocabulary, grammar and syntax, embarked on an analysis of certain orthographic features of the book of Job. He believed that an orthographic study could indirectly support one or another of the scholarly positions adopted with respect to the provenance and date of composition of the book.[72] His analysis of the orthography of the book has led him to the conclusion that "Job was a product of the (North) Israelite diaspora some time in the seventh or early sixth century B.C."[73] Even though this article was rather heavily criticized by J. Barr, especially for its basic premises and methodology,[74] it represents an attempt to address a problem of grammar that applies to the whole book of Job.

In 1974, Harmut Bobzin published his doctoral dissertation with the title: "Die 'Tempora' im Hiobdialog."[75] In this work he analyzed

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[69] Ibid., 3-35.

[70] The first one is in the work of Nahum Sarna discussed above.

[71] The more recent study of A. R. Ceresko, *Job 29-31 in the Light of Northwest Semitic* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1980), is not discussed here because it is concerned only with three chapters of the book. Ceresko (another student of M. Dahood) continues the use of the NWS (Northwest Semitic) method and applies it specifically to chapters 29 to 31. He has a brief grammar of Job 29-31 (Appendix 1, pp. 219-228). Here he has paragraphs on orthography, phonetics, pronouns, nouns, verbs (less than 1 page), prepositions, and particles.

[72] D. N. Freedman, "Orthographic Peculiarities in the Book of Job," *Eretz-Israel* 9 (1969): 35-44.

[73] Ibid., 43. His study is based on the hypothesis (supported by the epigraphical data) that in the North, the following contractions took place: *aw* > *ô* and *ay* > *ê*.

[74] See J. Barr, "Hebrew Orthography and the Book of Job," *JSS* XXX/1 (1985): 1-33.

[75] H. Bobzin, *Die 'Tempora' im Hiobdialog* (Marburg: Lahn, 1974).

the Hebrew verbal system while acknowledging early on that there are differences between the verbal system in prose and the verbal system in poetical texts.[76] Based on the work of his mentor Rössler, who worked from Akkadian, he defined two Hebrew "Tempora": the Ḥameṭ and the Mare'.[77] The schematic representation of his verbal system, which differentiates between main and subordinate clauses, is shown in *Table 1.1* below.[78]

For Bobzin, the Ḥameṭ marks an action as punctiliar, not repeated, not necessary, not certain, accidental, individual, and "simplex." Ḥameṭ can describe circumstances or long-lasting effects that are stative in function and, in connection with another continuing action, is never parallel.[79] On the other hand, the Mare' marks actions as non-punctiliar, repeated, necessary, certain, substantial, general, and "complex." The Mare' can give actions that function always as fientive, and when it appears in connection with another action, it always goes in parallel with this action.[80] This verbal system, which he discusses and expounds in some detail in the first part of his thesis, is then applied to the text of the book of Job.[81]

L. L. Grabbe tests systematically J. Barr's principles on comparative philology,[82] and he decided to do this by applying it to a selected corpus of literature. He chose the book of Job "because of the many philological riddles which still taunt each new exegete who thinks he can mark trails where others have failed."[83] He recognizes that the lexicon of the language cannot be analyzed in isolation of the grammar, but makes it very clear from the very beginning that his concentration is definitely on lexicography. Indeed, his study analyzes forty-five disputed words

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[76] He considers Job poetry. He does not think that the differences between the verbal system in prose and that in poetry should be overemphasized. See Bobzin, *Tempora*, 1 n. 4.

[77] The Ḥameṭ comes from the Akkadian term *ḥamṭu* (associated with "iprus"), while the Mare' comes from the Akkadian *marû* (associated with "iparras"). Bobzin, *Tempora*, 30.

[78] The following table is from Bobzin, *Tempora*, 55.

[79] Bobzin, *Tempora*, 42.

[80] Ibid.

[81] This is only a brief discussion of the verbal schema that Bobzin develops in his thesis. His system is described in detail in Bobzin, *Tempora*, 1-70. The table given above is a good visual representation of his system.

[82] The most complete presentation of Barr's methodology is found in J. Barr, *Comparative Philology and the Text of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988).

[83] L. L. Grabbe, *Comparative Philology and the Text of Job* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1977). This book is based on his Ph.D. dissertation from 1975 (Claremont Graduate School).

by systematically applying the methods of comparative philology intro-
duced by Barr. Thus, the study is again concerned mainly with the lexi-
cal element of the book.

