8.1. INTRODUCTION: DISCOURSE STRUCTURE

8.1.1. The Opening

The Blessing of Jacob (Gen 49:2–27) is a collection of tribal sayings with a brief introduction. The introduction (Gen 49:1–2) is arranged as a conversational framework and is a two-fold entity:¹

1. מָקֵם וְאַגִּידָה לָכֶם אֵת אֲשֶׁר־יִקְרָא אֶתְכֶם בְּאַחֲרִית הַיָּמִים

Gather around, that I may tell you what will happen to you in days to come (1b).

לְגַהֲבֵנִי וּשְׁמִיעְנֵי בֶּן יַעֲקֹב לְשַׁמּוֹן לְשֵׁמְעֵנִי אֵלֶּה יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲבִיכֶם

Assemble and hear, O sons of Jacob; listen to Israel your father (2).

Basically, these two openings are different with regard to four criteria: (1) the identity of the speaker; (2) the pragmatic intention of the speech; (3) the underlying temporal location of the events; and (4) the basic stylistic register.

The surface difference between them is marked by the shift from the 1st to the 3rd person in reference to the speaker, apparently, the forefather Jacob. I argue that this shift signals two different interpretations regarding the basic communicative situation and the pragmatic intention of the speech (cf. figures 1 and 2 below).

In the first opening (ex. 1a) the speaker is explicitly Jacob (cf. the 1st person in יִגְידֶה), the addressee is his sons (cf. the 2nd plural in לָכֶם; all of them collectively are addressed; only in the body of the sayings is

¹ On the double opening of the collection see the bibliographic review by de Hoop 1999: 505–6, and Macchi 1999: 35–37, especially nn. 32 and 33. De Hoop interprets vv. 1b–2 as a textual unity; p. 509: “It appears to us that the whole introduction to the Testament is a coherent unity.” He readdresses this problem in de Hoop 2003: 4–6. For various language difficulties in the composition see Gevirtz 1971; 1975a; 1975b; 1981; 1982; 1984; 1987; on the Blessing of Jacob and the tribal list tradition see Sparks 2003.
each one addressed separately), and the speaker proclaims the pragmatic intention of the speech to be the prediction of the future (אֲשֶׁרָא לְאִשָּׁרְיָ֑רְיָא אֱלֹהֵ֖י תָּכֹֽן בַּאֲחָרִית הַיָּמִים); see figure 1:

Figure 1. The communicative situation in the first opening (Gen 49:1b)

Speaker → Addressee (collective) [future prediction]: Addressee$_1$, Addressee$_2$, Addressee$_3$ (individuals) 

In the second opening (ex. 1b) Jacob need not be the speaker; it is rather an anonymous speaker who invites the Israelites (בְּנֵי יַעֲקֹב) to listen to the words of their father (וְשִׁמְעוּ אֶל־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲבִיכֶם), thence meaning to quote them. Moreover, if Speaker I is not Jacob, but the anonymous speaker, then Addressee I is not the twelve sons, but the community of Israel in general. In this sense the second opening does not continue the future prediction, but is simply the quotation framework to introduce Jacob’s words. Within the quoted speech, as the composition runs further, the communicative situation will be different: Jacob himself (Speaker II) is addressing each one of his sons, and the tribes correspondingly (Addressee II):²

Figure 2. The communicative situation in the second opening (Gen 49:2)

Speaker I → Addressee I [quotation framework]: Speaker II → Addressee II$_1$, Addressee II$_2$, Addressee II$_3$ 

The two opening formulas are also characterized by different patterns of temporal interpretation. In both formulas, ST, marked by explicit egocentric elements, is the starting point for interpretation: in the first opening ST is seemingly concomitant with the Deathbed Episode, while the second opening suggests an indefinite, not precisely located ST of the anonymous speaker. The first opening emphasizes that the ET associated with the content of the sayings will be somehow posterior to ST, namely in the future (לְאִשָּׁרְיָ֑רְיָא אֱלֹהֵ֖י תָּכֹֽן בַּאֲחָרִית הַיָּמִים),³ in the second opening, the ST

² This duality in the identity of the addressee, both the sons of Jacob and the corresponding tribes, is an important cognitive assumption available in the poetic text due to the duality of the speaker: the anonymous speaker refers to the tribes and Jacob refers to the sons, but practically speaking the viewpoints of both speakers are intertwined throughout the composition. The effect is further connected to the temporal and aspectual interpretation of tenses in the text, as will be shown below.

³ See Westermann 1986: 222: "only v. 1b understands the words as prophecy," and cf. the position of de Hoop 1999: 242, whose temporal interpretation is shaped by the Deathbed Episode and totally oriented to future.