3.1. Towards a Method: Preliminary Insights

The review in §1.1 has shown that we live in an age of mixed theoretical frameworks, in which BH linguistics finds itself at a crossroads between different methods. Since the present study aims at a thorough semantic description of the verbal system in a specific literary corpus marked by linguistic diversity, it is necessary to adopt a multifaceted theoretical perspective that will allow for the examination of the discourse characteristics of biblical poetic texts, consideration of the pragmatic inferences of the verbal statements, exploration of the syntactic environment and the inflectional identity of the forms, and representation of the dynamic, contextually sensitive spectrum of semantic values covered by each verbal form.¹

One of the basic methodological insights of the present study presupposes that verbal forms in poetic texts should be analyzed according to the same universal parameters as verbal forms in prose texts. The framework which supplies the closest theoretical model for the present tasks and the one largely adopted here is Discourse Representation Theory (DRT), associated with the works by Hans Kamp² and adjusted to the semantic analysis of tense and aspect by the late Carlota Smith.³

DRT provides for a rigorous semantic interpretation, deals with pragmatic information, and constructs a dynamic representation of discourse. However, insights from other methodological frameworks can also be applied, especially in what relates to the analysis of modality and generic

¹ For a dynamic type of the descriptive model cf. already Jakobson 1972 on “the dynamic synchrony.” Today most grammaticalization models intrude into pragmatic analysis and other discourse parameters, which potentially epitomize probable diachronic changes and paths of grammaticalization at any synchronic stage; see Hopper and Traugott 1993; Traugott 1999; Traugott and Dasher 2002; Mosegaard and Visconti 2009; Traugott and Trousdale 2010.

² See Kamp and Rohrer 1983 and Kamp and Reyle 1990.

The investigation will combine methods of formal syntax, semantics, pragmatics, and discourse analysis relevant to the goals of the present study, but will avoid technical mapping of the syntactic and semantic phenomena.

In contrast to many investigations of the BH verbal system, the present study does not set as its goal the reduction of the ‘contextual’ uses of a given inflectional category and the restoration of its default, ‘invariant’ function; nor does it aim at positing a strict, single-faceted definition of the verb system in the selected corpus. The level of linguistic diversity in the chosen corpus is so great, that sufficient space must be allowed for the description of the widest scale of phenomena. The discursive analysis of poetic text is the starting point of the investigation: it suggests the criteria for the taxonomy of discourse modes, which facilitates the pragmatic, semantic, and formal analysis of the verb forms in context.

In this chapter I will suggest working criteria for the discursive analysis of biblical poetic texts (§3.2); using these criteria I will work out a dynamic taxonomy of poetic discourse modes operating within the limits of the selected corpus (§3.3); then I will comment on the functioning of such basic linguistic parameters as time, aspect, and modality within different BH poetic discourse modes and formulate the problem of semantic ambiguity of linguistic units in poetic discourse (§3.4); in §3.5 I will suggest working criteria for evaluating the diversity of linguistic phenomena in the present corpus.

3.2. DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF BIBLICAL POETRY: BASIC CRITERIA

3.2.1. Linear vs. Pragmatic Standpoints in the Discursive Analysis of Biblical Poetry

Traditionally, biblical scholars have tended to explain the specific character of poetic discourse in terms of the linear vs. segmental controversy, i.e., in the spirit of the linear approach to discourse linguistics and in correlation with poetic parallelism. This approach provides for an adequate

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4 Cf. Carlson and Pelletier 1995; Frawley 2006; Boneh and Doron 2008; Guéron and Lecarme 2008; Werner and Leiss 2008; Portner 2009, to mention just a few. The author reserves the right to refer to any theoretical framework that can provide helpful tools for the questions posed by the materials.

5 Cf. the review above, especially §§1.1.2 and 1.2.

6 On the linear vs. pragmatic approach in discourse analysis and in BH studies see §1.1.1.1 above. The ‘linear’ approach to poetic discourse is intrinsically connected to the