

# TOWARDS A NEW DICTIONARY OF BIBLICAL HEBREW BASED ON SEMANTIC DOMAINS

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the course of the years many dictionaries of biblical Hebrew have been published. New dictionaries are on their way. Lexicographical insights have changed a lot over the past years, however. This paper deals with the question as to what extent modern lexicographic insights can be used in (biblical) Hebrew lexicography.

### 1.1. Traditional Approaches

One of the key questions in semantics, that needs to be answered before anybody can embark on the enormous and tedious task of creating a lexicon of biblical Hebrew, is the following: How do we find out the meaning of a particular word? If we study some of the more traditional Hebrew dictionaries we can see that a number of criteria have been used to determine the meaning of a particular entry or subentry. Let us briefly look into those criteria and try to evaluate them.

#### *1.1.1. Etymology*

This is information about a particular word on the basis of internal reconstruction, whether or not sometimes with the help of data from

related languages. If, for instance, we compare the meaning of a particular word with the meaning of the root from which it seems to have been derived, we can draw all kinds of conclusions about the possible meaning of that word. Although a word study of this nature may provide us with useful information, its significance is often overemphasized. As we will see later, the real meaning of a word is discovered when we study it in its context in the largest possible sense of the word. There are numerous cases of wrong exegesis of biblical passages because of the fact that the exegete leaned too heavily on the etymology of a particular word.

### *1.1.2. Comparative Linguistics*

Our knowledge of biblical Hebrew has benefited immensely over the last centuries from discoveries of manuscripts and inscriptions in related languages, some of which were not even known to exist before those days. The decipherment of those texts yielded a treasure of new insights in the linguistic mosaic of the ancient Middle-East and helped to discover other meanings for certain Hebrew words that had hitherto been hard to interpret. Again, this is important information as it can be used to substantiate the claims of the author(s) of the dictionary that a particular word must have meaning A rather than meaning B. In spite of this, however, one has to be very careful with this information, as it originates from different languages with different underlying world views and cultures, and --in many cases-- with only a limited data corpus. Moreover, a word has meaning only within its own language and its own period of usage (Barr 1992:141) and the primary method for determining the meaning of a word is by studying it within the context of all passages where it is found.

### *1.1.3. Semantic Analysis*

The dictionaries listed above usually contain some degree of semantic analysis. The gloss that is considered to represent the main or basic meaning of a particular entry usually precedes the glosses that point to meanings that are understood to be its derivatives. Unfortunately,

however, a *structural* semantic analysis is often lacking. This is a detailed study of the way different concepts in the world behind a language are perceived by the speakers of that language and how these concepts are transferred into semantic forms. Such a study gives us a lot of insight in the meaning of words and the ways different meanings interrelate. As Barr (1992:143) observes, however, the semantic analysis of the older dictionaries seems often to be defective and needs to be rethought.

#### 1.1.4. Syntagmatic Relations

Dictionaries often contain a certain amount of syntagmatic information as well. Words may take on a different shade of meaning when occurring in certain constructions, like idiomatic expressions. It may sometimes be important to know which preposition a particular verb requires or whether it is followed by an infinitive or not. This, however, is syntactic information and not of the same nature as semantic information. Many of the traditional dictionaries, though, come up with mixtures of syntactic and semantic data which may mislead the user and keep him/her from gaining a clear insight in the meaning of a particular word

## 1.2. Definitions vs. Glosses

The major weakness of many of the traditional Hebrew dictionaries, however, lies in the fact that, instead of giving the meaning of a particular Hebrew word, usually not more than one or more glosses of that word in the target language are given. This actually does not apply to Hebrew dictionaries only, but to many traditional dictionaries of other languages as well. This is a pity because a set of glosses only gives a limited insight in the meaning of a particular word. Glosses, according to Barr (1973:119-120), are not themselves meanings nor do they tell us the meanings; the meanings reside in the actual Hebrew usage, and for real semantic analysis the glosses have no greater value than that of indicators or labels for a meaning which resides in the Hebrew itself .

The use of glosses can even be misleading. If a certain entry in a particular dictionary is listed with three glosses the average reader may get the impression that that entry has three meanings even though those three glosses may be practically synonyms of each other.

If we want to know the meaning of a word we need much more information than can be contained in a simple gloss. It is interesting to note that a number of monolingual dictionaries handle their entries in a much better way. This type of dictionary usually explains the meaning of each word by means of a definition. A good example of such a dictionary is *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* (Sykes 1983). Many people, however, seem to think that the only reason why dictionaries of this category make use of definitions rather than glosses lies in the fact that these are monolingual dictionaries and certain words simply do not have the synonyms that could function as glosses. But according to Wierzbicka (1985:5), when it comes to concepts encoded in words of a foreign language, especially a culturally distant one, the intuitive link between a word and a concept is missing, and a full definition is the only way of ensuring true understanding of the cultural universe encoded in the languages lexicon.

### 1.3. Analysis of Meaning

But before we can write a definition for a particular entry we have to establish the methodology that is to be followed in order to do this well. The meaning of a word is not automatically equivalent to a long description with a large quantity of encyclopedic information, which, according to Louw (1985a:58) does not explain the meaning of the word but elaborates on the concept or the object involved. As Nida correctly observes, words have meaning only in terms of systematic contrasts with other words which share certain features with them but contrast with them in respect to other features (Nida 1975a:32). In other words, each particular word is a member of a larger group of words that have certain aspects of meaning in common. Such a group can be called a *semantic field* or a *semantic domain*. The meaning of a word can only then be

fully understood when we study it in combination with other words that belong to the same semantic domain.

This means that before we can write a dictionary of a particular language we need to start with a set of semantic domains. The next question that comes to mind, then, is the following: From where do we get those semantic domains? Is there a universal set of semantic domains that can be applied to every individual language? Unfortunately, things are not as simple as that. If the meaning of a word were only a relation to a particular entity in the practical world we would probably be able to come up with an universal set of domains. This is not the case, however. As Nida (1975b:14) observes, the meaning of a word relates to *a concept or a set of concepts that people have about an entity or a set of entities in the world around them*. And these concepts may vary from one language or culture to another.

