Language is a structured unity formalized in a system that allows for a choice between contextually and grammatically equivalent wordings and constructions. These choices on the part of the author are important when analysing the style of a composition. The linguistic collective is constantly exposed to a stylistic experience in the choice of words and constructions, and this experience subsequently influences the language in its way of forming structures.¹ The great obstacle in dealing with choices between various lexical and grammatical expressions in Ancient Hebrew is, needless to say, that we have little knowledge of the options that were available to writers in those days, and exactly which leading style characterized the various epochs in ancient Israel.²

It has been fully established, however, that the various text types in Biblical Hebrew have their specific grammatical constructions, and this difference between text types is likely to be found in Qumran Hebrew as well.³ In addition, by comparing texts from the Bible and from Qumran it seems possible to trace some linguistic development as reflected within the different text types. The aim of this article is, thus, to point to some aspects of the verbal system in Qumran Hebrew from the point of view of text type and genre, and to discuss the concurrence between text type and genre.

formal expressions, as well as the diachronic development of the language.

1. TEXT TYPE

In biblical prose narrative the most current text types are ‘narrative discourse’, and ‘procedural discourse’ and ‘hortatory discourse’, whereas ‘descriptive discourse’ is commonly embedded in the other text types. As the scenery is seldom described and the characters are depicted by their doings and sayings, not their moral qualities or appearance, the biblical styles admits very little space for description. It is occasionally employed to stress the customary character of some activities, either by using the yiqtol, as in Num 9:18ff., or by the weqatal, as in Gen 29:2–3.

Narrative discourse differs from procedural discourse in that though both are sequential, i.e., a matter is evolved in a sequence, narrative discourse spans a period of time while procedural instruction is located to the sphere of the future and does not span a certain period of time. By nature, hortatory discourse is agent-oriented—something is requested from someone—which, of course, is not the case with description, and neither request nor description are sequential in character.

Essential for all prose composition is the balance between narration and dialogue, and in this respect the biblical narratives are literary masterpieces. In biblical style, the narrator mostly restricts himself to stating what can be observed—including the conversations. This restriction makes dialogue an important constituent element of the narrative, and practically the only means to form a psychological analysis. Dialogue is, by nature, in the form of direct speech, which per se may contain any of the text types mentioned above, and hence is not a text type of its own. Also, not all direct speech is dialogue. Extensive procedural portions of the Pentateuch are formally cast in direct speech but lack any dialogue; and the same is true for admonitions, which form a characteristic part of the wisdom literature.

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4 In contrast to the Ugaritic literature, the Bible almost completely lacks poetic narratives.

5 A procedural précis that registers how things were done (e.g. Num 10:13–28) is not sequential, inasmuch as it develops no reference time of its own which moves a story forwards.