After Job 13:2, Job turns from the topic of knowledge to that of speech, as the analysis of chapters 3 and 4 has indicated. The two topics are quite heavily contrasted, as the use of אֲלֹם in 13:3 indicates: it is not knowledge that sets Job and his fellows apart, but the way in which they are speaking. The semantic analysis of the preceding chapter has confirmed that Job indeed does not wish to oppose his own way of thinking to that of the friends, but also that the topic of (correct) knowledge is not the main issue in the discussion between Job and the friends. Job seems to argue that the difference in the way they speak is what really differentiates him from his friends. But how should that difference in speaking be understood, and to what extent does it play an effective role in the dialogues? The semantic analyses of some of the terms of speech in Job 12–14 and in the book in general seek to answer those questions.1

In 13:3, Job’s description of his own desired way of speaking, two verbs designating a form of speaking are mentioned, viz.דבר andיכח. Both terms are also used on other occasions in Job 12–14, so that it stands to reason to focus our research on those terms. As many commentators have argued—some more emphatically than others2—Job’s desire for speaking with God takes the explicit form of a call to court, which is illustrated by a relatively high incidence of juridical terminology. Since, as I will explain later, the reference to a court case is subsidiary to his desire for communication, the different terms explicitly

---


designating aspects of Job’s intended litigation are only discussed in passing in what follows.

I. יכח hi.

For speakers of English, and probably many other languages, the meaning potential of the term יכח is disturbingly broad, as the numerous translational equivalents in the dictionaries indicate. This semantic breadth of the verb is inversely proportional to the relatively small number of attestations in the Hebrew Bible. As a result, many of the proposed meanings of the term apply in only a few cases, which renders (a) description of the term’s semantic structure somewhat intricate. Moreover, the verb displays considerable variation in the valency patterns it governs.

1. Meanings and Valency Patterns

Bringing together the evidence, the following picture emerges. In the majority of cases, the verb designates an action with both a personal subject and a personal object. The most frequent parallel terms to יכח being יסר pi., ריב and שׁפט, the meaning ‘to reprove’—i.e., to say that someone has done something wrong—presents itself. The object is usually introduced with the nota objecti ואת, or takes the form of a pronominal suffix, although, in a number of cases, it is marked with the preposition –ל. The alternation of both prepositions in indicating the verb’s object is probably to be accounted for by the fact that the verb implies verbal communication. As Malessa has argued, in this type of verb the object is readily preceded by the preposition –ל.

---

4 The evidence taken into consideration is primarily biblical, although some data from Qumranic and from Mishnaic Hebrew are also dealt with.
5 Exceptions are Jer 2:19; Job 6:25.
7 Is 2:4; Mic 4:3; Prov 9:7; 9:8; 15:12 (?); 19:25.
8 MALESSA, M., Untersuchungen zur verbalen Valenz im biblischen Hebräisch, Leiden, Selbstverlag, 2003, p. 73: “Daneben findet sich das Lamed objecti bei Verben, die verbale Kommunikation implizieren […]. Auch wenn das Objekt sonst als