

How Qoheleth Thought: A Natural Semantic Metalanguage Analysis of Ecclesiastes

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Abstract

Hebel is the key concept for understanding the book of Ecclesiastes. But what the meaning of *hebel* is remains a contested topic, as over twenty English glosses for *hebel* are in competition within scholarship, without any signs of resolution of the problem. This dissertation presents an original analysis of *hebel* by using the semantic theory, the Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM).

NSM theorizes that lexemes can be decomposed into universal semantic atoms. I demonstrate how such decomposition of lexemes into semantic atoms can capture many of the aspects of the contexts of *hebel* that have often been overlooked. In my analysis, I devise a new set of procedures for analyzing the textual context of a lexeme, which I call the Successive Trimming Algorithm (STA). STA is a procedure that defines an abstract lexeme by detecting all similarities in the textual contexts of a lexeme, while eliminating any meanings that violate any textual contexts. Using STA, I argue that *hebel* has a demonstrable abstract semantic structure that follows it in all of its usages. Although all theories regarding the meaning of *hebel* argue at least partially on the basis of textual contexts the lexeme occupies, I show that STA systematically analyzes the textual contexts in a way that captures larger numbers of similarities among the contexts.

Finally, I explore the implications of my definition of *hebel*. As bilingual studies have shown, understanding foreign language lexemes like Hebrew *hebel* is a process of familiarizing oneself with unfamiliar ways of thinking. *Hebel* is a way of thinking about the world that is unfamiliar to modern-day Anglo culture, but by learning to think about the world in terms of *hebel* through the definition I produce, it is possible to approach more closely the thoughts of the ancient author of Ecclesiastes.

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Abbreviations

ANE: Ancient Near Eastern

BH: Biblical Hebrew

CBL: Corpus-Based Linguistics

HB: Hebrew Bible

LXX: The Septuagint

MHM: Modified Hierarchical Model

MHM+: Modified Hierarchical Model +

NSM: The Natural Semantic Metalanguage

PS: Proto-Semitic

STA: The Successive Trimming Algorithm

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Understanding *Hebel*

Understanding the meaning of *hebel* is the first step to understanding the whole book of Ecclesiastes. It is therefore unfortunate that scholarship on Ecclesiastes has failed to form a consensus on the meaning of *hebel*; at least twenty-two different English glosses have been suggested for *hebel*, including ‘absurd,’ ‘enigma,’ ‘fleeting,’ ‘futile,’ ‘insubstantial,’ and ‘vanity.’ Perhaps more problematic is that these glosses are qualitatively dissimilar to one another. Claiming *hebel* means ‘futile’ is very different from claiming it means ‘insubstantial.’

There is clearly much more to the problem than our ability to form a cogent understanding of *hebel*. The lack of consensus indicates that the problem is rooted in a lack of criteria by which to judge proposals regarding semantic values as correct or incorrect. And indeed, examination of the argumentation seems to support this claim. Typically, the criteria are left unstated, or worse, they are simply non-existent. For instance, Antoon Schoors argues against the interpretation of his interlocutors with the following reasoning: “None of the meanings we drew from the literature cited above is satisfactory, since they all go in the sense of ‘futility, emptiness, vanity.’ But none of the situations or scenarios Qoheleth calls *hebel*, is futile.”¹ This, of course, is not an adequate argument at all, since presumably, his opponents thought otherwise in defining *hebel* as ‘futile.’

Roland Murphy, in observing the seemingly unending creation of new theories, writes: “How many far-fetched theories have been hazarded by modern writers who are locked up in

¹ Antoon Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, HCOT (Leuven: Peeters, 2013), 43.

their own crippling presuppositions?"² In observing the problematic influence of presuppositions onto readings of texts, Murphy seems to be pointing primarily at the general background of the scholar, the books the scholar was influenced by, etc. But he seems to overlook an important type of presupposition which is perhaps the most damaging to analysis: the concepts that are ingrained in our everyday language. People think in their own native language concepts and tend mistakenly to think that their concepts are adequate tools for definition, without reflection on how remarkably specialized their concepts are in light of cross-linguistic comparison with foreign language concepts. I will argue that this is the key methodological error that needs to be addressed to solve the problem of the meaning of *hebel* and, for that matter, the meaning of any ancient lexeme.

1.2. The Nature of the Problem

From a cross-linguistic perspective, English glosses of *hebel* represent only a fraction of the possible glosses for *hebel* available in the world's languages. Take for example the Japanese *Shinkaiyaku Bible 2017*, which translates *hebel* as 空しい (*munashī*). The adjective *munashī* has a somewhat similar meaning to English *vain*, but it is not a translational equivalent. The two words feel different for those with intuitions in both languages.

The Shueisha Japanese Dictionary defines *Munashī* with four different entries. One entry is irrelevant to the present investigation, since it lists an ancient usage meaning 'to die.' Two entries offer respectively one- and two-word glosses, but as an inspection of those glosses in the dictionary shows, those words are defined through *munashī* themselves, and so the definitions

² Roland E. Murphy, "Qoheleth Interpreted," *VT* 32, no. 3 (1982): 336.

are circular. The only meaningful entry defines *munashī* as 努力しても効果がないさま。甲斐がない。むだだ。 This can be translated very roughly: “The situation where there is no point in putting effort in. Ineffectualness. Uselessness.”³ *The Kenkyusha’s New Japanese-English Dictionary* suggests the glosses: empty, void, vain, fruitless, ineffective, ineffectual, futile, unavailing.⁴ For the purposes of this section, I will focus on discussing one of the English glosses offered for *munashī*, ‘vain,’ although the observations made apply equally to all other suggested glosses.

An analysis of the distribution of *munashī* and *vain* helps to reveal important differences in the semantics of them. According to the *shōnagon* corpus for Japanese, *Munashī* can be used to modify a variety of things such as action, emotion, connections, time, life, a thought, etc.⁵ For instance, it is possible to say something like the following in Japanese:

- 1) They were trying their best to solve the issue. But as the *munashī* time was passing, we decided to give up.
- 2) *They were trying their best to solve the issue. But as the *vain* time was passing, we decided to give up.

The way *munashī* functions in a sentence is clearly different from the way *vain* functions. As (2) shows, we do not talk of the time in which we are doing something as ‘vain,’ whereas such an

³ See *The Shueisha Japanese Dictionary*, 4th ed. (Japan: Shueisha, 1993), s.v. “むなしい.”

⁴ *The Kenkyusha’s New Japanese–English Dictionary*, 5th ed. (Tokyo: Kenkyūsha, 2003), s.v. “むなしい.”

⁵ *Shōnagon*, “空しい” accessed February 7, 2019. <http://www.kotonoha.gr.jp/shonagon/>.

expression is perfectly normal in Japanese (the asterisk indicates the sentence is felt to be ungrammatical or otherwise improper).

According to the Corpus of Contemporary American English, we talk of people being ‘vain,’ and we talk about actions being ‘vain,’ such as ‘vain attempts,’ ‘vain gestures,’ and ‘vain desires.’ In addition, we can talk about people’s actions as being done ‘in vain’ when those actions are presented as verbs.⁶ Thus, we may say the following:

3) Sam is a vain man.

4) *Sam is a munashī man.

While English allows people to be described as *vain*, Japanese does not allow people to be described in terms of *munashī*.⁷ Strictly speaking, I analyze Japanese *munashī* as having only one sense in modern usage, whereas *vain* seems to be polysemous. *Vain* has the specialized adverbial phrase “in vain” as well as two senses of “vain,” one attributable to action, the other attributable primarily to a person. But these details need not concern us for now. The basic distributional data that we are currently examining allows us to start making hypotheses about the meanings of *munashī* and *vain* respectively. For example, we may hypothesize that *munashī* describes the property of things we do something with, whereas *vain* describes the property of actions or people, since the range of modified noun of each word seems to suggest so.

⁶ *Corpus of Contemporary American English*, “vain,” accessed February 7, 2016 from <http://corpus.byu.edu/coca/>.

⁷ Technically speaking, *munashī* was applicable to people in the 14th century to refer to a dead person. However, this meaning has since gone out of usage. See *Nihon Kokugo Daijiten*, 2nd ed., vol. 12 (Japan: Shogakukan, 2001), s.v. “むなしい.”

But the difference between *munashī* and *vain* is not limited to the object modified. We may say other things with *munashī* that illustrate that it means something different from *vain*:

- 5) I successfully got my revenge. But as I saw the blood drip off the dagger, a *munashī* feeling gripped me.
- 6) The happiness I gained from winning the lottery was *munashī*, unlike the happiness I had from years of hard work.

If a Japanese speaker read (5), *munashī* would in the mind of the reader refer to the fact that the avenger did not feel good and could not manipulate the feeling so that satisfaction might be felt (although this may not be the way one describes it). On the other hand, we would not use *vain* to portray the same idea. Even saying “I got revenge in vain” sounds strange, as it implies the revenge was successful and unsuccessful at the same time. Equally, other glosses like *futile* or *unavailing* do not work, since they would not normally modify the noun *feeling*. *Empty* gets closer to the meaning, but it lacks the resentful sentiment *munashī* has towards the *feeling*, since it feels much more objective than *munashī*.

Sentence (6) implies that the happiness was not the quality expected and that it could not be manipulated to a higher standard. There is a fundamental mismatch between reality and the hope for something great. Additionally, there is something like resentment directed at the happiness. Again, the word *vain* cannot express the same sentiment. It would be confusing to call happiness in the context of winning the lottery *vain*. Even a gloss like *empty* would only be able to capture some select aspects of *munashī*. Perhaps it would capture the mismatch between expectation and reality but calling something *empty* is not a statement about the strong sentiment

of hope one had for that thing, at least to the extent that *munashī* expresses it. Furthermore, with usages of *empty*, there is apparently no resentment directed at the happiness; although the person may feel sad, it is not a resentful sentiment to call something *empty*.

Even when there is overlap between *munashī* and *vain*, the two still seem to be saying something different:

- 7) I made a *munashī* attempt at preventing the flood waters from entering the house.
- 8) I made a *vain* attempt at preventing the flood waters from entering the house.
- 9) I made a *futile* attempt at preventing the flood waters from entering the house.

The words *munashī* and *vain* have some overlap, and the less careful Japanese-English bilingual may say that they mean the same thing. After all, both convey that the person hoped that the preventative measures would work, and both agree that the failure was a bad thing. But if asked about the feeling conveyed, (7) is more resentful than (8). Sentence (8) implies the act of preventing was not dissimilar to the act of not preventing, as a matter of cold fact, whereas (7) is more about the feeling one feels from seeing the events unfold.

Some skeptical readers may think that the meanings are close enough, and *vain* adequately expresses *munashī* in context. They may further suggest that the intuition that there is a difference in meaning stems from general cultural sentiments, rather than from the word itself. But such a point of view requires excessively high standards for foreign lexemes to distinguish themselves from native lexemes: on this theory, the meanings are deemed to be the same unless one absolutely cannot read a native lexeme into the same slot and have it mean something meaningful to the reader.

Such standards would fail to differentiate the meaning of native lexemes if applied to them. Consider the difference between *vain* in (8) and *futile* in (9). Clearly, no thoughtful English speaker would suggest that *futile* and *vain* mean the same things in this context. *Futile* implies that the flood waters would have gotten into the house whatever was done, whereas *vain* does not go so far. Now, by the standards above, a Japanese linguist analyzing English may suggest that *vain* and *futile* both mean *munashī*, but quite clearly, such an analysis is mistaken. Thus, the standards for distinguishing foreign lexemes from native lexemes described above are excessive, if they cannot detect the difference between *vain* and *futile*, which we as English speakers know to mean different things. Of course, the difference is not fatal for the purposes of casual communication, but without understanding the difference, we could not get insight into the native psychology. Possible differences in meaning must be explored through analysis of the range of usages, rather than hastily dismissed.

Given that *munashī* and *vain* have different meanings, and since, as full study would show, *munashī* has no counterpart in English, the *Shinkaiyaku Bible 2017*'s translation of *hebel* as *munashī* must be seen as another candidate for the meaning of *hebel*, albeit a non-English candidate. The same story can be told for Jerome's translation of *hebel* into Latin, *uanitas*. According to Goodrich and Miller, the meaning of the Latin is now untranslatable. They comment on the word *uanitas* that "its semantic domain covers a wide range of meanings, including 'futility,' 'pointlessness,' 'falsity,' and an 'unsubstantial or illusory quality.' 'Vanity,' the traditional English translation of the Latin, no longer triggers these association in the minds of modern readers."⁸ It is astonishing that a translation that was so influential in Christian

⁸ Jerome, *St. Jerome: Commentary on Ecclesiastes*, ACW 66, ed. and trans. Richard J. Goodrich and David J. D. Miller (New York: The Newman Press, 2012), 143.

exegesis for over a millennium is now an untranslatable concept. But since its meaning differs from any English concept, it too should be considered a candidate for the meaning of *hebel* that has no equivalent in present-day English.

We should imagine that *munashī* and *uanitas* are not lone candidates of *hebel* that are not covered by English, but two among hundreds more. Indeed, recent experiments in bilingual studies have verified that languages differ in their inventory of meanings, and so we are no longer justified to proceed on the premise that the lexical candidates in any language are entirely adequate for describing lexical meaning in other languages.⁹ In fact, the idea that particularly abstract concepts tend to differ among languages is a long-known idea. Locke, in his *Essay on Human Understanding* writes:

A moderate skill in different languages will easily satisfy one of the truth of this; it being so obvious to observe great store of words in one language which have not any that answer them in another. Which plainly shows that those of one country, by their customs and manner of life, have found occasion to make several complex ideas, and given names to them, which others never collected into specific ideas. This could not have happened if these species were the steady workmanship of nature, and not collections made and abstracted by the mind, in order to naming, and for the convenience of communication.... if we look a little more nearly into this matter, and exactly compare different languages, we shall find, that though they have words which in translations and dictionaries are supposed to answer one another, yet there is scarce one of ten amongst the names of complex ideas, especially of mixed modes, that stands for the same precise idea which the word does that in dictionaries it is rendered by.¹⁰

The knowledge that there are many concepts available in the world's languages that are not available in English should guide how we approach the problem of what *hebel* means: We

⁹ See particularly Aneta Pavlenko, *The Bilingual Mind: And What It Tells Us about Language and Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 309-15.

¹⁰ John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding; with Thoughts on the Conduct of the Understanding By John Locke Esq. Collated with Desmaizeaux's Edition* (Edinburgh: Mundell & Son, 1798), 163.

should not begin with the assumption that our native language has a lexical counterpart to every Hebrew concept.

It is tempting to think in terms of field theory. For example, if we had a palette filled with the whole spectrum of color, both in terms of hue and lightness, it would be possible for us to give the English word for the color on any point on the palette. But to believe that languages operate in the same manner on more abstract levels, following field theory, would be naïve. John Lyons warns of the danger of making generalizations about semantic fields, which primarily apply to concrete domains like color, concerning more abstract domains like ‘intelligence’ and ‘beauty,’ since any such claims are unverifiable. He further states: “If these generalizations are taken at face-value, they may well give the impression that the abstract part of the vocabulary of a language is more neatly structured and tidier, as it were, than the concrete part. But this is an illusion bred of methodological vagueness and subjectivism.”¹¹ Indeed, it is difficult to think of a way that we can test whether there is a continuum between ‘wise’ and ‘intelligent’ like with ‘blue’ and ‘red.’ Therefore, any idea that the task of identifying the meaning of *hebel* is merely to look at what scene *hebel* denotes in each instance and to assign the English word for that scene must be abandoned.¹²

The fact that many people believe that lexical meanings do not differ among languages invites us to reflect on the nature of how one thinks about one’s own language. Without

¹¹ John Lyons, *Semantics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 1:259.

¹² In fact, it is not clear that color words necessarily function in terms of fields in all languages, like they do in English. Some languages have no concept of color, and they would not think in terms of fields as we do. Thus, whether even concrete domains are necessarily conceptualized as fields is questionable. See for an argument between the two sides, the correspondence between Kay and Kuenhi, and Wierzbicka in Paul Kay and Rolf G. Kuenhi, “Rejoinder to Anna Wierzbicka,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 14, no. 4 (2008): 886-87; and Anna Wierzbicka, “Rejoinder to Paul Kay and Rolf G. Kuenhi,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 14, no. 4 (2008): 887-89.

extensive experience in interacting within very different cultures, people tend to believe that their language has a comprehensive expressive capacity. Perhaps a sociological element is involved: Since we live in our native community, we rarely encounter experiences where others are genuinely confused about what we are saying. Our expressive abilities are only affirmed among our friends who speak and think like us. The problem is more acute in the anglosphere, since there is now seldom a need to genuinely familiarize oneself with another culture, since it is possible to survive with English alone in almost any country. But it would be dangerous to infer from our experiences of the effectiveness of English that English concepts are universal, with parallels in every language.¹³ Such default assumptions concerning foreign languages must be acknowledged and rejected. Rather, we must assume that human language is incredibly flexible. The challenge is whether we can think outside our own conceptual bubbles to form realistic theories about what foreign concepts mean.

Since we cannot begin an investigation of *hebel* by assuming English has the correct range of concepts to describe *hebel* we must confront the question of methodology. If English is not expressive enough, should all languages be considered instead? But clearly, such a method would require analysis of foreign language lexemes in multiple languages and would only multiply the amount of work involved. Furthermore, there is no guarantee that the Hebrew concept *hebel* has conceptual parallels in any other language in the world. Thus, any methodology that simply looks for ‘off-the-shelf’ options of ready-made concepts is inadequate. Rather, we must seek a methodology that has enough flexibility to analyze and define foreign concepts in such a way that it is possible to ‘tailor-make’ yet unknown concepts to fit the

¹³ For an insightful article on a further political dimension that has led to a lack of appreciation for non-anglo languages and culture in the United States, see Aneta Pavlenko, “‘We have Room for but One Language Here’: Language and National Identity in the US at the Turn of the 20th Century,” *Multilingua* 21 (2002): 163-96.

Hebrew word *hebel*. In short, my aim will be to produce a definition of *hebel* that is not dependent on any language's ready-made concept, but instead to reconstruct a yet unknown concept of *hebel* from an analysis of the Hebrew text alone.

1.3. The Natural Semantic Metalanguage

The Natural Semantic Metalanguage (henceforth NSM) is a theory in semantics that specializes in describing 'foreign meanings.' Its founder, Anna Wierzbicka, has written extensively on the need for scholars to recognize that their own native language concepts affect how they analyze other cultures in the world, in her publication *Imprisoned in English*.¹⁴ Having spent almost half a century in founding a theory of semantics, NSM, Wierzbicka claims that it can describe the lexemes of any language without introducing cultural biases into the definition.

The key claim in NSM is that it has uncovered sixty-five universal concepts. These universal concepts are at once meant to lie behind the meanings of all words in every language, and also meant to be the simplest units of meaning, such that they themselves cannot be reduced to anything simpler. Universal concepts are hypothesized to surface in every language as words. In English, the universal concepts correspond to words like SOMETHING, SOMEONE, THINK, and FEEL. By using these universal words, and these alone, it is possible to begin sketching out the contours of foreign language lexemes in a way that goes beyond a simple equation of foreign language lexemes with their translation equivalents, like the equation of *vain* with *munashī* in bilingual dictionaries. This is done by decomposing complex words like *vain* and *munashī* into simple concepts like SOMETHING, SOMEONE, THINK, and FEEL.

¹⁴ Anna Wierzbicka, *Imprisoned in English: The Hazards of Using English as a Default Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

NSM also allows detailed analyses of native language lexemes. In fact, it is very difficult to precisely define even our native language lexemes. For example, the *Random House Unabridged Dictionary* defines ‘vain’ in the sense of ‘vain effort’ as “ineffectual or unsuccessful; futile.”¹⁵ But listing synonyms like ‘futile’ does not sufficiently distinguish ‘vain’ from ‘futile’; quite clearly, ‘futile’ does not mean the same thing as ‘vain,’ as we saw in (8) and (9). Recognizing that synonyms have different meanings is an important step, but making a definition precise, such that it distinguishes its meaning from synonyms is a further, more challenging step. NSM again claims to be able to solve this problem of definitions. In the same way that NSM defines foreign language lexemes, it can also make definitions of native language lexemes in such a way that their meanings can be distinguished from synonyms. NSM claims that the problem with dictionary definitions like the definition of ‘vain’ through ‘futile’ is that they use synonyms, that is, equally complex words, to define complex words. Again, the approach of NSM is to decompose complex words into ‘universal words’ that are simpler than them.

In the following chapters, I will describe in some detail the theoretical foundations of NSM and show how it can be applied to Hebrew lexicography. I will argue throughout that NSM is the ideal theory on which to build Hebrew lexicography, since it describes lexemes in a culturally sensitive way that other theories do not; and as a result, it gives us insights into the texts that cannot be captured using other theories.

¹⁵ *Random House Unabridged Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (New York: Random House, 1993), s.v. “vain.”

1.4. Theories on *Hebel*

The importance of describing the meaning of *hebel* was already recognized by the earliest commentators. Gregory of Nyssa's commentary dating from around 380 CE, describes the Greek translation of *hebel*, ματαιοτης, as follows: "It is also often called 'futile' in ordinary language, when someone does everything with some purpose in view, energetically pursuing it as contributing to his object, but then, when some obstacle presents itself, the labor turns out to be useless; then the expense of effort without achieving anything is denoted by the word 'futile.'"¹⁶ Although it is only a few lines long, the description is in moderate detail, and goes beyond a simple listing of synonyms. More specifically, the definition includes some temporally sequenced scenes describing actions that would qualify as 'futile.'

Writing a few years later, Jerome comments concerning *hebel* that "We may translate these terms 'smoky vapor' and 'a faint breeze that quickly dissolves.' And so, something perishable, something not of the whole, is indicated by this phrase. Those things that are seen are temporal, while those things that are unseen are eternal."¹⁷ The brief comment is far from a full definition, but there is a clear understanding of the metaphorical dimension involved, along with a differentiation of the metaphorical meaning with the meaning of the term in the context of the book of Ecclesiastes.

However, it is not so clear that there has been much methodological progress since the ancient commentators. While the study of general linguistics has advanced our knowledge of how lexemes work, these have not been used to sharpen studies on the meaning of *hebel* in

¹⁶ Stuart George Hall and Rachel Moriarty, "Translation: Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa: Homilies on Ecclesiastes," in *Gregory of Nyssa Homilies on Ecclesiastes: An English Version with Supporting Studies*, ed. Stuart George Hall (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1993), 35.

¹⁷ Jerome, *St. Jerome: Commentary on Ecclesiastes*, 36

Ecclesiastes. One looks in vain for any argumentation on *hebel* that goes beyond impressionistic claims that translation A fits usages better than does translation B. We saw earlier Schoor's claim that Qoheleth does not mean 'futile' because Qoheleth never means it in his usages. Such limited argumentation is in fact quite common. For instance, Craig Bartholomew argues that "the common element in relation to Qoheleth's epistemological quest is that if there is meaning and value, it cannot be grasped and is thus *enigmatic* or *incomprehensible*."¹⁸ Bartholomew's claim is made, like Schoor's, on the grounds that in his mind, these meanings are common to all contexts in Ecclesiastes unlike any other lexeme. But it is not clear why his claim is any better than any other.

But the problem seems to extend further than the subjectivity of the methodology. There is also a problem of carelessness in definitions. If we carefully examine Bartholomew's claim above, it makes very little sense. The claim seems to be muddled by his adoption of two English lexemes 'enigmatic,' and 'incomprehensible,' and a phrase 'cannot be grasped.' Each of these expressions have different meanings. *Enigmatic* things are not things that 'cannot be grasped' or 'incomprehensible,' at least in normal usage. The adjective is normally used in phrases like 'enigmatic smiles,' 'enigmatic poems,' and 'an enigmatic person.' It is true that an 'enigmatic poem' is not fully understood, but there is no nuance that it is 'incomprehensible' or that it 'cannot' be grasped. Rather, the meaning seems to lie in the fact that someone thinks about the poem, "I know there is something I don't understand here," without any commitment concerning one's ability to understand it after further consideration. 'Incomprehensible' and something that 'cannot be grasped' also have two recognizably different meanings. Something

¹⁸ Craig G. Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, BCOTWP (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 106. Italics in Original.

‘incomprehensible,’ like an ‘incomprehensible language,’ is something that someone simply cannot comprehend. On the other hand, if someone ‘can’t grasp the language being spoken,’ it implies that there is an effort being placed into understanding it, and that one is somewhat close to understanding it. But it certainly does not entail that the language is ‘incomprehensible.’ Thus, Bartholomew’s claim collapses with some scrutiny due to the imprecise nature of the description, since three different and contradictory meanings are proposed at once; therefore, it is not even clear what the claim being made is.

One might think that my criticism is not quite fair. After all, no commentator expects every word used to be scrutinized to this extent. But such lack of precision in definitions seem to be at the root of the problem of *hebel*. If we cannot take the words used by commentators seriously, how is one to understand the descriptions? Are they only meant to be taken as rough guidelines? It should also be pointed out that commentators’ practices in defining *hebel* do not depart radically from the practice of dictionaries that list multiple synonyms along with sentential descriptions as if to set guidelines concerning the meaning, and so the practice of not giving precise definitions is common. But common practice does not excuse the fact that such descriptions often lack substance, and that they are thus beyond verification due to their vagueness.

Another notable aspect of the arguments concerning *hebel* is a procedural assumption that one has only off-the-shelf options through which to understand *hebel*. That is, an effort is made to pick known words that fit the usages of *hebel* best, without trying to tailor-make a concept that fits *hebel*. For instance, Tremper Longman asks concerning *hebel*, “does it signify that

‘everything is meaningless’ or that ‘everything is temporary’?”¹⁹ Such inquiries, if taken at face value, assume that English exhausts all possible concepts in the world, and of course, as we saw above, such assumptions are false.

Considerations of off-the-shelf options sometimes goes beyond one’s native language. For example, Michael Fox suggests the term ‘absurd’ for *hebel*, the term being meant in the sense of French *l’absurde* in Camus’ philosophy.²⁰ The adoption of French *l’absurde* clearly goes beyond the capacities of the English language. In fact, the gloss predates Fox, as it was used among French commentators.²¹ Although the consideration of foreign lexemes will give us more choices to consider, it is in principle still the same method as studies that only consider English options, in that it selects a meaning from an inventory of known meanings.

It is worth noting that Fox does not consider ‘absurd’ as capable of capturing the whole meaning. Instead, Fox criticizes approaches that assume any one word would do justice to the meaning by showing how a strict application of rival translation glosses shows that they are each inadequate.²² In terms of criteria, he states “it is possible to render the word by an equivalent that comes close to representing the range of meaning and that bears similar connotations.”²³ For Fox, we can get close to representing the meaning, but trying to render the exact meaning is too ambitious. But is this really the epistemological limit for our understanding of *hebel*? I will argue

¹⁹ Tremper Longman III, *The Book of Ecclesiastes*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 62.

²⁰ Michael V. Fox, “The Meaning of Hebel for Qohelet,” *JBL* 105, no. 3 (1986): 409.

²¹ See E. Podechard, *L’Ecclésiaste* (Paris: Lecoffre, 1912), 233; André Barucq, “Question sur le Sens du Travail: Qo 1,2; 2:21-23,” *AsSeign* 49 (1971): 66-71.

²² *Ibid.*, 409-15.

²³ *Ibid.*, 409.

that if we abandon off-the-shelf conceptual options for *hebel* altogether, it is possible to get much closer to the exact meaning than is achieved by conventional definitions.

Another type of description of *hebel* focuses on the metaphorical dimensions of *hebel*. For instance, Miller suggests that *hebel* has a meaning ‘vapor’ that served as a symbol, with three different meanings in different contexts: ‘insubstantial,’ ‘transience,’ ‘foulness.’²⁴ But even metaphorical approaches do not escape the criticism that they rely on off-the-shelf concepts. We will revisit his theory later in some more detail, but for now, we may note that the three different meanings are themselves English concepts, and thus, theories adopting metaphorical explanations are only a variant of typical off-the-shelf explanations.

As we have seen, studies on *hebel* lack linguistic insight, in both the procedures they use for arriving at a concept, and in their argumentation against others’ glosses. These studies wrongly narrow the debate to one concerning what the best off-the-shelf concept is to represent what Qoheleth meant by *hebel*. The problem of using off-the-shelf concepts can be further analyzed as having two aspects. The first is a representational problem. As we saw, some scholars lacked representational finesse. Bartholomew’s use of ‘cannot be grasped,’ ‘enigmatic,’ and ‘incomprehensible’ is one such case. Similarly, Fox’s observation that no word can represent *hebel* alone is also a representational problem; it assumes that people are incapable of representing some foreign concepts accurately using a word. In answer to this problem, I will argue that it is possible to tailor-make a new English word to represent *hebel* using NSM.

The second problem is the lack of imaginative capacities concerning foreign concepts and a corresponding closed-mindedness to different ways to see the world. Such closed-mindedness

²⁴ Douglas B. Miller, *Symbol and Rhetoric in Ecclesiastes: The Place of Hebel in Qoheleth's Work* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002). For a shorter summary of his theory, see Douglas B. Miller, “Qoheleth’s Symbolic Use of הֶבֶל,” *JBL* 117, no. 3 (1998): 437-54.

represents a lack of appreciation for how flexible the human mind is. The human mind has the potential to learn systems of thought that seem incomprehensible to us, but only if we are willing to allow foreign cultures to have their full effects on us. Consider, for example, the account recorded by the anthropologist Catherine Lutz of some Micronesian islanders speaking the Woleaian language. In the account, Lutz describes several scenes of the cultural meaning *fago* that is close to English *love* but has no direct translation equivalent:

Men, however, are said to be more susceptible to being shamed or embarrassed (*ma*) than are women, and as a result I more often heard statements expressing *fago* directed toward shamed men. Marriage is frequently the occasion for this emotion because a man must cope with the shame that can occur if the woman rejects him, as well as with the anxiety of coming to live with relative strangers in his wife's household. Ilefagomar told a small group of women and me the story of the attempt made many years earlier to marry her to Torogoitil. To show her opposition to marrying, she threatened to starve herself to death. Despite concerted efforts to gain her compliance with the arranged marriage, she ran off into the bush. Then, she said, one old man had such strong *fago* for Torogoitil that he himself ran into the woods in another direction.²⁵

Lutz's first-hand account of her time on the island has many such descriptions of situations that are strange in our eyes. The account is at once very human, but at the same time, it defies any attempt for us to conceptualize it in terms of our own concepts. The word *fago* here does not quite fit with the English concept *love*.

It may seem that *fago* means the 'feeling of embarrassment felt for others' or 'compassion.' But other examples that would equally be called *fago* seem to contradict this idea. For instance, Lutz observes that *fago* requires power, since *fago* entails concrete action rather than mere compassion: "the higher one's position is in the social hierarchy on Ifaluk, the more frequent and compelling are the contexts in which one is called on to *fago* and to 'take care of'

²⁵ Catherine Lutz, *Unnatural Emotions: Everyday Sentiments on a Micronesian Atoll and Their Challenge to Western Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 135.

(*gamwelar*) others.”²⁶ The fact that *fago* is seen as an emotion of the powerful makes it differ from what we would call ‘compassion,’ and it has little to do with ‘feeling embarrassed for others.’

Having observed that *fago* is one meaning, but that this one meaning corresponds to no English concept, Lutz abandons the attempt to translate the sentiment into our categories, as she was predisposed to do when she had landed on the island. Instead, she attempts to understand *fago* in its own cultural terms. She concludes, “*Fago* is central to the way people understand their relationship to others. That understanding includes the sense that the suffering of others is of vital concern, that attachment to others entails active nurturance more than self-contained feelings, that love is explicitly an emotion of power, and that love is heavily tinged with pathos because love’s object is weak and because love often equals loss.”²⁷

Our encounter with the book of Ecclesiastes should be likened to the anthropologist’s encounter with a foreign culture with foreign customs. Our goal must not be to reduce the foreignness in terms of our own culture, but to preserve that foreignness and to express it as it is. We must be flexible enough to imagine that others are capable of seeing the world in ways that differ from our own customs, and we must record that difference. But in order to do this, we must free our imagination from its English shackles, and we must read the Hebrew text in a way that allows our minds to be guided onto uncharted concepts.

Indeed, as I will show, even the process of intense reading is enough for us to capture the foreignness. As most people will have experienced, as we intensely read the Hebrew without recourse to English, the contours of *hebel* begin to emerge in our minds, only for it to crumble as

²⁶ Ibid., 141.

²⁷ Ibid., 154.

soon as we try to describe that impression we have formed in our mind in English. I will argue that it is possible to preserve that impression, and to systematically record the series of impressions we get while we read each occurrence of *hebel*; and these impressions can be organized into a definition for *hebel*.

Such a culturally and linguistically oriented approach to *hebel* in Ecclesiastes is unique among biblical studies. To be sure, other studies have focused on culture in Qoheleth. Mary Mills' monograph *Reading Ecclesiastes: A Literary and Cultural Exegesis* takes a 'Biblical Imagination' approach to reading Ecclesiastes.²⁸ The approach is 'biblical' in the sense that biblical texts are read in their original language, but the approach also involves 'imagination' in that it is interested in how people from different cultural backgrounds in the modern world interpreted the biblical text. Although I share interest in cultures, my interests are in the culture of the biblical author, not of modern readers, and I use linguistic methods, not literary methods.

Comparative studies in which *hebel* is set in the background of Ancient Near Eastern (henceforth ANE) culture is common. Most recently, Sneed has argued for an interpretation of *hebel* in light of parallels in ANE thought.²⁹ I agree that situating *hebel* in Ecclesiastes within ANE literature is a worthy study. However, my focus is narrower than such studies of ANE literature, since I base my studies on the Hebrew text alone. But my aims are not incompatible to Sneed's, since any pan-Semitic study requires detailed understanding of those languages and their literature in their own terms. I see my study as forming a base from which *hebel* can be compared to other concepts in the ANE.

²⁸ Mary E. Mills, *Reading Ecclesiastes: A Literary and Cultural Exegesis* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 4.

²⁹ Mark Sneed, "הבל as 'Worthless' in Qoheleth: A Critique of Michael V. Fox's 'Absurd' Thesis," *JBL* 136, no. 4 (2017): 879-94.

Sang-Bae Kim's dissertation is a linguistically oriented study of some roots in Ecclesiastes. The prime focus of his study is on possible influences of the Greek language and Semitic languages on Hebrew lexemes in Ecclesiastes. Such a study is markedly different from the present study, which is primarily interested in reconstructing meanings in Ecclesiastes through an investigation of the text of Ecclesiastes.³⁰

Therefore, there is still a need in the scholarship of *hebel* for a linguistic and cultural study that explores what modern linguistics tells us about what we can know about *hebel*. It is one of my aims to show that such a study helps us to overcome the methodological problems present in previous studies and moves us closer to Qoheleth's thoughts.

1.5. Cross-Linguistic Semantics in Hebrew Lexicography

In the realm of Hebrew linguistics, the idea that Hebrew lexemes reflect a culture different from modern English culture has been a key point of contention, ever since James Barr's now classic work, *The Semantics of Biblical Language*, which exposed the idea as a subject of importance.³¹ Barr rejects "the notion of the reflection of Hebrew thought in Hebrew language," in opposition to the theologians of his time, who were using opportunistic pseudo-linguistic arguments to suit their own theological agendas.³² Rather than putting the burden of Hebrew culture on Hebrew language, Barr prefers to allow stylistics to address the matter.³³

³⁰ Sang-Bae Kim, "A Study of the Linguistic and Thematic Roots of Ecclesiastes" (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2010).

³¹ James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961).

³² *Ibid.*, 295.

³³ *Ibid.*, 272.

