CHAPTER SIX

SEMANTIC ANALYSIS OF TERMS OF COGNITION AND PERCEPTION IN JOB 12–14

In the last chapter of the first part, a general outline of Job 12–14 on the basis of a functional analysis was presented. This analysis showed that Job’s speech consists of two parts, one addressed to the friends, and one to God, with profoundly different topics in each of the parts. In the first part (12:1–13:17) the main topics are 1) the relation between Job and his friends and between Job and God, 2) knowledge and 3) speaking. Moreover, these topics mutually overlap: the above pragmatic analysis has demonstrated that Job is explicitly trying to correct the friends’ ideas about their respective knowledge or intelligence, whereas it has also laid out that it is precisely on the point of speaking that Job and his friends differ most, in Job’s eyes. The second part of the speech (13:18–14:22) displays much less topical diversity, mainly treating Job’s fate, and, by extension, that of humankind at large.

In this and the following chapter, I propose to study the key terms related to the two main topics identified in the first part, viz. knowledge and speaking. If Job is so explicit about the fact that he and his friends differ not so much with regard to what they know than with regard to what they say, and if Job never addresses the differences between himself and his friends more overtly than in the present speech, it stands to reason to suppose that a semantic analysis of the terms related to the two topics mentioned above will be crucial in understanding the position of this speech in the dialogue, and might also teach us something about the meaning of the book as a whole. The topic(s) of the second part, viz. Job’s and man’s fate, are obviously not less important, but are less distinctive for the meaning of the present speech, and show less topical development throughout the whole dialogue. These topics would benefit more from a broad study of the way in which Job conceptualizes his fate in his different speeches. Here also a cognitive-semantic approach could prove to be very fruitful.

In the present chapter, I will first study the terms related to the topic of knowledge, after which—following the logic of Job’s speech itself—the terms related to the topic of speaking will be addressed, in
the following chapter 7. These semantic analyses will follow cognitive-semantic methodology, of which the theoretical background has been briefly sketched in the preceding chapter. The different terms will be studied here in the order in which they occur in the text, so that the topical progression in the text is already mirrored in the semantic analysis itself. Terms occurring more than once will obviously only be treated once, which might somewhat interrupt that progression. The present chapter will be concluded, however, with an overview of the importance of the topic of understanding in the chapters 12–14, in relation to the development of the topic in the rest of the dialogues and in the book of Job as a whole. In this conclusion, the different terms will be put into relation with each other, and the argumentative development of the chapters, and of the dialogues and the book, will be exposed. Since the term חכמה plays a crucial role in the present chapters, this term will receive a more elaborate semantic analysis.

I. Job 12:2–3

1. חכמה

The noun חכמה occurs four times in Job’s present speech (12:2; 12:12.13; 13:5), a considerable number given the fact that the noun only occurs eighteen times in the complete book of Job.1 This global number for the book is conspicuously low when compared to Proverbs and Qohelet, but high when plotted against the figures for other biblical books.2 It is not without reason, then, that the three books mentioned, Job, Proverbs and Qohelet, are commonly known as ‘Wisdom literature’. Before turning to the meaning of the term in the book of Job and particularly in the Jobian speech under investigation here, the general meaning structure of the term will first be studied.

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2 Proverbs: 42 instances; Qohelet: 28 instances for a total of 153 in the Hebrew Bible (including the late variant חכמות). More telling than these absolute figures are the relative data (number of instances of חכמה divided by total number of words in the book) as calculated by Accordance®: in Job, the word has an incidence of 1.41‰, in Prov and Qoh this is 4.21‰ and 6.23‰, respectively. If one includes the data for the adjective and verb חכם, the difference of the book of Job to the other sapiential books is even clearer: the relative incidence of all the words of the root חכם amounts to 2.20‰, whereas it is 10.34‰ and 11.02‰ in Prov and Qoh, respectively (for an average frequency in the Hebrew Bible of 0.67‰).