



H. H. Hardy II

The Development of Biblical Hebrew Prepositions

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This volume by H. H. Hardy II deals comprehensively with prepositions in the Hebrew Bible, both from the perspective of their meaning and from the historical linguistic perspective of how they developed. The book is significant and valuable for several research communities. Biblical scholars will benefit from the additional hermeneutical tools it contributes to the unending project of interpreting biblical verses. Biblical Hebrew scholars, and Semiticists in general, will find in it important linguistic discussions, both synchronic and diachronic. Finally, the larger community of historical linguists, especially those interested in the phenomena of linguistic change and grammaticalization, will find great interest in the fascinating picture it paints, both broad and detailed, of a wide range of specific historical changes. In light of all of this, the publication of this book is definitely an occasion for celebration.

The core of the book (chs. 3 and 4) focuses on the study of thirty-three prepositions: twelve single-morpheme prepositions whose origins can be identified from language-internal data, and twenty-one multiword prepositions. In discussing each preposition, Hardy first examines its morphology and syntax, then proceeds to give an overview of its meaning, including a comparison to cognates in other Semitic languages. Following this, Hardy outlines a possible trajectory of the changes in the item's meanings. These trajectories are based on cross-linguistic typologies of such changes and on a consideration of the likely bridging contexts in which the semantic changes could occur. The main assumption underpinning the proposals is that changes of this kind occur in linguistic

environments involving potential semantic ambiguity. According to this hypothesis, such changes follow a two-step process:

Stage 1: A certain lexical item can be understood in two ways: either as a fully fledged content word standing in a certain (usually genitive) relation to another nominal phrase or as a preposition denoting a certain relation. The shift happens when the first interpretation is replaced by the second.

Stage 2: There are contexts in which a sentence containing the lexical item in question (the preposition) can be true due to two different interpretations for the same preposition. For example, when both a temporal and a special relation hold in the world, the preposition can be interpreted as designating both relations. Thus, the fact that both interpretations are possible facilitates a change in meaning or the emergence of polysemy.

These two scenarios are, in fact, specific cases of *semantic reanalysis*. Where available, the book provides actual examples of such ambiguities from the biblical corpus. In other cases, it proposes possible bridging contexts based on cross-linguistic comparisons, namely, on actual development discernible in the history of other languages. In discussing the multiword prepositions, the book likewise presents a comprehensive analysis of these polymorphic forms, carefully mapping the syntactic and semantic relationships between the source constructions and the resulting functions. Also noteworthy are the helpful visual representations of the historical changes that accompany the discussions throughout the book. These are diagrams that map the semantic shifts and the semantic relations between the various interpretations of the prepositions (the relations between their extensions).

The methodological framework of the book is that of historical linguistics, and it treats the historical changes that lead to the formation of prepositions, and those that later trigger semantic change, as cases of grammaticalization. In order to lay the theoretical groundwork, the book's first chapter is a concise, accurate, and interesting overview of the linguistic literature on this type of historical development. It introduces the range of definitions that have been proposed for the phenomenon of grammaticalization, provides various examples of such development, and clarifies the aspects of this literature relevant to the study of the biblical prepositions. It does not, however, mention the literature that criticizes the notion of grammaticalization and argues that it is not a well-defined phenomenon.

Two issues are worth noting regarding the theoretical framework adopted in the book. First, the reader may have noticed that, in characterizing the two types of historical change presented in the book, I described them as cases of reanalysis, not as paradigmatic cases of grammaticalization. I would like to make a brief note on this choice of terminology. Hardy does devote some discussion to the relationship between the two phenomena of grammaticalization and reanalysis (21–24). He

follows Langaker's narrow definition of reanalysis, which restricts it to syntactic changes. However, as has been argued by many scholars, reanalysis, when formally defined, is merely a relation between two grammars of the same language in two consecutive points in time; the term *grammar* is used here in the broad sense of the term, including both morphological/syntactic analysis and the semantic interpretations associated with a linguistic expression. Reanalysis, accordingly, is a characterization of historical changes that are not manifested at the surface level of the language. It is not necessarily a single phenomenon: it can occur at the lexical semantic level of certain expressions, at the grammatical level, or at other levels of analysis. Thus, it seems best to describe the changes analyzed throughout the book as cases of semantic reanalysis.

Second, it is worth reflecting whether a shift from noun to preposition and the shift from one meaning of a preposition to another are cases of grammaticalization at all. The first is a shift in lexical category (Would a shift from a verb to a noun be considered grammaticalization?), and the second seems to be a regular shift in the meaning of a lexical item. So, unless every semantic change is a case of grammaticalization, the choice of this terminology seems unclear, or at least requires a more detailed discussion and elucidation.

The book is well situated within the literature on Semitic philology and linguistics. Following the introduction to the study of grammaticalization in Semitics, chapter 2 provides an overview of the Semitic prepositions, and throughout the book there are systematic comparative discussions of data from various Semitic languages.

Having reviewed the main parts of the book, I would like to address its scope, namely, the decision to confine the discussion to the linguistic inventory of a single corpus: the Hebrew Bible. What does the book gain by covering only examples from this corpus, and how do its discussions differ from other typological-historical studies that deal with the development of various prepositions selected from different languages? This question can be addressed from two perspectives: that of Biblical Hebrew scholarship, and that of historical linguists. Hardy partially answers this question, from the first perspective, in the last chapter of the book (ch. 5, "Conclusion"), where he argues that future studies will be able to examine the correlation between the historical trajectories of development proposed in the book and the distribution of the prepositions' meanings in the books of the Bible. In other words, the diachronic changes discernible in this corpus, which are traced in the book, can be evaluated against the various claims for the dating of the biblical books. Thus it may add data to the discussion about the validity of the dating. I might add that the book is also an invaluable resource for biblical scholars exploring the interpretation of certain prepositions in specific contexts (especially thanks to the detailed index!). It also provides tools for considering parallel developments in other cases.

From the linguistic perspective, it is unclear whether there are obvious advantages to restricting the discussion to a single corpus. Moreover, the book does not present an exhaustive discussion of

all the prepositions in the biblical corpus. As a result, it cannot provide statistical analyses of the ratios between the different types of semantic change. Nevertheless, the book presents highly useful data for the cross-linguistic study of such changes. It comprehensively reviews the types of nominal sources for prepositions, maps the types of relations denoted by the prepositions, and, more importantly, presents data on which meanings can converge in similar contexts and which polysemic relations can emerge from such contexts.

In sum, this is an excellent book that will certainly be of use to many scholars. Moreover, it provides a sound methodology for similar studies in diachronic semantics of similar phenomena in Biblical Hebrew.