Although Barr was undoubtedly right to criticize opportunistic linguistic arguments made by theologians of his day, more nuanced arguments concerning the interaction between language and thought have arisen since. We turn to a particularly dominant theory in today's Hebrew lexicography as a point of comparison to Barr's criticisms more than half a century ago: Cognitive linguistics. Cognitive linguistic lexicography was first adopted into Hebrew studies through Kjell Magne Yri's volume, *My Father Taught Me How To Cry, But Now I have Forgotten*, and subsequently, a significant number of works based on cognitive linguistics have been published.³⁴ Important volumes in Hebrew lexicography include Reinier de Blois' work on his *Semantic Dictionary of Biblical Hebrew*, Gerrit Jan van Steenbergen's *Semantics, World View and Bible Translation*, Ellen van Wolde's volume *Reframing Biblical Studies*, and Stephen Shead's *Radical Frame Semantics and Biblical Hebrew*.³⁵ Numerous works on Hebrew lexicography adopting cognitive linguistics continue to be published. Most recently, Marilyn E. Burton published her volume, *The Semantics of Glory: A Cognitive, Corpus-Based Approach to Hebrew Word Meaning*.³⁶

³⁴ Kjell Magne Yri, *My Father taught me how to cry, but now I have forgotten: The semantics of religious concepts with an emphasis on meaning, interpretation, and translatability* (Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1998).

³⁵ Reinier de Blois, "Towards a New Dictionary of Biblical Hebrew Based on Semantic Domains," *Journal of Biblical Text Research* 8 (2001): 264-85; Gerrit Jan Van Steenbergen, *Semantics, World View and Bible Translation: An Integrated Analysis of a Selection of Hebrew Lexical Items Referring to Negative Moral Behaviour in the Book of Isaiah* (Stellenbosch: Sun Press, 2006); Ellen J. Van Wolde, *Reframing Biblical Studies: When Language and Text Meet Culture, Cognition, and Context* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009); Stephen L. Shead, *Radical Frame Semantics and Biblical Hebrew: Exploring Lexical Semantics* (Leiden: Brill, 2011). I have not listed here important works primarily focusing on conceptual metaphor theory and blending theory, although they too are an important component of cognitive linguistics, since lexical meaning is only of secondary concern for these works. For instance, see Nicole L. Tilford, *Sensing World, Sensing Wisdom: The Cognitive Foundation of Biblical Metaphors* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017).

³⁶ Marilyn E. Burton, *The Semantics of Glory: A Cognitive, Corpus-Based Approach to Hebrew Word Meaning* (Leiden: Brill, 2017).

Enio R. Mueller, a Hebrew lexicographer adopting Cognitive linguistic approaches, responds to Barr's insistence that Hebrew language does not reflect Hebrew thought. Mueller claims that cognitive linguistics has shown religious ideas and other cultural elements cannot be divorced from language, since lexical meaning can only be understood in the background of these cultural elements.³⁷ Such inclusion of the cultural background as part of the description of Hebrew lexemes is typical in approaches adopting cognitive linguistics. For instance, in Burton's work, *kābōd* does not simply mean 'glory' but it must also be understood in the background of how it was associated with clothing, how it was associated with holiness, etc., since these associations frequently surface in the text.³⁸ Compared to structuralist methods that were adopted by Barr, cognitive linguistics has a wider scope of what it would call lexical meaning: Cognitive linguistics seeks to describe all background associations in explaining lexical meaning, whereas structuralists would not have seen such descriptions as part of what lexicography should concern itself with.

And so, cognitive linguistics is not a return to pre-Barr lexicographic projects that claimed to have uncovered Hebrew thought without sufficient grounding in linguistic theories. Rather, cognitive linguistics is an answer to Barr, who saw the necessity of integrating mainstream linguistics into the study of the Bible.³⁹

It is not clear, however, if cognitive linguistic approaches have addressed the problem of language and thought adequately. Although the approach analyzes various aspects of Hebrew

³⁷ Enio R. Mueller, "The Semantics of Biblical Hebrew: Some Remarks from a Cognitive Perspective," accessed February 11th 2019, http://www.sdbh.org/documentation/EnioRMueller_SemanticsBiblicalHebrew.pdf.

³⁸ Burton, *The Semantics of Glory: A Cognitive, Corpus-Based Approach to Hebrew Word Meaning*, 128-75.

³⁹ See Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language*, 288-96.

thought, the flip-side has not been considered: Just as Hebrew has its characteristic habits of thought reflected in its language, so also English has its own habits of thought. Unless *both* sides of the problem are addressed, the problem cannot be solved.

Consider Vardi's article on 'favor' in Biblical Hebrew.⁴⁰ The article considers the Hebrew phrase 'māšā' ḥēn bə'ēnēy Y' and discusses how its usages differ from the English 'Y found favor in the eyes of X.' Vardi makes several interesting observations. According to Vardi, in 90% of the occurrences of 'Y found favor in the eyes of X,' the sociocultural status of X is higher than that of Y. Indeed, there are exceptions, like Shechem (the local ruler) asking for favor from the sojourner (Jacob and his family). Vardi explains such exceptions to the 90% as cases where the sociocultural inferior has temporary power over others. In the case of Shechem and Jacob, Jacob, as the father of a potential bride, has temporary power over Shechem.⁴¹ Thus X is always in some way more powerful than Y when one says 'māšā' ḥēn bə'ēnēy Y'.

Another important observation made in the article concerns the significance of 'the eyes' for finding favor in Hebrew. The use of eyes for phrases concerning favor is not unique to Hebrew, since it is found also in Phoenician texts. But uniquely Hebrew is the significance of the eyes, since it is also the locus of emotion, righteousness, judgment, preference, etc.⁴² The perpetual link between the eyes and various thoughts and feelings of a person suggests there may be some cultural significance of the eyes that is not familiar to us in the modern world. Vardi links the use of 'eyes' in the construction 'Y found favor in the eyes of X' to the fact that ancient

⁴⁰ Ruti Vardi, "Favor: A Construction of Affection in Biblical Hebrew," *Hebrew Studies* 56 (2015): 49-69.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 58-59.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 56-57.

speakers probably looked at the eyes to see if favor was reflected in them.⁴³ Thus, the experience of visual focus upon the superior's eyes eventually developed into the usage of 'eyes' in phrases about favor (this is the idea of 'embodiment' that is foundational to cognitive linguistics; this idea will be explained in more detail, but for now, we do not need to be concerned with the details).⁴⁴

Vardi's analysis of the Hebrew phrase is informative concerning Hebrew culture. But curiously missing in Vardi's explanation is an explanation of what English *favor* means and how it differs from Hebrew 'favor,' except for a paragraph explaining that the Hebrew meaning is slightly different from English, but that this difference will not be pursued.⁴⁵ But is the meaning of English 'favor' a superficial element in discussing Hebrew *māṣā' ḥēn bə'ênēy Y?*

In fact, English culture is unique in how it construes 'favor' just as much as Hebrew. English construes *favor* (noun) as something 'gained' and 'won.' That is, it is something that can be actively pursued, unlike Hebrew *ḥēn*, which is construed as something 'given' by the superior, and 'found' by the inferior. Moreover, there are interesting characteristics to the thing 'won' in English *favor*. English *favor* allows degrees of the thing won in phrases 'some favor,' 'a lot of favor,' etc. In contrast, Hebrew never quantifies it: One either has it or hasn't got it. The quality of what one gains differs too. In English, *favor* does not guarantee action: Even if I gain favor with my students, there is no guarantee they will listen. But with *ḥēn*, action is guaranteed in every usage of the term. In terms of perspective, the two differ again. In my reading of the

⁴³ Ibid., 62-63.

⁴⁴ Lakoff describes embodiment as something that "arises from, and is tied to, our preconceptual bodily experiences." See George Lakoff, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal about the Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 267.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 50.

semantics of the two terms, *favor* takes on the perspective of the person talking about *favor*, and it is the estimation of this person about how the giver of *favor* feels about the receiver, and about the fact that something good may or may not happen as a consequence. On the other hand, *hēn* has little to do with the opinion of the speaker, but it has more to do with the reality of what the giver of *hēn* thinks about the receiver, particularly the fact that the giver wants to do good things and will do good things to the receiver due to the good feelings the giver has towards the receiver.

Quite clearly, there are some stark differences between the semantics of *favor* and *hēn*, and I hope to have shown, in my brief sketch of these differences, that these are not peripheral matters. This raises the question of whether it is worth retaining *favor* in a description of *hēn*. Should we say that *hēn* means *favor* except in all of the above qualities? Is that a realistic way for our minds to access the meaning of *hēn* every time we encounter that lexeme? In my view, retaining the English-specific meaning *favor* is a liability to our comprehension of *hēn*, since it involves two processes: Dismantling the meaning of *favor* before creating the meaning of *hēn*.

Neither should we be under the illusion that *favor* is a universal from which *hēn* has strayed due to cultural factors. For example, Japanese has no equivalent word for *favor*. *The Kenkyusha's New English-Japanese Dictionary* lists many suggestions, like 好意 (*kōi*) in the phrase 好意に預かる (*kōi ni azukaru*) and 親切 (*shinsetsu*) but these are closer to the idea of English *kindness*.⁴⁶ Words like 寵愛 (*chōai*) has limited overlap, but it is rarely used in modern Japanese.⁴⁷ Moreover, there are multiple complications that would distinguish it from ‘favor.’

⁴⁶ *The Kenkyusha's New English-Japanese Dictionary*, 6th ed. (Tokyo: Kenkyusha, 2002), s.v. “favor.”

⁴⁷ *The Kenkyusha's New Japanese-English Dictionary* glosses *chōai* with “win somebody’s favor” but also “be a favorite with one’s master” that begins to get at the semantic inequivalence that I am addressing here. See *The Kenkyusha's New Japanese-English Dictionary*, 5th ed. (Tokyo: Kenkyūsha, 2003), s.v. “ちょうあい”

First, the receiver may not even desire *chōai* from the giver. Secondly the word implies intense love directed at the receiver by the giver. To further complicate the matter, by ‘love’ would be meant a Japanese sense of ‘love’ that is different from English ‘love.’ A full comparative study would involve many such observations. In any case, it would be difficult to sustain the idea that *favor* is somehow a universal concept, if Japanese people cannot talk about *favor* at all.

If we claim that *favor* is only meant to be an approximate gloss of *hēn* and that it is of no great consequence in describing *hēn*, by the same logic we could use the phrase ‘he found *love* in the eyes of’ for the Hebrew phrase ‘*māṣā’ hēn bā’ēnēy Y.*’ Similarly, it would be possible to rewrite Vardi’s article with *chōai* instead of *favor*, but clearly this article would be making a very different claim. All this is to say that words encapsulate culture, and so they must be handled with much care. Just as an English reader would read a definition of *hēn* that keeps referring back to Japanese *chōai* with great suspicion since it seems too ‘cultural,’ so too we must be critical towards our own cultures.

Vardi’s study using English lexemes without recognition that English itself introduces intense bias into analyses is typical of cognitive linguistic investigations in Hebrew lexicography: Cognitive linguistic studies rely on native language words to express meaning. And whether the cognitive linguist acknowledges that the English is not the same meaning as Hebrew or not, there is a lack of recognition of the scale of the consequences of using one’s own language. English is as biased as Chinese, Zulu, Aymara, or any other language; the only difference is that for English speakers, the English culture is invisible to their eyes. Just as one would be suspect of lexicography that is founded on lexemes of any of these languages since they seem too culturally biased, one must also be suspect of English culture filtering into our own analyses. I will argue throughout this study that NSM goes beyond cognitive linguistics by

recognizing not only the cultural elements of Hebrew language, but also the cultural biases of one's own language.

1.6. Structure of the Dissertation

My aim in this dissertation will be to address the problems I have raised in the introduction through application of linguistic theories to *hebel*. In chapter 2, I will describe NSM. The description will aim to cover all of the relevant features of the theory, so that the reader can understand the arguments set out in this work, and also so that the reader can apply the theory to his/her own work. I will also describe in more detail why NSM is particularly suited to cross-cultural semantics.

In chapter 3, I will show how NSM can be applied to Hebrew lexicography. Since Hebrew is an ancient language, there are limits to what can be known about the meanings of ancient lexemes. However, I will argue that with a subset of lexemes, abstract lexemes, it is possible to reconstruct the meaning of ancient lexemes with relatively little loss of the original meaning. I will show how, with the insights of studies in bilingualism, psycholinguistics, corpus linguistics, language acquisition studies, and cognitive linguistics, it is possible to apply NSM to ancient lexemes. Then, using the insights of the different theories, I will construct an algorithm, which I will call the Successive Trimming Algorithm, that can be used to reconstruct the meaning of ancient lexemes. The algorithm strives to be a simple procedure for semantic analysis of abstract lexemes and can be used by both experts and novices in NSM alike.

In chapter 4, I will describe a further subset of abstract lexemes, stage-based lexemes. The brief discussion of what stage-based lexemes are will be followed by a case study of Albert

Camus' use of the phrase 'the absurd.' The discussion aims to be a tangible example of what it means for a lexeme to be stage-based.

In chapter 5 I will shift to an application of the Successive Trimming Algorithm to lexemes in Ecclesiastes. I will define the meaning of some key terms in Ecclesiastes: *'āmāl*, *'āmal*, *yitrôn*, *yôtēr*, *rə 'ût rû^aḥ*, *ra 'yôn rû^aḥ*, and *ra 'yôn lēb*. The chapter is followed by chapter 6, which defines the meaning of *hebel* using the Successive Trimming Algorithm. The chapters will differ in their mode. Chapter 6 seeks to be a running commentary that shows how the Successive Trimming Algorithm works in practice. I will include comments on various avenues that are explored through the process of the Successive Trimming Algorithm, and through this, I aim to familiarize readers with what the Successive Trimming Algorithm may be like to work with in practice. On the other hand, chapter 5 is not a running commentary of the Successive Trimming Algorithm itself, but instead a description of the definitions derived through it.

Chapter 7 transitions to a discussion of the results of chapter 6. I will discuss how NSM definitions may be used to internalize ancient lexemes, in a way that mimics how we learn and internalize modern day lexemes.

In chapter 8, I transition from a lexical definition of *hebel* to a description of how Qoheleth uses *hebel* in his own particular ways. The presentation, unlike chapter 6, will look like a more conventional explanation of *hebel*. I will show how various ideas that are portrayed in the book of Ecclesiastes are integrated together through the idea of *hebel*. Finally, chapter 9 is a brief conclusion.

Chapter 2: The Natural Semantic Metalanguage

2.1. Introduction

The Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) has become well known within the field of semantics since the initiation of the project in 1972 through Anna Wierzbicka's publication *Semantic Primitives*.⁴⁸ Several recent introductory volumes on semantics include NSM as one of the competing theories within the field. For instance, three introductory volumes on lexical semantics published in 2010 devote between five and eleven pages describing NSM in some detail.⁴⁹ This upward trend for NSM continues today, as researchers in NSM continue to publish their research.⁵⁰

While NSM is well known among lexical semanticists, the theory has gathered surprisingly little attention in Hebrew Studies, where references to NSM are restricted to either tangential or dismissive references, and an introductory volume to the theory is entirely lacking.⁵¹ This is not to say that there have not been any works that apply NSM to the Bible.

⁴⁸ Anna Wierzbicka, *Semantic Primitives*, trans. Anna Wierzbicka and John Besemeres (Frankfurt: Athenäum Verlag, 1972).

⁴⁹ Dirk Geeraerts, *Theories of Lexical Semantics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 127-37 (but see also Dirk Geeraerts, *Words and Other Wonders: Papers on Lexical and Semantic Topics* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2006) for a view of NSM that contrasts slightly with his textbook); Lynne M. Murphy, *Lexical Meaning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 69-73, 162-68; Nick Riemer, *Introducing Semantics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 71-76.

⁵⁰ See Cliff Goddard and Anna Wierzbicka, *Words & Meanings: Lexical Semantics across Domains, Languages, and Cultures* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 259-61.

⁵¹ The most substantial use of NSM is by Daniel Kroeze. In his theory, he includes twelve pages of explanations of the theory. However, he does not go as far as employing it as his theory, since he prefers a semantic fields approach. But he does use Wierzbicka's NSM definitions of the English lexemes for *fear* as a point of comparison with the Hebrew. See Daniel G. Kroeze, "A Semantic Study of the Lexical Field of 'Fear' Terms in Biblical Hebrew" (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2004), 39-50. Sanders makes a tangential use of NSM without fully utilizing the theory. See José Sanders, "Translating 'Thinking' and 'Believing' in the Bible: How Cognitive Linguistic Analysis Shows Increasing Subjectivity in Translations," in *Cognitive Linguistic Explorations*

Anna Wierzbicka herself has strong interests in the Bible, dedicating two volumes, *What did Jesus Mean?* and *What Christians Believe*, to describe biblical concepts using NSM.⁵²

Additionally, Myhill has defined some emotion words in Biblical Hebrew.⁵³ However, these works have not exerted an influence on Hebrew Lexicography, since Wierzbicka's works were written for a general audience, and Myhill's work was tailored for a linguistic audience.

In light of the lack of representation of NSM within Hebrew studies, this chapter aims to introduce readers to the basic tenets of NSM. The introduction will necessarily be limited to some basics, and it will leave many theoretical questions unaddressed. Where the reader wishes, more comprehensive arguments for NSM can be accessed through the footnoted publications.

in Biblical Studies, ed. Bonnie Howe and Joel B. Green (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014), 268-269. Francesco Zanella also briefly refers to NSM as a conceptual theory that is contrary to the structuralism he has adopted, but he describes NSM as “an interesting attempt to analyze the relationship between language and culture” without committing to stand for or against the theory. See Francesco Zanella, *The Lexical Field of the Substantives of “Gift” in Ancient Hebrew* (Leiden: Brill, 2010) 444. Van Steenbergen gives a sizeable description of NSM before dismissing it. See Gerrit Jan van Steenbergen, “Componential Analysis of Meaning and Cognitive Linguistics: Some Prospects for Biblical Hebrew Lexicology,” *JNSL* 28 no.1 (2002): 28-29; and idem, *Semantics, World View and Bible Translation: An Integrated Analysis of a Selection of Hebrew Lexical Items Referring to Negative Moral Behaviour in the Book of Isaiah*, 15-17. Innumerable other works mention NSM in a dismissive fashion, but since these do not go beyond a brief mention, or a dismissal that evinces little understanding of the theory, a comprehensive list here would be futile. For example, Burton's dismissal of NSM is taken almost wholesale from Geeraerts' volume, and should be taken as a very superficial treatment of NSM; see Burton, *The Semantics of Glory: A Cognitive, Corpus-Based Approach to Hebrew Word Meaning*, 9. However, I have been notified in personal communication with Anna Wierzbicka that there are a number of biblicists who have strong interests in NSM, although they have not yet published any works using the methodology.

⁵² See Anna Wierzbicka, *What Did Jesus Mean? Explaining the Sermon on the Mount and the Parables in Simple and Universal Human Concepts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) and Anna Wierzbicka, *What Christians Believe: The Story of God and People* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

⁵³ John Myhill, “What is Universal and What is Language-Specific in Emotion Words? Evidence from Biblical Hebrew,” *Pragmatics & Cognition* 5, no. 1 (1991): 79-129.

2.2. An Overview of The Natural Semantic Metalanguage

As any other semantic theory, NSM has a sizeable theoretical layer that undergirds it. But before delving into the theoretical details, it may be helpful to look at what an NSM definition of a lexeme looks like. Here, we will briefly look at the definition of the English word *trauma*.

NSM definitions are characterized by their use of natural language, that is, language of everyday conversation. NSM uses only a subset of words in natural language, a set which is considered to represent the smallest units of meaning. There are presently sixty-five such candidates including words such as SOMEONE, PEOPLE, THIS, ALL, SOME, NOW, WHEN, BEFORE, WANT, DO, SEE, SAY, HAPPEN, MOVE, ABOVE, CAN, MAYBE, BIG, AND SMALL. In contrast, what are considered complex words like ‘container,’ ‘table,’ ‘law,’ or ‘disaster,’ and all other complex words, that is, all words apart from the sixty-five simple words, are as a rule not used in definitions.

By using these simple words, NSM forms sentences about a word that are always true. Let us now turn to the word *trauma*. An NSM analyst must consider what is always true about *trauma*. Let us first look at the cause of *trauma*. How about the idea that people who go to war get *trauma*? This is indeed often true. We often hear of such stories. But it is not always true. One can get *trauma* from bad incidents that happen, like being caught up in a hostage situation. Alternatively, someone may get *trauma* through being a victim of some sort of abuse. At first glance, it may seem difficult to see if there are any commonalities at all among the possible causes of *trauma*. But deeper thought about the matter reveals that there are some similarities between war, a hostage situation, and abuse. We may say “something very bad happens to someone” in all of these situations. And in fact, this applies to all *trauma*. There is no such thing as a *trauma* in which nothing bad happened to that person who has *trauma*. We may diagnose

such a person who has had no bad past event as depressed, or some other psychological condition, but we would not call it *trauma*.

We can similarly start to do some guess work about the present state of the person who has *trauma*. Do people who have *trauma* always look sad? Or are they always crying? The answer seems to be no, since traumatized people can smile, and still enjoy life. But we do need to say that there is an effect of the past on these people. That is, we would not call it *trauma* if the person who experiences a tough event is unfazed by it, and genuinely continues to live like s/he did before. So perhaps we can describe the commonality of all trauma by using simple words as follows: “This someone is not like this someone was before.”

By methodically reflecting on the meaning of a word as I have shown above, it is possible to find elements that are true of all instances of *trauma*, and to write sentences using simple words to represent the meaning. Cliff Goddard and Anna Wierzbicka, two prominent researchers in NSM, have gone through this process and have suggested the following for the definition of *trauma*:

- 1) *trauma*
 - a) something very bad happens to someone for some time
 - b) at this time, this someone thinks like this:
 - c) “I want these bad things not to be happening. I want to do something because of this. I know that I can’t do anything.”
 - d) Because of this, after this, this someone feels something very bad for a long time.
 - e) This someone can’t say anything about it to other people for a long time.
 - f) This someone doesn’t want to think about it for a long time.
 - g) Because of all these things, this someone is not like this someone was before.

h) This someone can't feel many good things like this someone could before.⁵⁴

The definition has two important characteristics. Firstly, the definition is formed by using only simple words, instead of using complex words like 'psychological disorder,' or 'distress.' There are good reasons to avoid such complex words, as we will later see. Secondly, the definition is formed by a group of interrelated sentences. The sentences string together the commonality of all trauma. Something bad always happens to the person with *trauma* (1a). The person must want it not to happen but be unable to avoid it (1b-c). The events must leave an effect whereby the person feels bad for a long time (1d), doesn't want to talk about it (1e), and doesn't want to think about it (1f). Moreover, the sufferer must be seen as a changed person due to the events (1g), and always has the unfortunate symptom of not being able to feel good as often as s/he was able to in the past (1h).

As exemplified by the definition of *trauma* above, the definition is in itself comprehensible to anyone who can understand English, although the fact that the definition uses only 'simple words' may make it difficult to follow. But the definition may raise several questions. For example, why does NSM choose to use only simple words? Why should this method be applied to ancient languages? etc. There are, of course, profound reasons why NSM chooses to define words in this way. But this can only be understood by explaining the theoretical foundations of NSM. This will be the task of the following section.

⁵⁴ Adapted from Cliff Goddard and Anna Wierzbicka, *Words & Meanings: Lexical Semantics across Domains, Languages, and Cultures*, 215.

2.3. A Primer to The Natural Semantic Metalanguage

NSM is a theory of lexical meaning developed by Anna Wierzbicka. The theory has developed over almost half a century through the works of Wierzbicka and a prominent collaborator, Cliff Goddard. However, much of the development seems to be over, as in 2014, Goddard and Wierzbicka have expressed strong confidence in the current state of the theory to have fulfilled its initial goal of uncovering all the semantic primes (the details of which will be explained shortly).⁵⁵

The primer brings together the theoretical tenets of NSM from a variety of the researchers' publications. This may be helpful for the reader because of the nature of the literature on NSM: Although there has been considerable development in NSM, there has been no comprehensive introductory volume to NSM since the declaration that the research is coming to a close. As a result, there is no one article or volume that one could refer to in order to gain an understanding of NSM in its current developed form. By bringing information about the theory from multiple resources, I hope to facilitate the learning of an updated version of the theory. As I explain the theory, I will cite sources in the footnotes for further reference, but the reader should be warned that when earlier publications are cited, that some of the earlier theories have subsequently been abandoned.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Goddard and Wierzbicka, *Words & Meanings: Lexical Semantics across Domains, Languages, and Cultures*, 260-61.

⁵⁶ I refer those who seek to go beyond a primer to the comprehensive list of publications and recommended readings in Cliff Goddard, "Natural Semantic Metalanguage," griffith.edu.au, accessed January 28, 2018. <https://www.griffith.edu.au/humanities-languages/school-humanities-languages-social-science/research/natural-semantic-metalanguage-homepage>. My recommendations are as follows: For a short summary of the methodology, see Cliff Goddard, "The Natural Semantic Metalanguage Approach," in *The Oxford Handbook of Linguistic Analysis*, ed. Bernd Heine and Heiko Narrog (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 459-484. For a longer summary see Uwe Durst, "The Natural Semantic Metalanguage Approach to Linguistic Meaning," *Theoretical Linguistics* 29, no. 3 (2003): 157-200. The empirical evidence for the existence of Semantic Primes was presented and explained in: Cliff Goddard and Anna Wierzbicka, eds., *Semantic and Lexical Universals: Theory and*

2.3.1. A Conceptual Approach

Wierzbicka's theory derives from a lecture given by the linguist Andrezej Bogusławski at Warsaw University. The lecture discussed Leibniz's ideas concerning the alphabet of human thought:

If nothing could be comprehended in itself, nothing at all could ever be comprehended. Because what can only be comprehended via something else can be comprehended only to the extent to which that other thing can be comprehended, and so on; accordingly, we can say that we have understood something only when we have broken it down into parts which can be understood in themselves.⁵⁷

Leibniz's logic has two assumptions: a) Some meanings can be comprehended via smaller components of meaning; b) Meaning cannot be understood circularly (e.g., "nation" cannot be understood via "country," if "country" depends on "nation" for its meaning itself). The next logical step from these assumptions is that there must be meanings that are intuitively known, that themselves cannot be decomposed further. Leibniz's idea was to create a list of discrete building blocks for human thought. And since the building blocks of human thought is intuitively known, they must also be universal to all humans.

Leibniz's logic left open the question of how such an alphabet of human thought could be derived. Bogusławski suggested that a list of the basic components of thought may be discovered

Empirical Findings (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1994), Cliff Goddard and Anna Wierzbicka, eds., *Meaning and Universal Grammar: Theory and Empirical Findings*, 2 vols. (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2002), and a volume of a journal, Cliff Goddard, ed., "Studies in the Syntax of Universal Semantic Primitives," special issue, *Language Sciences* 19, no. 3 (1997): 197-288, a volume dedicated to empirical evidence for semantic primes and their syntax. A recent publication that explains the semantics of various kinds of lexemes is Goddard and Wierzbicka, *Words & Meanings: Lexical Semantics across Domains, Languages, and Cultures*. The significance and possible adaptation of NSM are described in Wierzbicka, *Imprisoned in English: The Hazards of Using English as a Default Language*. The methodology has been described and placed in the context of other theories of lexical semantics in Murphy, *Lexical Meaning*, 69-73, and Geeraerts, *Theories of Lexical Semantics*, 127-37.

⁵⁷ Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Opuscoles et fragments inédits de Leibniz*, ed. Louis Couturat (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1903), 430, translated in Wierzbicka, *Semantics: Primes and Universals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 11. Similarly, Descartes, Pascal, Arnauld, and Locke also pursued similar goals. See Wierzbicka, *Semantic Primitives*, 3-7.

through the study of language rather than through philosophical speculation.⁵⁸ This became Wierzbicka's pursuit and resulted in the publication of *Semantic Primitives* in 1972.⁵⁹ As a result, Wierzbicka identified words that she thought were the basic building blocks to human thought such as 'want' and 'feel,' and called such putative irreducible language universals **semantic primes**. Subsequently, with further methodological refinement, the list of semantic primes has grown from "somewhere between ten and twenty" to a total of sixty-five.⁶⁰

It may be worth taking a moment to contrast NSM's commitment to semantic primes with some approaches in cognitive linguistics. NSM's commitment to semantic primes assumes that the human mind is innately programmed with basic building blocks that are reflected in language via semantic primes. These semantic primes are used to build all other meanings. This is a **conceptual approach** to semantics, as the task of semantic analysis is seen as that of expressing the intricately formed 'inner' structure of the meaning of words using the most basic units of meaning, the semantic primes. That is, it is "inner" in the sense that humans are modelled as computing meaning *inside* their mind. Even a word like 'giraffe' is seen as created inside the mind using semantic primes, and although our seeing the giraffe may contribute to stirring our mind, the sight itself is not part of the meaning; meaning is influenced by perception,

⁵⁸ Anna Wierzbicka, "The Double Life of a Bilingual: A Cross-Cultural Perspective," in *Working at the Interface of Cultures: Eighteen Lives in Social Science*, ed. Michael Bond (London: Routledge, 1997), 121-122.

⁵⁹ Wierzbicka, *Semantic Primitives*.

⁶⁰ For Wierzbicka's initial estimation, see Wierzbicka, *Semantic Primitives*, 15. The most up to date list is posted on the NSM website. See Cliff Goddard, "Natural Semantic Metalanguage," griffith.edu.au, accessed January 28, 2018. <https://www.griffith.edu.au/humanities-languages/school-humanities-languages-social-science/research/natural-semantic-metalanguage-homepage>. For a table illustrating the changes in the list of semantic primes according to those postulated in major publications of NSM during the years 1972-2002, see Durst, "The Natural Semantic Metalanguage Approach to Linguistic Meaning," 159-161.

but the meaning is the computed formula of semantic primes created wholly by material within the mind, and not the mental picture of the giraffe.

On the other hand, some approaches in cognitive linguistics outright deny the existence of semantic primes and have taken an **experientialist approach**: meaning is seen as reflecting the experience of humans, thinking in the world.⁶¹ More specifically, concepts are created from two components. First, there is the human experiencer, who perceives the outer world using cognitive and neuro-anatomical structures shared with all other humans. Human sight, for example, is not a direct experience of the outer world, but it is mediated by perceptual mechanisms like focus, the principle of proximity (e.g. the idea that a row of dots in close proximity is naturally perceived as a line), and so on. Secondly, there is the environment that humans inhabit. For instance, we inhabit a world with seas, skies, trees, and so on. According to some approaches in cognitive linguistics, it is the combination of these factors that may be used to explain language, and no reference to an innate linguistic capacity is needed. The details of these approaches in cognitive linguistics need not worry us for now, but the different emphases of these approaches should be kept in mind: Whereas these approaches in cognitive linguistics build meaning from experience, NSM builds meaning from concepts.⁶²

⁶¹ For a summary of this aspect of cognitive linguistics, see Vyvyan Evans and Melanie Green, *Cognitive Linguistics: An Introduction* (Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2006), 63-68. See also Lakoff's statements in the early development of cognitive linguistics in Lakoff, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal about the Mind*, 266-268. The terms "conceptual approach" and "experientialist approach" are used in the specific sense meant by Goddard in Cliff Goddard, "Whorf meets Wierzbicka: Variations and universals in language and thinking," *Language Sciences* 25, no.4 (2003): 428.

⁶² I am personally eclectic in my approach, and I accept that a combination of the conceptual and experiential approaches may be fruitful for further understanding lexical semantics. Indeed, NSM researchers are not married to conceptualism, and are willing to have a dialogue with experientialists. See Goddard, "Whorf meets Wierzbicka," 428. On the other hand, the idea of semantic primes seems less acceptable to most cognitive linguists. The cognitive linguistic commitment (literally called a "commitment" in Evans and Green, *Cognitive Linguistics: An Introduction*, 64) to deny the existence of any semantic prime seems unduly narrow against conceptual approaches. After all, there is no reason that language cannot be a product of *both* experience and innate concepts,

2.3.2. Foundational Principles

The rationalistic principles that underpin the search for primitives are sevenfold. The first assumption is the Semiotic Principle:

- (I) “Semiotic Principle. A sign cannot be reduced to or analysed into any combination of things which are not themselves signs; consequently, it is impossible to reduce meanings to any combination of things which are not themselves meanings.”⁶³

The principle attempts to provide an answer to a key question in semantics: How should we describe the meaning of words? The answer in this instance is, by using other words. This is a traditional view of semiotics. For instance, Jakobson states “the meaning of any linguistic sign is its translation into some further, alternative sign, especially a sign ‘in which it is more fully developed,’ as Pierce, the deepest inquirer into the essence of signs, insistently stated.”⁶⁴ The traditional principle allows reduction of meaning in terms of words and paraphrases but prohibits methods of analysis that try to reduce meaning into non-verbal expressions.

particularly if experience alone is found to be an inadequate way to account for all meanings. In my estimation, this commitment against semantic primes is responsible for long known struggle to explain abstract lexemes like “justice,” in some strands of cognitive linguistics; how can such a concept be adequately derived from experience of the outer world, when the concept is clearly “inner” in its very nature? Metaphors and simulations may be part of the answer, but they cannot account fully for the meaning. For an example of continued difficulty to explain the abstract in recent work, see Benjamin K. Bergen, *Louder than Words: The New Science of How the Mind Makes Meaning* (New York, Basic Books, 2012), 209-22. A notable cognitive linguist whose ideas approach Wierzbicka’s is Leonard Talmy’s *Cognitive Semantics*. His brand of cognitive linguistics is more open to universal and innate semantics, which are not derived from experience, and also to the idea of decomposition of lexical meaning. Most importantly, his idea of “deep morphemes” are very close to NSM’s semantic primes since they represent “a concept that is believed to be both fundamental and universal in the semantic organization of language.” See Leonard Talmy, *Toward a Cognitive Semantics*, vol. 2, *Typology and Process in Concept Structuring* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000), 37.

⁶³ Cliff Goddard, “Semantic Theory and Semantic Universals,” in *Semantic and Lexical Universals: Theory and Empirical Findings*, ed. Cliff Goddard and Anna Wierzbicka (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1994), 7.

⁶⁴ Roman Jakobson, “On Linguistic Aspects of Translation,” in *On Translation*, ed. Reuben Brower (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1959), 232-33.

The use of words alone to describe lexemes is now somewhat unusual. One way other theories try to explain meaning apart from words is through **denotational analyses**.⁶⁵ This is the placement of meaning on the referent of the word, and to see any verbal description of that referent as strictly secondary to the real meaning that is the set of all referents in the world. For instance, denotational analysis may claim that the meaning *mug* is the set of all mugs, and then go on to describe potential attributes that mugs in the physical world can have.⁶⁶ This fails to abide by the semiotic principle, since such an analysis fundamentally places meaning in the physicality of the world. For example, a denotational theorist might describe a mug in ways like ‘has one handle,’ ‘has a flat bottom surface,’ ‘has approximately Xcm depth,’ etc., but these descriptions would be strictly secondary to the primary meaning, the denotata in the world.⁶⁷ A major problem with such a definition is that any definition that simply points to the denotata is unverifiable. That is, we can scrutinize a written definition of mugs, but “the set of all mugs in the world” is beyond scrutiny.

In contrast to denotational analysis, the process of definition proceeds in the opposite direction for NSM: Rather than the denotational range being fundamental and verbally stated features being secondary, verbal definitions are made in such a way that it accounts for the denotational range. According to Wierzbicka, in the case of *mugs*, *mugs* are made to drink hot

⁶⁵ Cliff Goddard, “Semantic Theory and Semantic Universals,” 7-8.

⁶⁶ See for an example that partially adopts this approach, William Labov, “The Boundaries of Words and Their Meanings,” in *New Ways of Analyzing Variation in English*, ed. C. J. Bailey and R. Shuy (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 1973).