For that reason each individual language requires a thorough and structural semantic study before we can even make the slightest effort towards producing a dictionary in that language. This becomes very crucial for translators in cases where there are significant differences in culture and world view between the source and target language. A Hebrew-English dictionary is such a case, even more so because of the fact that the text of the Hebrew Old Testament with its corresponding world view is more than 2000 years old.

## 2. EXISTING HEBREW DICTIONARIES

One of the oldest dictionaries that are still actively used by Hebrew scholars is the one by Gesenius. This and a number of more recent dictionaries will be discussed in more detail below.

### 2.1. Gesenius

A classic Hebrew dictionary is the one by Dr. Heinrich Friedrich Wilhelm Gesenius, of which the first edition was published around 1810, and which was written in the German language. Even long after his death

in 1842, many revisions, translations, and reprints of this classic work appeared. This dictionary contains a treasure of information, including cognates from related languages and references to other scholarly publications, but cannot be considered fully up-to-date anymore.

## 2.2. Brown–Driver–Briggs

Another well-known dictionary is the one by Brown, Driver, and Briggs, of which the first part was published in 1891 and completed in 1906. Their work was written in English and based on Robinsons translation into English of Gesenius dictionary, which came out in 1854. The editorial team incorporated many of the discoveries in the fields of archeology and philology that were made in the second half of the 19th century in their lexicon, although later editions of Gesenius dictionary contain much of that information as well.

This dictionary (henceforth referred to as BDB) has been organized in a slightly different way in that all roots have been listed alphabetically, whereas all entries that are to be considered derivations from those roots have been listed under the roots from which they have been derived. The advantage of this method is that it is easy for the user to see the semantic relationship between each root and its derivatives. This is important, because there are many cases where there is no significant difference between the meaning of a root and some of the words that were derived from it. This method has some disadvantages and dangers as well, however. The disadvantage lies in the fact that, in a dictionary like this, it is not always easy to find a particular entry if it is not a root. In the case of some of the more irregular verbs it takes a lot of insight to figure out from which root a particular entry could have been derived. Sometimes more than one single root can be postulated. And what is worse, there can be a lot of differences in opinion as to which root underlies which derivative. Another danger lies in the fact that some users may be inclined to overemphasize the semantic relationship between a particular root and its derivatives. In order to be able to understand the meaning of a word we will have to study it within its context and

though the etymological aspects of a particular word are not to be neglected, a number of derivatives undergo a certain amount of semantic shift which only the context in which they occur can help us discover.

In spite of these points of criticism, however, BDB should be considered a very valuable tool for both students and scholars, which --even though almost a century has passed since it was first published-- is still very useful. As Muraoka (1995:87) puts it, BDB and the 17th edition of Gesenius are still very much alive. As we have seen, however, lexicographical insights have changed significantly over the years and we need to see those insights applied to biblical Hebrew as well.

### 2.3. Koehler–Baumgartner

About half a century after the publication of BDB, Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner published the first edition of their *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros* (1953). Koehler was responsible for the Hebrew part whereas Baumgartner provided the Aramaic part. This edition was bilingual in that it provided glosses in both German and English. Two years after the death of Koehler, in 1958, a second edition appeared. This actually was an unaltered reprint of the first edition, together with a supplement from the hand of Baumgartner, which contained a German-Hebrew and a German-Aramaic glossary, together with a list of corrections and additions to the first edition and some other information. The first volume of the third edition to this impressive dictionary appeared in 1967. Unfortunately, however, in this edition the approach of using bilingual glosses was abandoned. The need arose, therefore, for a separate English edition, of which the first volume appeared in 1993. The last volume of the Hebrew part of this dictionary was published in July 1999. Only one more volume is forthcoming, but this will only contain the Aramaic part and a bibliography.

Unlike BDB, this dictionary is not based on the one by Gesenius. Since Koehler and Baumgartner's work is of a much more recent date than the dictionaries that were mentioned earlier it can be considered much more up-to-date. As far as its organization is concerned, however,

this dictionary is not significantly different from the one by Gesenius. It differs from BDB in that all entries have been listed alphabetically, with the result that it is easier to find a particular entry in this dictionary. For each root all words that are considered to have been derived from it are listed, so that the user is still able to see the etymological relations between the root and its derivatives.

One of the ways in which this dictionary (henceforth referred to as KB) differs from the ones that were mentioned earlier lies in the fact that it is based on a Hebrew text that, according to the preface of the edition of 1958, is free from obvious scribal errors and other mistakes (xi). In other words, KB contains quite a number of conjectural emendations even though this same preface claims that the greatest reserve was shown in the matter of emendation of the traditional text. According to the introduction to the first volume of the third edition, which appeared in 1967, however, many of the proposals for textual change in the first edition were abandoned in the third edition. In spite of this, however, KB still contains a considerable number of textual emendations, even though text-critical insights regarding the Hebrew text of the Old Testament have changed considerably in the course of the last decennia. Only a cursory glance at the results of the Hebrew Old Testament Text Project (HOTTP) will make this abundantly clear.

KB is a useful dictionary that provides the user with a large quantity of valuable information. From a lexicographical point of view, however, this dictionary does not have much more to offer than BDB.

#### 2.4. Clines

The first volume of *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* by David J.A. Clines (editor) came out in 1993. By this time already four volumes have come out, and up till now the letters א until ז have been covered. According to the preface, this dictionary marks an important departure from the tradition of Hebrew lexicography (p. 7). One of the ways in which it is said to differ from other Hebrew dictionaries is that it designates and defines a phase of the language as Classical Hebrew (p.

14). This dictionary is said to cover all Hebrew texts from the period prior to about 200 CE. In addition to the Hebrew Old Testament it covers the following texts as well: (1) Ben Sira, (2) the Qumran manuscripts and related texts, and (3) inscriptions and other occasional texts.