Table 1.1: Bobzin's Verbal Scheme

SATZART			'Tempus' typ	'Tempus' darstellung	
				ḤAMEṬ	MAREʼ
HAUPTSATZ	VERBALSATZ	uneingeleitet	A	yiqtōl - x weyiqtōl - x wayyiqtōl - x	qāṭal - x
		eingeleitet	B	x - qāṭal	x - yiqṭōl
	NOMINALSATZ	rein	_	_	_
		zusammengesetzt	B	x - qāṭal	x - yiqṭōl
NEBENSATZ	VERBALSATZ	uneingeleitet	B	qāṭal - x weqāṭal - x	yiqtōl - x weyiqtōl - x
		eingeleitet	B	x - qāṭal	x - yiqṭōl
	NOMINAL SATZ	rein	_	_	_
		zusammengesetzt	B	x - qāṭal	x - yiqtōl

W. L. Michel is one of the most recent scholars who have undertaken a comprehensive study of the book of Job.[84] His aim was to apply the Northwest Semitic (NWS) method[85] to the text of Job, just as Mitchel Dahood had applied it to the text of the Psalms. Being aware that professor Dahood has never provided a systematic statement of his methodology, and neither have his students, he starts by giving a brief description of this methodology, and then proceeds to analyze the whole book of Job in a verse-by-verse manner. So far, Michel has published only the first volume of his work (covering chapters 1:1-14:22), but two more volumes are expected to be published in the next few years.[86] While the second volume is supposed to continue the verse-by-verse analysis of Job, in the final volume (III), Michel intends to include a grammar of Job.[87] From the first volume of his work and from his stated intentions in the introduction, it is fairly clear that Michel's focus is mainly lexical. He intends to clarify the more obscure passages of Job by the NWS comparative method, and does not plan to analyze systematically the whole text of Job to define the verbal system, the verbless clause, or other grammatical features.

[84] Michel, *Job.* See note 9 for the full bibliography, and also the discussion under section, "The Difficulty of the Language of Job."

[85] He gives the following summary of Dahood's methodology (which is equivalent to the NWS methodology) on p. 3: 1) there is no real gap in time between Ugaritic and Hebrew; 2) there are no geographic limits either, because the Ugaritic literary texts mention geographic names outside the Ugaritic territory involving all of the land of Canaan; 3) there was a much greater unity of culture (including mythology), with local variants and diversity, in the ancient Near East than previously assumed; 4) the vocabulary and grammar from Ugarit and Ebla helps to clarify many obscure Hebrew terms and phrases and is especially significant for the understanding of the many Hebrew *hapax legomena*; there is also evidence for a much greater lexical stability in the Canaanite milieu than previously assumed; 5) the consonantal Hebrew text is not corrupt, while the understanding of ancient Hebrew by scholars is still less than adequate; 6) the rediscovery of the many poetic devices, used in the ancient Near East and especially by Ugaritic poets, sheds new light on Hebrew poetry and is of great significance for exegesis. This is a comparative approach which makes use of other Northwest Semitic languages (especially Ugaritic, Phoenician, Punic, and Eblaite) to clarify some problems in the obscure language of Job.

[86] This information is from personal communication in the spring and summer of 2001 (by email) with Dr. W. L. Michel. Though he was rather discouraged by the reception of the first volume of his work, he intends to press on and complete the publication of the following two volumes of his work.

[87] See Michel, *Job*, 9. He has also communicated this intention to me personally, but he had not published the grammar volume by the end of 2006.

IV. Suggestions for Further Study

From the brief summary of the work that has been done on the language of the book of Job,[88] it is quite clear that the focus has been mostly on the lexical side.[89] The major exceptions from this come from the work of D. N. Freedman who has focused on the orthographic peculiarities of the book, and from Nahum Sarna who has given considerable space to the study of the verbs (see his chapter on "tenses") in the book of Job. However, it is my perception that his study needs to be refined. The major problem with his analysis is that it does not go beyond the level of the sentence,[90] though he recognizes the importance of the context for establishing the tense of a particular clause.[91] He is right to point out the apparent "arbitrariness" in using the *yqtl* and *qtl* almost interchangeably in a series of clauses,[92] but I think that one has to go beyond the sentence and analyze discourse units to be able to explain this phenomenon.[93]

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[88] Note that my summary in the section, "Attempts to Analyze the Language of Job," was preoccupied with work that at least attempted to consider the whole book of Job. In the past 150 years, many other writers have written notes on the book of Job. Most of these works have focused on the lexical problems, while some have tried to solve the perceived problems in the text by emendation or re-pointing of the text. See Wolfers, *Deep Things*, 28-45. The following authors have also contributed "notes" to the book of Job: G. A. Barton, G. Beer, S. T. Byington, E. G. Clarke, M. Dahood, G. R. Driver, W. B. Stevenson, among others.

[89] Hoffman, *A Blemished Perfection*, 176-221, devotes a whole chapter to discuss the difficult language of the book of Job. She acknowledges that the syntax of the book may be one of the reasons for the difficulty (p. 177), but believes that a large number appearing syntactical actually originate in difficult words rather than in departure from accepted sentence structure (p. 178). Thus she concentrates her analysis mainly upon the lexicographical aspect. Hoffman's study is useful for the discussion of the *hapax legomena,* foreign words, homonyms, and unique metaphors. See n. 1 for her conclusions about the reasons for the difficult language of the book.

[90] Note also the analysis of P. C. Craigie, "Excursus II: The Translation of Tenses in Hebrew Poetry," in *Psalms 1-50* (WBC; Waco: Word Books, 1983), 110-13. He also notes the problem of establishing tense in Hebrew poetry (focusing especially on Psalms) and emphasizes the importance of context for this. His analysis (like that of Dahood) also does not seem to go beyond the clause/ sentence level. See also M. Dahood, "Grammar of the Psalter," in *Psalms III* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 1970), 361-456.