⁶⁷ The attributes of a set of physical objects are not always arbitrarily assigned in such a methodology or even described in terms of physicality. For a case where native speaker intuition concerning the attributes of the object denoted by a word is collected in a controlled experimental setting in terms of verbal description, see Eleanor Rosch and Caroline Mervis, “Family resemblances: studies in the internal structure of categories,” *Cognitive Psychology* 7 (1975): 578.

liquids slowly, and in many different locations; the physicality derives from this logic.⁶⁸ There needs to be a handle to avoid the heat. The surface needs to be flat, so it can be placed on multiple types of surfaces. It must be thick enough to insulate the hot liquid for a long time, etc. This is not to say that mugs are never used for cold liquids, but the definition constrains the use of *mugs* to things that look like they were made for that purpose. A merit of this approach is that definitions are not beyond scrutiny, since it forces the analyst to create a fully transparent verbal definition that could potentially be disproved on further examination.

- (II) “Principle of Discrete and Exhaustive Analysis. Meanings can be analysed in a fully determinate way; that is, any complex meaning can be decomposed into a combination of discrete other meanings, without circularity and without residue.”⁶⁹

There are two related components to the second principle. First, it commits NSM to uncovering the full definition of lexemes, rather than just a part of the definition. In practical terms, the definition must be able to account for all usages of a particular word; any definition that does not account for all usages is insufficient. Therefore, definitions are testable through correlation with actual usages. But importantly, ‘meaning’ in the sense meant here excludes various pragmatic meanings such as metaphor, irony, sarcasm, hyperbole.⁷⁰

The commitment to exhaustive analysis contrasts with approaches that do not aim at exhaustive analysis. For instance, cognitive linguistics takes an **encyclopedic** view of meaning (contra NSM). As the term “encyclopedic” implies, the amount of information a lexeme may

⁶⁸ See Anna Wierzbicka, *Lexicography and Conceptual Analysis* (Ann Arbor: Karoma Publishers, 1985), 10-103.

⁶⁹ Goddard, “Semantic Theory and Semantic Universals,” 8.

⁷⁰ See Wierzbicka, *Semantics: Primes and Universals*, 241.

contain is open ended, just like an encyclopedia could always have more information if it wished. A corollary of this approach is that words cannot be described exhaustively, due to their complexity, and because lexical meaning is constantly in flux, as individuals are constantly exposed to new information about concepts.⁷¹ Thus, while an encyclopedic organization of lexemes is plausible, a byproduct of this approach is that descriptions of the semantics of a word are always open-ended.⁷²

A second component of the principle of discrete and exhaustive analysis is its avoidance of circularity. Dictionaries are notoriously circular. For instance, Goddard and Wierzbicka give the following example that they found in the *Collins Cobuild Dictionary of the English Language*.⁷³

- 2) a) hot—something that is hot has a high temperature, e.g., The metal of the tank is so hot I can't touch it.
- b) temperature—the temperature is the amount of heat that something has or that is in a place.
- c) heat—warmth or the quality of being hot.

In this example, *hot* is defined partially by *temperature*, *temperature* is defined partially by *heat*, and *heat* is partially defined by *hot*. As a result, each of the definitions assume prior knowledge of one another. Of course, this kind of circularity is not helpful to those reading the entries, and it

⁷¹ Evans and Green, *Cognitive Linguistics: An Introduction*, 215-22.

⁷² Langacker states “complete semantic descriptions cannot realistically be envisaged. Any actual description must limit itself to facets of the total meaning that are either central or relevant for a specific immediate purpose.” See Ronald W. Langacker, *Cognitive Grammar: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 11.

⁷³ Goddard and Wierzbicka, *Words & Meanings: Lexical Semantics across Domains, Languages, and Cultures*, 60.

is inconceivable that people could learn the meaning of words if the lexical entries in our minds were also circular. There must be simpler concepts that help to define the more complex.

What principle II does *not* mean is that all words are decomposable, since NSM proposes there are a set of Semantic Primes that are themselves not further decomposable. Rather, it is complex words—that is, words other than semantic primes—that are decomposable into semantic primes.

- (III) “Semantic Primitives Principle. There exists a finite set of undecomposable meanings — semantic primitives. Semantic primitives have an elementary syntax whereby they combine to form ‘simple propositions.’”⁷⁴

Principle III is the logical consequence of principles I and II. The idea of semantic primitives itself is in no way unique to Wierzbicka. However only Apresjan and Wierzbicka made theories centered on semantic primes and produced lists of them.⁷⁵

Since the semantic primitives take the form of words in all languages, both the meaning and the principles for combining the primes are certainly known by humans. In fact, the words are so simple that Goddard’s child had acquired the full set of NSM semantic primes by the time he was three years old.⁷⁶ As a consequence, even little children are capable of understanding the sentences made by semantic primes; this is, of course, desirable for a lexical semantic theory, since it explains why children should be capable of understanding their own words at a young

⁷⁴ Goddard, “Semantic Theory and Semantic Universals,” 8.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 14-20; Juri Apresjan, *Systematic Lexicography*, trans. Kevin Windle (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 215-30.

⁷⁶ Cliff Goddard, “Conceptual Primes in Early Language Development,” in *Applied Cognitive Linguistics I: Theory and Language Acquisition*, ed. Martin Pütz and Susanne Niemeier (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2001), 198-199.

age. In fact, the simplicity of NSM definitions contrasts with the norm of the technical language adopted in many other linguistic theories.

- (IV) “Natural Language Principle. Semantic primitives and their elementary syntax exist as a minimal subset of ordinary natural language.”⁷⁷

Principle IV concerns the mode that a metalanguage should take. The term metalanguage in linguistics means the language being used to talk about language. Metalanguage is sometimes seen as being the same as natural language, but more often it is seen as being different from natural language.⁷⁸ It should be noted that NSM advocates that the appropriate metalanguage is not simply natural language, but a subset of natural language. It identifies a short list of words that may be used in definitions, and the remainder may not be used in definitions.

An example of where the metalanguage differs from normal language, is what has been called **formalism**. Formalism has unfortunately been used in multiple different senses in linguistics, but what we are concerned with here is the idea that a word is used to refer to an abstract ‘formal’ language created by the linguist.⁷⁹ For instance, a word such as CAUSE is used in generative semantics, but it is not to be understood as being the same in meaning as the natural meaning of the word *cause*.⁸⁰ The existence of such an abstract meaning CAUSE that is not the same meaning as the natural language word *cause* is conceivable. But what does CAUSE mean? If

⁷⁷ Goddard, “Semantic Theory and Semantic Universals,” 10.

⁷⁸ See Lyons, *Semantics*, 1:10-13.

⁷⁹ See F. R. Palmer, *Semantics*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 196-97.

⁸⁰ See for example Paul R. Kroeger, *Analyzing Grammar: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 277-78.

it can be defined using natural language, then it is not a simple concept but a complex concept that is built up of simpler units, or as Lyons puts it, it is “parasitic upon the everyday use of language.”⁸¹ If on the other hand, it cannot be defined using natural language, it is beyond comprehension, and beyond verification. Therefore, formalism is left with a set of formal language that at once is not part of natural language, and also cannot be defined by natural language, which is undesirable. The natural language principle, which requires metalanguage to be a subset of natural language, is much more transparent in its meaning, and therefore it is to be preferred to formalism.

The cognitive linguist Leonard Talmy’s cognitive semantics is very close to NSM. Talmy assumes that lexical meaning is decomposable into what he calls **deep morphemes**.⁸² These deep morphemes are semantic units that are “both fundamental and universal in the semantic organization of language.”⁸³ Included among these morphemes are meanings like MOVE, BE_{LOC}, and SOMETHING. The strong parallels with NSM are immediately obvious, since NSM also has MOVE, BE (SOMEWHERE), and SOMETHING as semantic primes, although the overlap between semantic primes in NSM and Cognitive Semantics is only partial. But one crucial difference between Talmy’s approach and Wierzbicka’s is that Talmy claims that his deep morphemes are not to be equated to natural language, and so the surface form like MOVE is to be seen as a symbol, just like in formalism. In one place, Talmy refers to MOVE as the “occurrence... of translational motion,” but presumably, even the scientific term ‘translational

⁸¹ Lyons, *Semantics*, 1:12.

⁸² Leonard Talmy, *Toward a Cognitive Semantics*, vol. 2, *Typology and Process in Concept Structuring*, 37.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

motion' is not a definition of MOVE.⁸⁴ Therefore, Talmy's cognitive semantics falls into the same problem as formalism, with the distinction that cognitive semantics would not place such universals solely on the linguistic faculty but would probably say that other cognitive faculties such as vision also contribute to our knowledge of MOVE. Of course, it is possible that our semantic knowledge is based on inexpressible universals, but it must be accepted that any explanations of meaning that are based on such inexpressible universals are not strictly testable. Perhaps more problematic is the assumption that these universals have not surfaced in natural languages, since if, as Talmy claims, these meanings are fundamental and universal, is it not likely that they would surface in natural languages, since they are so prevalent in linguistic meaning?

Other branches of cognitive linguistics take a different attitude towards metalanguage. For instance, Evans and Green reject semantic primes but still use natural language to represent meaning, with the caveat that such representations are merely replicas of pre-linguistic elements of meaning.⁸⁵ Furthermore, they support such verbal representations using diagrammatic representations: "Cognitive linguists often attempt to support their formal representations of meaning elements by using diagrams. Although concepts are labelled with ordinary words, the advantage of a diagram is that it can represent a concept independently of language."⁸⁶ However, it is not entirely clear if diagrammatic representation escapes the criticism against formal language, because diagrams too seem to be parasitic to natural language. It can be granted that

⁸⁴ Ibid., 25.

⁸⁵ The pre-linguistic elements of meaning mentioned here refers to image schemas. I have refrained from introducing the concept here, since it is largely irrelevant to NSM.

⁸⁶ Evans and Green, *Cognitive Linguistics: An Introduction*, 180. But not all cognitive linguists would subscribe to this characterization of diagrams. For instance, Langacker sees diagrams as strictly heuristic. See Langacker, *Cognitive Grammar*, 9-12.

visual representation can be a different source of information from natural language. However, diagrams often have specialized notations, and these must be described by natural language; indigenous tribes would not understand the diagrams unless they were given substantial training. For instance, certain lines may be thicker, and there may be arrows displayed across the diagram, etc.

All this goes to show that the study of meaning is at some level dependent on natural language, despite the claims otherwise: While theories can claim that meaning is rooted in non-natural language units, all theories are dependent on natural language when it comes to representing what they mean. Metalanguage must at some level be composed of natural language if it is to be intelligible. The distinguishing feature of NSM is that it claims that natural language is no different from the way the mind itself works in defining meaning. That is, the metalanguage is not just a representation of the real meaning, but it is the real meaning.⁸⁷

- (V) “Expressive Equivalence of NSMs. The NSMs derived from various languages will be semantically equivalent, that is, have the same expressive power. Any simple proposition expressible in an NSM based on L₁ will be expressible in an NSM based on L₂, L₃ and so on.”⁸⁸

The first four principles dealt with the logic of semantic primes. Principles V-VII deal with the universality aspect of the semantic primes. The principles are interrelated and derive from

⁸⁷ See particularly Cliff Goddard, “Natural Semantic Metalanguage: Latest Perspectives,” *Theoretical Linguistics* 29, no.3 (2003): 230-232.

⁸⁸ Goddard, “Semantic Theory and Semantic Universals,” 12.

Leibniz's idea of the alphabet of human thought: The list of primes is genetically coded and innate to human thought, and since it is innate, it is universal.⁸⁹

Principle V is testable; if linguists of various languages went through the process of deriving the simplest units of meaning in every language, then the same set of primes should be found in every language. The process of derivation itself is in fact very simple. Derivation involves three procedures involving trial and error:

- 3) a) Identify constructions within a language that cannot be defined using other words.
- b) Test whether a semantically equivalent construction is present in all other languages.
- c) See if the constructions found in (a) and (b) can be used to define all other words.

The process may be better exemplified rather than explained. Goddard's example of GOOD will be used in this section.⁹⁰ We may start with (a) by asking how *good* could be defined using other words. Could it be defined using words like *positive* and *value*? But surely not all things considered *good* have to do with *value* or *positive*, like a *good computer*. Moreover, semantic equivalents for *positive* and *value* are not found in all languages, which would leave us in a position where semantic primes are language-specific. If *good* cannot be defined without using words that seem to be more complex and less universal, it leads to the hypothesis that *good* may itself be a prime. This leads to part (b), of cross-linguistic study, and it indeed reveals that a word for *good* exists in all languages. If the same is available in many languages, process (c) may be

⁸⁹ Anna Wierzbicka, "Common Language of All People: The Innate Language of Thought," *Problems of Information Transmission* 47, no. 4 (2011): 378-79.

⁹⁰ Cliff Goddard, "The Search for the Shared Semantic Core of All Languages," in *Meaning and Universal Grammar: Theory and Empirical Findings*, ed. Cliff Goddard and Anna Wierzbicka (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2002), 16-17.

applied to the list of primes, by trying to find words that cannot be defined by the list of primes. If there is a word that still cannot be defined, it indicates that there must be some primes that are yet to be identified.

The process is one of negative proof. Various possible paths of definition may be tried until they are exhausted. However, there can be no positive proof, whereby there is a feature that certifies that something is a prime. Just like any other linguistic theory, NSM proposes a model and scrutinizes it; although it cannot claim superiority to other theories on the grounds of its cross-linguistic studies, the scrutiny has been done, and bold claims like principle V do in fact withstand such scrutiny.

- (VI) “Isomorphism of NSMs. The simple propositions which can be expressed through the NSMs based on different languages will be fundamentally isomorphic.”⁹¹

Principle VI claims that the primes in various languages should have the same kind of combinability; that is, they should all be able to combine in the same ways, in order to create the same propositions. The claim being made is not that the language-specific inflectional systems or the word orders will be the same. Rather, the question is whether certain words are combinable at the semantic level. For instance, if in English, the first-person pronoun ‘I’ and the verb ‘SAY’ are primes, it is expected that there exists a counterpart to SAY in all languages that can combine with an agent ‘I.’ There should be no language where SAY refuses to combine with ‘I’ to create ‘I SAY.’ Whether SAY does not conform exactly to the English syntactic category ‘verb’ is not in question. A more detailed discussion of NSM’s universal syntax will be given later.

⁹¹ Goddard, “Semantic Theory and Semantic Universals,” 12.

- (VII) “Strong Lexicalisation Hypothesis. Every semantically primitive meaning can be expressed through a distinct word, morpheme or fixed phrase in every language.”⁹²

The Strong Lexicalisation Hypothesis is the most conjectural principle of the seven.

Goddard stresses the provisional nature of this hypothesis, stating that it may be dispensable if the empirical evidence shows that primes are not always lexicalized.⁹³ However, if the strong lexicalization hypothesis is validated, it will show that every language *does* have a mini-lexicon of semantic primes that can be used for language description.⁹⁴

The forms through which primes can be lexicalized include words, morphemes, and phrases. For instance, the English prime A LONG TIME is a phrase rather than a word. This may at first seem to be decomposable into at least three meanings corresponding to each word used in the phrase. However, if we reflect on whether we can define A LONG TIME without using the metaphor ‘long,’ we immediately encounter problems. Moreover, it is not clear that the abstract concept expressed in English ‘time’ really defines A LONG TIME. Since the phrase A LONG TIME cannot be decomposed any further, and because the meaning seems to be present in all languages, it should be considered as a semantic prime that consists of a phrase.

The other way that the strong lexicalization hypothesis can be disproved is if empirical evidence shows there are languages where a prime has no direct exponent—in other words, if there is no word, morpheme, or phrase found in a language that corresponds to a semantic prime candidate. If this is shown to be the case, the fallback position is not immediately that primes are not universal, but that the prime *is* present in the language, but only conceptually. This could be

⁹² Ibid., 13.

⁹³ Ibid., 13-14.

⁹⁴ Goddard, “The Search for the Shared Semantic Core of All Languages,” 5-6.

shown if many of the lexemes in the language require the prime for their definitions. In such a case, the prime would be surfacing consistently in combinations with other primes, but the prime never surfaces on its own.

If the strong lexicalization hypothesis turns out to be true, this would vindicate the project, since it shows that the primes are so basic to human thought that they surface discretely in every language. However, even if there is found a language in which not all of the primes are found, this would be only a small concession since the semantic primes are fundamentally conceptual in nature, and whether they surface in every lexicon or not is only a peripheral matter in this regard.

2.3.3. Summary: What are Semantic Primes?

The principles that undergird the idea of Semantic Primes have been explained in the previous section. The seven principles may be summarized by bringing together four themes that surfaced again and again (I borrow here the four principles that Durst used in introducing NSM):

- (A) Indefinability: Semantic primes are units of meaning that are comprehensible, yet indefinable through the use of other lexemes.
- (B) Universality: Semantic primes are universals. Semantic correlates of the semantic primes can be found in all languages.
- (C) Indispensability: The semantic primes together must be adequate to explicate all utterances in languages. Stated inversely, all words must be decomposable into semantic primes, as inability to do this shows that the inventory of semantic primes is inadequate.

(D) Combinability: Semantic primes can be combined with one another in restricted ways.

These options are universal. In other words, the semantic primes of any language have the same semantic combinability.⁹⁵

2.3.4. The Inventory of Semantic Primes

The idea of semantic primes was based on Leibniz's principles, but evidence for their existence could only be proven by methodical examination of many languages. This cross-linguistic experiment was carried out, and the results were published in several books and articles. The major publications were in an edited volume *Semantic and Lexical Universals: Theory and Empirical Findings* published in 1994, a special volume of *Language Sciences* "Studies in the Syntax of Universal Semantic Primitives," dedicated to the universality of the syntax of semantic primes published in 1997, and a further edited volume *Meaning and Universal Grammar: Theory and Empirical Findings*, published over two volumes in 2002.⁹⁶ Languages from various language families were chosen. The list of languages studied through the years include:

Australian Languages: Kayardild, Mparntwe, Arrernte, Yankunytjatjara.

Austronesian Languages: Acehnese, Mangap-Mbula, Malay, Mangaaba-Mbula, Longgu, Samoan

Indo European Languages: English, French, German, Italian, Spanish, Polish, Russian

Japanese-Ryukuan Languages: Japanese

Niger-Congo Languages: Ewe

Papuan Languages: Kalam

Misumalpan Languages: Miskitu, Panamahka, Ulwa

Semitic Languages: Amharic

⁹⁵ Durst, "The Natural Semantic Metalanguage Approach to Linguistic Meaning," 165-74.

⁹⁶ Goddard and Wierzbicka, *Semantic and Lexical Universals*; Cliff Goddard "Studies in the Syntax of Universal Semantic Primitives," 197-288; Goddard and Wierzbicka, *Meaning and Universal Grammar*.

Sino-Tibetan Languages: Mandarin Chinese, Hong Kong Cantonese

Tai-Kadai Languages: Thai, Lao

Others: Hawaii Creole English

The twenty-five languages were distributed across different families, and although not all families were represented, enough languages were studied so that a substantial claim about universality could be made.

The ideal method of study would include the study of individual languages internally, in order to find non-decomposable semantic primes independently in each language. This would be followed by cross-linguistic correlation of the primes, and a test of whether there are certain combinatorial properties that are universal. Unfortunately, this method of study was never carried out, since this would require one native linguist for every language represented, and that linguist would also need to be proficient in the NSM methodology as well. And so this route of confirming universals was abandoned. Instead, a less burdensome, but adequate, method was chosen. This was to study English alone internally to derive primes, and then to test whether the primes and their combinatorial properties were attested in all other languages.

These tests led to a confirmation of universality of many of the primes that were initially proposed. In general, the process led to an increase in the number of primes, as it became apparent that the initial set of primes was not adequate to account for all words in various languages. The initial thirty-nine primes isolated in 1994 were increased to sixty-five in the most up-to-date list published in 2014. At the same time, some primes were deleted from the list. For instance, IMAGINE had been deleted by 1994, and IF... WOULD was deleted by 2002.

As a result of the increased number of primes, explications of complex words have generally become more elegant. Moreover, researchers have reached a point where they are

confident that the list is coming towards completion and may indeed have been completed.⁹⁷ The present-day list of sixty-five primes is shown in table 1 below.

Table 1.1: Table of Semantic Primes⁹⁸

Substantives	I, YOU, SOMEONE, SOMETHING~THING, PEOPLE, BODY
Relational Substantives	KINDS, PARTS
Determiners	THIS, THE SAME, OTHER~ELSE
Quantifiers	ONE, TWO, SOME, ALL, MUCH~MANY, LITTLE~FEW
Evaluators	GOOD, BAD
Descriptors	BIG, SMALL
Mental Predicates	KNOW, THINK, WANT, DON'T WANT, FEEL, SEE, HEAR
Speech	SAY, WORDS, TRUE
Actions, Events, Movements	DO, HAPPEN, MOVE
Location, Existence, Specification	BE (SOMEWHERE), THERE IS, BE (SOMEONE/SOMETHING)
Possession	(IS) MINE
Life and Death	LIVE, DIE
Time	WHEN~TIME, NOW, BEFORE, AFTER, A LONG TIME, A SHORT TIME, FOR SOME TIME, MOMENT
Place	WHERE~PLACE, HERE, ABOVE, BELOW, FAR, NEAR, SIDE, INSIDE, TOUCH
Logical Concepts	NOT, MAYBE, CAN, BECAUSE, IF
Augmenter, Intensifier	VERY, MORE
Similarity	LIKE

⁹⁷ See Cliff Goddard, "The On-going Development of the NSM Research Program" in *Meaning and Universal Grammar: Theory and Empirical Findings*, ed. Cliff Goddard and Anna Wierzbicka (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2002) 2:315; and Goddard and Wierzbicka, *Words & Meanings: Lexical Semantics across Domains, Languages, and Cultures*, 11-12.

⁹⁸ Cliff Goddard and Anna Wierzbicka, "Semantic Primes (English Exponents)," last modified in 2014. Retrieved and adapted from <https://www.griffith.edu.au/humanities-languages/school-humanities-languages-social-science/research/natural-semantic-metalanguage-homepage/downloads>

2.3.5. Miscellaneous Issues on Semantic Primes

The list of the semantic primes has been derived using the principles and methodology outlined earlier. But for the careful reader, the list of semantic primes may prompt some further questions that have not been adequately addressed to this point. In this section, I intend to address some of the more commonly raised issues with NSM, to show that although these issues are legitimate, that they can be answered with some careful thought. I see two types of issues involved. First, there are issues of how to understand semantic primes that have multiple exponents (phonologically variant linguistic tokens). Secondly, there are issues over the legitimacy of certain semantic primes.

2.3.5.1. *Allollexy: One Semantic Prime, Multiple Exponents*

Some semantic primes have multiple exponents. Some of these semantic primes are displayed on the table with the possible range of exponents, while others are not. Such situations where the semantics are identical, but multiple exponents are involved are called **allollexy**. But there are three causes for allollexy that deserve to be distinguished and explained in their own terms.

The first type of allollexy involves semantic primes such as ‘I.’ Along with the normal exponent ‘I,’ a second exponent ME is used in the object position, just like in normal English. It is possible to question whether such use of two different exponents for one semantic prime is legitimate. Wierzbicka argues that these two different words can be used for one prime, since the two forms reflect syntactic differences, and not semantic differences.

Indeed, both ‘I’ and ME seem to mean the same thing, with the exception of the implication that one is used primarily as a subject, and the other as an object. Whether this

difference is ‘semantic’ and what consists of ‘semantics’ and what does not is difficult to adjudicate. The NSM approach is to distinguish case as syntactic in nature, and to express the meaning of case through constructions. Wierzbicka has written on the matter, and proposes, akin to cognitive linguistics, that it should be understood in terms of prototypes; that is, phrases like the one below constitute the prototypical accusative, and other accusatives derive from this prototype:⁹⁹

4) Someone did something to someone (ACC)

Because case is not wholly a matter of semantics, its meaning cannot be defined like other words. However, it can be defined in terms of constructions with reference to semantic universals. In any case, the phenomenon wherein semantic primes have different surface forms as a consequence of case is called **positional allolexy**; in such cases, the surface forms of a semantic prime may differ according to the syntactic environment.¹⁰⁰

Another case where there are two different exponents for one semantic prime is SOMETHING~THING. This clearly cannot be explained as positional allolexy, since it has nothing to do with case. However, once again, the difference is not semantic in nature. The following example shows why two exponents are needed:

5) *all somethings

6) all things

⁹⁹ Anna Wierzbicka, “Semantic Primes and Linguistic Typology,” in *Meaning and Universal Grammar: Theory and Empirical Findings*, ed. Cliff Goddard and Anna Wierzbicka (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2002), 279.

¹⁰⁰ Goddard, “The Search for the Shared Semantic Core of All Languages,” 20.

7) I did something

8) *I did thing

The phrases (6) and (7) are natural, whereas (5) and (8) are unnatural. However, the meaning of ‘thing’ in (6) and (8) seem to be equivalent to ‘something.’ Of course, the indefiniteness inherent in ‘something’ is not a part of the meaning of ‘thing,’ but this can be interpreted as a collocational matter, and not a matter of semantics. That is, we cannot paraphrase “I wanted something” as “I wanted an indefinite thing.” Note again that the term ‘indefinite’ itself is a complex word that can be decomposed further.¹⁰¹ Thus, once again, the difference is not in the semantics but in the surface realizations. These differences are triggered by certain lexical collocations. Such cases where certain combinations produce different surface forms have been called **combinatorial allolexy**. Of course, it is possible to show how a diachronic development may have led to these combinatorial properties, but for now, what is important is that synchronically, we are now at a stage in English where the same meaning is expressed by two exponents.

Another important morphosyntactic feature that demands attention is tense. Some readers of (7) and (8) may have recognized that the word DID was used instead of DO that was found on the table of semantic primes. In fact, this is a legitimate example of where the sentence is not stated in terms of primes alone; no claim is being made that DID and DO are semantically equivalent. But the additional meaning meant by DID can be expressed using semantic primes. Past tense has been explicated as below by Goddard:

¹⁰¹ For the problem of decomposing SOMEONE and SOMETHING further in terms of ±HUMAN, ±ANIMATE, see Wierzbicka, *Semantics: Primes and Universals*, 38-39.

9) Past Tense

At some time before now, I did/*do something¹⁰²

Explications are as a rule expected to be a full expression of the semantics of a construction in terms of semantic primes. However, adding the tense to an explication on each occasion would cause explications to become unnecessarily lengthy, and so tense is not included by convention. Such shortcuts in explications are called **semantic molecules**. Semantic molecules are, as the name suggests, words that are complex rather than primitive. They are usable on the assumption that these words themselves have already been explicated in terms of semantic primes. This kind of allolexy where one semantic prime appears in different morphological configurations has been called **inflectional allolexy**.¹⁰³ Before we go on, a further point may be noted. Explication (9), which seeks to explicate the past tense morpheme, also uses DID rather than DO, even though it should be given in primes alone. The reason that DID is used is that English does not allow DO to be used in the position above. What matters for now is that what is meant is the semantic prime DO, and whether it surfaces in one shape or another in a certain language is a matter of inflectional allolexy that itself can be defined.

One final issue that will be addressed in this section is not allolexy but involves the same issue of the relationship between a semantic prime and its exponents. This is the problem of dealing with cases where two semantic primes occurring together is best expressed in a way that is not a straightforward juxtaposition of the two primes. An example is the combination of CAN and NOT. In English, the sentences “I can not do that,” and “I can’t do that” are distinguished.

¹⁰² Goddard, “The Search for the Shared Semantic Core of All Languages,” 22.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

The first has ‘not’ as modifying ‘do,’ and means that the person is capable of ‘not doing,’ although the interpretation that ‘can not’ means the same as ‘can’t’ is not impossible. The second has ‘not’ fused with ‘can,’ resulting in ‘can’t,’ and means that the person is not capable of ‘doing.’ A straightforward juxtaposition would not semantically be the same meaning as its constituents, and so in following English conventions, NSM specifies that one should use CAN’T or more formerly, CANNOT in such cases. Such cases where two semantic primes are represented by one exponent are called **portmanteaus**.¹⁰⁴

2.3.5.2. *Irreducibility*

Another type of issue of the semantic primes is whether they are legitimately irreducible or not. Issues in semantics will ultimately boil down to intuition, and it may be too ambitious to try to persuade all semanticists that NSM is the correct way to think of these problems. But intuitional issues aside, there are also misunderstandings of the logic by which NSM operates. In this section, I address a handful of specific problems so that the reader may become familiar with the kind of reasoning that is typical of NSM. Even if there is a degree of disagreement, it at least will not be based on misunderstandings of NSM.

The first type of issue is one of morphological complexity; whether a semantic prime like SOMEONE is decomposable into the two constituent morphemes ‘some’ and ‘one.’ In this regard, it is important to remember that the claim made by NSM is that the *meaning* of its semantic primes is not decomposable, and morphological complexity does not necessarily imply semantic complexity. In this case, the meaning of SOMEONE is not constituted of ‘some’ and ‘one.’ The

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 24.

same applies to the semantic prime SOMETHING, the meaning of which is not the sum of its parts.¹⁰⁵

Another type of issue often raised is whether a semantic prime is really irreducible. These questions can arise since NSM often merges what has traditionally been seen as two different types of meanings into one. An example of this is the semantic prime CAN. English *can* has traditionally been analyzed of consisting of at least the ‘can of possibility’ and the ‘can of ability’:

10) I can speak English. (ability)

11) Every tree that can house pests must be cut down. (possibility)

Why should CAN be seen as one discrete meaning, against the traditional view that there are two meanings, the ‘can of possibility’ and the ‘can of ability’? This problem has been addressed by Wierzbicka.¹⁰⁶ The basic logic is that it is not ‘ability’ and ‘possibility’ that define CAN, but the inverse: CAN defines ‘ability’ and ‘possibility.’ That is, ‘ability’ and ‘possibility’ are more complex than CAN. Moreover, it is CAN that is universal and indispensable in defining other words, not ‘ability’ or ‘possibility.’

¹⁰⁵ In fact, it is questionable whether these parts are even ‘morphemes’ if we follow the typical definition of morphemes as the smallest meaningful units (for example see Martin Haspelmath and Andrea D. Sims, *Understanding Morphology*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2010), 3.). On the one hand, both ‘some’ and ‘one’ are meaningful when they stand independently as words, but on the other hand, they play no meaningful role within the word ‘someone’ in present day English according to NSM.

¹⁰⁶ Anna Wierzbicka, "Semantic Primitives Across Languages: A Critical Review," in *Semantic and Lexical Universals: Theory and Empirical Findings*, ed. Cliff Goddard and Anna Wierzbicka (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1994), 482.

Let us look in a little more detail at what Wierzbicka may mean. The word ‘ability’ is an abstract lexeme that is used to give an interpretation about the world. This interpretation of the world is based on experience of previous sets of circumstances. For instance, we would be unlikely to say (10) if we did not know something about the past; i.e., I have spoken English in the past. Moreover, the interpretation concerning ability is also dependent on “knowing I can still speak English.” Therefore, it is possible to say that the definition of ‘ability’ contains at least the following:

- 12) Ability (of X to do Y)
 X has done Y
 Because of this I know: X can do Y

Thus, ability is definable through previous experience and CAN. On the other hand, possibility is defined through knowledge and thought concerning the present state of affairs, and so at least the following is involved in its explication:

- 13) Possibility (that X happens to Y)
 I know: sometimes X happens
 Because of this, I think like this: X can happen to Y.
 Maybe X will happen to Y

Possibility is derived from knowledge; whether it is based on past experience (like ability) or not is irrelevant. Also, it has to do with applying this knowledge to a present state of affairs. Thus, it seems that ‘ability’ and ‘possibility’ are abstract nouns that can be defined through CAN and not the other way around. On the other hand, it seems very difficult to define CAN through ‘ability’ and ‘possibility.’ It is difficult to explain why this is so, except to say that this is simply how the mind works. The case of CAN is interesting in that the word CAN is used almost exclusively for

these two types of situations, ability and possibility. But this must not be confused with definitions. Saying that CAN participates often in these two contexts is different from claiming CAN is defined by ‘ability’ and ‘possibility.’

Similarly, one may question whether FEEL is polysemous or not. For instance, the prime FEEL can be used both for emotion terms, and for sensory terms: We can ‘feel’ tired, and we can also ‘feel’ something in a part of our body. But again, the polysemy is illusory rather than real, since neither of the so-called senses of FEEL can be used to define the other, and also because cross-linguistically, the link between emotion and sense in FEEL is universal.¹⁰⁷ If it is remembered that the hard dichotomy implied by the view that the sensory and emotional are different is a product of the split between the mental and bodily in western thought, it may help to explain why our intuition may be misleading. Just like with the example of CAN above, we must once again distinguish our categorizations of the usages with the definition of FEEL.

Despite this objection, it is true that some of the words representing the primes are legitimately polysemous in natural language. However, it does not follow that natural language cannot be used to represent primes. It is a matter of semantically constraining the primes, so that only a certain meaning is possible. An example is the temporal prime BEFORE. Phrases in combination with the prime TIME or a deictic THIS referring to a previous event are allowed for use, but phrases like ‘before this place’ where the spatial sense is used instead of the temporal is banned, on the grounds that these uses lack universality. More explanation on the syntactic constraints placed on the semantic primes will be offered later.

¹⁰⁷ Cliff Goddard and Anna Wierzbicka, “Semantic Primes and Universal Grammar,” in *Meaning and Universal Grammar: Theory and Empirical Findings*, ed. Cliff Goddard and Anna Wierzbicka (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2002), 63-64.

A slightly different issue on irreducibility is the case of deictic semantic primes. For example, Barker questions whether the semantic primes I and YOU could be decomposed further in terms of what in semantics has been called **indexicals**.¹⁰⁸ Indexicals are expressions that have context-dependent properties. For instance, the truth of the sentence “I am your son” depends on the context, in this case, who is saying it.¹⁰⁹ Barker suggests that perhaps ‘I’ can be decomposed in terms of the speaker who says the utterance. Presumably, Barker would also suggest that YOU could be defined in terms of the hearer of the utterance.

Let us examine in a little more detail what the definition of ‘I’ may be in such a case. The definition would have to involve the idea of SOMEONE and it must be explained that this someone is the one saying what is being said:

14) Someone:

This someone is saying this something now to someone else

But (14) seems inadequate, since it has no way to express the deictic center necessary in ‘I’ to determine that what is meant by THIS SOMETHING is being said by ME and not by anyone else at this moment. Moreover, it is possible that the person speaking is not ‘I’ in a matrix sentence, for instance in the sentence “He thought, ‘I am so smart.’”

It is important to concede that there does seem to be a relationship between the primes I, YOU, SOMEONE. But it is also important to recognize that the existence of a relationship does not imply that one can be defined in terms of the other. Such relationships, where semantic primes

¹⁰⁸ This question was raised in Chris Barker, “Paraphrase is Not Enough,” *Theoretical Linguistics* 29, no. 3 (2003): 206-07.

¹⁰⁹ See Stephen C. Levinson, *Pragmatics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 55-57.

are clearly related in meaning, but not expressible in terms of one another are called a **non-compositional relationship**.¹¹⁰

Another slightly different problem is the one of whether it is necessary to have both GOOD and BAD. Quite clearly, there is also a non-compositional relationship here. Furthermore, one may suggest that GOOD may be defined as NOT BAD or vice versa. But a moment's reflection shows that NOT BAD is not the same as GOOD; not everything that is 'not bad' is 'good.'¹¹¹ Thus opposites cannot be defined through negation.¹¹² A similar thing can be said of scalar opposites like SMALL and BIG as well. A more difficult problem is ABOVE/BELOW and BEFORE/AFTER. It may seem like it would be possible to use ABOVE to define BELOW:

15) Something (Y) is above something else (X)

When people say something about this place where X is, these people say: X is Below Y.

However, there is something unsatisfactory about this approach. Goddard suggests that there is a difference in perspective that cannot be defined. In other words, the definition does not seem to capture the whole meaning BELOW and so the relationship between the two is non-compositional. Such a difference in perspective may be explainable in terms of Langacker's idea of profiling; that is, there seem to be different foci involved.¹¹³ In any case, this again is a non-compositional relationship between semantic primes that may be mistaken as an issue of reducibility.