In addition, this dictionary is said to differ from other dictionaries in that it is based on modern linguistic principles. According to the introduction, the focus in this dictionary is not so much on the meanings, or the translation equivalents, of individual words as on the patterns and combinations in which words are used; and attention is paid primarily not to the unusual and difficult words but to the common words (p.15).

As far as its organization is concerned, this dictionary has followed the same method as Gesenius and BDB: all words have been listed alphabetically. It also provides the user with the number of occurrences of each lemma in the four different bodies of text that were listed above. This information is followed by the part of speech and a gloss that helps the user identify the lemma. Then all morphological forms of the lemma are listed, followed by its semantic analysis, its syntagmatic analysis (depending on its part of speech), and its paradigmatic analysis (synonyms, antonyms, etc.). Finally, a number of related entries is given.

Clines dictionary (henceforth referred to as DCH) does not contain any comparative data from other Semitic languages either, because the significance of the cognates has been systematically misunderstood by many users of the traditional dictionaries (p. 17-18). Another important feature of this dictionary is that it makes an effort to keep semantic, syntagmatic, and paradigmatic information apart. It is a well-organized dictionary that contains a treasure of information. It also deserves praise for the fact that --in most cases-- all references in which a particular word occurs have been listed. The wide range of texts that are covered is unprecedented as well. DCH also seems to be considerably more reluctant to suggest emendations of the Hebrew text than KB.

There is no doubt, therefore, that this dictionary is an important step forward in the history of Hebrew lexicography. It has a number of

disadvantages as well, however. Unfortunately, a structural semantic analysis (see section 1.1 for a definition of this term) of Classical Hebrew is missing. Therefore the semantic analysis for each particular entry has a large subjective element in it (p. 19). On this same page the author of the introduction even states that our perception of senses is often dependent on the semantic structure of the English language. That is how it must be, and should be, of course, in an interlingual dictionary. Muraoka (1995:91) labels this correctly as a most extraordinary and dogmatic statement. This statement may hold some truth for a Bible translator who wants to translate the Old Testament into English, but is hard to accept for someone who wants to do translation work in any other language and needs a dictionary in the English language in order to understand what the Hebrew text says. A Hebrew dictionary is to teach us something about meaning in Hebrew and too much emphasis on the semantic structure of the English language may prevent us from really understanding what goes on in Hebrew. Only a structural semantic analysis of Hebrew can help us to understand what the language is trying to communicate and only on the basis of such an analysis we will be able to determine which semantic domains are relevant to the language. Therefore, in spite of what the introduction says, the makers of DCH have not used the insights provided by modern lexicography to the fullest extent.

Another problem --though somehow related to the one described in the previous paragraph-- lies in the fact that the meaning of each individual (sub)entry is described in the form of one or more *glosses* rather than a clear *definition*. This makes it much more difficult to get an clear overview of the different senses that one particular entry may have. As a result of this, this dictionary looks more like other dictionaries than would have been necessary.

A further disadvantage, as de Regt (1997:71) observes, is that the senses of a word are generally arranged in order of frequency of attestation. However interesting the information that is gained by this perspective may be, it is not of a semantic nature and prevents us from getting a clear view of the different senses of an entry and the way these

senses relate to each other.

Finally, one could ask oneself the question whether DCH does not contain an *overload* of information. Is it really necessary to list all different verbs that have the word אָב father as subject, all verbs that have it as object, and all types of nominal clauses in which it occurs? Do we not have computer programs these days that can provide us with information of that nature if we really want it? What are the semantic benefits of knowing all passages where *Moses* is the subject of יָחַז to hold, seize, grasp rather than *Jacob* or *David*? A dictionary should not be an exhaustive encyclopedia containing all available information about a particular word but should limit itself to the information that is relevant from a semantic point of view.

## 2.5. Alonso–Schökel

One year after the first volume of DCH saw the light, another remarkable dictionary was published. Luis Alonso Schökel, in cooperation with Víctor Morla and Vicente Collado, published their *Diccionario bíblico hebreo-español*, which will henceforth be referred to as DBHE. This Hebrew-Spanish dictionary of the Bible, however, is not just the first of many volumes that are still to be published, but a complete Hebrew dictionary. It is a pity, of course, that, up till now, this dictionary is only available for a limited public, but we do not want to begrudge the Spanish speaking world this impressive piece of work. We can only hope that it will soon become available for the rest of the world as well.

This dictionary is organized alphabetically like Gesenius, KB, and DCH, and has a lot of features in common with DCH. Like DCH, it is well-organized and does not contain etymological or comparative data (p. 8). DBHE does not contain the same amount of information as DCH although that may well be an advantage rather than a disadvantage, as not all information in DCH is relevant. DBHE can be considered a modern dictionary that has really made an effort to incorporate modern lexicographical insights. Many entries, for instance, --though unfortunately not all-- are explained by means of descriptive phrases instead of (series

of) glosses, and --what is even more important-- the makers of this dictionary have even made use of a kind of semantic domains to distinguish between different ways certain words are used. The entry אֶבֶן stone, for instance, is divided into nine subentries on the basis of semantic categories like: *natural substance*, *construction material*, *weapons*, *ornamental use*, *commercial use*, *religious and cultural use*, *pagan use*, *meteorological use*, and *figurative use*. This is very helpful.

Unfortunately, however, this dictionary has a number of disadvantages as well. Unlike DCH, DBHE does not list the number of occurrences of each entry, and it does not list the scripture references for (almost) all entries either. In addition to that, semantic domains are only used in the case of entries that can be considered key terms or technical terms. When it comes to less frequent or less important words DBHE resembles the more traditional dictionaries. Moreover, a structural semantic analysis (see section 1.1 for a definition of this term) of Hebrew seems to be missing. The way this dictionary is organized also does not allow the user to compare different (sub)entries that belong to one single semantic domain. An index organized according to semantic domains could be very helpful here, although its significance would be limited as not all entries have a semantic classification.

