CHAPTER 2

Schematic Continuity

Having painted with such broad brush-strokes the big picture of how language reflects and embodies human cognition in the previous chapter, this chapter narrows in on one particular facet, exclusively in biblical Hebrew: schematic continuity, or, effectively, how paragraphs and their sub-units are delimited and maintained as cohesive units. (It is assumed that they are coherent, as discussed above.)

2.1 The Paragraph in Biblical Hebrew: Background

The discussions over the biblical Hebrew verbs have often centered on whether their function is primarily at the clause-level (for tense, aspect and modality) or equally at a higher level, a discourse level. Discussions on the higher discourse level of the paragraph have been anything but uniform. Some refer strictly to morphosyntactic criteria (e.g. morphological form and word order), others to speaker orientation (e.g. narrative vs. direct speech) and others to discourse pragmatics (e.g. foreground vs. background).

2.1.1 Formed by Chains

The ubiquitous wayyiqtol ‘chain’ in biblical Hebrew narrative is often considered the prototypical paragraph (Longacre, 1992, 178; Heller, 2004), with wayyiqtol itself the narrative tense. The seeds of this view are found in discussions such as Gesenius’ on wayyiqtol (the ‘wāw consecutive’ in his words).

The imperfect with Wāw consecutive serves to express actions, events, or states, which are to be regarded as the temporal or logical sequel of actions, events, or states mentioned immediately before. The imperfect consecutive is used in this way most frequently as the narrative tense, corresponding to the Greek aorist or the Latin historic perfect. (Gesenius et al., 1910, §111a)

‘Narrative tense’ here means the tense mostly commonly used in narration. If it expresses temporal or logical sequences, then a complete chain of temporal or logical sequences is the natural paragraph. The essential feature to note is that Gesenius identifies temporal or logical sequence within the wayyiqtol...
form, though he considers such sequence to be absent in the bare yiqtol form (the ‘imperfect’). Similarly, in Jouën and Muraoka’s discussion regarding the conjunction (waw) with finite verbal forms, they distinguish between the conjunction of ‘pure juxtaposition’ and the conjunction ‘shaded with succession, consecution and purpose’:

In a sentence like *divide et impera* “Divide and rule!” where the *et* is logically equivalent to *ita ut* (sic) *imperes* “so that you may rule” = *et sic imperabis* “you will thus rule” (consecution), *and (in consequence) you will rule* or to *ut imperes* (purpose), *so that you may rule*, Hebrew distinguishes a modal nuance of the Waw (consecutive or final).

From a logical point of view one may therefore distinguish between an *et* of pure juxtaposition and an *et* shaded with succession, consecution and purpose. (Joüon and Muraoka, 1993, §115a)

From the recognition that the waw consecutive does indicate an additional nuance over non-consecutive waw came first the clause-level theories of conjunctive versus disjunctive waw (Waltke and O’Connor, 1990, §39.2) and then the paragraph-level theories of wayyiqtol chains as carrying the significant information associated with succession, consecution and purpose: the essential elements of a narrative. A few scholars consider the consecution merely syntactical (Endo, 1996; Cook, 2004; 2012), but the majority consider it the identifying feature of the narrative foreground, or the central plot (Longacre, 1989; Van Wolde, 1997).

There is a logical leap, of course, between the claim that the waw consecutive indicates a kind of connection between two clauses and the claim that such connection exists if and only if so indicated by a waw consecutive. The former claim amounts to considering the waw consecutive technically ‘marked’ for succession, consecution or purpose, with other forms ‘unmarked’ and therefore capable of being interpreted either with or without the succession, consecution or purpose. As seen above (1.4.2.3 Indicating continuity), continuity such as that of time in a narrative is generally unmarked in languages, as it can be assumed in the absence of notification to the contrary.

The second claim does not include a marked/unmarked opposition, since it associates succession exclusively with the waw consecutive. If markedness is the appropriate theory to invoke for the feature of succession/consecution/purpose, then this second claim does not meet the requirements of classical markedness theory. And if we acknowledge markedness theory to accurately reflect cognitive organization, then it may suggest this second claim’s view of the waw consecutive is empirically untenable. We are then left with the first claim: that the waw somehow marks succession, consecution or purpose.