¹¹⁰ Durst, "The Natural Semantic Metalanguage Approach to Linguistic meaning," 168.

¹¹¹ See Lyons, *Semantics*, 276-77.

¹¹² The problem is in fact a little more complex than is explained here. However, this would require extensive quotation of foreign languages, so I refrain here from further discussion. I refer the reader to Wierzbicka, "Semantic Primitives Across Languages: A Critical Review," 496-97.

¹¹³ Goddard, "The Search for the Shared Semantic Core of All Languages," 15-16.

Finally, there is the problem of universality in irreducibility. Some semantic primes have an obligatory social dimension to them that seems not to be universal.¹¹⁴ For instance, the Japanese semantic prime for ‘I’ could have several options like *watashi* (formal or female), *ore* (a confident self-presentation), *boku* (modest self-presentation), etc. What is more, there is no neutral first-person pronoun that has no social meaning, since every pronoun reflects some self-presentation.¹¹⁵

Wierzbicka is aware of this problem and deals with it through a distinction between semantics and pragmatics. For Wierzbicka, the pragmatics of culture are always superimposed onto language. The challenge is to identify these social customs in the language, and to set it aside in NSM explications. This is very difficult to do in practice. For instance, using Japanese *ore* in explication will sound self-important or even condescending, and can be distracting, however much we try to separate the pragmatics from the semantics.¹¹⁶

English also has a related pragmatic problem in euphemism. An example is the semantic prime BAD; some people do not want to say anything is ‘bad,’ and so prefer to use ‘not good,’ or some other similar phrases as a replacement. Such a layer of meaning related to how we speak (i.e., pragmatics) always accompanies semantics and is difficult to eliminate completely. Wierzbicka suggests that in these cases, a compromise should be possible. The NSM semanticist should be able to understand the primes as strictly conceptual in nature, and consciously avoid

¹¹⁴ Riemer problematizes a similar issue in Thai. See Riemer, *Introducing Semantics*, 74-75.

¹¹⁵ Ayumi Miyazaki, “Japanese Junior High School Girls’ and Boys’ First-Person Pronoun Use and Their Social World,” in *Japanese Language, Gender, and Ideology: Cultural Models and Real People*, ed. Shigeo Okamoto and Janet S. Shibamoto Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 256-74.

¹¹⁶ See the discussion in Masayuki Onishi, “Semantic Primitives in Japanese,” in *Semantic and Lexical Universals: Theory and Empirical Findings*, ed. Cliff Goddard and Anna Wierzbicka (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1994), 362-66.

the pragmatic implications. However, if a definition is to be presented to a non-specialist audience, a less formal definition should also be possible, if that reduces confusion. For instance, in the use of Japanese pronouns, any of the pronouns should potentially be usable in explications if strict semantic accuracy is not essential.¹¹⁷ This is particularly important when asking native speakers whether a certain definition is correct or not; it would be foolish to over-emphasize semantic accuracy at the risk of distracting the native speaker by appearing rude or condescending.

2.3.6. The Universal Grammar of Semantic Primes

NSM is a theory of semantics that partially collapses syntax under semantics.¹¹⁸ Following typologists like William Croft, it is theorized that identifying ‘similarity’ in linguistic constructions is ultimately a matter of semantics rather than syntax.¹¹⁹ Thus, NSM specifies the ‘syntactic’ combinability of semantic primes in terms of their semantic valency. A list of the current semantic primes with their combinability is produced in table 2.2 in English. It should be stressed that the English particular syntax is not important to the combinability, but it is the semantic combinability of semantic primes that is of importance. The list in table 2.2 has been taken from the NSM website.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ Wierzbicka, “Semantic Primitives Across Languages: A Critical Review,” 449.

¹¹⁸ Wierzbicka, “Semantic Primes and Linguistic Typology,” 258-59.

¹¹⁹ See William Croft, *Typology and Universals*, 2d. ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 13-14, and the theory in William Croft, *Radical Construction Grammar* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). For an evaluation of similarities and differences of NSM with conventional construction grammars, see Laura A. Michaelis, “NSM and Cognitive-Functional Models of Grammar,” *Theoretical Linguistics* 29, no. 3 (2003): 275-81.

¹²⁰ Goddard, “Natural Semantic Metalanguage,” griffith.edu.au, accessed January 28, 2018. <https://www.griffith.edu.au/humanities-languages/school-humanities-languages-social-science/research/natural-semantic-metalanguage-homepage/downloads>

Table 2.2: Combinatorial Possibilities of the Semantic Primes

I ~ ME	<p>I want to do/know/say something I want this, I don't want this I don't know something bad can happen to me someone like me</p>
YOU	<p>I want you to do/know/say something something bad can happen to you you are someone like me</p>
SOMEONE	<p>this someone the same someone someone else this other someone someone does/says something</p>
SOMETHING~THING	<p>this something~thing the same something~thing something else~another something something big something small something of one kind</p>
BODY	<p>someone's body people's bodies part of someone's body a body of one kind bodies of two kinds something bad happens inside someone's body someone feels something in the body</p>
PEOPLE	<p>these people many people some people few people many people think like this: ... people can say ... people of one kind</p>
KIND	<p>this kind the same kind another kind this other kind something/someone of one kind people of one/two/many kinds</p>

PART	<p>part of someone's body this part the same part another part this other part this something has two/many parts</p>
WORDS	<p>many words other words one word words of one kind say something with (not with) words say something in other words say these words these words say something</p>
THIS	<p>this someone (something) these people this kind this part at this time in this place because of this it is like this: ...</p>
THE SAME	<p>the same someone the same thing the same part the same kind at the same time in the same place someone says/does/thinks/knows/wants/feels the same</p>
OTHER~ELSE	<p>someone else something else at another time somewhere else other parts other kinds this other part this other kind this other someone this other thing</p>

ONE	<p>one someone one thing one part one kind in one place at one time one of these things/people something of one kind one more thing</p>
TWO	<p>two things two parts two kinds two of these things/people two more things</p>
MUCH~MANY	<p>many people many things many parts many kinds at many times in many places much of this something (e.g., water) much more many more</p>
ALL	<p>all people all things all parts all kinds at all times in all places all of this something (e.g., water)</p>
SOME	<p>some people some things some parts some kinds at some times in some places some of these things/people some of this something (e.g., water)</p>
LITTLE~FEW	<p>few people few things a little of this something (e.g., water) very little very few</p>

TIME~WHEN	(at) this time (at) the same time at another time at this other time at some times at many times at the time when
NOW	Something is happening here now When I say this now , ...
MOMENT	It happens in one moment a moment before a moment after at this moment
(FOR) SOME TIME	some time before some time after it happens like this for some time someone does this for some time [during this time = at this time, for some time]
A LONG TIME	a long time before a long time after a very long time for a long time [=for some time, a long time]
A SHORT TIME	a short time before a short time after a very short time for a short time [=for some time, a short time]
BEFORE	before this some time before a short time before a long time before
AFTER	after this some time after a short time after a long time after
WANT	I want this someone wants something someone wants to do/know/say something someone wants someone else to do/know/say something someone wants something to happen I want it very much
DON'T WANT	I don't want this someone doesn't want this someone doesn't want to do something someone doesn't want something to happen

FEEL	<p>someone feels something (good/bad)</p> <p>someone feels something (good/bad) in part of the body</p> <p>someone feels something good/bad towards someone else/something</p>
DO	<p>someone does something (to someone else)</p> <p>someone does something with something else/part of the body</p> <p>someone does something with someone else</p> <p>someone does something good (for someone else)/bad (to someone else)</p>
SAY	<p>I say: ...</p> <p>someone says something (good/bad) (to someone)</p> <p>someone says something (good/bad) (about someone/something)</p> <p>someone says something like this: ...</p> <p>someone says something with words</p> <p>someone says a word to someone</p>
KNOW	<p>I know</p> <p>this someone knows it</p> <p>this someone knows something (a lot) about someone/something</p> <p>people can know this</p>
SEE	<p>someone sees someone/something (in a place)</p> <p>people can/can't see well in this place</p> <p>someone/people can/can't see this something</p>
HEAR	<p>someone hears something</p> <p>people can feel something bad when they hear this word</p>
THINK	<p>someone thinks about someone else/something</p> <p>someone thinks something good/bad about someone else/something</p> <p>someone thinks like this: ...</p> <p>many people think like this: ...</p>
HAPPEN	<p>something happens</p> <p>something happens to someone</p> <p>something happens to something</p> <p>something happens somewhere (in a place)</p> <p>something happens inside someone/something</p>
BE (SOMEWHERE)	<p>someone is somewhere (in a place)</p> <p>something is somewhere (in a place)</p> <p>someone is with someone else</p>
LIVE	<p>someone lives for a long time</p> <p>many people live in this place</p> <p>this someone lives with someone else</p> <p>it is good if someone lives like this</p>
DIE	<p>someone dies at this time</p> <p>all people die at some time</p>

THERE IS	there is something in this place there is someone in this place there are two/many kinds of ...
BE (SOMEONE/SOMETHING)	this someone is someone like me this is something of one kind this something is big/small I know who this someone is
(IS) MINE	this thing (knife, shirt, etc.) is mine [this thing is someone else's = someone else can say about this thing: it is mine]
MOVE	someone moves (in this place) something moves in this place parts of this someone's body move as this someone wants
TOUCH	something touches something else (somewhere) something touches part of someone's body someone/people can/can't touch this something
INSIDE	inside this something inside this someone inside part of this someone's body
PLACE~WHERE~ SOMEWHERE	(in) this place (in) the same place somewhere else (in) this other place in some places in many places in the place where ...
HERE	something is happening here now
ABOVE	above this place far above this place someone above other people
BELOW	below this place far below this place
ON ONE SIDE	on this side on the same side on one side on two sides on all sides
NEAR	near this place near someone
FAR	far from this place
NOT~DON'T	not good not bad not like this I don't know someone can't do this

CAN	<p>someone can do something someone can't do something someone can't not do something something (good/bad) can happen it can be like this: ...</p>
BECAUSE	<p>because of this it happened because this someone did something before ... not because of anything else</p>
IF	<p>if it happens like this for some time, ..., if you do this, ... if someone does something like this, ...</p>
MAYBE	<p>maybe it is like this maybe it is not like this maybe someone else can do it</p>
LIKE~AS~WAY	<p>it happens like this: ... it is like this: ... someone thinks like this: ... someone like me this someone does it like this it happens as this someone wants ... do/say it in this way, not in another way</p>
VERY	<p>very big very small very good very bad very far very near a very short time a very long time I want it very much (=very) very very big very very good very very far etc.</p>
MORE~ANYMORE	<p>someone wants more someone does more someone wants to know/say/think more about it one more two more many more not more not living anymore not like this anymore</p>
SMALL	<p>something small a small place very small</p>

BIG	something big a big place very big
BAD	something bad someone bad something bad something bad happens do something bad (to someone) feel something bad this is bad it is bad if ...
GOOD	something good someone good something good happens do something good (for someone) feel something good this is good it is good if ...
TRUE	this is true this is not true

A few things concerning the combinatorial properties should be noted. First, prepositions are used extensively in English to express different meanings. For instance, there are phrases like ‘something happens **to** someone.’ These prepositions are essential for some combinations of meaning, but their usage is constrained to specific semantic frames. Second, normal English often exceeds the universal semantic valencies. For instance, ‘feel’ in the sense “I felt the ground with a walking stick” violates the primitive syntax, and in fact seems to mean something different from FEEL, since it has the meaning of “DO SOMETHING WITH SOMETHING TO TOUCH SOMETHING SO THAT [m] I CAN FEEL SOMETHING IN A PART OF MY BODY.” Thus, not all natural language meanings of the words are available in NSM explications. Thirdly, the table is a sample list of sentences, and it is not comprehensive (a comprehensive list would be very long). However, the verbs are restricted to the frames given.

2.3.7. Explications Using Semantic Primes

Thus far, the semantic primes and their syntax have been explained. However, how they should be written has not yet been explained. An example of an explication is as follows:

16) Parricide

- a) something
- b) people can say what this something is with the word parricide
- c) someone can say something about something with this word when this someone thinks like this:
- d) “it can be like this:
- e) someone thinks like this: ‘it will be good if I kill [m] my father [m]’
- f) because of this, after this, this someone does it
- g) it is very bad if it is like this”
- h) when people think about it, they can’t not feel something very bad¹²¹

There are some important orthographic conventions in the explications. First, sentences and clauses may be separated by lines and assigned an alphabetical letter for reference if necessary. However, if there is no need for reference, the lines may be organized in the manner deemed most appropriate. Secondly, a head verb should be presented with a colon. If a complement clause is presented on the next line, it should be presented with indentation (as in lines (e) and (f)). The complement clause may be presented with quotation marks for the sake of presentation (as in lines (d)-(g)). Thirdly, commas can be used between subordinate adverbial clauses and the main clause for disambiguation. Fourthly, the notation [m] is used for semantic molecules. In the case of (16e) above, it is ‘kill’ and ‘father’ that are molecules. There is an obvious merit to this

¹²¹ Example from Goddard and Wierzbicka, *Words & Meanings: Lexical Semantics across Domains, Languages, and Cultures*, 217-18.

shortcut, as explications of each of these terms themselves are long. But also, the molecules indicate how concepts can be structured in relation to one another; some concepts assume others, and there may be a lot of chunking going on for the mind to manage and understand complex concepts.¹²² Sometimes, other symbols can be used in explications like the following:

17) What *colour* is this thing (X)?

- a) people can think like this about many things:
- b) “if someone sees this thing at some time when people can see things well,
- c) this someone can know something of one kind about it because of this”
- d) I want to know something of this kind about this thing (X)
- e) when someone knows something of this kind about something,
- f) this someone can say it with a word of one kind
- g) I want to know with what word people can say something of this kind
about this thing (X)¹²³

As in (17) above, an explication does not have to be for a word, but it can also be for a clause. In this case, it is the clause ‘what colour is this thing (X)?’ being explicated. Furthermore, symbols like (X) can be used to index elements in the construction being explicated. This helps the reader to keep track of what is being referred to; in the case of (17), (X) is the object with color.

The significance of the symbols has been debated by the interlocutors.¹²⁴ The general philosophy around the representative system is that only a minimal amount of symbols should be

¹²² Goddard, “Natural Semantic Metalanguage: Latest Perspectives,” 233.

¹²³ Example from Goddard and Wierzbicka, *Words & Meanings: Lexical Semantics across Domains, Languages, and Cultures*, 98

¹²⁴ For an oppositional view, see Lisa Matthewson, “Is the Meta-Language Really Natural?” *Theoretical Linguistics* 29, no. 3 (2003): 269-270. For the NSM explanations, see the reply by Uwe Durst, “About NSM: A General Reply,” *Theoretical Linguistics* 29, no. 3 (2003): 300. See also for a general discussion, Goddard and Wierzbicka, “Semantic Primes and Universal Grammar,” 79-81.

used. Therefore, in a strict representation there are no periods, and there is no use of capital letters at the start of sentences. Again, the symbols, like indentation and line spacing, are not to be thought as covert primitive meanings, but as a matter of disambiguation. In other words, the explications could be provided with none of the above-mentioned symbols, but as a block of words.

This leaves the question of whether some primes covertly carry multiple senses. For instance, THIS by its nature can be anaphoric or cataphoric, and in NSM, the ambiguity is resolved through the use of symbols like (X) that identify the referent. NSM semanticists would have to concede this fact, but the flexibility of THIS is arguably why it is so useful in language. Moreover, in terms of theory, the claim being made is not that explications are unambiguous to somebody exposed to the word for the first time, but that speakers who already know the word know what the indexicals are pointing at. The representative system is simply there to help readers quickly get to the correct answer, which speakers already know.

2.3.8. Characteristics of Explications

Partly due to the shape of the inventory of semantic primes and the commitment to use only the semantic primes in explication, the explications take on three notable characteristics: (1) Anthropocentrism; (2) cross-linguistic sensitivity; (3) semantic invariance. These characteristics deserve some explanation.

2.3.8.1. *Anthropocentricity*

NSM explications are **anthropocentric** in the sense that they are not objective observations of things in the world. There are four important features that fall under the idea of

anthropocentricity. The first is the personal nature of definitions. As implied by the inclusion of ‘I’ among semantic primes, NSM explications often include the first-person perspective. Indeed, many definitions contain simulations like “SOMEONE THINKS LIKE THIS: I FEEL VERY BAD” that require a personal element. This may seem unusual, since we do not normally see definitions that contain ‘I,’ since by convention, English prefers third-person definitions. The reason that first-person is used is that it is believed that the mind often frames things in terms of ‘I.’ That is, it is closer to cognitive reality.¹²⁵

A second way in which definitions are anthropocentric is in their subjectivity. Explications often resort to phrases and words like SMALL. Such explications are anthropocentric in the sense that they are personal experiences of the world by the experiencer, and as a consequence of this, the definition is the speaker’s opinion of the world, rather than an objective observation of the world itself; something SMALL in the opinion of one may not be SMALL in the opinion of another, but what matters is that the opinion exists.¹²⁶

A third aspect of anthropocentrism is related to subjectivity but distinguishable from it. This is the incorporation of the experience of the experiencer into the definition. Semantic primes like TOUCH incorporate the experiencer’s senses into the definition. As a consequence, a word like “smooth” would be defined through TOUCH rather than through objective definitions

¹²⁵ There is some psycholinguistic evidence that some simulation in the mind has what Bergen calls “participant perspective,” showing that the first person is cognitively present on some level in the mind. See Bergen, *Louder than Words*, 108-14.

¹²⁶ In this regard, NSM is very similar to Lakoff’s cognitive linguistics. See Lakoff, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal About the Mind*, 157-184. However, it should be noted that the characterization that all models using the semantic invariant (see below) are somehow associated with objectivism is wrong. Indeed, Goddard argues that NSM and Cognitive Linguistics share much in common, and NSM is, in his eyes, cognitive in its nature (Cliff Goddard, “Bad Arguments against Semantic Primitives,” *Theoretical Linguistics* 24, no. 2 (1998): 142).

like “no bumps” and so on.¹²⁷ Such a focus on the experiencer and experience as opposed to the world itself shares similarities with the idea of embodiment in cognitive linguistics.

A final sense in which NSM is anthropocentric is that the explications are not meant to be **expert definitions**. By expert definitions is meant a definition that states details about an object that only the expert would know. For instance, most people do not know details about insects that entomologists may know, such as the way bees communicate. Indeed, there may even be information in the commoner’s definition of ‘bees’ that conflates ‘bees’ with ‘wasps.’ But technical incorrectness can creep into the meaning of words, since the average person does not know everything experts know. Such a lack of precision should not be equated to a lack of structure; words can nonetheless be sufficiently structured and explicated. Thus, the definitions do not need to be objectively ‘correct,’ and may incorporate folk beliefs about the world. This is possible since, in line with the conceptual approach (see 2.3.1), meaning is in the mind, and not in the objective state of the world.¹²⁸

2.3.8.2. *NSM and Culture*

One of the consequences of the theory of universal semantic primes is that NSM is as much a theory of semantic particularity as it is a theory of semantic universals: While NSM claims that the semantic primes are universal meanings, the same claim is not made for most words in a language. Languages build their lexicon from a large but finite number of semantic explications, but the pool of possible semantic explications they choose from is infinite.

¹²⁷ See Goddard and Wierzbicka, *Words & Meanings: Lexical Semantics across Domains, Languages, and Cultures*, 66-67.

¹²⁸ Durst, “The Natural Semantic Metalanguage Approach to Linguistic Meaning,” 180-81.

The resulting theory concerning the relationship between languages is of considerable interest. The universality of semantic primes implies that all languages are formed from the same conceptual basis, but the flexibility with which semantic primes may be combined implies that the shape of the lexicon differs substantially among languages. But for NSM, the differences among languages are not untranscendable; rather, since all humans share in their basic building blocks, it is possible to understand and explain foreign language meanings through usage of semantic primes. On the other hand, non-primes should be avoided in cross-linguistic analysis, as they may contaminate the semantic analysis by introducing concepts native to English. In this regard, the semantic primes are the primary tool for cross-linguistic analysis.¹²⁹

Cross-linguistic analysis is best conducted by explicating the foreign language word in terms of semantic primes. A native translational equivalent may also be explicated to contrast the differences among languages. Consider the explications below:

18) English: *freedom*

- a) Someone (X) can think something like this:
- b) If I want to do something I can do it
- c) No one else can say to me: “you can’t do it because I don’t want this”
- d) If I don’t want to do something I don’t have to do it.
- e) No one else can say to me: “you have to do it because I want this”
- f) This is good for X
- g) It is bad if someone cannot think this

¹²⁹ This section raises NSM’s position on so-called linguistic relativity. In short, NSM believes that languages enable its own way of thinking but does not completely restrict the way of thinking. For an in-depth analysis of the issue, see Goddard, “Whorf meets Wierzbicka,” 393-432.

19) Russian: *svoboda*

- a) Someone (X) can think something like this:
- b) If I want to do something I can do it
- c) When I do something, I don't have to think:
I can't do it as I want to do it because some (other) people do/say something
- d) X feels something good because of this¹³⁰

The explications are for English *freedom* and the Russian translation equivalent *svoboda*. The two explications have both identical elements and differing elements. Both explications agree on (18a, 19a) and (18b, 19b) but differ on the remainder of the respective explications. For instance, English 'freedom' is a value that should not be violated (18g). Also, it harbors potential conflict, as elements (18c) and (18e) could bring about a situation in which someone's 'freedom' may be violated for the sake of another's 'freedom.' But it should be emphasized again that NSM is anthropocentric and does not believe that all concepts work harmoniously in society.

On the other hand, Russian *svoboda* is not a value, but a personal feeling (19d). Also, it is not so much a social thing, concerning what others can and cannot say, as in English *freedom*. Rather, it is the personal mentality being released from external pressures (19c), a mindset. Thus, *svoboda* can be used for the state of drunkenness, or the state of a professor who is joyfully explaining a subject that he/she knows about well. English *freedom* would sound peculiar, or simply wrong, for describing these situations. This is not to say that the two are never applicable to the same situation. For instance, both *freedom* and *svoboda* can be given by a person in authority.¹³¹

¹³⁰ Example from Anna Wierzbicka, *Understanding Cultures through Their Key Words: English, Russian, Polish, German, and Japanese* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 130, 141.

¹³¹ See *ibid.*, 139-44.

A strength of NSM is that the explications can be confirmed with native speakers of any language. These natives do not need to be able to understand English, because the explications can be translated using, for example, the Russian counterpart of the semantic primes; the Russian primes have the same meaning, and the same rules of combinability. If Russian language speakers would agree to (19) but not (18) as the definition of *svoboda*, then it gives further credibility to the definitions. Thus, NSM is a theory that is easily adapted to cross-linguistic field studies, since native intuitions can be used to guide lexicography.¹³²

The idea that languages have concepts that are partially or totally different is by now an experimentally verified fact.¹³³ But the extent to which language-particular meanings permeate the lexicon is still disputed. The idea that languages have ‘weird concepts’ is probably not contested by many readers, since we hear many words that are unfamiliar. Take for example, *karma* and *nothingness* from, respectively, South Asia and East Asia, that are unfamiliar to our ears. However, NSM (along with experiments in bilingual studies) goes further in claiming that many concepts like *freedom* that many would think are universal, are in fact language-specific.¹³⁴ In the case of *svoboda* and *freedom*, the words share elements in definition, but it would be wrong to say that *svoboda* sometimes ‘means’ *freedom*. NSM would claim that this is never the case. For instance, theories that take a denotational view of meaning may say that the two have the same meaning in scenes where masters are giving *svoboda/freedom* to their subjects, since there seems to be denotational overlap (i.e., it applies to the same world situation). However, it is

¹³² Anna Wierzbicka, “Bilingualism and Cognition – Perspective from Semantics,” in *Language and Bilingual Cognition*, ed. Vivian Cook and Benedetta Bassetti (Hove, UK: Routledge, 2010), 214.

¹³³ See particularly Pavlenko, *The Bilingual Mind: And What It Tells Us about Language and Thought*, 80-83.

¹³⁴ For an example, see Aneta Pavlenko and Viktoria Driagina, “Russian Emotion Vocabulary in American Learners’ Narratives,” *The Modern Language Journal* 91, no. 2 (2007): 213-34.

likely that natives of each language would understand the situation differently, even for the same scene, as words are more than their denotation.

An example internal to English may help to show how words can bring in different feelings, even if the denotation overlaps: We may refer to the same person as *grandmother* and *professor* but the identity of the referent does not mean that the two words have the same ‘meaning.’¹³⁵ This applies equally for cross-linguistic studies of meaning, and NSM seeks to go beyond denotational meaning in its definitions. More specifically, it attempts to be an explanatory theory of meaning, explaining why certain words are used, not merely a descriptive theory of meaning that catalogues usages.¹³⁶ That is, it seeks to represent native intuition of how words feel to the native speaker, and not just what they refer to.

A common criticism of NSM is that it only allows the use of semantic primes to explicate the meaning of words. The lack of availability of all but sixty-five English words in definitions is criticized as a liability. For instance, why can’t we use ‘temperature’ to describe another language’s translation equivalent ‘temperature’ if we already know what ‘temperature’ in English means?

The matter can be divided into two different issues. First, there is an intuitive appeal to this reasoning; some words seem to be defined through other words we know. But as we have already seen, NSM allows the use of semantic molecules, if they themselves can be defined. For

¹³⁵ I use here the word ‘meaning’ vaguely. Lexical semanticists who wrote prior to the advent of post-structuralism would prefer the term ‘associative meaning’ for what I have called ‘meaning’ here. see Leech, *Semantics*, 10-27.

¹³⁶ Most applications of cognitive linguistics to Biblical Hebrew are more descriptive than they are explanatory. For instance, Bosman catalogues the different meanings of *’hb*: *’hb* means ‘love’ in some contexts (God, marriage, friends, etc.), but also ‘admire’ or ‘ally with’ or ‘care’ in yet other contexts (political, social, etc.). Such matching of English words to Hebrew contexts only works if emotions are universal. See Tiana Bosman, “Biblical Hebrew lexicology and cognitive semantics: A study of lexemes of affection” (PhD diss., University of Stellenbosch, 2011).

instance, ‘legs [m]’ should be used in an explication of *mouse*, since it prevents the definition of *mouse* from becoming unnecessarily complicated, as well as replicating our intuitive knowledge structure whereby we define a component of the word *mouse* through *legs*.¹³⁷ But such a logic should only be applied only if it can be shown that a certain semantic molecule indeed is part of the lexemes’s definition.

Second, opponents of the usage of only sixty-five semantic primes often miss the significance of the cross-cultural layer of NSM semantic analysis. If we return to the example of *svoboda/freedom* above and assume that the explications are correct, it is quite clear that *svoboda* cannot be defined through *freedom*. In fact, even though *freedom* is a rough translation of *svoboda*, it cannot be understood in terms of the semantic molecule *freedom*. If we did, we would immediately be confused as to why *svoboda* is not treated like a good thing like English *freedom* (18 f, g). Do Russians secretly think it is a good thing, but are they suppressing their desires due to social/political reasons? More likely, such questioning is in fact characteristic of English culture, and reflects our assumption that English values are universal. Quite apart from the obvious condescending nature of such an analysis towards foreign cultures, as a matter of sound linguistic procedure, it is much easier to start with the semantic primes, since defining *svoboda* through *freedom* would require elimination of a substantial amount of meaning in *freedom*.

Thus, we should not harbor the illusion that cross-linguistic analysis is akin to monolingual analyses such as that of ‘mouse’ in terms of ‘legs,’ whereby the definition does match our intuition that the definition should include certain molecules. It is tempting to believe that our intuition, which is often so reliable when analyzing our own language, is also applicable

¹³⁷ Wierzbicka, *Semantics: Primes and Universals*, 340-41.

in the analysis of other languages. But such belief is wrong. Cross-linguistic analysis of non-English lexemes requires a different mindset. Since each language builds up its lexicon using its own semantic molecules and key values, we often cannot use our own language's semantic molecules and values to explain its logic. Therefore, we must suppress our intuition that an English semantic molecule is involved, since it is highly likely that we will end up contaminating the analysis with English culture, so that an explication that accurately accounts for the usages in the foreign language becomes impossible.

In fact, NSM is unique in the extent of its recognition that our own native biases can contaminate analysis. The fact that lexical meanings can differ significantly among languages has been understood and implemented into other theories in semantics as well, and so the recognition of foreign worldviews in itself is not unique to NSM. For instance, some approaches in cognitive linguistics recognize that there are cross-cultural variations in language, and they have their own way of explaining these.¹³⁸ But the crucial difference between NSM and these approaches is that NSM takes a further step in recognizing cross-linguistic variation: It recognizes that our own languages reflect our own cultures, and it does not take for granted that our native language cognition can be used as a touchstone for understanding other language cognition. I call this problem of not recognizing the culturally specific nature of our own language **blindness**.

The idea of blindness has been recognized in bilingual studies. Pavlenko writes in the conclusion of her book *The Bilingual Mind*:

¹³⁸ See René Dirven, Hans-Georg Wolf, and Franz Polzenhagen, "Cognitive Linguistics and Cultural Studies," in *The Oxford Handbook of Cognitive Linguistics*, ed. Dirk Geeraerts and Hubert Cuyckens (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 1203-21.

My key point is that researchers working in and on ‘other’ languages as well as on the languages they consider ‘their own’ need to start worrying – and continue to worry – not only about malfunctions in the recording equipment but also about ‘language effects’: the blindness to the artificial nature of the categories of our own languages, perpetuated by the illusion of the seamless concord, the limitations of the knowledge of the L2, which cannot be overcome by a year or two of language study, and the unavoidable distortion of translation.¹³⁹

Pavlenko problematizes, not the fact that languages differ in their cognition, but the blindness that scholars tend to have towards their own cognition. The problem of blindness must be distinguished from the general recognition of variations in language, since blindness is not simply a problem of describing foreign language lexemes in a way that differs from our translation equivalent. It is a problem of the recognition of the biases of our own language. Moreover, blindness should be distinguished from other ways in which we are aware of our culture, such as the political structure, the social structure, and so on. More specifically, blindness is the problem with using our own native *lexemes* in analysis, since our native lexemes are artificial and as biased as any other language’s lexemes. That is, blindness is a problem concerning metalanguage.

It is for the problem of blindness that NSM offers a unique solution. For instance, van Wolde’s study of ‘anger’ in the Hebrew Bible uses cognitive linguistic theories such as metaphor, prototypical scenarios, and cognitive domains to explain how ‘anger’ in the Hebrew Bible differs from our English idea of *anger*.¹⁴⁰ We do not need to be concerned with what these

¹³⁹ Pavlenko, *The Bilingual Mind: And What it Tells us about Language and Thought*, 314.

¹⁴⁰ Ellen J. Van Wolde, “Sentiments as Culturally Constructed Emotions: Anger and Love in the Hebrew Bible,” *BibInt* 16 (2008): 1-24.

cognitive linguistic theories are for now, except that they are being used to address the cultural differences between English and Hebrew. But what is notable is that van Wolde's explanation uses the English term *anger* throughout to explain Hebrew terms. Now, it is true that universalists in emotion studies have proposed that *anger* is an emotional universal.¹⁴¹ But these controversial claims by universalists have been soundly refuted by bilingual experimentation, anthropological studies, as well as by NSM.¹⁴²

In reply to such an accusation of blindness to one's own language's cultural biases, one may say that she is not referring to the English concept *anger*, but that *anger* is simply a term being used as a rough equivalence to the Hebrew concept. Let us call this sense ANGER. The problem is then that we do not know what ANGER means. Presumably, we are implying that it is akin to English *anger*. But if we cannot define ANGER, then we are only making weak claims about parallels we see between the English and Hebrew. In terms of the hypothesis, due to this definitional weakness, van Wolde's explanation is not claiming strictly to be a testable representation of the cognition of the Hebrew mind, but only a characterization of some similarities and differences between English and Hebrew. In sum, such a line of argumentation fails to address the blindness problem, as it fails to recognize that whether *anger* is meant as an English meaning or not, it introduces biases in the mind of the analyst in understanding the

¹⁴¹ See Paul Ekman, "Are there basic emotions?" *Psychological Review* 99, no. 3 (2003): 550-53.

¹⁴² See Pavlenko, "Russian Emotion Vocabulary in American Learners' Narratives," 213-234; Lutz, *Unnatural Emotions: Everyday Sentiments on a Micronesian Atoll and Their Challenge to Western Theory*, 155-182; and Anna Wierzbicka, *Emotions across Languages and Culture: Diversity and Universals* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 87-89.

Hebrew term, even though we may be claiming to acknowledge that ‘emotions’ differ widely among cultures.¹⁴³

In this regard, NSM is unique in claiming not only that its theory explains cultural differences, but also in claiming that its metalanguage in explaining cultural meanings is culture-neutral, and thereby capable of capturing other language meanings without an innate blindness to our own linguistic biases. Thus, NSM sees both universality and language-particularity, by claiming that English is only *mostly* language particular, but that a subset of its lexemes, the semantic primes, are universal, and thereby capable of capturing other language meanings without introducing the problem of blindness. Thereby, it is also capable of making theories about the conceptual realities present in other cultures, in such a fashion that all of the words being used to explicate the other language can be taken seriously and tested, without any regression into arguments claiming that the English word is not strictly what is meant.

In answer to the criticism that NSM has only sixty-five words available to explicate meanings, this limited vocabulary is a strength rather than a weakness in performing cross-linguistic study. Given the vast differences in meanings among languages, only NSM has the metalinguistic flexibility that allows analysts to imagine and express the different ways of thinking about the world that are ingrained in foreign language lexemes.

2.3.8.3. *The Semantic Invariant*

A key to understanding NSM’s theory of meaning is its commitment to the idea of the **semantic invariant**. The more common term for the semantic invariant in linguistics is the

¹⁴³ I use here the term ‘emotions’ with full recognition that the term is now avoided in emotion studies. See Pavlenko, *The Bilingual Mind: And What it Tells us about Language and Thought*, 254-56.

‘necessary and sufficient features.’ However, since this term is often associated with a host of classical theories that are not related to NSM, the term ‘semantic invariant’ will be preferred here. The idea of the semantic invariant is the traditional idea of definitions, traceable as far back as Aristotle. The semantic invariant is, just as the name implies, meaning that is consistently found in every usage of the word, or found in every use of one of the senses of a polysemous word (we will return to the issue of polysemy in the next chapter). For example, when we use the phrase ‘X loves Y’, we assume concerning X that ‘X FEELS SOMETHING GOOD TOWARDS Y.’¹⁴⁴ Even if we know a fiendish person who never wishes the good of others and we are told about him that ‘he loves Y,’ we may tell the person who said this that he is wrong, but we would not assume that *love* does not mean in this instance that ‘X FEELS SOMETHING GOOD TOWARDS Y,’ because it is an essential part of the meaning that must be found in all usages of the word.

More recently, rival theories like cognitive linguistics have preferred to use a more novel approach to definitions, the idea of **prototypes**.¹⁴⁵ Since the proponents of the prototype model have popularized the idea that the semantic invariant is a wrong-headed approach to semantics, it may be worth looking at the nature of the difference. The idea that the semantic invariant is misguided arises from three popular assumptions about it.¹⁴⁶ The first assumption is the idea that objectivism is part and parcel with the semantic invariant. However, as we have seen, NSM is

¹⁴⁴ See Anna Wierzbicka, *Semantics, Culture, and Cognition: Universal Human Concepts in Culture-Specific Configurations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 145.

¹⁴⁵ The theory of prototype is largely credited to Eleanor Rosch’s work. See for a summary of her work, Eleanor Rosch, “Principles of Categorization,” in *Cognition and Categorization*, ed. B. Lloyd and E. Rosch (Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 1978), 27–48.