In spite of this, however, DBHE is a commendable dictionary and an important step ahead of what has been published so far in this field, including DCH.

### 3. LOUW AND NIDAS LEXICON

Towards the end of the 1980s a totally new lexicographic product saw the light, when Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, with the help of Rondal B. Smith and Karen Munson, published their *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*. This lexicon was based on the latest insights in modern semantic analysis and, as a result of that, was organized in a way that differed drastically from what had been done so far. This lexicon will henceforth be referred to as LN.

The user who expects an alphabetic list of Greek words finds a list of 93 semantic domains instead, ranging from *Geographical Objects and Features* to *Names of Persons and Places*. Most semantic domains contain a number of subdomains. Even at that level words have not been arrayed alphabetically. Instead of that, words with *generic* meanings are listed before words with more *specific* meanings. In order to be able to find a particular word an index has been added, that lists each entry alphabetically and leads the user to the various semantic (sub)domains where this word can be found.

In a number of cases footnotes have been used to explain why certain entries, or groups of entries, were classified under one domain rather than another, or why the editors felt it necessary to set up certain domains for entries that could have been classified under another domain as well.

The first distinction in the classification of words (see p. vi of the introduction to their dictionary) that Louw and Nida have made is threefold:

1. *Unique referents* words that refer to one single, unique *Object*: proper names
2. *Class referents* words that refer to a class of *Objects*, *Events*, or *Attributes*: common words
3. *Markers* words that mark the relationship between other words, like *Objects*, *Events*, or *Attributes*. Another term that is often used in semantic, and which seems to denote the same category of words, is *Relationals*.

On the first page of the introduction to their lexicon (p. vi), Louw and Nida report to have devoted their domains 1-12 to *Objects*. According to them domains 13-57 are used to designate *Events*, and domains 58-91 are said to contain *Attributes*, including *Relationals*. As we just observed, this information is a little contradictory, as, earlier on the same page, they claim domains LN 89 and LN 91 to contain *Markers*, which are to be considered different from *Class Referents*. So how can Louw and Nida group *Attributes* and *Relationals* together? We get the impression that Louw and Nida are referring to two different models at the same time and that is confusing. It may be better to cling to the simpler division of

lexical units into *Objects*, *Events*, *Attributes*, and *Relationals*. Could we conclude on the basis of Louw and Nidas introduction that domains 58-88 contain *Attributes* whereas domains 89-91 contain *Relationals*? We cannot say that with certainty. Also the position of LN 92 (*Discourse Referentials*) within this framework does not become entirely clear. Are they to be considered *Relationals* according to their approach? Maybe. In this research, we will not make use of Louw and Nidas categories *Unique Referents*, *Class Referents*, and *Markers*. Instead of that we will use the simpler division of *all* lexical units into the four categories of *Objects*, *Events*, *Attributes*, and *Relationals*.

The basis on which Louw and Nida have set up the entire range of semantic domains that they have used are what they call the three major classes of semantic features: shared, distinctive, and supplementary (p. vi). *Shared* features are those semantic features that certain lexical elements have in common. In addition to that, each lexical item has (*distinctive*) features that distinguishes it from other lexical items. Finally, most lexical items have a number of *supplementary* features as well, that are of a more peripheral nature and play a role in a limited number of contexts. More information about Louw and Nidas methodology can be found in Louw (1985b) and Nida and Louw (1992).

#### 4. LOUW AND NIDAS APPROACH AND BIBLICAL HEBREW

Louw and Nidas dictionary is a very helpful tool for the study of New Testament Greek. Now what to do with biblical Hebrew? The scholarly world is desperately in need of a dictionary of this language that is built on the same principles. It actually is a pity that this needs to be done *after* the completion of this New Testament dictionary. It is an undeniable fact that the Old Testament has had a major influence on the New Testament (Mulder 1979:8) It would not be an overstatement to say that it is extremely difficult --if not impossible-- to understand the New Testament well without a thorough understanding of the Old. Much of the

terminology that is used in the New Testament has its origin in the Old Testament and that has consequences for our semantic analysis of those terms.

One scholar who has seen the need for a new dictionary of biblical Hebrew based on semantic domains is James A. Swanson. In 1997 Logos Research Systems published an electronic version of *We will come back to the use of electronic versions of dictionaries later in this section. A Dictionary of Biblical Languages*, consisting of both a Hebrew and an Aramaic part. This is an Old Testament dictionary that has used Louw and Nidas setup of semantic domains. Each word is listed in its alphabetical order and every (sub)entry contains a reference to one of Louw and Nidas (sub)domains. Instead of using the name of that (sub)domain Swanson uses its index number or a range of those numbers. By clicking on that index reference the program will display Louw and Nidas dictionary.

In his *Authors Preface* Swanson readily admits that this method has its disadvantages. According to him the purpose was not to suggest that Hebrew/Aramaic and Greek thought structures are of the same. There is no suggestion that a lexeme in the OT language mathematically equals (univocal) the Greek lexemes in meaning. There is also no suggestion that a Greek language domain structure should be imposed on a Hebrew culture domain structure. The reasons why he makes use of Louw and Nidas system are primarily pragmatic as he regards it as an organizational principle to keep track of the tens of thousands of meanings of OT lexemes. Secondly, Swanson argues that there is at least an analogical connection between the domains of meaning in the Greek New Testament and Hebrew/Aramaic culture. Many of these domains could relate to nearly any culture of the world. But he also agrees that certain domains in the Hebrew have to be more carefully studied and debated as to their cultural mindset.

Swansons dictionary certainly is a useful tool. But we can only underline the disadvantages of the method he used that he brings up himself. In spite of all analogies and similarities, biblical Hebrew and New Testament Greek are basically unrelated languages. Moreover, there

are significant differences between the culture that lies behind the Old Testament and the one which underlies the New Testament, with its Hellenistic influence. As a result of this we cannot expect the 93 semantic domains used by Louw and Nida to fully match the Hebrew Old Testament.