[91] See especially Sarna, *Language of Job*, 30.

[92] See the summary of his analysis above.

[93] See Y. Endo, *The Verbal System of Classical Hebrew in the Story of Joseph: An Approach from Discourse Analysis* (SSN; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1996), 26-28. He clearly states (he is analyzing narrative) that there is "ample evidence to prove that 'tense' in biblical Hebrew is a linguistic phenomenon beyond the sentence

Thus, for a more productive analysis of Job, one has to focus more on the systematic study of the verbal system and the verbal clause. I believe that it is important to realize that not all books in the Hebrew Bible belong to the same period, and that it is possible and desirable to write a grammar for almost every individual book of the Bible. This would be especially useful for the poetical books of the Bible which, I believe, display a lot less uniformity in grammar than the prose books (the Pentateuch and the Former Prophets). A comparison of their grammar would then perhaps be useful to help place these books in the proper diachronic sequence in the history of the Hebrew language.

Especially in the book of Job, the arguments for its origin, authorship, and date of composition have been coming from lexical and philosophical considerations. Perhaps a more fruitful and safe (controlled) discussion would spring from an in-depth analysis of the grammar of the book (provided that other books are analyzed in the same manner and thus can be later compared). However, the clarification of these questions about origin and authorship of the book should not be primary concerns. It is more important for scholars to have a better understanding of the verbal system and syntax in Hebrew poetry. Thus, a useful work would be directed toward the analysis of the following verbal forms in the book of Job: *yiqtōl, w-yiqtōl, wayyiqtōl, qātal,* and *w-qātal.* These should be analyzed by paying special attention to the type of clause in which they appear, and the place in the clause. In other words, this approach should be based on discourse analysis;[94] it should analyze the verbal forms beyond the level of the clause, by starting with discourse units.

The larger discourse units in Job are easily defined, based on the change of the speakers who alternate throughout the book.[95] These alter-

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level and should also be described by discourse grammar." And again, for him "it is evident that unless we admit that 'tense' in BH is also a discourse phenomenon which is observed on the linguistic level beyond the sentence, we cannot describe it adequately." I believe that the same is true about Hebrew poetry.

[94] Note that there are not many works which discuss discourse analysis in poetry. For the book of Job this is a pioneering effort. The only other attempts to apply discourse analysis in poetry are those found in E. R. Wendland, ed., *Discourse Perspectives on Hebrew Poetry in the Scriptures* (UBS Monograph Series 7; New York: United Bible Societies, 1994) and idem, *The Discourse Analysis of Hebrew Prophetic Literature* (MBPS 40; Lewiston: Mellen Biblical Press, 1995).

[95] Of course, as it is well known, this alternation of speakers is much more questionable in chapters 24-28. See the more recent work of Hoffman, *Blemished Perfection,* 276-88. She believes that the block of chapters 25-28, as it presently stands, is blemished. According to her, the following scholars also view this cycle as corrupted or incomplete: Duhm, Gordis, Y. Kaufmann, Fohrer, Dhorme, Driver and Gray, Horst, etc.

nating speakers are usually contained in one or two consecutive chapters in the translated versions.[96] For distinguishing the smaller discourse units, a step that is necessary for analyzing the verbal system in my scheme, the following three main opening markers could be taken into consideration: shift in speakers (addressee), shift in topic (tone), and shift in time (setting).[97] The main unit terminators are inclusio, epiphora, and exclamation. Other markers that should be taken into consideration are the following: shift of type of address, transitional expression, direct speech/address, and rhetorical question.[98] A good methodology would make use of the principle of "convergence" to determine a discourse unit. This principle is quite simple: "the more rhetorical-structural markers that appear together in a given colon or bicolon, the more likely it is that this particular utterance constitutes a border which either opens or closes some larger compositional segment."[99]

An informed analysis should also take into consideration the earlier and latest studies on the verbal system in biblical Hebrew, despite the fact that most of these studies are specifically directed to narrative.[100]

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[96] Thus Job speaks in chapter 3, Eliphaz in chapters 4-5, Bildad in chapter 8, etc. In the original Hebrew version, the speaker is usually clearly introduced by the standard phrase PN ויען. (PN stands for "personal name.")

[97] This is based on the research of Wendland, *Discourse Analysis,* 30-68. Note that the last marker (shift in time) is also something that has to be determined. Thus there is the danger of circular argumentation.

[98] See the detailed study and explanation for these terms by Wendland, *Discourse Analysis*, 30-68.

[99] Wendland, *Discourse Analysis*, 64-5. But note that the activity of establishing relevant structural units in ancient documents will probably never be certain and absolute.

[100] Note for example the article of John Cook, "The Hebrew Verb: A Grammaticalization Approach," *ZAH* 14/2 (2001): 117-43, and the bibliography there. See also his more recent article "The Finite Verbal Forms in Biblical Hebrew Do Express Aspect," *JANES* 30 (2006): 21-35.