¹⁴⁶ For an account of the problems, see Evans and Green, *Cognitive Linguistics: An Introduction*, 251–255. However, it should be noted that their assertion that NSM fits in with the structuralist theories like componential analysis is so misleading that one wonders whether they had read any work on NSM (see *ibid.*, 208). This mischaracterization of NSM is very common, and unfortunate. This frequent mischaracterization of NSM is a subject of Goddard, “Bad Arguments against Semantic Primitives.”

not a theory that conforms to denotational analyses (i.e., objectivism); semantics is a conceptual matter contained inside the mind (see 2.2.1). The difference between cognitive linguistics and NSM is that whereas cognitive linguistics places the focus of semantics on the experiencer, NSM places the focus exclusively on the innate linguistic instrument in the mind.

The second misleading assumption about the semantic invariant is the idea that many words cannot be defined if definition is to be concerned with the semantic invariant. This is the argument of Evans and Green, who claim that it is erroneous to say a cat ‘has four legs,’ and ‘is furry’ since a three-legged cat is still called a cat, and other cats have lost fur.¹⁴⁷ Therefore, they would argue, it is wrong to recognize the semantic invariant as a central mode of definition, since it cannot be psychologically real.¹⁴⁸ However, it should be noted that they have disproved a rather questionable invariant, ‘has four legs.’ All that would need to be changed to make it invariant is to frame it as ‘people think about it like this: it has four legs;’ that is, the perception people have about cats having four legs is certainly invariant, and therefore they are surprised to see a three-legged cat, but they are able to understand it as a cat nevertheless since they know there may be exceptions to any standard perception.

Against the common assumption that semantic invariant definitions are impossible, Wierzbicka argues that the semantic invariant has been dismissed too rashly. It is true, she concedes, that some semanticists have failed to identify the semantic invariant using various methodologies. However, she claims that such failures can be attributed to objectivism, but with the advent of subjectivity in definitions, defining words in a manner that is semantically invariant

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 253.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

is possible. Wierzbicka spends two chapters in her book *Semantics: Primes and Universals* to show what some of these definitions look like.¹⁴⁹ Among the words she defines is the word *game*, which has become a paragon of ‘undefinables,’ due to Ludwig Wittgenstein’s influential work. Wittgenstein asserted:

Consider for example the proceedings that we call ‘games.’ I mean board-games, card-games, Olympic games, and so on. What is common to them all? Don’t say: ‘There must be something common, or they would not be called “games”’—but look and see whether there is anything common to all.—For if you look at them you will not see something that is common to all, but similarities, relationships, and a whole series of them at that. To repeat: don’t think, but look! . . . Are they all ‘amusing?’ Compare chess with noughts and crosses. Or is there always winning and losing, or competition between two player? Think of patience. In ball games there is winning and losing; but when a child throws his ball at the wall and catches it again, this feature disappeared. . . . And the result of this examination is: we see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing. . . . I can think of no better expression to characterize these similarities than ‘family resemblances.’¹⁵⁰

According to Wittgenstein, close inspection of some words shows that they defy any definition in terms of invariants. Game A and B may share similarity X, and game B and C may share Y, but A and C may share neither X or Y. Therefore, Wittgenstein proposed that meaning should be understood in terms of **family resemblance**, rather than the semantic invariant. That is, the idea that members of the groups may share a network of similarities, but there does not need to be a set of features that all members share, just like a family only shares certain features with one another. This idea of family resemblance was subsequently popularized through Rosch’s

¹⁴⁹ See the chapters “Prototypes and Invariants” and “Against ‘Against Definitions’” in Wierzbicka, *Semantics: Primes and Universals*, 148-169, 237-257.

¹⁵⁰ See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1953), 31-32.

psycholinguistic experiments on family resemblances, and furthermore through Lakoff's extensive use of Rosch.¹⁵¹

Wierzbicka attempts to counter Wittgenstein's argument by showing that there are significant invariants in the word *game*. *Game* can be defined as follows:

20) *game*

- a) many kinds of things that people do
- b) people can say what this something is with the word *game*
- c) someone can say something about something with this word when this someone thinks like this: it can be like this:
- d) people do this something (X), because these people want one thing (Y) to happen, because these people want to feel something good
- e) people can do this something (X) for some time, because they think like this:
- f) I want one thing (Y) to happen, when this something happens I will feel something very good at that moment.
- g) when these people are doing this something (X), these people feel something good these people are thinking:
- h) I can do many things, because of these things, after these things, this thing (Y) will happen
- i) I want to do these things, not like many other people doing this something (X) do this something (X)
- j) These people know that these people can do some things, can't do other things
- k) after this one thing (Y) happens, these people do not do this something¹⁵²

¹⁵¹ See Eleanor Rosch, and Caroline Mervis "Family Resemblances: Studies in the Internal Structure of Categories," *Cognitive Psychology* 7 (1975): 573–605; and Lakoff, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal About the Mind*, 40-57.

¹⁵² The explication has been adapted from Wierzbicka, *Semantics: Primes and Universals*, 159. The adaptation was carried out as it was felt that although the definition had enough components to explain all of the activities listed as having no commonality by Wittgenstein, the definition lacked some components that would distinguish it adequately from activities like racing, boxing, ski, fishing, stamp collecting, and crosswords.

The definition attempts to capture the semantic invariant of *game*. The definition includes components (a) – (c) that may seem vacuous. I will return to these in chapter 4, but for now, all that needs to be noted is the idea that (c) is saying that whether someone says something is a *game* or not is the opinion of the speaker, and people know that this is so. For instance, if a murderer says, ‘killing you is a game to me,’ the noticeable thing is that the speaker’s opinion is extremely abnormal; but nobody would say that *game* is the wrong word to use. This indicates that people know what a *game* is and that since they also know it is someone’s opinion, they can know something about the speaker through its utterance.

Wittgenstein claimed that not all games are ‘amusing.’ This is true, if we choose to define *game* through the word ‘amusing.’ But we could rephrase his definition in a semantically invariant way using semantic primes: PEOPLE WANT TO FEEL SOMETHING GOOD (d). The loser may not feel good, but this is not to say he does not play a game because he WANTED TO FEEL SOMETHING GOOD. This applies also to some sports that are sometimes referred to as a *game*, and at other times not. It is true that chess is classified as a game, but this reflects the general nature of chess as something enjoyable. But chess is not *always* described as a ‘game,’ since it is not always a game to the contestants. When professional play together, chess is more often referred to as a ‘match’ rather than as a ‘game,’ whereas much less serious matches between friends are more likely to be called ‘game.’ Again, it is about the speaker’s opinion about what qualifies as FEELING SOMETHING GOOD (c, d).¹⁵³

¹⁵³ According to the data in the British National Corpus, *game* is used metaphorically with *chess* as a paragon of complicated but logical games, often in the phrase “X was like a chess game to him.” Of 40 collocations of *game* and *chess*, 27 fit this category. Additionally, there is a usage of *game* as a count word, as in “he won 5 games to 1,” which should be seen as a polysemous sense. Of 40 collocations of *game*, 3 fit this category. Only 10 referred to people playing a game of chess, and these all implied it was a pastime, often with adjectives like ‘enjoy.’

The second claim made by Wittgenstein is that there is not always a winner and a loser, and that there are not always two competitors. This again is correct, for instance, with a child playing a ball game alone. But again, we can be more careful with how we word the definition. If we use the explication PEOPLE WANT ONE THING TO HAPPEN (d), the problem can be solved since it is true that if we say a child is playing a game, that we imply he WANTS ONE THING TO HAPPEN (d); we are not saying his movements are random, but that there is a sense of purpose to what he does. Moreover, it is only ONE THING that can be the objective of a game. There may be multiple things that are achieved on the way, but there is always one ultimate objective. We may say of the boy, he wants to kick the ball, and he wants the ball to bounce, but if we are to characterize what he is doing as a game, rather than just ‘playing with the ball,’ we must also add something like ‘so that the ball hits the pole.’

Thinking about why car racing and fishing are not called games also reveals something about how we define *game* in our minds. Car racing is not called a *game* for two reasons. First, we do not think of racers to be thinking I CAN DO MANY THINGS (h) while racing, and this lack of flexibility compared to say, football, makes it difficult to call it a *game*. Secondly, it is far from clear to us that racers FEEL SOMETHING GOOD (g) *while* they race (although they do feel good if they win (d)).

In this regard, it is interesting that since the advent of video gaming, car racing can be a game. But racing games are modified versions of ‘racing’, since the number of choices available

On the other hand, when *match* is used with *chess*, 2 of the 3 hits were used in the sense of a serious contest between individuals. This indicates that the idea that *chess* is a *game* is reserved for metaphors, and pastime activities, while the idea of a *match* is reserved for serious contests in chess. See the British National Corpus, accessed January 15th, 2019 <https://corpus.byu.edu/bnc/>. A similar distinction can be seen in articles about professional chess, where *game* is used to refer to the count word, and for depictions of the excitement. On the other hand, ‘match’ is used where the sentence refers to the professional aspect of the championship that is not accompanied by vivid descriptions of how the match proceeded. See for example “Carlson Wins Worldchampionship,” World Chess Championship News, last modified November 29, 2018, accessed January 15, 2019, <https://worldchess.com/news/622>.

to the racer is increased, so for a racing game, one can select the car to be used, or use special items that block competitors and so on, so one is able to enjoy the process of racing.

Fishing is not a game since there is no clear single goal that can be described as AFTER THIS ONE THING (Y) HAPPENS, THESE PEOPLE DO NOT DO THIS SOMETHING (k). Catching a fish is a goal, but fishing refers to the process by which an indefinite number is caught. In other words, there is no single goal that would mark the activity as over.

The examination of *game* shows that Wittgenstein's theory about games having no abstract commonality cannot be sustained. Rather, there seems to be a semantic invariant that is active in our linguistic decisions. There are two important senses in which the semantic invariant is active. Firstly, the activity is not restricted to calling things 'games' that we heard others call a 'game,' but also extends to our ability to see something we had never seen and to decide whether it is a 'game' or not.

Secondly, the semantic invariant is always active in our interpretation of usages, however peculiar a certain usage is. That is, none of the components of the semantic invariant may be ignored, unlike with the theory of family resemblance that claims that the context of usage determines what components of the meaning are involved in any usage. For instance, it would be peculiar if somebody said, "I am playing a game of insulting myself to make myself depressed, even though I don't want to be depressed.' This is because component (d) specifies that PEOPLE WANT TO FEEL SOMETHING GOOD cannot be ignored. The only way our mind can process the sentence is by seeing it as ironic, and to guess that the speaker at some level gains pleasure from his game. Whereas the idea of family resemblances cannot represent this gut instinct about the meaning of such a sentence, NSM can identify and represent these meanings by specifying the content of the semantic invariant. Thus, not only is the idea that semantic invariants do not exist

untrue, but also, there is an intuitive appeal in the idea of the invariant, in that it gets close to our deep instincts about what a word means.

Moving on from Wittgenstein's argument, a third criticism against the semantic invariant has been that the semantic invariant does not predict **prototype effects**. The Prototype effect is the effect whereby people react differently to various members of a category, so that what people consider as more prototypical members of a category (e.g., a 'robin' within the category of 'bird') are more easily recognized than non-prototypical members (e.g., a 'penguin' as a 'bird') as proven by Rosch's experiments.¹⁵⁴ Prototype effects are also related to category boundaries; it is not just that there are more central members in a category, but also that what constitutes a member of a category and what does not is not always determinate, and Rosch called this indeterminacy **fuzziness**. When linguists talk about fuzziness, two different ideas are involved. The first applies for something like color. Colors have a central prototype, but fuzzy boundaries, as shown by Berlin and Kay.¹⁵⁵ For instance, there is no rule prescribing the boundary between green and yellow. Another example may be what constitutes 'a tall man,' where the boundary is not objectively determinate.¹⁵⁶ The second type of fuzzy boundary is where all members clearly

¹⁵⁴ For Rosch's experiments, see Eleanor Rosch, "Cognitive Representations of Semantic Categories," *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General* 104, no. 3 (1975): 199-206; Eleanor Rosch, and Caroline Mervis "Family Resemblances: Studies in the Internal Structure of Categories," *Cognitive Psychology* 7 (1975): 573-605; Eleanor Rosch, Caroline Mervis, Wayne Gray, David Johnson and Penny Boyes-Braem, "Basic Objects in Natural Categories," *Cognitive Psychology*, 8 (1976): 382-439.

¹⁵⁵ See Brent Berlin and Paul Kay, *Basic Color Terms: Their Universality and Evolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969).

¹⁵⁶ It should be noted that most of the early experiments centered on concrete lexemes. However, it was never so clear that the same effects can be seen in abstract lexemes. To assess whether prototype effects extend to abstract lexemes, experiments were carried out by Linda Coleman and Paul Kay, followed by René Dirven and John Taylor. See Linda Coleman and Paul Kay, "Prototype Semantics: The English Word Lie," *Language* 57, No.1 (1981): 26-44; René Dirven and John R. Taylor, "The Conceptualization of Vertical Space in English: The Case of Tall," in *Topics in Cognitive Linguistics*, ed. Brygida Rudzka-Ostyn (Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1988), 379-402. However, there seems to be some carelessness on the part of the experimenters that have biased their experiments. See for an argument against these experiments, Wierzbicka, *Lexicography and Conceptual Analysis*, 340-43.

belong to a category, but some members are less easy to recognize as belonging to a category. Pertinent to this second type may be the example of birds, where people recognize a robin as a bird faster than they recognize a penguin as a bird.¹⁵⁷ According to Rosch, the existence of prototype effects and fuzziness in human categorization disproves the idea of Aristotelean categories, since the semantic invariant should define things in a black or white way.¹⁵⁸

NSM accepts that there may be disagreement concerning the range of things a word refers to. However, it contends that the mess is in the world, and that the mess is not a cognitive reality in the mind. Rather, the cognitive reality is a semantic invariant definition, constructed of semantic primes. Wierzbicka states NSM's viewpoint concerning fuzziness as follows:

The real semantic problem consists not in quantifying this variability and not in measuring that vagueness, but in finding a definition which would make that vagueness explicit. An adequate definition of a vague concept must aim not at precision but at vagueness: it must aim at precisely that level of vagueness which characterizes the concept itself. A vague definition of the kind suggested here must have full predictive power: it must correctly account for the entire range of use, including the fuzzy boundaries of that range.¹⁵⁹

For NSM, prototype effects can be ingrained into the definition in multiple ways. One source is the semantic prime LIKE. A color, for example, may be defined as being 'like the color [m] of the sky [m]' for instance. Such a definition is entirely consistent with prototype effects, since it predicts that one member of the category is central, and the remaining members are reliant on the experiencer's subjective decision of whether a color is like another.

¹⁵⁷ Eleanor Rosch, "Cognitive Representations of Semantic Categories," 199-206.

¹⁵⁸ Eleanor Rosch, "Cognitive Representations of Semantic Categories," 225.

¹⁵⁹ Wierzbicka, *Lexicography and Conceptual Analysis*, 17; emphasis in original.

A second source of prototype effects in NSM is the subjectivity of definitions. For instance, the prime BIG is a gradient concept, and the range of referents should differ among speakers of a language. Another instance may be the phrase, ‘some people think about people of this kind like X,’ which may be behind the fuzziness of the phrase ‘tall man.’

A third source of prototype effect in cognition is related to the definition of members of a category. For instance, ‘penguin’ may be defined as ‘bird [m] OF A KIND,’ but at the same time, it may also have a list of things within its definition that explains how it is not like other birds like ‘THIS THING CANNOT fly [m]’. Thus, the definition of ‘penguins’ may at once include a taxonomic structure in relation to ‘bird,’ explaining why they are unambiguously in the category, but also have components that explain differences from other birds. This explains why people may not think of penguins first when asked to name birds.¹⁶⁰ Therefore, as has been demonstrated, the assumption that semantic invariant definitions are necessarily black or white in their referential range is wrong. Thus, the premise that semantic invariance is incapable of capturing prototype effects, and consequently that it is incompatible with recent findings, is erroneous.

On this point, it is worth contrasting how the semantic invariant differs with various forms of it in cognitive linguistics. The idea of semantic invariant survives in a less prominent position, and in a slightly different manner in cognitive linguistics. In Langacker’s model of cognitive grammar, it is asserted that nouns have both a **schema** (a set of shared features), and a

¹⁶⁰ See Wierzbicka, *Lexicography and Conceptual Analysis*, 258-328. Wierzbicka’s reflections on Rosch’s definitions are more intricate than implied here, as types of prototype effects are divided into yet more different types. The brief discussion here is a simplification of Wierzbicka’s argument.

prototype.¹⁶¹ For instance, the word *ring* is used most of the time for circular objects like a piece of jewelry or a circular arena (for now, we will ignore square wrestling arenas). This subset is polysemous, but also shares the schema of ‘circularity.’ Although schemas are a type of invariant, the idea of the schema is deviant from what NSM calls the invariant, since in cognitive grammar, the schema cuts across multiple polysemous senses in a single word. But in NSM, the semantic invariant applies to one of the senses of a word, and if a word is polysemous, the semantic invariant refers to that invariant element in each of the senses of the word.

Another case where the semantic invariant and schemas differ is Taylor’s example of puns using homonyms. He uses the following sentence:

21) Financial banks resemble those you find by rivers; they control, respectively, the flow of money and of water.¹⁶²

He claims that this pun demands access to a schema whereby we relate both financial banks and river banks to the idea of ‘flow.’ The schema here is slightly more extreme than Langacker’s schema, since Taylor claims that there may be schematic knowledge even among demonstrably homonymic senses of *bank*. Although this example exemplifies human ability to identify similarity even across homonyms, this is not the same as the idea of the semantic invariant in NSM, which is concerned with the semantic invariant within a single sense of a word.

Now, we will return back to NSM and the semantic invariant. To this point, the discussion has focused on refuting claims made against the semantic invariant. What can be said

¹⁶¹ Langacker, *Cognitive Grammar*, 34.

¹⁶² P. Deane, “Polysemy and Cognition,” *Lingua* 75 (1988): 345. Quoted in John R. Taylor, *Linguistic Categorization*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 167.

positively about what it is? Perhaps the most characteristic feature of the semantic invariant is its flexibility: Anything that is semantically invariant can be included in the explication. For instance, values can be expressed by adding ‘it is good/bad when it is like this’ to an explication. The warm connotation that a word like *home* brings can be expressed by a phrase like ‘I feel something good in this place.’ The negative affective meaning associated with apologies can be specified by the phrase ‘I don’t want this.’¹⁶³ All this goes to show how very different ideas can be contained within the semantic invariant; there is no need to rule out ‘connotations,’ or ‘mood’ from being included in the semantic invariant.

Secondly, the semantic invariant of a word may be discerned by examining the range of usages of a word, since it is theorized to be a cognitive reality within the brain of the language user, and this cognitive reality regulates language use. Wierzbicka describes the invariant concept as the speakers’ tacit knowledge that “guides them in their use of that word.”¹⁶⁴ Thus, it is a cognitive entity that is of interest, and therefore, not anything that could be semantically invariant should be involved in a definition. For example, defining *love* in the phrase ‘X loves Y’ should not involve the component X KNOWS SOME THINGS. Even though the component is semantically invariant, since any conceivable person knows something, it is not cognitive in the sense that it guides people’s usage; it is true but irrelevant to *love*. Equally, expert knowledge such as the fact that *sugar* is either collected from sugar beet or sugarcane is true, but irrelevant to normal language usage; that is, we cannot claim that the entity controls language use for the commoner.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶³ For the full explication of *apology*, see Goddard and Wierzbicka, *Words & Meanings: Lexical Semantics across Domains, Languages, and Cultures*, 172.

¹⁶⁴ Wierzbicka, *Semantics: Primes and Universals*, 264.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 261-64.

The cognitive reality of the semantic invariant is also apparent from our awareness of its violation. Violation of the semantic invariant can be just as illuminating as correct uses in this regard. For instance, we may look at the word ‘disappointment.’ It is clear that sentences such as below sound wrong:

22) *I knew he was hopeless, and so I am experiencing disappointment.

In this case, our dissatisfaction with the sentence seems to indicate that there is something being violated by the phrase ‘I knew he was hopeless.’ This can be explained as follows:

‘Disappointment’ has an invariant, I WANTED SOMETHING TO HAPPEN. I THOUGHT THIS SOMETHING WILL HAPPEN. There can be no ‘disappointment’ without a desire coupled with an expectation that the desired thing will come to pass. This is not to say that the content of the desire is always salient in usages of the word ‘disappointment.’ However, it is nevertheless always implicitly present, so that violations of it are unsatisfactory; any violations will be difficult to make sense of. It is in this sense that the semantic invariant contributes to the meaning of a sentence.

But the hypothesis that the semantic invariant is a cognitive entity is not to be interpreted as a hypothesis that the whole explication is processed in every usage. Rather, it is likely that in processing, there may be some chunking.¹⁶⁶ That is, some concepts rely on other complex concepts for their meaning and owing to the vast length of the explications created by such a configuration, it is unrealistic to suppose that whole explications are being processed in usage.

¹⁶⁶ Cliff Goddard, “Semantic Molecules and Semantic Complexity,” *Review of Cognitive Linguistics* 8, no. 1 (2010): 146-47.

For instance, ‘penguin’ has in its explication ‘kind of bird [m]’ where ‘bird’ is a semantic molecule, and it is not likely that in accessing the idea of penguins, people are also processing the meaning of bird at the same time, which itself may be reliant on other semantic molecules like animal [m], feather [m], and so on. In any case, NSM is not committed to a particular theory of language processing. Its predictive power pertains to usages, rather than processing.

In relation to the predictive power of the semantic invariant, it should also be stressed that this applies equally to borders. The semantic invariant predicts the appropriate borderline for what a word is. The border may be clear, or it may be vague, but whichever type of border is present, the semantic explication makes a precise prediction concerning the type of border. This predictive power is not attributable to prototypes in Lakoff’s model of cognitive linguistics. Prototypes can motivate the inclusion of non-central members, but it does not predict what the non-central members will be.¹⁶⁷ In this sense, NSM has more predictive power than Lakoff’s model.

In summary, the semantic invariant is the meaning found in the cognition of the language user in every usage of a word. This meaning accounts for the range of usages of a word, and so it can be discerned through careful examination of the range of usages of a word. Any definition that claims to be semantically invariant is a scientific hypothesis concerning the meaning of a word: By comparing the definition with a range of usages, it is possible to test the hypothesis concerning the semantic invariant of a particular word. The semantic invariant is not a rival theory to the prototype theory, but it incorporates prototype theory, since semantically invariant definitions can predict fuzzy borders; the job of the analyst is to determine what aspects of a

¹⁶⁷ Lakoff, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal About the Mind*, 154.

meaning are susceptible to fuzziness, and what aspects are not by paraphrasing exclusively using semantic primes.

2.4. Summary: What is Meaning?

In this chapter, I have sketched the core principles of NSM. More specifically, I have looked at what semantic primes are, what the syntactic principles of the semantic primes are, and explored some of the characteristics of NSM definitions. In the next chapter, I will move on to applying NSM to the study of Hebrew.

But before closing the chapter, it may be worth reflecting on what we mean by ‘meaning’ in NSM explications. As I have described in this chapter, an explication of a word represents a word’s semantically invariant meaning in cognition. But it is not claimed that this is the only meaning there is to words. For instance, encyclopedic information is also relevant to the study of meaning; the fact that tomatoes were only introduced to Europe in the 16th century is relevant to the meaning of *tomato* in an encyclopedic sense, and the fact may complement NSM explications, although NSM explications themselves are not concerned with such aspects of meaning. Similarly, it is known that people’s motor neurons react when given a sentence like ‘he kicked the ball,’ but again, although such a perspective of meaning is in itself interesting, it is not the focus of NSM explications.¹⁶⁸ Another facet of meaning is the bodily reactions some lexemes prompt: There is experimental evidence that some lexemes cause some sweating, and an increase

¹⁶⁸ See Bergen, *Louder than Words: The New Science of How the Mind Makes Meaning*, 73-92.

in heart rate.¹⁶⁹ Such studies are interesting and may contribute to the full experience of language, but again, NSM is not concerned with this aspect of meaning.

Thus, NSM does not claim to explain every aspect of the meaning of a word. Neither does it claim that its definitions alone are sufficient to understand how humans interact with linguistic meaning. But NSM *does* claim to define words, and it *does* claim to be able to explain cross-linguistic differences in semantics. This twin focus, lexicography and cultural sensitivity, backed up by an empirically established theory, is well suited to be introduced in Hebrew studies to explain various Hebrew lexemes in terms of its own culture. And through application, it is possible to unpack the cultural logic that underlies the usage of various Hebrew lexemes. The specifics of how NSM may be applied to Hebrew lexicography will be the subject of the next chapter.

¹⁶⁹ See Pavlenko, *The Bilingual Mind: The Bilingual Mind: And What It Tells Us about Language and Thought*, 245-98.

Chapter 3: A Procedure for Rediscovering Meaning in Ancient Languages

3.1. Introduction

Semantic theories take for granted that native intuition is available for semantic analysis. In order to apply these semantic theories to the Hebrew Bible, the Hebraist must invent procedures that address our lack of native intuition in analyzing Hebrew. Given the mounting evidence of how diverse languages are in their concepts, any application of semantic theories to the Hebrew Bible without an explanation of how a lack of native intuition could be circumvented is now inexcusable.

In this chapter, I will sketch the nature of the ancient language problem, and then explain why NSM is particularly adaptable to ancient languages, due to its perspective on meaning. I will also show that with an eclectic theory that has NSM at its core, it is possible to recover the meaning of ancient lexemes for a subset of lexemes: Abstract lexemes. Finally, I will explain a procedure that I have created, the successive trimming algorithm. But before addressing the ancient language problem, I will first describe the NSM procedures for semantic analysis in modern languages.

3.2. NSM Procedures for Modern Languages

To this point, we have not yet discussed how NSM discovers the meaning of lexemes in modern languages. First, it should be noted that NSM explications are not of the kind that may be formulated by writing out what first comes to mind, which in fact is often the source of data

for psycholinguistic experiments. According to Wierzbicka, the method through which to discover the meaning is rather, *thinking* and *methodological introspection*:

In the case of words describing natural kinds or kinds of human artefacts, to understand the structure of the concept means to describe fully and accurately the idea (not just the visual image) of a typical representative of the kind: that is to say, the prototype. And to describe it fully and accurately we have to discover the internal logic of the concept. This is best done not through interviews, not through laboratory experiments, and not through reports of casual, superficial impressions or intuitions (either of ‘informants’ or the analyst himself), but through methodical introspection and thinking.¹⁷⁰

The idea of ‘thinking’ in NSM involves the practice of paraphrasing a word in terms of semantic primes. For instance, it is not good enough to ‘think’ about *game* and say it is ‘something we play’ or to say, ‘for example, football.’ These quick definitions may give us instant gratification but in turn they raise the question of whether all *playing* is a *game*, and if not, what components of meaning of *playing* are not consistent with *games*. Indeed, this is why NSM prefers to decompose words into semantic primes, since the primes themselves require no further analysis. The constraint that a word should be reworded in terms of semantic primes forces the analyst to grapple with all the small details ingrained in the word, in such a way that all types of usages are sufficiently explained. And as explications are often several lines long, containing many components, they demand long thought in the scale of hours. As anybody who has gone beyond the theory and tried to define a word in terms of semantic primes knows, the process of finding a definition is challenging, as the analyst is forced to continually refine faulty components until finally, the whole explication seems to fit all kinds of usages.

There is also a democratic element in NSM research; although the linguist may be responsible for guiding the process of arriving at a definition, the informants continue to be

¹⁷⁰ Wierzbicka, *Lexicography and Conceptual Analysis*, 19, emphasis in original.

consulted throughout the process. Quite crucially, when the word under study is in a foreign language, the definition is given to the informant in his/her own language, in terms of semantic primes; there is no need to find a bilingual informant. Thus, although the reliance on informants is similar to most other theories in semantics, the availability of an accurate translation into the informant's language makes NSM somewhat more fit for cross-linguistic study.¹⁷¹

Thinking about a word may seem not to be a procedure of any kind. After all, is it likely that people would arrive at the same conclusions when they explore their consciousness? This is a question that no amount of theorizing can answer; only experience of the procedure can give light to the matter. Wierzbicka stresses that in her experience of this democratic process, she has found that differences in opinion were often apparent rather than real; a deep exploration of consciousness leads to agreement about what a word means. Wierzbicka's confidence in this emergent intersubjective agreement has caused her to conclude that ultimately, the most important thing is not the number of people consulted, but how deeply personal intuition has been explored.¹⁷² Semantics analysis is to be performed personally but confirmed through the intuition of many.

3.2.1. Polysemy in NSM

A discussion of the issue of polysemy has been placed as part of this chapter that primarily deals with procedures, since the way NSM approaches the problem is best understood

¹⁷¹ Wierzbicka, *Semantics: Primes and Universals*, 22-23.

¹⁷² Wierzbicka, *Lexicography and Conceptual Analysis*, 42-43.

in terms of its procedure. But first, it will be useful to distinguish between vagueness and polysemy in terms of NSM.

Vagueness is where a meaning is ‘imprecise,’ and additional information that the listener may want to know about the referent may be missing. For example, if I say, ‘I have a friend,’ it is still vague as to whether the friend is male or female.¹⁷³ In terms of NSM, vagueness is that degree of indeterminacy that is deliberately left in the definition.¹⁷⁴ For instance, the word *game* in English is vague concerning whether it is referring to ‘chess’ or ‘tag.’ I repeat here the explication for ‘game’ for the sake of reference:

1) *game*

- a) many kinds of things that people do
- b) people can say what this something is with the word *game*
- c) someone can say something about something with this word when this someone thinks like this: it can be like this:
- d) people do this something (X), because these people want one thing (Y) to happen, because these people want to feel something good
- e) people can do this something (X) for some time, because they think like this:
- f) I want one thing (Y) to happen, when this something happens I will feel something very good at that moment.
- g) when these people are doing this something (X), these people feel something good. these people are thinking:
- h) I can do many things, because of these things, after these things, this thing (Y) will happen

¹⁷³ Murphy, *Lexical Meaning*, 84.

¹⁷⁴ Wierzbicka, *Lexicography and Conceptual Analysis*, 17.

- i) I want to do these things, not like many other people doing this something (X) do this something (X)
- j) These people know that these people can do some things, can't do other things.
- k) after this one thing (Y) happens, these people do not do this something¹⁷⁵

A breadth of referents is already assumed in component (a), which specifies a *game* is MANY KINDS OF THINGS, and the remainder of the explication works to rule out many things that are not games, while incorporating all things that are *games*. So the sentence “this is a game” may be referring to chess, football, cards, or any number of referents. Thus, in NSM, vagueness does not arise from any lack of specificity in the definition, but as a result of a deliberate attempt to make the explication vague enough, so as to subsume all referents of the word.

On the other hand, **ambiguity** is where one word has more than one sense.¹⁷⁶ There are two types of ambiguity: **homonymy** and **polysemy**. In polysemy, the senses are semantically related (e.g., coat (animal's covering) vs. coat (garment)), whereas they are not for homonyms (e.g., bank (of river) vs. bank (financial institution)). What exactly we mean by ‘relation’ is potentially problematic, but we need not be concerned for now.¹⁷⁷

Of the two types of ambiguity, polysemy will be of central concern here. Polysemy in NSM is not a matter of one word having an indeterminate number of potential referents (i.e., vagueness), but a matter of one word having two or more different explications. A pertinent example may be the explication of two senses of the verb *send* as explained by Goddard:

¹⁷⁵ The explication has been adapted from Wierzbicka, *Semantics: Primes and Universals*, 159.

¹⁷⁶ Murphy, *Lexical Meaning*, 84.

¹⁷⁷ For a more detailed examination of what we mean by “relation” (i.e., the grammatical and historical dimension), see *ibid.*, 87-89.

- 2) person-X *sent*₁ person-Y somewhere (to Z)
- a) X wanted Y to go somewhere (to Z)
 - b) X wanted Y to know this
 - c) because of this, someone said something to Y
 - d) because of this, Y thought something like this: I will go somewhere (to Z)
 - e) because of this, after this, Y moved for some time
 - f) because of this, after this, Y was somewhere else
- 3) person-X *sent*₂ P (e.g., some flowers, a letter) to Z (at this time)
- a) X wanted someone else (Z) to have [m] P
 - b) X knew that Z was somewhere else
 - c) because of this, X did something
 - d) because of this, someone else did something to P
 - e) because of this, P moved for some time after that
 - f) because of this, after this, P was somewhere else¹⁷⁸

The two definitions of *sent* are an example of polysemy. While they are clearly related, one cannot be reduced to the other. Explication (2) *sent*₁, is for sentences like ‘I sent Bill to the office.’ It is noteworthy that the construction is defined through a combination of syntactic and semantic components, such that the object is a person, and a location is involved. The claim is that every usage of *sent*₁ has these semantic components. That is, the definition is semantically invariant, has the right amount of vagueness, has no superfluous components, and so on.

¹⁷⁸ The explication has been adapted from Cliff Goddard, “Polysemy: A Problem of Definition,” in *Polysemy: Theoretical and Computational Approaches*, ed. Yael Ravin & Claudia Leacock (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 138-39. Specifically, component (2c) has been changed from BECAUSE OF THIS, X SAID SOMETHING TO Y to BECAUSE OF THIS, SOMEONE SAID SOMETHING TO Y, since often in sending person Y somewhere, a middle man is used to communicate the sending. Thus, changing ‘X’ to an indeterminate ‘SOMEONE’ makes sense. Also, the subject, ‘X’ was changed to ‘person-X’ to rule out usages like ‘a drill sent hundreds of soldiers into combat mode.’ Also I have added SOMETHING LIKE THIS to component (2d) to imply that the following thought is a prototypical kind.

On the other hand, sentences like ‘I sent flowers,’ cannot be reduced into explication (2). Having ‘flowers’ as Y, perhaps as a metaphorical person, is not enough, since components (2b), (2c), (2d) are violated; flowers cannot know, be spoken to, or think. Although it is likely that the polysemy developed out of metonymy (letters used to be sent with a person), this is not to say the polysemous sense retained the original explication. Instead, a new invariant must have been formed within speakers when the sense of ‘send flowers’ began to be used. Thus, unlike vagueness, polysemy is not a matter of changing the referents within an explication. Rather, it requires a different explication.

For the sake of completion, I mention that *sent*₂ is currently developing further polysemy. With the advent of the internet, there are new phrases like ‘I sent an email.’ With this new usage, components (3d) and (3e) are violated, and so a new polysemous sense must have been created through metaphorical extension. In any case, the three polysemous senses together govern usages of ‘send’ so that no usage violates it, at least until another usage is popularized.

A dimension of polysemy that NSM says little about is the diachronic mechanisms such as metaphor and metonymy that produce polysemy. But NSM does recognize these diachronic mechanisms in terms of synchronic phenomena. For instance, metaphor as a synchronic phenomenon is recognized as a productive device in English: The phrase ‘darkness is my friend’ does not require a polysemous sense of *friend* whereby ‘friend’ is to be explicated by SOMETHING rather than SOMEONE. Rather, it is much more cognitively realistic to suppose that there is a semantic rule in English allowing the use of any word X in the sense ‘Z is like X.’ Such creative usages like ‘darkness is my friend’ are omitted from a list of polysemous senses until it has developed into an independent sense of a word that cannot be explained by ‘Z is like X’, and until it has popularized, although the demarcation of what constitutes ‘popular’ will always be

difficult and will be ignored for now. Thereby, what seems like creative ‘leakage’ from semantically invariant definitions can be explained through general rules governing the language as a whole.¹⁷⁹

In terms of methods, there are multiple methods for identifying polysemy within different strands of semantics. Of the three main methods, the ‘truth theoretical method,’ the ‘acceptability judgment method,’ and ‘definitional method,’ NSM follows the definitional method.¹⁸⁰ Goddard describes the method as follows:¹⁸¹

One assumes to begin with that there is but a single meaning, and attempts to state it in a clear and predictive fashion, in the form of a translatable reductive paraphrase. Only if persistent efforts to do this fail is polysemy posited. The next hypothesis is that there are two distinct meanings, and attempts are made to state both in a clear and predictive fashion, and so the process goes, until the full range of application of the word can be captured within the specified range of senses.