Research is needed in order to determine the specific needs of the biblical Hebrew language, which consequently should be incorporated into the basic framework of semantic classes, to result in a Hebrew lexicon that is based on a linguistically adequate semantic foundation that does full justice to biblical Hebrew and the world view behind it.

In addition to this there are a number of disadvantages related to Louw and Nidas methodology as well, which make it difficult to use the framework which they have set up for a semantic domain dictionary for biblical Hebrew. A number of these problems will be dealt with in the following subsections.

#### 4.1. Class referents

As we have seen above, Louw and Nida have divided all words that refer to classes of lexical items into three major categories: *Objects*, *Events*, and *Attributes* (including *Relationals*). Their list of domains has been divided accordingly. In spite of this, however, there is a significant number of cases where these three classes have not been kept apart.

There is, for example a special semantic domain (LN 9) that has been reserved for (individual) *People*. Many words that, strictly speaking, belong to this domain, however, have been classified elsewhere. The word **soldier**, for instance, has been classified under *Military Activities* (LN 55), while the word **carpenter** can be found under *Building, Constructing* (LN 45). Here *Objects* have been classified as *Events*, obviously because of the close relationship in these cases between the person and his main activity.

A similar problem can be met when studying domain LN 88: *Moral and Ethical Qualities and Related Behavior*, where *Attributes* (e.g. **sinful**), *Events* (e.g. **sin**), and *Objects* (e.g. **sinner**) have been grouped together as

*Attributes.* Also in this case the reason why it was done this way is easy to see from a practical point of view. Nevertheless, from a strictly linguistic point of view, this may not be the most ideal thing to do.

One of the intentions of this research is to come up with a basic framework that will take care of these types of difficulties in a way that will be both acceptable from a scholarly point of view and practically feasible.

## 4.2. Semantic Domains

While studying Louw and Nidas lexicon and going through the different semantic domains it is not always easy to resist the impression that the semantic framework that was used is based on a mixture of two distinct types of information. An example may illustrate this.

Let us look, for instance, to their domain *Attachment* (LN 18). Entry **18.4** is the verb ἀρπάζω, which is defined as to grab or seize by force, with the purpose of removing and/or controlling . This same verb can be found under *Possess, Transfer, Exchange* (LN 57), entry **57.235**, where this verb is said to mean to forcefully take something away from someone else, often with the implication of a sudden attack . Another occurrence of this same verb (**37.28**) can be found under *Control, Rule* (LN 37), where it has been defined as to gain control over by force . Now if we compare these three definitions carefully we will see that they have quite a lot in common. These three entries share a considerable number of semantic features, although there are a number of distinctive and supplementary features that play an important role as well. But if we look at the shared semantic features of these three instances of ἀρπάζω it gives us some important lexical information about this verb. (Unfortunately, the way this dictionary has been organized makes it difficult to obtain this information, but more about that later.) On the basis of the three definitions given above, one could easily give a basic definition of the meaning of ἀρπάζω. This would be something like to forcefully take hold of an object . Every context in which this verb occurs, however, draws our attention to other components of meaning,

either of a distinctive or a supplementary nature, that help us determine the exact meaning of ἀρπάζω in that particular context. One glance at Louw and Nidas Greek-English index provides us with numerous other examples. The distinction between *generic* and *specific* that Louw and Nida often use does not help us very much here. Why would entry **18.4** be more generic than **37.28** or **57.235**? All three passages that contain this verb ἀρπάζω have a context that helps us determine the exact meaning of this verb within that context.

Louw (1991) makes an important distinction between what he calls the *lexical* and the *contextual* meaning of words. The former deals with those aspects of meaning that a word contributes in and of itself, whereas the latter deals with the information provided by the utterance in which that word occurs involving the circumstances of and the objects referred to in a specific context in terms of its usage in such a context along with other words or phrases contributing to the context. A distinction like this --though we would have to formulate it a little bit more precisely-- would help us deal effectively with a word like ἀρπάζω. It would be very rewarding if we could make a distinction between the *lexical* meaning of this word and its *contextual* meaning. The former would deal with the meaning of the verb in its minimal context whereas the latter would deal with its meaning in its wider context. The *lexical* meaning of a word would focus on the *shared* semantic features of all occurrences of that word, whereas its *contextual* meaning would take *all* its semantic features into consideration.

### 4.3. Figurative Language

The Hebrew Old Testament contains more than one literary genre. A substantial part of it is written in poetry, and one of the features of Hebrew poetry (as in so many other languages) is the use of figurative language. But also in non-poetic texts we can find an impressive amount of figurative language. Certain metaphors and other figures of speech are so common in biblical Hebrew that it becomes hard to see them as highly marked specialized expressions. They seem to have become a

structural part of the language.

Let us take a word like **חֶרֶב**, for example. Literally, this word means sword and, according to Louw and Nidas classification, would belong to LN 6 (*Artifacts*). But if we go through all occurrences of this word in the Old Testament we will discover that it is often used in a metaphorical sense, with focus on the activity that a sword is most commonly used for: violence, aggression, war .

Now if it were easy to indicate in which context **חֶרֶב** refers to sword as an artifact and in which context it denotes violence, aggression, war , we would not have a problem. **חֶרֶב** a would be classified under *Artifacts* and **חֶרֶב**, under *Violence, Harm, Destroy, Kill*. But this is exactly where the problem lies. In a considerable number of passages it is not easy to choose between these two possibilities. Let us take the RSV translation of Jeremiah 47:6,7 as an example:

*Ah, sword of the LORD! How long till you are quiet? Put yourself into your scabbard, rest and be still! How can it be quiet, when the LORD has given it a charge? Against Ashkelon and against the seashore he has appointed it.*

This is just one of several cases in which sword is used in more than a single sense. Is it used as an artifact here? Yes, because of the scabbard. Is it used as an *Event* here? Sure, because it actually means war in this context. This is a case where the way Louw and Nida have organized their lexicon becomes problematic for biblical Hebrew. And this is not just an isolated example. It actually is a structural problem in this language. Many words that basically denote a particular *Object* are also used to refer to the type of activity that that *Object* is normally used for. In addition to that there are words in Hebrew that technically should be considered *Events*, but that --in certain contexts-- are used to denote the most prominent *Object* in the argument structure of that *Event*.

Because of these patterns, however, Louw and Nidas methodology of organizing words by semantic domains rather than in their alphabetical order may not work well for biblical Hebrew, because it does not give us sufficient insight in the different ways one single word can be used. And that is exactly what is so important if we want to have an idea of what

is happening in Hebrew semantics. If we miss the patterns we will miss the essentials! Even the presence of an index (as is contained in volume II of Louw and Nidas lexicon) does not sufficiently bridge the gap.

## 5. NEW PROPOSAL

The question that arises then is the following: Is there a way to modify Louw and Nidas framework in such a way that it will overcome its weaknesses (at least from the perspective of biblical Hebrew), and will be able to serve as a sound basis for a new lexicon?

The answer to that question is yes, and it is the aim of this research to come up with a modified framework, that will do full justice to a language like Biblical Hebrew and its underlying culture and world view, without discarding the important insights with which Louw and Nidas work have provided us.

A number of major modifications will have to be introduced, however, which will be discussed in the following subsections.

### 5.1. Lexical vs. Contextual Domains

We have already mentioned the distinction between *lexical* and *contextual* meaning. A lexical entry has one or more *lexical* meanings, that focus on the components of meaning that are shared by a group of obviously related instances of that *lexical* entry. In addition to that, for each *lexical* meaning there are one or more *contextual* meanings as well, that take all relevant aspects of the context of a particular instance of this entry into consideration.

In order to make that possible we will need to make a distinction between *lexical* and *contextual* semantic domains as well. This implies that most lexical entries have to be classified twice and receive both *lexical* and *contextual* labels. In other words, every (sub)entry may have one or more *lexical* meanings and will therefore be assigned to one or more *lexical* semantic domains. For each *lexical* meaning, in turn, we may find one or more different contexts, each providing its own relevant

information that will need to be covered by one or more *contextual* semantic domains.

Lexical entries like **soldier** and **carpenter**, for example, both have one *lexical* meaning. From a *lexical* point of view both could be covered by one single *lexical* domain labeled *People*. From a *contextual* perspective, however, the former would need to be assigned to a *contextual* domain like *Warfare*, whereas the latter would fit well under the *contextual* domain *Crafts*.

In a similar way words like **sword** and **chisel**, could be dealt with. *Lexically*, both are *Objects* (*Artifacts* according to Louw and Nidas classification), but from a more *contextual* point of view they could be classified under the same domains as the two words discussed in the previous paragraph.

In order to illustrate this further, let us look at the word **חֶבֶל** rope, which, *lexically*, and according to LNs list of domains, should be classified under *Artifacts*. This word, however, is used in many different contexts, as we can see in the examples below:

(a) as an instrument for measuring:

REF **2 Samuel 8:2**

BHS וַיִּדֹּם אֶת־מוֹאָב וַיִּמְדָּרֵם בְּחֶבֶל

RSV And he defeated Moab, and measured them with a **line**,

(b) as an instrument for hunting:

REF **Job 18:10**

BHS טָמוּן בְּאֶרֶץ חֶבֶל וּמִלְכָּדָתוֹ עָלַי נְתִיב:

RSV A **rope** is hid for him in the ground, a trap for him in the path.

(c) as an object that helps to keep a tent in its place:

REF **Isaiah 33:20**

BHS אֶהְל בַּלְיָצָעַן בַּלְיָסַע יִתְדֹתָיו לִנְצַח וְכָל־חֶבְלָיו בַּלְיָנְחָקוֹ:

RSV ..., an immovable tent, whose stakes will never be plucked up, nor will any of its **cords** be broken.

(d) as a part of the rigging of a ship:

REF **Isaiah 33:23**

BHS נִטְשׁוּ חֶבְלֵיךָ בַּלְיָנְחָקוֹ כְּוַתְרָנָם בַּלְפָּרְשׁוֹ נִס

RSV Your **tackle** hangs loose; it cannot hold the mast firm in its place, or keep the sail spread out.

(e) as a sign of submission:

REF **1 Kings 20:31**

BHS שימה נא שקים בְּמַתְּנֵינוּ וְחִבְּלִים בְּרֵאשֵׁנוּ

RSV ... let us put sackcloth on our loins and **ropes** upon our heads,

...

Now in whatever context חִבֵּל occurs, it remains an artifact. *Lexically*, nothing changes. *Contextually*, however, there is a lot of variation.

It should be noted, however, that one single entry may have more than one *lexical* meaning. The verb חִבֵּא, for instance, has six *lexical* meanings, which will be listed below, in the form of *definitions*:

(a) to go to a location where one will not be readily seen by others and/or be safe from danger

(b) location where one will be safe from danger

(c) causative of [a]: to cause someone else to go to a location where that person will not be readily seen by others and/or be safe from danger

(d) to leave in a such a way that other people do not notice

(e) as [c], but without indication of a specific location: to keep someone from (physical or non-physical) harm

(f) as [a], but extended to events: to come to a stop

For each of these six *lexical* meanings, however, we can find several different contexts, each of which provides information that can be relevant to the text, and that needs to be covered by one or more *contextual* domains. Now if we incorporate this *contextual* information, in the form of *glosses*, into the little scheme above, we will get something like this:

(a) to go to a location where one will not be readily seen by others and/or be safe from danger

- to hide oneself (out of fear of a supernatural being)
- to hide oneself (out of fear of an aggressor)
- to hide oneself (out of shame or shyness during a public gathering)
- to withdraw, step aside (out of respect for someone important during a public gathering)
- to hide oneself, ambush (in order to attack someone)