Polysemy, therefore, is a matter of trial and error. One definition is attempted, then two, then three, etc.

Although Goddard does not mention it in his article, there in fact seems to be a further procedure in discovering polysemy. This is the process of identifying the **trigger** that prompts the mind to recognize that a certain sense is meant. A look back at examples (2) and (3) will reveal that on the first line, Goddard seems to be specifying the triggers. The first sense is triggered when the thing sent is SOMEONE and the location is SOMEWHERE. The second sense is when the thing sent is SOMETHING.

¹⁷⁹ See *ibid.*, 144-49.

¹⁸⁰ For a brief explanation of the different methods, see Dirk Geeraerts, “Polysemy,” *The Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics* (Oxford: Pergamon, 1994).

¹⁸¹ Goddard, “Polysemy: A Problem of Definition,” 132.

The example above incidentally had semantic triggers; that is, when it becomes known that the thing sent is semantically a person and a location is involved, the sense in (2) is triggered in the mind, but when the thing sent is SOMETHING, then sense (3) is triggered in the mind. But this may just as equally be syntactic; a certain syntactic frame of a verb may trigger a different meaning. It may also be phonetic; a certain intonation may trigger a different meaning. Identifying the trigger is an important part of identifying polysemy, as it clarifies the conditions that give rise to a certain sense.

3.3. The Ancient Language Problem

There are several problems that are related to semantic analysis of lexemes in the Hebrew Bible. First, many of the procedures that NSM uses to discover the meaning of words are not usable to the same effectiveness for ancient languages. While it is still possible to think about meaning, it is not possible to do so with intuition. In the case of ancient languages, thinking about meaning is not a process of uncovering our own cognition but becomes a process of trying to uncover the cognition of others. It is still possible to consult experts, but it is not possible to confirm definitions with native speakers.

Moreover, if it is true, as NSM claims, that language-particulars permeate the lexicons of various languages, then the problem becomes even more difficult: modern day sentiments and exegetical opinions on words must be treated with suspicion, since our descriptions of Hebrew words inevitably use English words and reflect English patterns of thinking. The very strength of NSM as a theory of both universal and language particular culture seems to be diminished

without a strong procedure that can preserve the otherness of ancient cognition. In the next section, I will outline a procedure that can bypass the ancient language problem.¹⁸²

Secondly, a problem that is unique to the Hebrew Bible is that it is a mixture of different strands of Hebrew. The Hebrew Bible includes texts of various dialects, and various historical periods. The problem is significantly more difficult than the typical periodization—Archaic, Standard, and Late Biblical Hebrew—may suggest.

In a recent publication, Young and Rezetko have called into question the very practice of periodization, since periodization relies on historical criteria (i.e., the return from exile) rather than on linguistic criteria for their dating.¹⁸³ Thus, although it is possible to make generalizations about Late Biblical Hebrew in comparison to Standard Biblical Hebrew, there is no reason to use the conventional tripartite division of period, over, for instance, individual texts as a point of comparison according to Young and Rezetko. Since Young and Rezetko's publication *Linguistic Dating of Biblical Texts*, their work has been criticized for holding diachronic studies to unrealistic standards. This is linked to their misapprehension of diachronic studies in linguistics, as diachronic studies are aware and work under the assumption that variation within single time

¹⁸² It seems to me that there has been no systematic inquiry on how NSM may be applied to ancient languages. Works by Wierzbicka that analyzed ancient works offer little guidance on how these lexemes may be analyzed beyond the normal procedure of NSM minus the native intuition. It is suggested that modern cultures that have inherited the past culture may be used as a hint, and that the exegesis should be careful, but little else is said. See Wierzbicka, *What did Jesus Mean? Explaining the Sermon on the Mount and the Parables in Simple and Universal Human Concepts*, 1-23; Anna Wierzbicka, *Experience, Evidence, & Sense: The Hidden Cultural Legacy of English* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010), 98; Anna Wierzbicka, "Jewish Cultural Scripts and the Interpretation of the Bible," *Journal of Pragmatics* 36 (2004): 575-99.

¹⁸³ Robert Rezetko and Ian Young, *Historical Linguistics and Biblical Hebrew: Steps Toward an Integrated Approach* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014), 49-56.

periods is a norm. But their work has reignited the debate concerning the role of linguistics in dating texts.¹⁸⁴

Although the general principle that languages change is an undeniable fact, not all differences among texts can be attributed to diachronic change. There are other linguistic factors to consider, such as archaisms, style, register, dialect, borrowing, etc. Thus, although variation can be identified, it is often not possible to determine what factor(s) have caused the variation.¹⁸⁵ Additionally, there is the possibility that a given form is a textual corruption that has found its way into a biblical text. In short, analysis of the Hebrew Bible is a philological matter; that is, a discipline covering language, languages, and texts.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁴ See Ian Young and Robert Rezetko, *Linguistic Dating of Biblical Texts*, 2 vols. (London: Equinox Publishing Ltd, 2008). Their approach has rightly been criticized for doing away with diachrony altogether, but their general point that *absolute* dating of Biblical texts through linguistic criteria *alone* is not without problems has been accepted. But as has rightly been pointed out, Young and Rezetko hold diachronic models to wholly unrealistic standards that seem to misunderstand the nature of diachronic analysis; for criticism, see Elan B. Dresher, "Methodological Issues in the Dating of Linguistic Forms: Considerations from the Perspective of Contemporary Linguistic Theory," in *Diachrony in Biblical Hebrew*, ed. Cynthia Miller-Naudé and Ziony Zevit (LSAWS 8; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2012), 19-38; Jacobus A. Naudé, "Diachrony in Biblical Hebrew and a Theory of Language Change and Diffusion," in *Diachrony in Biblical Hebrew*, ed. Cynthia Miller-Naudé and Ziony Zevit (LSAWS 8; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2012), 71; John A. Cook, "Detecting Development in Biblical Hebrew Using Diachronic Typology," in *Diachrony in Biblical Hebrew*, ed. Cynthia Miller-Naudé and Ziony Zevit (LSAWS 8; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2012), 83-85; Robert D. Holmstedt, "Historical Linguistics and Biblical Hebrew," in *Diachrony in Biblical Hebrew*, ed. Cynthia Miller-Naudé and Ziony Zevit (LSAWS 8; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2012), 97-124. Hurvitz, whose approach had directly been challenged by Young and Rezetko over many articles and their volume, seems to have maintained his earlier position; see Avi Hurvitz, "The Recent Debate on Late Biblical Hebrew: Solid Data, Experts' Opinions, and Inconclusive Arguments," *Hebrew Studies* 47 (2006): 191-210, and idem, "The 'Linguistic Dating of Biblical Texts': Comments on Methodological Guidelines and Philological Procedures," in *Diachrony in Biblical Hebrew*, ed. Cynthia Miller-Naudé and Ziony Zevit (LSAWS 8; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2012), 265-79.

¹⁸⁵ Although it has been left unstated here, the study of dialectal variation is still in its infancy. Rendsburg has written extensively about dialectal variation; Gary Rendsburg, "A Comprehensive Guide to Israelian Hebrew: Grammar and Lexicon," *Orient* 38 (2003): 5-35. However, Rendsburg's work has been criticized in that it leans too heavily on dialects to explain evidence, and also because his explanation of how texts can constitute dialects is more problematic than he acknowledges. See Na'ama Pat-El, "Israelian Hebrew: A Re-evaluation," *VT* 67, no. 2 (2017): 227-63.

¹⁸⁶ See James Turner, *Philology: The Forgotten Origins of the Modern Humanities* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 3.

For the purposes of the present work, linguistic variation will only be a peripheral concern, since the present work will be occupied primarily with the meaning of some key words in Ecclesiastes. But since Hebrew is an ancient language, the historical nature of the texts must be acknowledged. Because of the historical nature of the study, two key assumptions are necessary. First, uniformitarianism is assumed; that is, I assume that ancient languages operated in the same way as modern languages, and so principles that apply to modern languages may be applied to ancient languages. For instance, it is assumed that lexemes in ancient languages are decomposable into semantic primes, just like lexemes in modern languages.

Secondly, in agreement with Holmstedt, the principle that each text is “grammatical, interpretable, and pragmatically felicitous within its discourse context” must be operative in applying linguistic analysis.¹⁸⁷ That is, since this is a work dealing with lexical semantics, we must start by trying to explain what modern readers see as inconsistency in the semantics in terms of ancient semantic concepts. But this linguistic analysis should be placed within the larger frame of philological analysis. Where textual corruptions have been suggested, with or without textual support, these too must be entertained. However, since the situation varies on a case by case basis, there can be no procedural ranking among the various factors. Therefore, I will work as a philologist, and acknowledge that various explanations are possible, but I will place an emphasis in suggesting semantic explanations for what we perceive as textual anomalies.

The variation in language among Hebrew Bible texts includes semantic. That is, a meaning may vary by geography, date, and other factors of the like. Therefore, just as phonological, syntactic, and semantic triggers will be considered, so also textual triggers will be

¹⁸⁷ Robert D. Holmstedt, “Issues in the Linguistic Analysis of a Dead Language, with Particular Reference to Ancient Hebrew,” *JHebS* 6, no. 11 (2006): 10.

considered; that is, belonging to a certain text or group of texts is an adequate condition for there to be polysemy, since different texts are written in different linguistic contexts. Of course, ‘textual’ is meant here as a vague term; textual differences in meaning could be a consequence of various factors, such as dialect, register, genre, temporal period, etc.

The aim of the rest of this chapter will be to show that a discovery procedure for ancient lexemes can be created through recruitment of various theories, that is, an eclectic theory. With an eclectic theory, it is possible to rediscover the meaning of a subset of the lexicon, abstract lexemes.

3.4. Abstract Lexemes

The present work focuses on **abstract lexemes**. The term abstract lexeme in linguistics is often used in reference to lexemes with no physical referent, whereas **concrete lexeme** is used in reference to lexemes with a physical referent. Of course, the category is not clear cut, since there are things like ‘song’ that have both dimensions but for now, there is no need to create a hard boundary between the two. We will use the term abstract lexeme heuristically.

In many semantic theories, abstract lexemes are seen as more complex than concrete lexemes. For instance, Lakoff sees abstract lexemes as being more complex than concrete lexemes, since the meaning of abstract lexemes are derived from directly meaningful concrete concepts.¹⁸⁸ This is because directly meaningful things are to be found in experience, and the abstract is seen as being built from what is directly meaningful.

¹⁸⁸ See George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1980), 115; and Lakoff, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal About the Mind*, 268. For a NSM critique of metaphorical definitions of the abstract, see Anna Wierzbicka, “Metaphors linguists live by: Lakoff & Johnson contra Aristotle,” *Research on Language & Social Interaction* 19, no. 2 (1986): 287-313.

On the other hand, NSM sees the directly meaningful units of meaning as semantically primitive concepts. Thereby, there is no need to see experiences with the concrete as producing the abstract, since some of the semantic primes are already abstract. In fact, abstract lexemes prove to be much simpler to explicate than the concrete.¹⁸⁹ Thus, if we mean by ‘complexity,’ the length of definition, then abstract lexemes are often less complex than the concrete. This makes abstract lexemes an ideal object of studies, since they are easier to define than concrete lexemes.

But there are other factors to abstract lexemes that make them easier to define in ancient languages than concrete lexemes. We must look outside NSM to familiarize ourselves with some characteristics of abstract lexemes that distinguish them from the concrete lexemes. In the following sections, I present the insights gained about abstract lexemes and language acquisition from various sub-disciplines within linguistics.

3.4.1. Bilingualism and Abstract Lexemes

Experimentation on bilinguals have shown that abstract lexemes were less similar cross-linguistically than were concrete lexemes. In van Hell and de Groot’s experiment, Dutch-English bilingual subjects sat in front of computer screens, and a word was given in either Dutch or English. The subjects were told that when they saw the word, they had to respond as quickly as possible, by saying a single word that first came to mind. But they were also told that their response had to be in a certain language, either Dutch or English. Some of the words that were given were concrete lexemes, and others were abstract. When van Hell and de Groot analyzed

¹⁸⁹ Wierzbicka, *Lexicography and Conceptual Analysis*, 330.

the results, one of the things they found was that when subjects were working across languages, concrete lexemes were more likely responded to using translational equivalents than were abstract lexemes. The experiment shows that abstract and concrete lexemes can, to an extent, justifiably be seen as two different categories. More specifically, it seems that the translational equivalents of abstract lexemes are less similar across languages than are those of concrete lexemes.¹⁹⁰

But the nature of conceptual overlap is not always simply a matter of more or less overlap. Sometimes, some abstract lexemes simply do not exist in other languages. For example, Pavlenko found that Russians who had never experienced life in the anglosphere could not describe a silent film about *privacy* as portraying *privacy* (we will return to this experiment later in more detail in chapter 7). We do not need to be concerned with the details of the film for now, but what is significant is that Russians did not see privacy: They simply did not have a feel for what it meant and had no lexical equivalent to express *privacy* in Russian. Instead, they used words like ‘embarrassment’ to describe the same visual scene.¹⁹¹ The experiment demonstrates two important things about abstract lexemes. First, it is significant that the lack of a meaning, *privacy*, in Russian was not apparent but real. Therefore, we cannot take for granted that our English concepts are universals, or even that something resembling it would be known by people from other cultural spheres. Again, we are faced with the problem of how we can describe the meaning of words that have no translation equivalents. NSM may help to explain these cross-linguistic lexemes with its universal semantic primes.

¹⁹⁰ Janet G. van Hell and Annette M. B. de Groot, “Conceptual Representations in Bilingual Memory: Effects of Concreteness and Cognate Status in Word Association,” *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition* 1, no. 3 (1998): 193-211.

¹⁹¹ Aneta Pavlenko, “Eyewitness Memory in Late Bilinguals: Evidence for Discursive Reality,” *The International Journal of Bilingualism* 7, no. 3 (2003): 257-81

Secondly, the experiment shows that even the same scene can be interpreted very differently among cultures. That is, there is no inherently given interpretation of a film that is objectively true. Therefore, it is doubtful whether people can simply ‘see’ that a scene is about privacy, justice, happiness, and so on. Rather, there seems to be the need for help from other sources of information to interpret the meaning of a scene successfully. We will see below that this finding converges with findings in psycholinguistics and corpus linguistics. This suggests that people primarily use language to learn the meaning of abstract lexemes, as opposed to simple ostentation (i.e. pointing at something and saying “that is privacy”). But it is also important to notice a blindness that languages produce: It is easy for people to take for granted that just as almost everyone agrees on the nature of a visual scene in their own native community, that the same will apply cross-linguistically. But this assumption is wrong. Any visual scene is a kaleidoscope of information, and extrapolating from the consensus we can form within our own communities concerning the interpretation, and supposing that our intuition may also apply cross-linguistically is dangerous.

3.4.2. Psycholinguistics of Abstract Lexemes

Research has shown that abstract lexemes are best understood as a category that has a range of contributing factors. According to Kousta et al., who follow a long tradition of experiments on abstract lexemes, the following factors can be detected as influencing various tasks in experimentation:

Context Availability: It is easier to conjure up a meaningful context for some words than for others. For example, *love* may conjure up the situation of romance between a man and

woman, *chair* may conjure a physical scene of a chair and a table. Context availability tends to be higher for concrete lexemes.

Imageability: It is easier to retrieve a sensory image for some words than for others. For example, ‘music’ is closer to sensory responses than ‘doctrine.’ Concrete lexemes tend to be more imageable.

Affectiveness: Affectiveness has to do with how emotionally loaded a word is. For example, ‘hate’ is more emotionally loaded than ‘table.’ Abstract lexemes are generally more affective than concrete lexemes.¹⁹²

According to Kousta et al., abstract lexemes have three measurable factors that each lie in a continuum with concrete lexemes. Abstract lexemes tend to have less context availability, less imageability, but more affectiveness. The general lack of context availability and imageability give a disadvantage to abstract lexemes in processing, such that they are recognizably slower than concrete lexemes in processing. But concreteness (how physical something is) alone was found not to lead to any difference in processing speed. In their experiment, Kousta et al. found words that were on the one hand abstract (e.g., curse) and on the other hand concrete (e.g., monsoon), that were equal in the context availability, imageability, and affectivity. They used these words in a lexical decision task (deciding whether something is a word or not as fast as possible). They found that the supposed difference in reaction time between concrete and abstract lexemes vanished in these conditions. The contribution of Kousta et al. is that they show that the category of ‘abstract’ may not be best described through their lack of physicality as has

¹⁹² Stavroula-Thaleia Kousta, Gabriella Vigliocco, David P. Vinson, Mark Andrews, and Elena Del Campo. “The Representation of Abstract Words: Why Emotions Matter,” *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General* 140, no. 1 (2011): 14-34.

often been presumed, and instead, they should be explained by three yet simpler factors. For instance, ‘a curse’ which is not physical, may be higher in context availability, imageability, and affectivity, than a physical thing like ‘a monsoon.’

The lack of a sharp distinction between concrete and abstract lexemes seems to be predicted by NSM, which sees no need to qualitatively distinguish the explications of the two types of lexemes. Of course, concrete lexemes are expected to contain more semantic primes like ON ONE SIDE and TOUCH in comparison to abstract lexemes, but the explications are created out of the same conceptual principles. Being able to predict that there is no sharp divide between abstract and concrete lexemes may seem unspectacular, but other theories like Lakoff’s cognitive linguistics predict there is a qualitative difference between abstract and concrete lexemes, and so Kousta et al.’s results are difficult to explain. More specifically, Lakoff theorizes that abstract lexemes are ultimately grounded in embodied experience of the concrete, since innate concepts do not exist in cognitive linguistics, in opposition to NSM.¹⁹³ For example, ‘time’ is structured through spatial metaphors. Therefore, we talk of time in spatial terms such as moving, as passing, coming, etc.¹⁹⁴ But if we think and conceptualize the abstract in terms of the concrete through metaphor, there should be a *qualitative* difference between these two categories. That is, when we say, ‘I grasped the idea,’ our cognition must somehow distinguish the abstract idea of ‘grasping’ from the physical as something metaphorically derived from a physical idea. But for

¹⁹³ Lakoff, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal About the Mind*, 370-73.

¹⁹⁴ See Zoltán Kövecses, *Metaphor: A Practical Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 37-38. It should be noted that some cognitive linguists believe that time *is* something people can directly experience. See Evans and Green, *Cognitive Linguistics: An Introduction*, 75-87. But nevertheless, the idea that time is structured through spatial metaphor still holds.

such a theory, we expect there to be a difference in reaction times that are derived from the more complex nature of abstract lexemes.¹⁹⁵

Another experiment deals with context availability. Context availability may be thought of as a strategy people use to apply a word to a meaningful situation through association with related things. Of course, for concrete lexemes with real physical existence, context availability would normally be a physical context. For instance, for the word *chair*, a chair may be placed in contexts, such as in combination with a desk. However, for abstract lexemes, contexts are most often verbal rather than physical, as has been shown by Schwanenflugel and Stowe's experiment where they tested whether meaningful sentential context helped to process abstract words faster or not in a word naming task.¹⁹⁶ For instance, for the word 'value' the following sentences were used:

¹⁹⁵ The hypothesis that abstract lexemes are grounded in the concrete was founded on textual findings that abstract lexemes were often accompanied by concrete metaphors. But some psycholinguistic experiments call into question whether the processing of abstract lexemes has anything to do with the experiences or even motorsensory simulation. See Lera Boroditsky and Michael Ramascar, "The Roles of Body and Mind in Abstract Thought," *Psychological Science* 13 (2002): 185-89; Benjamin K. Bergen, Shane Lindsay, Teenie Matlock, and Srin Narayanan, "Spatial and Linguistic Aspects of Visual Imagery in Sentence Comprehension," *Cognitive Science* 31 (2007): 733-64. This is balanced with some experimental results that seem to support the embodied hypothesis. See Meylysa Tseng, Yiran Hu, Wen-Wei Han, and Benjamin Bergen, "'Searching for Happiness' or 'Full of Joy?' Source Domain Activation Matters," in *Proceedings of the Thirty-First Annual Meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society*, ed. Rebecca T. Cover (Berkeley: Berkeley Linguistics Society, 2005), 359-370. But I find the analysis of Tseng et al.'s experiment questionable. In it, they hypothesize that people would be more likely to talk about *joy* than *happiness* while in the process of drinking something, since *joy* is something people are filled with, like the process of drinking is the process of being filled, whereas the same cannot be said for *happiness*. But they fail to identify other factors: *Joy* is something experienced while something good is happening, like drinking, whereas *happiness* has little to do with events presently unfolding, but much more to do with the state one is in. Their lack of acumen in noting differences in the meaning of *joy* and *happiness* except in their metaphorical dimensions seems to discredit their results. For a summary of various experiments on metaphor and the abstract, and the significant challenge left to justify embodied theories of the abstract, see Bergen, *Louder than Words: The New Science of How the Mind Makes Meaning*, 194-222.

¹⁹⁶ Paula J. Schwanenflugel and Randall W. Stowe, "Context Availability and the Processing of Abstract and Concrete Words in Sentences," *Reading Research Quarterly* 24 (1989): 114-26. For a summary of their findings, see Paula J. Schwanenflugel, "Why are Abstract Concepts Hard to Understand?" in *The Psychology of Word Meanings*, ed. Paula J. Schwanenflugel (New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1991), 223-50.

- 4) The increase in bankruptcies occurred due to declining market ____
- 5) You'll never guess that the last word of this sentence is _____¹⁹⁷

Whereas (4) is a meaningful sentential context, (5) is a non-meaningful sentential context. In the experiment, after the computer screen showed a sentence like (4) or (5), it went blank for 0.5 seconds, and then the target word appeared on the screen. In the case of (4) and (5), the target word would be *value*. Subjects had the task of reading the word out as fast as possible, and subjects were timed for how quickly they could read the word out aloud. The experiment was conducted on both abstract and concrete lexemes. It was found that concrete lexemes were processed faster than abstract lexemes in non-meaningful contexts like (5). However, when they were presented in meaningful contexts like (4), the difference in processing speed between concrete and abstract lexemes was eliminated. Moreover, although both concrete and abstract lexemes performed better in meaningful contexts, abstract lexemes benefitted more from sentential contexts than concrete lexemes. Thus, abstract lexemes seem to be dependent on sentential context in a greater magnitude than concrete lexemes. It should be stressed that it is *sentential* context that is important: Simply priming (showing a related word to a subject before showing them the target word) abstract lexemes did not produce the same results, showing that semantic relatedness alone does not increase processing speed.

Related to this emphasis on sentential context is a neuroscientific study by Binder et al.¹⁹⁸ In this neuroscientific study, Binder et al. used MRI to scan the brains of people doing lexical decision tasks (a task of trying to decide as quickly as possible whether a certain chain of letters

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 119.

¹⁹⁸ J. R. Binder, C. F. Westbury, K. A. McKiernan, E. T. Possing, & D. A. Medler, "Distinct Brain Systems for Processing Concrete and Abstract Words," *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience* 17 no. 6 (2005): 905-17.

is a real word or not). They found that there were differences that could be seen in MRI scans of the brain, depending on whether an abstract lexeme was processed, or a concrete lexeme was processed. When a comparison of brain activation was made, it was found that the right hemisphere, related to imagistic processing, was almost completely inactive in the processing of abstract lexemes. Instead, the left posterior inferior frontal area was activated more in abstract words. This is the area that is related to verbal short-term memory and lexical retrieval. They maintain, for complex reasons that will not be recited here, that this had to do with lexical memory rather than semantic memory.

What seems to be happening is the following: In the case of being shown an abstract lexeme, participants, in deciding if a chain of letters is a word or not, are unable to retrieve the semantics of the word itself and are dependent on associated words to work out whether it is a real word or not. So, the first response becomes one of finding associated words. This is not to say that this is where the normal processing of a word ends, since the task given to participants was merely to identify whether something was a word or not. Thus, the results of Schwanenflugel and Stowe, and Binder et al. can be summarized as follows: When context is unavailable, the word identification is a matter of finding associations rather than the purely denotational semantic value of the lexeme. But when sentential context is available, the process of understanding a word is greatly accelerated.

Further psycholinguistic evidence seems to tell more of the story of abstract lexeme processing. Barsalou and Hastings performed an experiment where they asked participants to freely list properties that were characteristic of words for a full minute, as they came to mind.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁹ Lawrence W. Barsalou and Katja Wiemer-Hastings, "Situating Abstract Concepts," in *Grounding Abstract Concepts: The Role of Perception and Action in Memory, Language, and Thinking*, ed. Diane Pecher and Rolf A. Zwaan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 129-63.

This was done for both abstract and concrete lexemes. Barsalou and Hastings noted differences between concrete and abstract lexemes in the way that properties were described. Although both concrete and abstract lexemes were sometimes described in terms of situations, different kinds of situations were listed. Concrete lexemes focused much more on objects, locations, and characteristic behavior. On the other hand, abstract lexemes tended to focus on social elements like people, communication, and social institutions. Also, the content included more beliefs, and tended to have more complex sentences that related the various elements.

Barsalou and Hastings' experiment gives us further insight into how abstract lexemes are processed. Whereas Schwanenflugel and Stowe's and Binder's experiment focused on processing immediately after the subjects were exposed to lexemes, Barsalou and Hastings investigated how participants consciously processed the word for a full minute after exposure to a word. The experiment shows that beyond short term processing, processing of an abstract lexeme moves into a phase of retrieving situations, which tends to have more complex sentences and to be more socially oriented for abstract lexemes than for concrete lexemes. Thus, there are layers of different kinds of processing involved that are unique to abstract lexemes. Of these layers, NSM seems primarily to address the kind of processing that is conscious and reflective, and that happens after the initial processing, since its explications are formed from such reflections on the meaning.

Rolf Zwaan has reflected on Barsalou and Hastings' experiment, and theorized concerning how abstract lexemes function in processing.²⁰⁰ Zwaan argues that a key difference in concrete and abstract lexemes is that concrete lexemes have much more specific sensorimotor

²⁰⁰ Rolf A. Zwaan, "Situation Models, Mental Simulations, and Abstract Concepts in Discourse Comprehension," *Psychon Bull Rev* 23 (2016):1028–34. Cf. Roger G. Schank, *Tell Me a Story: A New Look at Real and Artificial Memory* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1990).

representation (i.e., physical tangibility), whereas abstract lexemes have very little. For example, the word *justice* can have very different sensorimotor representations associated to it according to individual situations, whereas a *car* has similar sensorimotor associations in almost every occurrence. But if abstract lexemes have little to do with sensorimotor associations, what function can they serve in processing? Zwaan argues that abstract lexemes have primarily a framing function. That is, it is virtually empty of any simulation of specific instantiations of ‘justice,’ but rather works as a mold into which sensorimotor meanings can be poured in during the unfolding of discourse. For instance, the idea that a criminal was caught, and that he was prosecuted may be structured by the abstract lexeme *justice*, so that the scenes can be integrated into a larger whole. Thus, for Zwaan abstract lexemes are active in working memory to integrate incoming information, or to organize information that has already been given in discourse. Such a view of abstract lexemes seems to help to explain how NSM explications of abstract lexemes may have to do with texts and their processing. That is, the explication of an abstract lexeme may function as a structuring device that helps people to correctly integrate information.

The preceding discussion has focused on processing. But there is also the question of how an abstract lexeme is learnt and used. Barsalou suggests learning involves a process of abstraction of situations that are related to a lexeme’s current use.²⁰¹ The situations may not be comprehensive but depend on personal experience. When a new usage situation arises, various memories of past experiences can be retrieved and abstracted to create simulations for the present situation. These simulations help to interpret the present situation.

²⁰¹ See Lawrence W. Barsalou, “Abstraction in Perceptual Symbol Systems,” *Philosophical Transactions: Biological Sciences* 358, no. 1435 (2003): 1177-87. I have avoided various specialist terms included in the original article, in order to represent what is being said as simply as possible.

An example may help to understand what Barsalou means. If the word being investigated is 'disappointment,' first, speakers must encounter various usage situations of the word in order to understand the meaning. These situations are interpreted by the subject and stored. Storage is done not like video recordings, but through personal selection of whatever is abstracted as relevant to a word. Such storage naturally prefers repeated experience; this, of course, would include invariant or near-invariant elements. For 'disappointment,' it may be the fact that somebody was desiring an outcome, and so sure of its inevitability, but in the end, the person ended up feeling sad about an unexpected outcome. When enough experiences are stored, people gain the ability to simulate what any section of the whole experience looks like. For 'disappointment,' it may be the ability to re-enact the sad face at the end of the ordeal. Moreover, the events are initially stored in isolation; for 'disappointment,' the scene of someone looking forward to something, the scene of someone encountering an unexpected outcome, and his facial expressions may be stored independently. Also, memory may contain both specific scenes, and generic scenes, even if they do not together form a tight coherent theory of 'disappointment.' But eventually, the memories fuse together in various relationships. In the case of abstract lexemes, these are often temporal and causal relationships between events. For 'disappointment,' the storage would have the event in which the man had an expectation for a good outcome as occurring temporally before the unexpected bad outcome that made the person sad, and the cause of the sad face is the disappointing event that happened, and so on. According to Barsalou, people also have an ability to select one element of the whole abstract scene and to see it as a part of the whole. For instance, the sad face may be seen against the background of intense expectation.

When the subject encounters a new situation of ‘disappointment,’ the subject recalls some, but not all of the stored information, and abstracts from the stored information to create a representation of the meaning of the word online. The information recalled is selected according to relevance to the present situation. Whatever happens to be recalled becomes the meaning processed on that occasion. This abstraction is used in order to interpret the new situation of ‘disappointment.’ In the following encounter with a situation of ‘disappointment,’ the same information may not be recalled, and so the new abstraction may be different from the old. For example, specific experiences that seem related to the present event may be chosen, rather than generic information that may be unhelpful. This is what Barsalou means by a ‘dynamic realization’ of abstraction.

It should be noted that Barsalou takes Wittgenstein’s idea that there is no invariant for granted in his work. Therefore, he believes that abstraction cannot be taking place on *all* previous situations, and must be selecting from a portion, since it is impossible, according to Wittgenstein, to have an invariant that covers all situations. Nevertheless, Barsalou does not abandon the importance of similarity; if he abandoned it completely, then it would be difficult to select the features that are relevant for a word among the infinite features that could be selected for memorization. Thus, although it is not the only type of information retained, similarity is a crucial organizational principle for the mind’s selection of relevant features. Therefore, his idea represents a middle way in seeing the need for similarity being the key organizational principle for memory, and in also agreeing with Wittgenstein’s idea that there is no semantic invariant. In making the meaning of a word relative to the encountered situation, he hypothesizes that no permanent definition exists in the mind, but only various simulations loosely knit together; the

various possible simulations are fundamental, and the meaning of a word is a matter of online creation, and therefore subject to variation, following Wittgenstein.

As already explained, NSM has shown that semantic invariance does exist, and there is no necessity to suggest that only a selection of memory is used for creation of definitions. Nevertheless, Barsalou's theory seems to complement NSM in other ways, in that it is a theory about *how* people acquire a conceptual representation of words when they use them. As we saw earlier, if people are asked to define an abstract lexeme, they list various situations, and come up with provisional definitions that sum up the similarities of the situations conceived as shown by Barsalou and Hastings' experiment. Barsalou believes a similar process is taking place unconsciously in the mind through analysis of encounters and storage of repeatedly encountered features. The idea that initially haphazard pieces of information in encounters can gradually become refined through the organizational principle of similarity, and that these memories can become structured wholes could just as well be applied to NSM. Moreover, the memorization of specific situations encountered in the past is also amenable to NSM, since NSM does not claim that the semantic invariant is the *only* meaning of the word. But Barsalou's idea that some incoherence must be retained in memory, and that such incoherence leads to a family resemblance structure of meaning is unnecessary for NSM.

Barsalou's theory also contributes something to processing in NSM. Although we do not need to suppose that abstractions are dynamic, whether there is productive abstraction that happens before every usage of a word or not is an open question in two ways. First, even if previous encounters with a word may be forgotten if they were not sufficiently recent or frequent, it is expected that memory of enough experiences would successfully create a semantically invariant simulation that would be sufficiently similar to that of other individuals.

Therefore it is possible that people gradually forget old encounters with words, and still be able to know what the invariant is from their recent encounters.²⁰² Second, there is the question of whether all of the components of an explication are necessarily processed to the same extent at every usage; it is possible that some may be given a more prominent role than others in processing depending on the need of the speaker, as theorized by Barsalou's dynamic realization model. For instance, in the sentence 'he is so disappointed that he is crying,' the simulation of the expectation that something good will happen may not need to be simulated. Nevertheless, since people have the ability to simulate things within the context of the whole, we expect that even partial simulation of NSM semantic explications would still create usages that are consistent with the whole semantic explication.

Hastings and Graesser's study is another study about the acquisition of abstract lexemes. It addresses a different aspect of acquisition.²⁰³ Although the experiments they conducted are largely uninteresting for the present purpose, their theory reflects an important insight that has been gained through general psycholinguistic knowledge of how abstract lexemes work. Hastings and Graesser observe that when people are learning abstract lexemes, what people call 'situations' are primarily linguistic, rather than physical. For instance, there is no physical situation which by itself represents an abstract lexeme like 'ignorance,' whereas a physical 'thing' is available for a concrete lexeme like 'chair.' Abstract lexemes, unlike concrete lexemes, need linguistic context to learn. Moreover, the linguistic context is not simply there to 'help' the

²⁰² I use the term "sufficiently similar" as a common range of usages does not preclude differences in semantic invariance among individuals; some people may have narrower definitions (i.e., additional components) in their minds, but as long as they are a minority, they will have little effect on how the next generation learn the meaning.

²⁰³ Katja Wiemer-Hastings and Arthur C. Graesser, "Representing Abstract Concepts with Abstract Structures," in *Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Cognitive Science Society* 22 (2000): 983-89.

physical experience. Rather, according to Hastings and Graesser, the linguistic context is fundamental, not the physical situation.

It has long been known that people are capable of learning some words without physically encountering a certain situation, as long as they have encountered the word within a relevant sentential context.²⁰⁴ Such an idea that linguistic context is the source of understanding for abstract lexemes is coherent with the fact that abstract lexemes are learnt later in child language acquisition; since children cannot learn abstract lexemes without knowing the meaning of other words, they can only learn abstract lexemes later. Moreover, Hastings and Graesser's theory is coherent with the other psycholinguistic studies cited earlier. Abstract lexemes are processed faster in sentential context than outside sentential context; they rely on verbal association rather than images for processing; their meanings are described in complex sentences. This finding also converges with the finding in bilingual studies that shows that there is no obvious interpretation of a physical scene by itself. Thus, perhaps textual help is necessary to help people to learn how to interpret a physical scene. Moreover, this theory concerning the acquisition of abstract lexemes, developed within psycholinguistic research, is similar to the ideas in corpus linguistics, and in fact, corpus linguists have created a very similar model to psycholinguists in order to capture the meaning of abstract lexemes. Each discipline is seemingly unaware of the parallel developments in the other.

²⁰⁴ See Robert J. Sternberg, and Janet S. Powell, "Comprehending Verbal Comprehension," *American Psychologist* 38 (1983): 878-93.

3.4.3. Corpus Linguistics of Abstract Lexemes

Corpus Linguistics can be divided into two types: Corpus-Driven linguistics, and Corpus-Based linguistics. The former is a methodology that stresses the importance of using a corpus to verify the truth of theories. In contrast, corpus-based linguistics is not a methodology, but a theory that claims that the corpus itself should be used to form theories about language.²⁰⁵ The latter will be of concern here.