- (b) location where one will be safe from danger
  - hiding-place (against an aggressor)
  - hiding-place (against the wind)
- (c) causative of [a]: to cause someone else to go to a location where that person will not be readily seen by others and/or be safe from danger
  - to put away, hide (in prisons)
  - to hide someone (in order to keep him/her from harm)
- (d) to leave in a such a way that other people do not notice
  - to leave secretly
- (e) as [c], but without indication of a specific location: to keep someone from (physical or non-physical) harm
  - to hide someone > to protect someone (by God, from slander)
  - to hide someone > to protect someone (by God, in the shadow of his hand)
- (f) as [a], but extended to events: to come to a stop
  - to hide oneself (of one's voice) > to become silent, stop speaking (during a public gathering)

For more examples, see the sample dictionary in section 8.

## 5.2. Organization of Lexicon

We have already seen that the way Louw and Nida organized their lexicon has a certain number of disadvantages. Because of the fact that they have grouped the lexical entries by their semantic domains rather than in their alphabetical order it has become difficult to see the shared semantic components of a particular lexical item that is found under more than one domain. This argument is relevant for both biblical Hebrew and New Testament Greek. In addition to that, this way of organization makes it hard to see patterns in the way words are figuratively used.

Another complication is the fact that we will be using two different levels of classification: one according to *lexical* criteria and the other along *contextual* lines. This will make it difficult to follow the way Louw and Nida organized their lexicon, because we will have to make a choice: Are we going to organize the dictionary according to *lexical* domains or

according to *contextual* domains?

In addition to that, times are changing. In these days, when the information technology is advancing at an amazing speed we really have to start questioning the usefulness of a printed dictionary. Many scholars already make use of computer programs that display the biblical texts, have powerful search engines, and give access to grammatical, lexicographic, and other relevant information about that text at one click of the mouse. With the help of tools like this there is no need anymore of leafing through large indexes (if they exist) while being referred from one entry to another without the absolute guarantee that you will find what you are looking for.

Because of all the arguments mentioned above it would be good to revert to the more traditional style of organizing lexicons and group the different lexical items alphabetically. For those who prefer to work with printed dictionaries two indexes (one for *lexical* and one for *contextual* domains) will be provided that will help them to find and compare all entries that belong to the same domain. Those, however, who will make use of the computer program will have the additional advantage of being able to look up all (sub)entries that belong to one particular *lexical* or *contextual* domain (or a combination of both) in a much easier (and quicker) way.

## 6. LEXICAL SEMANTIC DOMAINS

In my dissertation several chapters have been devoted to a detailed study of all semantic categories in biblical Hebrew in order to determine the *lexical* semantic domains that are relevant for this language. It is impossible to summarize the entire research in a few words. In this paper I can only outline the results.

### 6.1. Objects

As far as the semantic category of *ObLjects*, is concerned, the following eight *lexical* semantic domains were proposed:

- (a) *Animals* all living creatures, with the exception of human beings
- (b) *Deities* all supernatural beings
- (c) *Parts* all *Objects* that cannot exist in isolation but are an integral part of another *Object* and therefore usually occur as part of an associative construction, or require a possessive pronoun
- (d) *People* all human beings
- (e) *Plants* all plants and trees
- (f) *Products* all inanimate *Objects*, usually of a relatively small size, produced by *People*, *Deities*, *Animals*, or *Plants*.
- (g) *Scenery* all inanimate *Objects*, with the exception of *Plants*, that usually cannot be moved, and are part of the scenery in which events in the Old Testament take place
- (h) *Substances* all inanimate *Objects*, shaped in such a way that they usually cannot be counted but are to be measured instead, and from which other *Objects* can be produced

## 6.2. Events

The following four *lexical* semantic domains were found for the semantic category of *Events*:

- (a) *Description* all *Events* that describe the features of *Objects*.
- (b) *Position* all *Events* that describe the relationship between *Objects* and the environment in which they are located.
- (c) *Connection* all *Events* that describe the relationship between *Objects* that are attached to one or more other *Objects*.
- (d) *Perception* all *Events* that describe the relationship between *Objects* and the mind of animate beings.

For each Within the *lexical* domain of *Perception*, there is no distinction between *Events* with an *Object* as their main argument and those that have an *Event* in that position.

of these four domains, however, we have to make a distinction between three levels of abstraction:

- A. *Events* occurring in propositions with an *Object* as their main argument, and used with their basic, concrete sense

*B. Events* occurring in propositions with an *Object* as their main argument, but with a more *abstract* meaning.

*C. Events* occurring in propositions with another *Event* as their main argument.

Each of the three subcategories mentioned above, in turn, is to be further subdivided into the following three *levels of derivations*:

(1) *State/Process* the simplest type of *Event*, found in propositions of which the main argument (the *Statant*) is not in control of the *Event*

(2) *Action* a derivation of the *State/Process* where the main argument has the semantic function of *Agent* and is in control of the *Event*.

(3) *Causative* a derivation of the *Action* in that a third argument (*Causer*) is added, which takes over the control of the *Event* from the *Agent* and actually causes that *Agent* to perform the *Action* described above.

Because of the relatively complex hierarchical structure presented above, there is a need to refer to each different *lexical* semantic domain a more concise way. This will be done with the help of (relatively) short labels, e.g.

*Description, Objects, State/Process* (for a, A, 1)

*Position, Events, Action* (for b, C, 2)

*Connection, Objects, Abstract, Causative* (for c, B, 3)

etc.

### 6.3. Attributes

In biblical Hebrew there is not sufficient reason to distinguish between Events and Attributes. The latter will be treated as Events. For details, see my differtation.

### 6.4. Relationals

There seem to be three types of *Relationals* in biblical Hebrew:

(i) *Relations* *Relationals* that link *Objects* and/or *Events*

(ii) *Referents* *Relationals* that *replace* *Objects* or *Events*

(iii) *Markers* *Relationals* that *point to* *Objects* or *Events*

Each of these three categories can be split into two subcategories depending on the semantic classes they link, replace, or point to: *Objects* or *Events*.

*Relationals* of the first category (i.e. *Relations*) are related to *State/Processes* and can therefore be subclassified in a way that is similar to the way the semantic class of *Events* is subdivided. The following subclasses of *Relations* are found:

*Description, Objects*

*Description, Objects, Abstract*

*Description, Events*

*Position, Objects*

*Position, Objects, Abstract*

*Position, Events*

*Connection, Objects*

*Connection, Objects, Abstract*

*Connection, Events*

*Perception, Objects/Events*

*Perception, Objects/Events, Abstract*

## 7. CONTEXTUAL SEMANTIC DOMAINS

The list of contextual semantic domains is not yet complete. In the samples given in section 8 a number of examples is given.

## 8. SAMPLES

חַבּ noun, m. חַבּ

(a) *Objects: Parts*

small bag formed by a folded piece of cloth; part a garment;

used to can carry small objects, which will not be visible from the outside

Crafts; Clothing; Search > Publicity; Wrong טָמֵן בְּחָב to hide (one's iniquity) in the fold of one's garment > to hide (one's iniquity) from others (JOB.31:33)

## חָבַא

(1) verb

(a) *Events: Description, Object, State/Process*

hithp. to become solid; of liquid substances; as a result of low temperatures during cold weather

Liquids; Temperature; Weather - to freeze (JOB.38:30)

(2) verb חָבַא noun, m. חָבֹא noun, m. חָבָה

(a) *Events: Position, Object, Action*

niph.; pu.; hithp. to go to a location where one will not be readily seen by others and/or be safe from danger

Search; Fear; Apparition - to hide oneself (out of fear of a supernatural being) (GEN.3:8,10; 1CH.21:20; DAN.10:7)

Search; Fear; Hardship - to hide oneself (out of fear of an aggressor) (JOS.2:16; 10:16,17,27; JDG.9:5; 1SA.13:6; 14:11,22; 19:2; 23:23; 2KI.11:3; 2CH.18:24; 22:9,12; JOB.24:4; AMO.9:3)

Search; Status; Groups - to hide oneself (out of shame or shyness during a public gathering) (1SA.10:22)

Search; Status; Groups - to withdraw, step aside (out of respect for someone important during a public gathering) (JOB.29:8)

Search; Violence - to hide oneself, ambush (in order to attack someone) (2SA.17:9)

(b) *Events > Objects: Position, Object, Action*

noun location where one will be safe from danger

Search; Hardship - hiding-place (against an aggressor) (1SA.23:23)

Search; Weather - *hiding-place (against the wind)*

(ISA.32:2)

(c) *Events: Position, Object, Causative*

hiph.; hoph. (passive) causative of [a]: to cause someone else to go to a location where that person will not be readily seen by others and/or be safe from danger

Restriction - *to put away, hide (in prisons)* (ISA.42:22)

Search; Care; Hardship - *to hide someone (in order to keep him/her from harm)* (JOS.6:17,25; 1KI.18:4,13; 2KI.6:29)

(d) *Events: Position, Object, Abstract, Action*

niph. to leave in a such a way that other people do not notice

Travel; Publicity - *to leave secretly* (GEN.31:27)

(e) *Events: Position, Object, Abstract, Causative*

niph. (passive); hiph. as [c], but without indication of a specific location: to keep someone from (physical or non-physical) harm

Care; Communication; Providence - *to hide someone > to protect someone (by God, from slander)* (JOB.5:21)

Care; Hardship; Providence - *to hide someone > to protect someone (by God, in the shadow of his hand)* (ISA.49:2)

(f) *Events: Position, Event, Action*

niph. as [a], but extended to events: to come to a stop

Communication; Groups - *to hide oneself (of one's voice) > to become silent, stop speaking (during a public gathering)* (JOB.29:10)

חָבַב verb חָבַב, חָבַב, חָבַב

*Events: Connection, Object, Abstract, State/Process*

qal to experience a deep affection for somebody else

Affection - *to love* (DEU.33:3)

כב

חבב noun, name חבב

*Relationals: Object Referents*

son of Reuel; Midianite; ancestor of Kenites

Names; Individuals - *Hobab* (NUM.10:29; JDG.4:11)

חבב verb חבב: חבב, חבב, חבב

*Events: Position, Object, Action*

qal; niph. to go to a location where one will not be readily seen by others and/or be safe from danger

Search; Fear; Hardship - *to hide oneself (out of fear of an aggressor)* (1KI.22:25; ISA.26:20; JER.49:10)

Search; Violence - *to hide oneself, ambush (in order to attack someone)* (2KI.7:12)

חבב noun, name חבב

*Relationals: Object Referents*

son of Shemer; tribe of Asher

Names; Individuals - *Hubbah* (1CH.7:34{a})

(a) 1CH.7:34 - MT-Q NIV NJB NJV NRSV CEV; MT-K RSV

REB TEV חבב, חבב, חבב Jehubbah

חבור noun, name

*Relationals: Object Referents*

river; in Mesopotamia; eastern tributary of Euphrates

Names; Nature - *Habor* (2KI.17:6; 18:11; 1CH.5:26)

חברה noun, f. חברה(1)

*Events: Description, Object, State/Process*

state of physical injury apparently evident in a mark left on the body, caused by sickness or inflicted by someone else

Body; Hardship - *bruise, sore, wound* (GEN.4:23;

EXO.21:25; PSA.38:6; PRO.20:30; ISA.53:5)

Body; Punish, Reward - *bruise, sore, wound (inflicted on someone else as punishment)* (EXO.21:25)

Body; Personification; Groups; Hardship - *bruise, sore, wound > deplorable condition (of an entire nation)* (ISA.1:6)

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