Corpus-Based Linguistics (henceforth CBL) has often been dubbed ‘neo-Firthian,’ since it follows Firth’s famous maxim about collocation, “you shall know a word by the company it keeps.” As a result of this acute interest in collocations, CBL is particularly good at discovering phenomena that would otherwise escape attention. For instance, the words ‘build,’ and ‘construct’ may seem to be synonymous, but systematic study of collocations (words occurring close to the target word) shows that ‘build’ often co-occurs with ‘house’ whereas ‘construct’ does not. The result may seem obvious once it is stated, but it is difficult to notice without a corpus study. The most influential proponent of CBL, John Sinclair, writes the following concerning the principle that there are many things in corpuses that may escape our attention:

In summary, I am advocating that we should trust the text. We should be open to what it may tell us. We should not impose our ideas on it, except perhaps just to get started. Until we see what the preliminary results are, we should apply only frameworks that are loose and flexible, in order to accommodate the new information that will come from the text. We should expect to encounter unusual phenomena; we should accept that a large part of our linguistic behaviour is subliminal, and that therefore we may find a lot of surprises.²⁰⁶

This commitment to stick to the data gained from the corpus, regardless of whether the results are expected or unexpected, is characteristic of CBL. The same principle may be usefully applied

²⁰⁵ Tony McEnery and Andrew Hardie, *Corpus Linguistics: Method, Theory, and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 5-6.

²⁰⁶ John Sinclair, *Trust the Text: Language, Corpus, and Discourse* (London: Routledge, 2004), 23.

to the study of ancient texts. According to NSM and bilingual studies, the meanings of words vary significantly between languages. This cultural difference is often difficult to overcome. One particular danger is that of imposing our own views of meaning onto the target language (see 2.3.8.2). CBL offers a partial solution: we can allow the text to set out its own contours of meaning, and we must be prepared to accept the results, whether the meaning we arrive at is alien to us or not.

CBL linguists do not take the view that all words can be described by their collocations alone, but since most words have statistical tendencies in terms of collocation, collocations are seen as being an important part of meaning. The process of analysis of words may be exemplified by Sinclair's study of 'naked eye.'²⁰⁷ The meaning of the idiom has a lot to do with the collocations to its left. The collocational pattern was represented as follows by Sinclair:

6) visibility + preposition + the + naked + eye²⁰⁸

According to a study of a corpus, the slot to the immediate left is dominated by 'the' in 95% of the corpus. The second slot is dominated by a preposition. There is some variation: 'with,' and 'to,' are the most frequent. Prepositions make up over 90% of this slot. The third slot is dominated by a word to do with visibility. These include 'see,' 'visible,' 'invisible,' as the most frequent, but also other words like 'detect,' 'recognize,' and 'judge.' The third slot can be characterized as dominated by what Sinclair calls **semantic preference**. This is, as the name

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 30-35.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 32.

implies, a simple preference for a certain meaning to occupy the slot, rather than a syntactic preference (e.g., preposition) or a certain word (e.g., ‘the’).²⁰⁹ Another trend is that somewhere in the context, a word with a meaning of ‘difficulty,’ like ‘faint’ is present in the context (85%). The tendency for words of ‘difficulty’ appearing is called **semantic prosody**. In Sinclair’s view, semantic prosody is to be distinguished from semantic preference since the former is for attitudinal terms, and since Sinclair sees ‘difficulty’ as attitudinal he describes it as having a prosody. Thus, words seem to have sentential patterns that are lexical, syntactical, and semantic. These patterns are so extensive that there must be something in cognition that controls usage in such a way that these patterns surface in usage.

Sinclair’s findings can be explained both in terms of language acquisition and language processing. In agreement to Hastings and Graesser’s theory concerning the importance of linguistic context for learning the meaning of abstract lexemes, CBL seems to give specific ways in which the linguistic context could contribute to learning the meaning of a word; the semantics of a word may not be constrained to the word itself but may influence what kinds of other words appear in the context. More specifically, semantic prosody seems to be governed by a loose rule stating that a word with a sense of ‘difficulty’ should appear in close enough proximity such that its relationship with ‘naked eye’ is recognizable. In terms of NSM, it is likely that something like I CANNOT SEE SOME THINGS WELL IN ONE MOMENT is probably involved, and the fact that this is involved may be learnt from repeated exposure to the contexts, that frequently contain this meaning. It should be noted that semantic invariance does not imply that in order to learn something is invariant, the context must not *always* support the idea of ‘difficulty.’ Rather, what is specified is that no context should contradict the semantic invariant.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

Concerning language processing, Sinclair's findings seem to be close to what Zwaan argues, in that 'naked eye' helps to process and structure the meaning of 'difficulty' and vice versa, as one meaning seems to prepare the reader for the other. In terms of NSM, the explication of 'naked eye' that contains the notion of 'difficulty' may be activated by the concept of difficulty, and the token 'naked eye' may also activate the concept of 'difficulty' if it has not appeared in the context.

Other studies in CBL have also noted similar, and sometimes surprising patterns. Stubbs, for instance, has found that the English word *cause* has a negative semantic prosody, with words like *illness* and *accident* being found as collocations.²¹⁰ Again, the negativity is not found in a particular slot, but spans nearby slots. Other studies have shown that what has been considered as synonyms can be distinguished by their semantic prosody. The words *outcome* (positive), *consequence* (neutral), *aftermath* (negative) each have different semantic prosodies, which were discoverable through corpus study.²¹¹ This seems to confirm that the ideas of semantic preference and prosody are suited to explain various lexemes in the lexicon, and that they are not to be restricted to the description of just a few lexemes.

An important methodological aspect of CBL is its care to note the position of words. Whether a word is one to the left, or two to the left, etc., is important in organizing the data from corpuses. However, when it comes to semantic criteria, there seems to be more leeway. If we return to the 'naked eye' case, words for visibility are also common in the fourth slot to the left and are not limited to the third slot. Moreover, there is further leeway for the concept of

²¹⁰ Michael Stubbs, "Collocations and Semantic Profiles: on the Cause of the Trouble with Quantitative Studies," *Functions of Language* 2, no. 1 (1995): 23-55.

²¹¹ Richard Xiao and Tony Mcenery, "Collocation, Semantic Prosody, and Near Synonymy: A Cross-Linguistic Perspective," *Applied Linguistics* 27, no.1 (2006): 111.

difficulty, which simply seem to occur anywhere beyond the third slot. Thus, in the case of semantics, non-slot-specific observations can be made.

Such a corpus analysis of semantics without specification of slots may be usefully incorporated to the study of ancient languages using NSM. The context can be analyzed irrespective of word slots, to find patterns in the semantics; there needs to be careful analysis of the semantics of surrounding words in the context of a target word.

Furthermore, the idea of semantic primes may be used in the analysis of what CBL calls semantic preferences and semantic prosody. Sinclair analyzed a semantic pattern he saw as based on ‘visibility.’ However, the pattern seems much better described in terms of simpler words, the semantic primes. The semantic prime SEE may be more appropriate in describing the pattern, since all of the words that Sinclair observes (‘visibility,’ ‘judge,’ etc.) can be decomposed to reveal a semantic component SEE. Moreover, semantic prosody needs not to be distinguished with semantic preference, since both can be expressed by semantic primes. The pattern of ‘difficulty to see’ occurring in the context of *naked eye* could be expressed in semantic primes as I CANNOT SEE SOME THINGS WELL IN ONE MOMENT. The words related to *cause* such as *illness* and *accident* can be described as SOMETHING BAD HAPPENED. In such a manner, the textual context may be analyzed to find semantically invariant components that occur in the context; such components may not always occur in the context, but they may occur in some occasions, but not be contradicted in other occasions.

3.4.4. Principles in Language Acquisition

Sinclair’s idea of semantic preference and prosody requires that humans are capable of searching for the meaning of a word in its overall context. This idea is not alien to studies in language

acquisition. The fact that children use collocational information in language acquisition is already an established fact.²¹² But it also seems that children are not simply assuming that a referent of a word will be found in temporal-spatial contiguity, as when somebody points to a dog and says ‘dog.’²¹³ Rather, children are able to detect the intention of a speaker, to track, and to identify the relevant referent. In one experiment, an adult taught children a new word *toma*, which stood for a toy. This was done by enacting a scenario where the adult would first announce ‘let’s find the *toma*’ and then looked for the *toma* that was located in one of five buckets. In one circumstance, the *toma* was found in the first bucket, followed by an utterance ‘ah’ on finding. In the second circumstance, the *toma* was not found in the first four buckets, and the objects found in those buckets were rejected. But in the fifth, the *toma* was finally found and followed by the exclamation ‘ah.’ After each of the circumstances, the children were tested on whether they knew what a *toma* was, by testing if they would correctly respond to questions like “could you pass me the *toma*?” In both circumstances, the children understood the referent of the target word equally well.²¹⁴

The significance of the experiment is that children (and by implication also adults) do not simply employ the tactic of identifying a word with whatever is pointed to next. Rather, they have the ability to hold a word in mind while processing more information. Most importantly, they can note the intention of the speaker, and successfully narrow down what the referent of the speaker is. These findings seem to support the findings of CBL, in that semantic preference and

²¹² Michael Tomasello, *Constructing a Language: A Usage-Based Theory of Language Acquisition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 77.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 68-69.

²¹⁴ Michael Tomasello and Michelle Barton, “Learning Words in Non-ostensive Contexts,” *Developmental Psychology* 30 (1994): 646-48.

prosody need not necessarily be found in the immediate sentential context. Rather, what is fundamental to learning is not the sentence, but the intention of the speaker in saying something; and people are able to leave the target concept in working memory, while isolating the referent and identifying the semantics in relationship to the referent, in order to learn the meaning of a word.

3.4.5. Cognitive Linguistics and Language Learning

NSM has a very limited theory of how words are acquired: Universal semantic primes are simply innate or learned very early in humans, whereas the remainder of the lexicon is a combination of semantic primes. Cognitive linguistic insights can be used to help supplement NSM's theory on language acquisition. One of the key ideas in cognitive linguistics is the idea of **usage-based acquisition**.²¹⁵ According to this theory, people learn language through contact with usages. The main mechanism of learning is through abstraction. The idea of usage-based acquisition stretches throughout all the components of language, including phonology, morphology, and semantics.²¹⁶

Aspects of usage-based acquisition may be applied to NSM. First, it is important to remember that not the whole theory may be applied to NSM, since there are directly contradictory differences between NSM and usage-based acquisition. The most fundamental difference between NSM and usage-based theories is in their attitudes to innates. Usage-based models arose in reaction to generativist notions that language was innate and rule-driven. In

²¹⁵ Strictly speaking, the idea of usage-based acquisition is not original to Cognitive Linguistics and is at least as old as pre-structuralist 'historical-philological' semantics. See Geeraerts, *Theories of Lexical Semantics*, 16.

²¹⁶ See Joan Bybee, *Frequency of Use and the Organization of Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

opposition to generativism, usage-based models build meaning from experience, in line with the general notion of experientialism. This element of usage-based acquisition cannot be reconciled to NSM, which sees semantic primes as innate. However, NSM is not diametrically opposed to usage-based models, since its inventory of innate primes is restricted to sixty-five and their combinatorial properties.²¹⁷

Rather than putting the whole burden of the architecture of languages on innate structures, NSM claims that most everyday words are created from semantic primes, and these are not innate but learned. Therefore, NSM leaves the majority of the lexicon to experiential learning; it is because people in different cultures experience very different things that languages differ drastically. This aspect of NSM is amenable to theories concerning language learning.

With the inclusion of semantic primes into the equation, it is possible to apply the ideas of usage-based acquisition. One important dimension of usage-based acquisition is the importance of **abstraction** through pattern-finding skills in acquisition. The pattern-finding skill is the human ability to identify similarity in both objects, events, and language.²¹⁸ As a result of these skills, humans can create cognitive structures that generalize the patterns that they have found. A second important principle is the idea of **schematization**. This is a special type of abstraction, whereby the abstracted patterns are simplified, and give rise to representations that are much simpler.²¹⁹ Such a process that searches for commonalities is coherent with NSM, since it requires its explications to represent the commonalities.

²¹⁷ See Evans and Green, *Cognitive Linguistics: An Introduction*, 108-47.

²¹⁸ See Tomasello, *Constructing a Language: A Usage-Based Theory of Language*, 28-31.

²¹⁹ Evans and Green, *Cognitive Linguistics: An Introduction*, 115.

Of course, a procedure that incorporates usage-based learning into lexical analysis will have to do consciously what is normally done unconsciously. But presumably, as human language uses general human skills that humans have available, our conscious pattern-finding ability and schematization ability will not differ significantly from our unconscious abilities.

NSM may be helpful in a further step of verbalizing what is meant by ‘cognitive structures.’ The semantic primes provide a metalanguage through which these cognitive structures may be represented, without biasing the representation to any language. And if, as NSM believes, cognition relies on the same inventory of meanings as the semantic primes, then consciously using these primes and trying to replicate the patterns should allow a verbalization of our cognition that goes beyond conventional representations of lexical semantics that simply rely on the English language as a whole.

3.4.6. Summary

In the previous sections, we have surveyed various different linguistic theories. A summary of those theories is provided here:

Bilingualism

-Translational equivalents of abstract lexemes are less similar to one another than are those of concrete lexemes.

-Some abstract lexemes lack altogether an equivalent or near-equivalent in other languages.

Thus, we cannot assume that our English inventory of lexemes is sufficient for analysis.

Psycholinguistics

-There is no qualitative distinction between concrete and abstract lexemes in their processing.

-The initial stage of processing abstract lexemes operates quickly within relevant sentential contexts. It operates slowly in irrelevant sentential contexts. Simply having a synonym to prime the word does not help to the same extent as sentential contexts helps in processing. Thus, relevant sentential contexts are uniquely related to the meaning of abstract lexemes.

-The initial stage of processing abstract lexemes when sentential context is unavailable is not semantic but depends on lexical associations. It does not depend on images like concrete words.

-The next stage of processing (up to a minute) involves coming up with situations where the word may be used. These situations are often social situations and tend to be articulated in complex sentences.

-Abstract lexemes may help people to process long discourse, by instructing them how to organize the incoming information.

-People memorize the situations in which a word was used, and subsequently structure their memories of a word by the criteria of similarity. In the case of abstract lexemes, this often includes causal and temporal chaining of various situations that are thought to be relevant to a word.

-People can learn the meaning of words from texts alone, without encountering a physical situation the word describes. Even when physical situations are experienced, those situations need linguistic help for interpretation.

Corpus Based Linguistics

-A corpus can be used to confirm linguistic hypotheses.

-The text often reveals patterns that are subliminal to native speakers. Thus, trusting the results of textual analysis is important, whether the results derived are intuitive or not.

-Some collocational patterns are semantic, showing that semantic rules also govern the usage of words. But these rules are not slot specific, and the semantics seems to be able to surface flexibly in the text.

Language Acquisition

-Language acquisition often requires linguistic context.

-People are capable of retaining a target word in their mind and inferring from the intention of the speaker what is meant by that word. It is not immediate context that is fundamental for language learning, but the inferred intention of the speaker.

Cognitive Linguistics

-Language is learnt on the basis of language usage.

-The mechanism of learning is abstraction of patterns, and schematization of patterns into a representation.

Significance

A semantic theory that attempts to recover the meaning of ancient lexemes must address two problems. First, we have no native intuition of ancient languages, but instead, we only have texts. Secondly, cross-linguistically, the meaning of abstract lexemes tends to differ more than the meaning of concrete lexemes. The keys to the resolution of these two problems have been provided in the studies cited above. These theories can be integrated together into an eclectic theory about abstract lexemes that addresses the two problems.

The problem of the lack of native intuition may be circumvented in the case of abstract lexemes. As the studies discussed above indicate, the meaning of abstract lexemes may largely be reconstructed from ancient texts, due to their nature: Abstract lexemes are uniquely dependent

on sentential and textual context for their meaning, and their meaning influences their respective textual contexts. This contrasts with concrete lexemes, which rely to a large extent on the physicality of a thing. Since we have the most important carriers of meaning for abstract lexemes, the ancient texts which provide the larger context, it is possible to use these texts to recover the meaning of abstract lexemes.

Therefore, given their textual nature, the questions that remain are how textual meaning is learnt, and how textual meaning relates to cognition. We may assume as the studies above have shown, that: a) humans have an ability to identify semantic patterns and abstract from them; and b) humans have the ability to pay attention to long stretches of text. Then it follows that humans can abstract the commonality among the contexts in which words are used, and that they can learn the meaning of abstract lexemes from texts.

The question of what form cognition takes demands commitment to a theory on cognition. In this study, I will adopt NSM's theory of cognition, and therefore use NSM explications to represent cognition. That is, we assume that people see the commonality among textual information in terms of the simplest unit of thought, the semantic primes, and subsequently store that representation in memory. Furthermore, this cognition can be represented by analysts using semantic explications that use semantic primes.

The second problem, the cross-linguistic nature of the study of ancient lexemes, can be addressed using NSM. The blindness problem can be avoided by using semantic primes in making hypotheses about other languages, and the foreignness of the target culture can be recovered using the CBL maxim 'trust the text.' That is, we may depend on the text to reveal its own semantic patterns.

The unusualness of the logic that will be manifested in the semantic explication is not a problem, contra traditional approaches; in fact, if the concept that results from trusting the text is non-native to us, it is evidence that we have successfully identified a non-native meaning, although whether we have identified the correct non-native meaning is a further question to ask. In any case, what justifies the semantic explication is that it makes sense within the logic of the texts from which it was deduced, to the maximal extent; that is, the explication is that meaning that maximally incorporates the common meanings of all the contexts, and thereby facilitates processing of the text.

One caveat that should be stated is that I do not mean that people learn meanings of abstract lexemes exclusively from texts; the vivid sensory memories that impress themselves in physical scenes may also contribute, as well as our previous knowledge about the world that is ingrained in our culture, etc. But the most important source of information for abstract lexemes, the verbal context, is available even for ancient texts, and it is worth exploring how far the texts can take us.

In a sense, then, the present study is an experiment with the following questions: Are there semantic patterns in the text surrounding abstract lexemes that are semantically invariant? How satisfactory are the explications derived from texts? Do these explications guide us to more insight for reading the text? Ultimately, theorizing about abstract lexemes can only take us so far, and whether we are justified in our pursuit to learn ancient meanings from texts alone is an empirical question.

3.5. The Successive Trimming Algorithm

In the previous section, we have discussed the theoretical principles that underpin an application of NSM to the analysis of abstract lexemes in ancient languages. The principles correspond to the following set of procedures I call the successive trimming algorithm (STA), which I have designed as a set of procedures for rediscovering the meaning of abstract lexemes in ancient languages:

Successive Trimming Algorithm (STA)

- 1) Assume that your native language translation of the target construction is wrong, and instead assume you know nothing about the target construction. Start with any usage of the target construction and assume that the construction's meaning is equivalent to its whole textual context.
- 2) In each successive text where the construction is used, systematically examine the meaning of the textual context. Add to the accrued meaning any contextual meanings that are not contradicted by or irrelevant to previous examples. Shave off, or abstract further from the accrued meaning, any meaning that is contradicted by or is irrelevant to each successive text. Assume that words can be decomposed into semantic primes as set out in NSM: The common denominator in abstraction is to be schematized into semantic primes. Note down the results as an NSM explication.
- 3) Continue (2) until all usages are exhausted.
- 4) If there is a set of texts that share a common trigger that may distinguish these from other environments, apply (1) - (3) for these texts, and determine the common denominator and identify this meaning as polysemous. Tag the polysemous meanings with the respective triggers. The resulting explication is the definition of the target construction.

The algorithm seeks to imitate the human learning process of abstract lexemes. In short, the algorithm is about the impressions we get when we encounter foreign lexemes in reading a

foreign language text. STA instructs us on how to represent those impressions concerning the semantics, and on how to systematically record those impressions in such a way that we can retain and refine those impressions until we are in a position to create a definition. STA guards against the contamination of the pure experience of the text through interference from our own native concepts.

STA begins with the assumption that the target word is totally unknown by the analyst. This step is important, since most biblical lexicography starts with the assumption that the translation equivalent is either equivalent or partially equivalent with the meaning of the target lexeme. However, translational equivalents can be misleading, as we saw in our investigation of *freedom* and *svoboda*; the ability of a translation to describe the same scene does not entail that the translation can define the target construction. In order not to get caught by such problems of blindness, it is necessary to empty ourselves of our own linguistic biases, and thereby to suppress the application of our abstract concepts onto the text.

Instead of allowing our own linguistic biases to set in, STA specifies that it must be assumed that on inspection of the first instance of a construction, the whole textual context is the target construction's meaning. By textual context, I mean an indefinite amount of text, that is perceived by the analyst as related to a word. It should be noted that such a formulation fails to be objective; but there are two good reasons why 'textual context' should be defined so. First, boundaries of a unit are notoriously difficult to define. For instance, traditionally, the definition of a topic and its textual boundary has eluded strict definition.²²⁰ Moreover, even if a discourse boundary is marked explicitly, the boundary does not ensure that the semantics of an abstract

²²⁰ Gillian Brown and George Yule, *Discourse Analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 68-124.

lexeme does not continue into the next section; a love story may be portraying *love* scene after scene, until finally, the protagonist confesses his *love*. Therefore, the boundaries of textual context cannot be defined by any objective means.

Secondly, and more importantly, human language is subjective by nature. Therefore, it is expected that in learning the meaning of a lexeme through text, the first encounter will naturally be difficult to comprehend. We are unsure what the meaning is, and clues concerning the meaning are usually difficult to identify. Thus, STA mimics such a natural process of language learning. But the inability to define textual context should not be confused with the inability of humans to look for relevance. Even if they turn out to be wrong, people are capable of estimating intention and relevance. Moreover, once we encounter more usages of a construction, what consisted of the textual context of the first encounter in step (1) becomes clear. The innate human pattern-finding ability will identify patterns among the first and second text, and anything that is similar will be noted, while any textual context that contradicts, or is irrelevant to earlier usages will be discarded or abstracted further.

In practical terms, for step (1), awareness of whole texts is expected. If we have stored the textual information in our memory, then the relevant textual context will later naturally show itself through careful pattern finding. But extensive reading should be balanced with an estimation of the author's intent in using the target construction, and a careful estimate of the extent to which the meaning of the target construction is relevant. As we have seen in the case of first language acquisition, awareness of the speaker and a constant estimation of intent is an important factor in learning.

A potential problem is that our methodical awareness of the text and our purposeful reading and reflection on the text departs from the process of natural learning. Such a departure

is necessary, if we are to milk the limited textual resources available to the maximum extent possible. Moreover, departure, in the sense that we are doing *better* what is normally done, is permissible and should not be conflated with a procedure that does something *qualitatively different from* what is naturally done in language acquisition.

STA does not assign a certain instance of a construction to start with. This part of the procedure mimics the fact that in our own encounter with new words, the first encounter is randomly selected. Since STA ultimately covers the whole corpus, the order through which analysis is performed does not affect the results. However, there will inevitably be more helpful instances to start with. For instance, if we started an analysis of *hebel* in Eccl 1:2, “*hebel* of *hebels* says Qoheleth,” the context seems to supply very little to the analysis. In practical terms, it may be wiser to start with instances where the context seems to be rich, but such selection is strictly a matter of subjective preference.

Step (2) is the process of trimming the definition. Just as one trims a plant as it grows thicker, things that are unneeded are disposed of, while new insights in the textual context are kept. The principle used for guiding the trimming process is the idea of the semantic invariant; any semantic invariant element is kept, while non-invariant elements are trimmed off via disposal of contradictory and irrelevant elements. The theory used for schematizing (i.e., creating a representation) the meaning is the idea of semantic primes (principle III) and the idea that all words can be decomposed into semantic primes (principle II). Semantic patterns in the textual context may be articulated by using semantic primes. If there is consistently a word for SEE in the textual context as we saw in the ‘naked eye’ example, then this may reflect a cognitive entity SEE in the author’s mind that prompts its appearance in the context. However, it should be noted that the analysis is not merely an analysis of the semantics of the words that surface. Sometimes, the

words that surface may be symptomatic of deeper semantics that govern them. For instance, the surface semantics may indicate deeper motives, underlying feelings, etc. This is what Wierzbicka means by saying that we must think about the meaning. As will later be shown in chapter 6, this process is by no means mechanical. Some of the semantics will be easy to recover, but others require deep thought into the commonality that underlies various words, phrases, and sentences that at first sight seem unrelated.

Some of the details in step (2) may be worth unpacking. First, step (2) requires that the textual context is consulted, and again in step (2), an indefinite amount of related text is meant by textual context. However, as practice will show, it quickly becomes clear what the scope of the semantics of a target construction are, such that the process will not be hampered by too much information. But one should be cautious, and always preempt the possibility of longer stretches of text being involved in the target construction's meaning, since foreign concepts may be more complex than we initially expect them to be.

Successive texts are to be judged by two criteria: contradiction and irrelevance. The idea of contradiction follows from invariance. But much caution is needed to identify contradiction in textual contexts. For instance, "I could easily see it with my naked eye" may seem to contradict the idea that 'naked eye' has to do with the concept of difficulty. However, through our intuition, we know that 'ease' does not contradict the fact that 'naked eye' is used here in terms of difficulty: The point is that something can be seen, despite the potential for difficulty, and it is expected that greater knowledge of the context of the utterance will prove this point. For example, this may be a child boasting about how good his sight is, and the point may hinge on the fact that seeing the object is meant to be difficult. The pitfall in this example seems to lie in the nature of antonyms (for now, all types of opposition, such as polar opposites,

complementaries, etc., will be meant by the term). Antonyms are in fact very similar in meaning to one another. For instance, the ‘married’:‘unmarried’ pair differs only in one dimension, marriage, and is perceived as a pair of complementaries in English. However, ‘wife’:‘bachelor’ differs on at least two dimensions, marital status and gender, but more difference does not imply that there is a stronger sense of antonymy here. Rather, it is not perceived as an antonym because antonymy assumes strong similarity.²²¹ Therefore, antonyms must be examined with care, since much similarity is often entailed.

Contradiction is much more easily identified when two texts are contrastive. For instance, “I couldn’t see the star with the naked eye,” and “I couldn’t see Calais with the naked eye,” can lead to the conclusion that ‘star’ and ‘Calais’ are contradictory, since they share almost no semantic features; the idea of ‘seeing the star’ and ‘seeing Calais’ cannot both be contained in the concept of ‘naked eye’ at the same time, since if the idea of ‘naked eye’ was limited to the situation of looking at ‘the star,’ then its use in the context of ‘seeing Calais’ would seem to contradict the proposal that it is only used for ‘the star,’ and vice versa. Even though they belong in the same slot, which is the object of SEE, we may safely conclude that ‘star [m]’ is not part of the semantics of ‘naked eye.’

The idea of relevance eliminates elements that clearly do not belong to the meaning of a word but cannot be eliminated through contradiction. For instance, if “giraffes are not human” was in the context of ‘naked eye’ on one occasion, it would be difficult to find another text that contradicted it. In fact, we expect no text to contradict such a statement. However, careful inspection of successive texts should tell us that the idea does not play any role in our processing of texts, and that if anything, it is a liability in the explication. Again, there must be caution,

²²¹ See Lyons, *Semantics*, 270-87.

since ‘weird concepts’ may be ingrained in foreign lexemes. But there are limits, and if we cannot perceive something as relevant to a word at any stretch of the imagination, and if successive texts seem to ignore that component, then that component may be deleted. Of course, there may be ancient concepts that create links between things in a way that we cannot preempt, but we must weigh the two possibilities, of whether something is irrelevant, or whether the ancient speakers knew a connection that we did not.

Contradicted or irrelevant elements are to be either shaved off or abstracted. The option of deleting a component completely applies when there is no conceptual overlap in successive texts. The sentence “giraffes are not human” is an example of this, since successive texts will show that the statement of this fact has nothing to do with the idea of ‘naked eyes’ in others. On the other hand, if both a ‘star’ and ‘Calais’ are the object of seeing in successive texts, we may abstract further from the specifics. That is, there is still similarity between ‘star’ and ‘Calais’ in that they are both SOMETHING.

Step (3) makes the study exhaustive of a certain corpus. Being exhaustive is important, as the more usages are studied, the more chance there is for previous definitions to be corrected by new instances of a lexeme, and this is entirely practical for a limited corpus like the Hebrew Bible.

Step (4) of STA is that of identifying polysemy, following the procedures set out by NSM. Sometimes, one may find that two definitions are needed, rather than one. In such a case, the trigger that prompts the change of meaning must be identified, whether it is phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic, or textual. Each of the new definitions must have phases (1) – (3) of STA applied again, to show that they are invariant under a certain trigger.

3.6. Testing STA

STA rests on a number of theories, as discussed in this chapter, with NSM at its core. If the algorithm succeeds in finding textual patterns in ancient lexemes, this in itself will be a remarkable achievement, since it justifies STA, as well as the principles of NSM. Most importantly, success of the algorithm justifies the hypothesis I have put forward in this chapter, the idea that the semantic invariant for abstract lexemes are learnt from patterns in surrounding texts so that we can reconstruct the semantic invariant for abstract lexemes from texts alone.

A slightly different question is whether the semantic explication is adequate. That is, the invariance of the textual context does not entail that the explication that represents the textual context is sufficient. By sufficient is meant the idea that the explication distinguishes the construction from others. For instance, if STA produces an explication of a noun as simply SOMETHING, I CAN DO SOMETHING WITH THIS SOMETHING, then such an explication is not distinct enough to distinguish it from other words, since the same explication could probably apply to a large set of nouns. Explications must have enough detail to justify them as sufficient definitions.

Finally, explications made by STA should not be discredited in a manner such as, “I still prefer translation X of the ancient lexeme Y because it feels right, the explication must be wrong because it just feels wrong.” Such an argument against STA would represent the translational analysis of Hebrew lexemes used in many works, but these fail to address the blindness problem; that is, our intuition should be used only with extreme caution in a strict analysis of foreign lexemes. If STA produces an explication, the only argument against it should be based on specific biblical texts that disprove the explication created.

3.7. Conclusion: Very Close to the Linguistic Ground

In this chapter, we have discussed the nature of abstract lexemes, and we have derived a set of procedures, STA, that is designed to reconstruct the meaning of abstract lexemes in ancient lexemes. I have argued that abstract lexemes are uniquely textual in nature, and that it is possible to reconstruct their meaning with methodical examination of their textual context.

I conclude with a short discussion on a response by Wierzbicka against Jackendoff, who characterized NSM of being “very close to the linguistic ground,” and who complained that it is not concerned with how language relates to other human cognitive capacities, among which are language processing and acquisition.²²² Wierzbicka responded: “When one stays near to the linguistic ground, however, one notices things—small and not so small—which those of loftier gaze may overlook.”²²³ This conversation between the two semanticists seems to encapsulate what differentiates NSM from other recent theories in semantics: NSM has refused to get drawn in to too many conversations about wider human cognition, and has instead fixed its focus on words and their meanings.

In this chapter, I have attempted to introduce some assumptions about cognitive capacities of humans into NSM in order to create a set of procedures, STA, for reconstructing ancient lexemes. However, I consider STA just like its theoretical mother NSM, as being ‘very close to the linguistic ground.’ An analyst using STA is forced to drag his/her head through dense semantic jungles of text to notice small patterns in the text, and to represent these pieces of information using simple words. Such a procedure, I believe, is close to our natural learning

²²² Ray Jackendoff, “Conceptual Semantics and Natural Semantic Metalanguage Theory have Different Goals,” *Intercultural Pragmatics* 4, no. 3 (2007): 411-18.

²²³ Anna Wierzbicka, “Theory and Empirical Findings: A Response to Jackendoff,” *Intercultural Pragmatics* 4, no. 3 (2007): 399-409.

processes, involves in practice no lofty specialist knowledge about this or that cognitive processes, and is uniquely designed so that our native biases will not contaminate the product. And as I will later show, it is capable of capturing generalizations about constructions and their contexts that other theories have overlooked.

Chapter 4: The Nature of Stage-Based Lexemes

4.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, I described the Successive Trimming Algorithm, an algorithm that can be used to rediscover the meaning of ancient abstract lexemes. I argued that aspects of psycholinguistics, corpus linguistics, and cognitive linguistics support the idea that meaning can be derived from texts, so that the historical distance between today and the Hebrew speakers is not an unsurmountable obstacle for semantic investigation.

This chapter will aim to focus our study on a further subset of abstract lexemes, lexemes that have temporally sequenced scenes as part of their meaning. These are words like *trauma* that assumes a sequence of historical scenes in its meaning, i.e., something bad happening in the past, escape from the bad events, but continued effect of the past on the mind, and so on. There are several reasons that we should look at lexemes with temporally sequenced scenes in some more detail. First, *hebel* in Ecclesiastes also has a temporal scene as its meaning. Second, temporal scenes have some characteristics that are worth describing for their own sake. Third, the temporal scene is a convenient place to introduce one further concept, the idea of profiling.

The second aim of this chapter is to do a case study of *the absurd* in Albert Camus' *The Myth of Sisyphus*. The case study will go into some details with the aim of showing that the idea of the semantic invariant and the idea of temporal scenes in words are both identifiable, in modern works as well as ancient works. Also, since *absurd* has been used to describe *hebel* in Ecclesiastes, the case study aims to find an explication for *absurd* that will be a point of comparison with the explication for *hebel* that we will see later.

4.2. Theory: How to Understand Stage-Based Lexemes

4.2.1. Stage-Based Lexemes

The idea of lexemes that denote temporal scenes has been explored in multiple approaches within General Linguistics, whether they be called prototypical scenarios, scripts, or frames. These ideas have also made their way into Hebrew Studies via the pioneering work of Kjell Magne Yri, and some further applications by Ellen van Wolde.²²⁴ But as I will show, NSM explications bring in new dimensions that have not yet been sufficiently explored in these earlier works.

An illustration using Fillmore's explanation of the lexeme *disappointment* may be particularly helpful in grasping the idea:

Disappointment is the way somebody feels who had wanted something to happen, who had reason to believe that it was going to happen, but who has found out that it wasn't going to happen. In order for us to have an understanding of these words, we have to have experienced such feelings as wanting, expecting, etc., and we also have to understand the characteristic historical features of the associated scenes.²²⁵

Fillmore notes the temporal aspect of *disappointment*. In Fillmore's analysis, there are four characteristic temporal stages to *disappointment*: 1) Wanting something to happen, 2) believing

²²⁴ The term "prototypical scenario" is typically used within Hebrew Studies for words that denote temporal scenes. See Kjell Magne Yri, *My Father taught me how to cry, but now I have forgotten: The semantics of religious concepts with an emphasis on meaning, interpretation, and translatability*, and van Wolde, *Reframing Biblical Studies: When Language and Text Meet Culture, Cognition, and Context*, 259-63.

²²⁵ Charles J. Fillmore, "Scenes-and-frames Semantics," in *Linguistic Structures Processing*, ed. Antonio Zampolli (Amsterdam: North-Holland, 1977), 74. A similar analysis of *risk* has also been made by Fillmore (see Charles J. Fillmore, "Toward a Frame-Based Lexicon: The Semantics of Risk and its neighbors," in *Frames, Fields, and Contrasts: New Essays in Semantic and Lexical Organization*, ed. Adrienne Lehrer and Eva Feder Kittay (New York: Routledge, 1992), 75-102. Schank, a prominent cognitive psychologist, pursues the same idea albeit from the perspective of a cognitive psychologist. He states concerning words like "betrayal" that "we have a great many words and phrases in English that are really the names of complex stories and thus serve to standardize particular situations. These words are stories or more accurately, the names of stories." See Schank, *Tell Me a Story: A New Look at Real and Artificial Memory*, 148.

it was going to happen, 3) finding out it wasn't going to happen, 4) feeling something because of this. Indeed, our intuition concerning the meaning of disappointment tells us that this is true; we cannot imagine disappointment without all four temporal stages. We do not normally call something *disappointment* if we did not want something to happen, or if we thought something was not going to happen, or if we did not find out it wasn't going to happen, or if we did not feel something bad at the end; if we did, we would have to call such usage deceptive, precisely because these seem to be semantically invariant elements of the meaning of *disappointment*. Henceforth, I will call such lexemes with temporally sequenced elements encapsulated within them **stage-based lexemes**.

Two key structural qualities of the scene are the sequencing and the bounding. First, the four temporal stages are **sequenced**; the order of items cannot be exchanged. Reworded in terms of the invariant, the explication must be arranged in a certain temporal order, so that a change in the temporal order may be deemed a change in the hypothesis of what the invariant explication is. The temporal sequencing can be integrated into NSM definitions by using the semantic primes, BEFORE, AFTER, TIME~WHEN, NOW, AT THIS TIME, etc. In doing so, the sequence itself is coded into the definition. Related to the issue of sequencing is the idea of **bounding**. In defining stage-based lexemes, the scenes start and end. In the world itself, there is no intrinsic beginning and ending of a scene, as in a movie. Time never stops, and one event is seamlessly followed by the next. However, humans have the ability to devote attention on a particular sequence of events, and to perceive a start and an end, in order to attribute significance to a set of bounded events. Thus, rather than being a property of the world, stage-based concepts are cognitive in nature; there is no such unit called *disappointment* existing in the world apart from humans who perceive it. Such bounding is coherent with NSM explications, since they too are always

discrete: In NSM, although the world is infinitely complex, linguistic meaning is discrete and neatly packed.²²⁶

Fillmore's description of *disappointment* can be reworded into an NSM explication as follows:

1) *Disappointment*

- a) something
- b) people can say what this something is with the word *disappointment*
- c) someone (X) can say something about something with this word when X thinks like this:
 - d) it can be like this:
 - e) someone (Y) wanted something to happen
 - f) after this, because Y saw many things, Y thought:
 - g) this something will happen
 - h) after this, Y saw something
 - i) because of this, Y knew: this something will not happen
 - j) after this, because of this, Y felt something bad.

Two features of the explication above need explanation. Firstly, Goddard and Wierzbicka have suggested adding lines (a) – (d) to explications concerning abstract lexemes.²²⁷ Component (a) reifies the whole scene into a 'thing.' This is needed since disappointment is conceptualized as a noun. Furthermore, in component (b), "something" is connected with the word *disappointment*. Component (c) characterizes the forthcoming scene as a discourse tool. That is, the word is a

²²⁶ For a discussion concerning this aspect of NSM in terms of fuzziness, see Geeraerts, *Theories of Lexical Semantics*, 129-32.

²²⁷ Goddard and Wierzbicka, *Words & Meanings: Lexical Semantics across Domains, Languages, and Cultures*, 210.

way to *say* something about the world; it is a way of thinking that can be imposed onto the world, but is itself inexistent apart from in discourse, unlike, say, a noun like *tree*. Finally, component (d) provides an entry point into the way of thinking, by introducing a prototypical scenario that a real-world event can be compared with in order to understand. That is, when we say something is *disappointing* in our conversation, we are saying an event in our lives can be thought like the scene that follows in (e) - (j).

A second important feature of (1) is that part of component (j) has been underlined to signal prominence. I have added this feature to my explications, and this practice deviates from the standard explications of NSM. The reason that this feature was added was that the definition would seem to be incomplete without signaling that one component of meaning is more salient than the others. I borrow here the term **profiling** from Langacker's *Cognitive Grammar*.²²⁸ The bad feeling is more prominent than the remainder of the scene. Henceforth, I will indicate the component of the explication that is profiled by underlining that component.

The following sentence exemplifies how one component is profiled over the others:

2) After the events, people felt bitter disappointment.

The sentence says two things about disappointment. First, it is something felt, indicating that the latter part of (j) in explication (1) has got a special place in the definition.²²⁹ Secondly, the sentence indicates that disappointment is bitter. Bitterness must be modifying the latter part of (j)

²²⁸ See Langacker, *Cognitive Grammar: A Basic Introduction*, 66-70.

²²⁹ See for a similar analysis of prominence within a definition, Valentina Apresjan, "'Fear' and 'Pity' in Russian and English from a lexicographic perspective," *International Journal of Lexicography* 10, no. 2 (1997): 91. The idea is also similar to the differentiation between assertion and presupposition that can be identified using the negation test. See Levinson, *Pragmatics*, 177-78.

in the definition, not any other part of the definition. It seems, therefore, that not every part of the definition shares equally in terms of prominence in processing the sentence: one part of the definition is more salient, and therefore more available for direct modification.

This is not to say the other parts of the explication are inactive, since *disappointment* depends on the whole temporal scenario for its meaning. The other elements loosely form the background of the word *disappointment*, sometimes with the help of the textual context. This can be shown by referring to actual usages of disappointment in English language. (3) – (5) below are some examples of uses of the word disappointment as found in *the Corpus of Contemporary American English*:²³⁰

- 3) We all hold ourselves to very high standards, and naturally there's a disappointment when something doesn't turn out the way that you want it to.²³¹
- 4) It's a huge disappointment. We didn't execute. It's sad because we definitely had the potential to be a Super Bowl winning team, but it's not going to happen this year.²³²
- 5) Andrew Luck is the bearded face of the NFL's biggest disappointment. Now he's Hard Luck. What happened? Injuries. Bad blocking.²³³

These examples manifest various elements of our explication of disappointment in (1). Sentence (3) shows that something is wanted (component (e): SOMEONE (Y) WANTED SOMETHING TO

²³⁰ The examples were retrieved from the Corpus of Contemporary American English “disappointment”, accessed July 24, 2016, <http://corpus.byu.edu/coca/>. I have picked here three examples where: 1) The contexts were relatively clear, and 2) The context was dissimilar to a previously picked usage.

²³¹ *Washington Post*, May 4th, 2015, A:10.

²³² *Denver Post*, November 1st, 2015.

²³³ Sports, *USA Today*, November 4th, 2015, 4.

HAPPEN), and a failure of that wanting is involved (component (i): BECAUSE OF THIS, Y KNEW: THIS SOMETHING WILL NOT HAPPEN), as well as perhaps an implication that there was a strong expectation that what was wanted would happen, since they held themselves to a high standard (components (f) and (g): AFTER THIS, BECAUSE Y SAW MANY THINGS, Y THOUGHT: THIS SOMETHING WILL HAPPEN). Sentence (4) has the idea that something happening, “we didn’t execute,” led to the expectation being broken (component (h): AFTER THIS, Y SAW SOMETHING), as well as the idea that there was a high expectation for good reason, since they “had potential” (components (f) and (g): AFTER THIS, BECAUSE Y SAW MANY THINGS, Y THOUGHT: THIS SOMETHING WILL HAPPEN). Sentence (5) puts emphasis on the events, “injuries, bad blocking,” that led to disappointment (component (h): AFTER THIS, Y SAW SOMETHING).

The claim being made is not that in texts using the word *disappointment*, the word *disappointment* alone expresses the scene as expressed in (1(a)-(j)). The claim is that disappointment is a name of the whole scene, but that it participates *with* its context to express this scene. Of course, the information given by the word *disappointment* partially overlaps with the context, to the extent that the context describes the temporal sequence that led to *disappointment*. But the very fact that the word is used helps processing the scene, since the word binds together components of a scene into a known, integral, sequenced, and bound whole.

4.2.2. Case Study: The Absurd

I would like to take a look at *the absurd* in Camus' work *The Myth of Sisyphus*.²³⁴ The phrase *the absurd* is a specialized term in Camus' work and due to the obvious parallels with *hebel* in Ecclesiastes, both in its use and as a specialized key term in a contemplative work, it is worth studying in some detail as a case study.²³⁵

Albert Camus' *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (*The Myth of Sisyphus*) was written in 1942 in French. The term *the absurd* is used throughout *The Myth of Sisyphus* and goes back to the French, *l'absurde*.²³⁶ Analyses of what Camus means by *the absurd* have already been made in multiple past works, such as Foley's 1998 publication.²³⁷ However, I do not know of a strictly linguistic analysis of *the absurd*. My analysis here will be linguistic in nature, focusing on the semantic invariant. The present analysis will be carried out on the English translation made in 1955. Although the translation may not be perfect in carrying over all the semantic nuances of the original, it will be shown, from a selection of the most important usages of *the absurd* in his book, that even in translation, the meaning of *the absurd* (English) in Camus' work is consistent. More importantly, it will be shown that there is an invariant element in the meaning of *the absurd*.

The analysis presented here will be partial, so as not to stray down a tangential topic for too long, but I believe that the explication I give below applies equally to the whole book. Although the reader may rightly doubt whether my analysis pertains to the whole book, I wish to

²³⁴ Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, trans. Justin O'Brien (New York: Vintage International, 1955).

²³⁵ See for the idea that *hebel* is a specialized term, Fox, "The Meaning of Hebel for Qohelet," 412.

²³⁶ See Albert Camus, *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1942).

²³⁷ John Foley, *Albert Camus: From the Absurd to Revolt* (London: Routledge, 2008), 5-14.

assure the reader that the usages of *the absurd* I give as examples below have not been picked so as to fit my explications, but rather, the opposite is the case: The explication has been tailored to fit all usages, and the examples are meant as representative usages that help to show readers how stage-based lexemes can be defined using NSM. We begin by looking at two contexts in which the meaning of *the absurd* is described by Camus:

- 6) I am thus justified in saying that the feeling of absurdity does not spring from the mere scrutiny of a fact or an impression, but that it bursts from the comparison between a bare fact and a certain reality, between an action and the world that transcends it. The absurd is essentially a divorce. It lies in neither of the elements compared; it is born of their confrontation.²³⁸
- 7) My reasoning wants to be faithful to the evidence that aroused it. That evidence is the absurd. It is that divorce between the mind that desires and the world that disappoints, my nostalgia for unity, this fragmented universe and the contradiction that binds them together.²³⁹

These explanations of *the absurd* by Camus are difficult to penetrate due to metaphorical language like “divorce.” Nevertheless, it seems that Camus, as far as he was consciously aware, had one idea in mind. The challenge is to articulate this idea that he himself had difficulty articulating, by deciphering what he means, with the help of usages of *the absurd* in various contexts. Below are some further contexts:

²³⁸ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, 30.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, 49-50.

- 8) The world evades us because it becomes itself again. That stage scenery masked by habit becomes again what it is. It withdraws at a distance from us. Just as there are days when under the familiar face of a woman, we see as a stranger her we had loved months or years ago, perhaps we shall come even to desire what suddenly leaves us so alone. But the time has not yet come. Just one thing: that denseness and that strangeness of the world is the absurd.²⁴⁰
- 9) At certain moments of lucidity, the mechanical aspect of their gestures, their meaningless pantomime makes silly everything that surrounds them. A man is talking on the telephone behind a glass partition; you cannot hear him, but you see his incomprehensible dumb show: you wonder why he is alive. This discomfort in the face of man's own inhumanity, this incalculable tumble before the image of what we are, this "nausea," as a writer of today calls it, is also the absurd.²⁴¹
- 10) Likewise the stranger who at certain seconds comes to meet us in a mirror, the familiar and yet alarming brother we encounter in our own photographs is also the absurd.²⁴²

These scenes capture components of *the absurd*, which were not clear in his own explanations. Clearly, *the absurd* includes a temporal scene; what was once known becomes unknown in a moment, due to what Camus calls "evidence" (7). This process is metaphorically expressed as a divorce in (6) and (7). This divorce seems to surface in (8) - (10) as the moment that the known

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 14.

²⁴¹ Ibid., 14-15.

²⁴² Ibid., 15.

becomes unknown, irrespective of whether this is a woman (8), a familiar scene of somebody in the phone booth (9), or the self (10). This process of thinking through the various temporal stages can be continued by looking at the smaller details, and schematized. I suggest the following explication for *the Absurd* in Camus's work:

11) *The Absurd (Camus)*

- a) something
- b) people can say what this something is with the words *the absurd*
- c) someone (X) can say something about something (Z) with the words *the absurd* when X thinks like this:
 - d) it can be like this:
 - e) some time before, X thought like this: I know Z
 - f) because of this X felt something good
 - g) after this X saw something in one moment
 - h) now X cannot say: I know Z
 - i) now X thinks like this: before this, I had thought some things about X
 - j) these things were not true
 - k) X thought these things (I know Z) because X did not want to think like this: I don't know Z
 - l) because of this, X feels something bad

Let us examine the veracity of the explication by comparing the components to usage contexts of *the absurd*. The explication above involves two temporal stages. The first is a stage where somebody feels something good due to knowledge of something (components (e) and (f)). In Camus' world, this knowledge can be any detail about life. For instance, in his discussion of the absurdity of death, Camus writes that "before encountering the absurd, the everyday man lives with aims," and is naïve about death since he thinks "he acts as if he were free," only to

face the fact one day that in death there is no freedom.²⁴³ This naïve and strange ideology that claims that there is freedom forever corresponds to components (e) and (f). Moreover, this stage is accompanied by an implicit idea that this stage of thinking “I know Z” is a better condition: Camus construes this stage with words like “loved” (6), and elsewhere with words like “beauty.”²⁴⁴ On the other hand, it is never portrayed as a period of misery. Thus, it seems that for Camus’ notion of absurdity, it is crucial that the past is the comfortable, and it is what is henceforth bitterly missed.

In the second stage (components (g) –(l)), there is a sudden realization, through which the mind is transformed into a bitter one. The realization (g) is sudden; it happens in a phone booth (9), or as one sees oneself in the mirror (10), or in what he refers to elsewhere as “that moment.”²⁴⁵ Moreover, in (8) this realization is construed in terms of “seeing,” and elsewhere Camus describes this new insight as something of which he is “aware.”²⁴⁶ The moment triggers the idea that what was known is now unknown (h). This is accompanied by a realization that what was once thought true was not true (i, j). Camus construes the past as a “pantomime” (9) and “that stage scenery masked by habit” (8); somehow the past was not true, at least in his thinking. This is also true in his example of death, where he says that the ignorant man “acts as if he were free, even if all the facts make a point of contradicting that liberty.”²⁴⁷ The same is true for Camus’ factory worker, who follows his routine everyday as if he knows how it will benefit

²⁴³ Ibid., 57.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 14.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 57.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

him, only to find out one day that what he thought he was doing was not what he was doing; he realizes he has no idea why he was following the same routine every day, and the principles that guided his life are lost. This process is an “awakening” for Camus, as though the past was less authentic, and altogether an illusion rather than a truth.²⁴⁸

The realization that past assumptions about the world were not true leads also to an inspection of why one thought that way: It is human nature to want not to think “I don’t know Z” (k). As Camus says, “the mind’s deepest desire, even in its most elaborate operations, parallels man’s unconscious feeling in the face of his universe: it is an insistence upon familiarity, an appetite for clarity.”²⁴⁹ Such texts indicate that it is a desire (WANT) that drives humans’ denial of ignorance, and not reason (THINK). This move away from the desired world is an unwelcome change in that is frustrating. Therefore, it is consistently a bad feeling (l), as implied by words like “strange,” “alarming,” and “nausea” (9), and a “divorce” (6, 7); it is a negative thing that happens in separation, not a positive liberation from false beliefs.

The profile of *the absurd* seems to be on component (h), “now X cannot say: I know Z.” For example, in discussing *the absurd*, Camus writes, “Before encountering the absurd, the everyday man lives with aims. . . . But after the absurd, everything is upset.”²⁵⁰ This makes clear that the absurd is located in the realm of NOW, although what happens before and after are also indispensable as the background through which to understand the NOW. Further evidence is found in his own explanations (6) and (7), where he calls *the absurd* “a divorce.” This metaphor seems to be pointing at component (h), since component (h) expresses the fact that the past is no

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 13.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 17.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 57.

longer known. The remainder of the explication seems to be backgrounded in usages. That is, the remainder still plays a crucial role in understanding *the absurd* in each usage, but it is not a salient entity in the contexts of use: A divorce assumes a prior history, but the prior history is not the main focus of meaning assumed in divorce.

This case study shows that there is a consistency in what Camus means by *the absurd*. Whether Camus was conscious of the full extent of his own intuition concerning *the absurd* or not, the consistency of the semantics of “the absurd” in the passages we have just discussed is suggestive of the operation of a semantic invariant in Camus’ cognition. This invariant seems to have guided his writing. Thus, it seems that while the creation of new texts involves the creation of new concepts, once the concept becomes a word, it becomes a fixed entity for the creator of that concept. The specific meaning can vary in every usage, to the extent that the definition has some vagueness, but there are limits. The challenge for the semanticist is to analyze the usages, to discern the invariant structure among the variation, and to describe the semantic invariant that underlie the usages.

This case study was on a modern work. We expect that the same cognitive principles applied in ancient times too; therefore, we endeavor to find a semantic invariant in our analysis of *hebel* in Ecclesiastes.

Chapter 5: Keywords in Ecclesiastes: ‘*āmāl*, ‘*āmal*, *yitrôn*, *yôtēr*, *rə ‘ût rû^aḥ*, *ra ‘yôn rû^aḥ*, and *ra ‘yôn lēb*

5.1. Introduction

The previous chapter concluded the theoretical sections of this dissertation. In this chapter and the following chapter, the theoretical models introduced in the previous chapters will be put to use on analyzing keywords in Ecclesiastes.

The first aim of this chapter will be to define some keywords in Ecclesiastes: ‘*āmāl*, ‘*āmal*, *yitrôn* and *yôtēr*. The most important keyword in Ecclesiastes, *hebel*, will be reserved for the next chapter. The reason for this organization is that it is more difficult to understand *hebel* without first understanding ‘*āmāl*, ‘*āmal*, *yitrôn* and *yôtēr* than vice versa, since these terms constitute important parts of the meaning of *hebel*.

The second aim of this chapter is to show that ‘*āmāl*, ‘*āmal*, *yitrôn* and *yôtēr* have been misunderstood in studies of their meaning. One may be of the impression that the English glosses of these words have given satisfactory readings of Ecclesiastes. However, a reconstruction of the meaning from the ground up using STA tells a different story. I will show that the explications for these keywords are significantly different from our English counterparts, and the impression of correspondence with an English counterpart is misleading. An explanation of this illusory effect that happens in translation will be left to chapter 7.

A third aim of this chapter is to conjecture on the meanings of *rə ‘ût rû^aḥ*, *ra ‘yôn rû^aḥ* and *ra ‘yôn lēb*. The phrases *rə ‘ût rû^aḥ*, *ra ‘yôn rû^aḥ* and *ra ‘yôn lēb* are treated separately, since they are mentioned as afterthoughts parasitically to the main scene of *hebel*. As we will see, this means that it is difficult to discern what aspect of the *hebel* scene is *rə ‘ût rû^aḥ*, *ra ‘yôn rû^aḥ* and

ra 'yôn lēb, as STA fails to discern an explication that is different from *hebel*, and so I will fall back to an etymological study for these constructions.

5.2. Keywords in Ecclesiastes: *'āmāl*, *'āmal*, *yitrôn*, *yôtēr*, *rə 'ût rû^aḥ* and *ra 'yôn rû^aḥ*

Although not to the extent of *hebel*, the keywords *'āmāl*, *'āmal*, *yitrôn*, *yôtēr*, *rə 'ût rû^aḥ*, *ra 'yôn rû^aḥ*, and *ra 'yôn lēb* have themselves received considerable attention in scholarship, due to their importance in understanding Qoheleth. Most notably, some of these lexemes have been used as evidence of a strong socio-economic concern in Qoheleth. Referring to a list of these putatively economically oriented lexemes, Choon-Leong Seow writes that “there can be no doubt that Ecclesiastes presumes an audience that is deeply concerned with economic matters.... Indeed, at times Qoheleth sounds like a pragmatic entrepreneur ever concerned with the “bottom line.”²⁵¹

Seow arrived at his socio-economic orientation of Ecclesiastes by comparing the usage of these terms in Ecclesiastes with the usage of their cognates in economic texts of neighboring cultures. But apart from cognate evidence, Seow does not show that Ecclesiastes itself uses these terms in a commercial sense. If we are to assume, following James Barr, that we cannot take it for granted that Semitic cognates would have the same meaning as the Hebrew, then we must show that the Hebrew usage has the same meaning as the various cognates.²⁵² I will show that, contrary to Seow’s reading of Ecclesiastes, an analysis of usages in Ecclesiastes does not validate a commercial reading for these terms.

²⁵¹ Choon-Leong Seow, *Ecclesiastes: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 18C; New York: Doubleday, 1997), 22.

²⁵² See James Barr, *Comparative Philology and the Text of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 156-87.

5.2.1. Format

One of the aims of this dissertation is to provide a running commentary on how STA may be applied in a verse by verse analysis of Ecclesiastes. The reason for providing such an extended commentary is to show readers an example of how STA would work in practice. Such a demonstration will be provided in an analysis of *hebel* in chapter 6. There I will describe the thinking process that underlies an STA analysis. *Hebel* has been chosen as the subject of a running commentary, since it provides the most interesting account for an STA commentary.

The drawback to an extended commentary is that apart from the procedural insights provided by such an extended analysis, the discussion will consume an extensive amount of space, without necessarily telling us things we cannot know from the resulting explication itself. Therefore, in this chapter, instead of a commentary-style description, I will give the explication of the keywords that I derived using STA with an explanation of how the explication applies to texts. Although such descriptions will not comprehensively show how I derived the explication, they will deal with the logic of the explication, and show that these explications are invariant.

Before moving on to the analysis, I would like to address the layout of translations in what follows, and throughout this work: English translations of a text will precede the Hebrew text, so that the Hebrew text will come below. I consider this to be an important shift from the more usual presentation of having the English translation under the Hebrew text. The practice of putting the source text below the translation follows the conventions established by the linguist Alton Becker, who has worked on South-East Asian languages. In his book, *Beyond Translation*, Becker writes, “What I am attempting here is beyond translation in a simple sense. Translation is not the end point, the final outcome of a philological endeavor. Rather, it is a starting point, the

beginning of moving back, looking back, toward the source of the translation.”²⁵³ Placing the translation above the Hebrew text emphasizes that the translation is not the end-product, but is the entry point to reading the Hebrew text itself. Such an attitude towards the Hebrew text is especially important in this work, since I assume that translations of the text can only approximate the meaning, not replicate it.

Following Becker’s skeptical attitude towards translation, translations of the text will be kept at a minimum. Where a text has no specific difficulties, no translation will be given. But translations will be offered in a difficult text where it would be useful to indicate what my reading is. It is hoped that the quotation of Hebrew with its peculiarities included will help not to obscure the texts by evoking English concepts into readings.

As explanations are made concerning the meaning, I will describe the scene in terms of semantic primes. The semantic primes will be written in small caps (e.g., AFTER) within the main text, whereas they will be written following the conventions given in chapter 2 wherever a full explication is being given.

5.2.2. *‘āmāl* and *‘āmal*

The two lexemes, *‘āmāl* (noun) and *‘āmal* (verb) frequently co-occur with *hebel*, and so their meanings must be defined before we can investigate the meaning of *hebel*.²⁵⁴ The verb occurs in Ecclesiastes 8 times of the total 11 times in the HB, and the noun 22 times in Ecclesiastes of the

²⁵³ Becker, A. L. *Beyond Translation: Essays toward a Modern Philology* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1995), 18.

²⁵⁴ Although related, the noun *‘āmēl* “worker” will not be dealt with here, since it is difficult to deduce its meaning from the occurrences. I assume that it has a similar meaning to *‘āmal* and *‘āmāl*.

total 55 times in the HB. Studies of *‘āmāl* and *‘āmal* have produced multiple glosses, including ‘earning,’ ‘trade,’ ‘work,’ ‘fruit of labor,’ ‘toil,’ ‘product of toil,’ ‘strain,’ ‘income,’ and ‘wealth.’²⁵⁵

There are some ideas that are generally accepted in more recent works: 1) The noun *‘āmāl* is the nominal counterpart of the verb *‘āmal*. 2) The meaning of the noun *‘āmāl* is different in Qoheleth compared to elsewhere in the HB, where the majority of usages mean “trouble.” 3) The uses of *‘āmāl* in Ecclesiastes have a much less negative connotation in comparison to English *toil*, if not completely neutral in terms of connotation. As I will show shortly, these ideas are correct.

We may start a discussion of the meanings of *‘āmāl* (the noun) and *‘āmal* (the verb) with a definition that has been produced through STA. From these definitions, we may work back and

²⁵⁵ Gordon claimed that *‘āmāl* was a borrowing from Babylonian *nêmelu* “earning.” He merely states that Ecclesiastes has a commercial milieu as evidence. See Cyrus H. Gordon, “North Israelite Influence on Postexilic Hebrew,” *IEJ* 5, no. 2 (1955): 87. Rainey wrote a short note pushing back against Gordon’s idea that *‘āmāl* means “earning,” arguing instead that its meaning is “trade.” His argument is mostly impressionistic, apart from a short reference to parallelism with “skill” in Eccl 4:4. See Anson F. Rainey, “A Second Look at Amal in Qoheleth,” *Concordia Theological Monthly* 36, no. 11 (1964): 805. Foresti claims that *‘āmāl* in Ecclesiastes can mean both “work” and “fruit of labor.” This claim is supported both by text internal exegesis, and by etymological studies, where it is shown that Arabic and Ethiopic have the cognate meaning “work.” His sizeable study of the etymology probably represents the most detailed study of the matter. See Fabrizio Foresti, “‘āmāl in Koheleth: ‘Toil’ or ‘Profit,’” in *Ephemerides Carmeliticae* 31 (1980): 415-30. Otzen claims that Ecclesiastes has a neutral meaning “work” for the *‘ml* roots (i.e., a less negative connotation than “toil”). See B. Otzen, “לַמְלָא” in *TDOT*, 11:200-01. Fox claims there is some metonymy so that *‘āmāl* can mean “toil” and “product of toil.” Secondly, he claims that the root in Qoheleth can stand for a wide range of activities that are aimed at some kind of achievement. But he also notes that there is always a gloomy connotation of it being burdensome. See Michael V. Fox, *A Time to Tear Down & A Time to Build Up: A Rereading of Ecclesiastes* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1999), 97-102. Schoors argues that the root means “toil, strain” but also has a second meaning “income, wealth” that has “toil” in its background (i.e., product of toil). See A. Schoors, *The Preacher Sought to Find Pleasing Words: A Study of the Language of Qoheleth* (Leuven: Peeters, 2004), 2:139-45. Ingram suggests that there is deliberate ambiguity, and that *‘āmāl* can mean “work/toil/wealth/earnings” in Ecclesiastes. See Doug Ingram, *Ambiguity in Ecclesiastes* (LBS 431; New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 150-60. Kim suggests that the sense of “earning” may have been a semantic borrowing from Akkadian *nêmelu*, and thus attempts to revive Gordon’s theory. Unfortunately, there is little evidence of interaction with Foresti, Fox, and Schoors, who have dealt with the issue. See Kim, “A Study of the Linguistic and Thematic Roots of Ecclesiastes,” 114-16. Most recently, Weeks has written a short segment on the noun *‘āmāl*, suggesting it can mean both “labor” and “business” in Ecclesiastes. But his essay contributes little new material to the argument. See Stuart Weeks, “Notes on Some Hebrew Words in Ecclesiastes,” in *Interested Readers: Essays on the Hebrew Bible in Honor of David J. A. Clines*, ed. James K. Aitken, Jeremy M. S. Clines, and Christle M. Maier (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013), 379-81.

confirm the correctness of each component via comparison with texts. Their definitions seem to be quite simple:

- 1) Person (X) *'āmal*
 - a) someone (X) does something (Y) of one kind for a long time at many times
 - b) because X thinks like this:
 - c) I want something.
 - d) if I do Y for a long time at many times, this something will be mine.
 - e) because of this, I will feel something good.
 - f) all people live doing something like this

- 2) *'āmāl* of someone (X)
 - a) something (Y)
 - b) people can say what this something is with the word *'āmāl*
 - c) someone can say something about something with this word when this someone thinks like this:

it can be like this: someone(X) is 'performing the act of 'āmāl' [m].

What should be noted is that *'āmāl* (noun) can be defined through the verb; the noun seems to be a simple nominalization of the verb. Of course, the opposite could also be true, so that the verb is defined by the noun, but this is not an important matter for now; what is important is that they share their semantics. There is a further metonymic sense of the noun that we will return to later.

The verb is defined through goal-centered telic action, that SOMEONE DOES FOR A LONG TIME AT MANY TIMES (1a). The fact that it is centered on doing something for A LONG TIME AT MANY TIMES is evident from Eccl 5:17: *hinnē(h) 'āšer rā 'îî 'ānî ṭōb 'āšer yāpe(h) le'ēkōl wālišṭōt wəlir'ōt ṭōbā(h) bəkol 'āmālō šeyya'āmōl taḥat haššemeš mispar yāmê ḥayyāw 'āšer nātan lō hā'elōhîm kî hū' ḥelqō*. The context implies that *'āmāl* is not something done in an

instant, or even a day. Rather the context implies it is something done throughout life repetitively. Moreover, v. 17 contrasts with v. 15-16 where a man performs the act of *‘āmal* to hoard goods, rather than enjoy his daily food, and gets vexed in the process. This again implies a long-term action. This idea of a long-term pursuit is never contradicted or irrelevant elsewhere.

It may be worth noting that in Eccl 3:9, after the so-called catalogue of time, *‘āmal* is not used: *ma(h) yitrôn hā‘ōše(h) ba’āšer hū’ ‘āmēl*. The catalogue includes actions like killing, weeping, and embracing that are clearly momentous actions. This lack of long-term repetitive action may be the logic of why Qoheleth chose to use *hā‘ōše(h)* in Eccl 3:9 over *‘āmal*. We will shortly return to the lexeme *‘āmēl* that is used in Eccl 3:9.

Other contexts show that the DOING is caused by the idea of WANTING SOMETHING and the projection that THIS SOMETHING WILL BE MINE (1b - d). *kol ‘āmal hā’ādām ləpīhū wəgam hannepeš lō’ timmālē’* in Eccl 6:7 may imply that *‘āmāl* is something done for the sake of food and drink. But Eccl 2:10 shows that *‘āmāl* is in fact much more abstract, as Qoheleth’s pursuits in Eccl 2:4-8 include things like making gardens, and acquiring servants that have nothing to do with food: *wəkol ‘āšer šā’ālū ‘ēnay lō’ ‘āšaltī mēhem lō’ māna’tī ‘et libbī mikkol šimḥā(h) kī libbī sāmē^aḥ mikkol ‘āmālī wəze(h) hāyā(h) ḥelqī mikkol ‘āmālī*²⁵⁶ These are also ideas that affirm the projection that BECAUSE OF THIS, I WILL FEEL SOMETHING GOOD (2e). The idea of wanting something apart from food can also be found outside Ecclesiastes too in Jonah’s case, where he had not performed the act of *‘āmal* for the sake of getting a shade from the plant (Jonah 4:10). Although the shade is not food, it is certainly something he knew he WANTED once he had

²⁵⁶ Fox makes a similar point about *‘āmāl*, pointing out that it is very broad and covers various endeavors. He concludes that “all efforts that aim at achievements, even fairly moderate ones, fall in the category of *‘amal*.” See Fox, *A Time to Tear Down & A Time to Build Up: A Rereading of Ecclesiastes*, 101-02.

it, and something that would have been the reason for him to think I WILL FEEL SOMETHING GOOD.

This is not to say that this projection that I WILL FEEL SOMETHING GOOD is always fulfilled in the future. The man who had performed the act of *'āmal* but had no relative to inherit his work, and ruined his daily life is described as follows: *wə 'ē(y)n qēš ləkōl 'āmālō gam 'ē(y)nō lō(') tišba 'ōšer ūlāmī 'ānī 'āmēl ūmāḥassēr 'et napšī miṭṭōbā(h)* (Eccl 4:8). This bad feeling, however, is the man's reflection on his own work from a future perspective, and it does not contradict the idea that he was working because he thought he would FEEL SOMETHING GOOD. Indeed, the man's own question of why he deprived himself from good can be answered: it was because he projected that he would FEEL SOMETHING GOOD, before he realized that his project was harmful. Since the ideas I WANT SOMETHING and the projection that IF I DO Y FOR A LONG TIME AT MANY TIMES, THIS SOMETHING WILL BE MINE are affirmed in some contexts, relevant in all contexts, and never contradicted in any context in Ecclesiastes, these are semantic invariants.

The act of *'āmal* should also be defined as something that all people do: ALL PEOPLE LIVE DOING SOMETHING LIKE THIS. Never is it assumed that the act of *'āmal* is something that only a select group of people do, but rather, there is the assumption that everyone does it as a part of life. For instance, Eccl 2:24a has: *'ē(y)n ṭōb bā 'ādām miššeyyō(')kal wəšātā(h) wəher 'ā(h) 'et napšō ṭōb ba 'āmālō.*²⁵⁷ The assumption in the verse is that *'āmal* is not an act that only some people do, like sky-diving, but that *'āmal* is an act that all people do in life, since the verse addresses all people. Thus, it parallels acts like eating and drinking. Similarly, the initial question

²⁵⁷ The verse is emended to read *miššeyyō(')kal*, following the Peshitta reading *'elā dāne(')kol*. Alternatively, *še* may mean “except” by itself in this context. But regardless of whether we emend or not, the sense here must be that there is no good “except” that people eat, drink, etc.

in Ecclesiastes 1:3, *ma(h) yyitrôn lā 'ādām bəkol 'āmālō šeyya'āmōl taḥat haššāmeš*, seems to be asking a general question about humanity that assumes that 'āmāl is something everyone does.

Another issue is the question of whether there is any negative connotation in 'āmāl and 'āmāl. The idea that there is a negative connotation goes as far back as the ancient translators: LXX translates the terms respectively as *μοχθος* (toil/hardship) and *μοχθεω* (to be weary with toil).²⁵⁸ Targum translates each term with the root *trḥ* meaning “to be a burden” and “to take pains in doing something.”²⁵⁹ This negative translation is further supported by the usages of 'āmāl outside Ecclesiastes that all have a negative connotation, and are often translated as “trouble.” However, it is doubtful that a negative connotation is meant in Qoheleth. Qoheleth’s pursuit of his own fantasies in Eccl 2:1-11 seems to contradict this theory. Qoheleth did his works by following his own desires, and from his own volition, and we would not normally call such works ‘toil.’ Moreover, all of the usages of 'āmāl (the verb), both within Ecclesiastes and outside it, seem not to have a negative connotation. Indeed, this disjunct in meaning tells us that 'āmāl is polysemous. A negative meaning seems to exist outside the book of Ecclesiastes, but this same negativity is not found within Ecclesiastes.

Further data helps to give more perspective to the problem. Another cognate noun, 'āmēl is used in Judg 5:26 in the phrase *halmūt 'āmēlîm* “a hammer of an 'āmēlîm.” Here a translation using “toiler” or “one in misery” seems out of place, and “worker” seems much more natural. The idea of heaviness may be relevant, but this is not the same as a negative connotation of FEELING SOMETHING BAD.²⁶⁰ Similarly, the usage of 'āmēl in Eccl 3:9 has no negative

²⁵⁸ See LSJ, 9th ed., s.v. “*μοχθος*” and “*μοχθεω*.”

²⁵⁹ See *The Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon*, s.v. “*trḥ*,” accessed November 13 2018, <http://cal.huc.edu/>. The Peshitta translates using the root 'ml and so it is not informative on this matter.

²⁶⁰ Foresti, “‘āmāl in Koheleth: ‘Toil’ or ‘Profit,’” 422-23.

connotation, since the actions in the catalogue of time have no negative pattern. Rather, its co-occurrence with the word *hā'ōše(h)* indicates it is a neutral meaning like English 'worker.'

Cognate data also gives us more insight into the meaning of *'āmal*. According to Otzen and Foresti, the cognates in Ancient South Arabic, Classical Arabic, and Ethiopic do not have a negative connotation and seem to mean something akin to English *to work/do*. But in Old Aramaic it seems to have a negative connotation in the sense of 'afflictions' and 'to labor.'²⁶¹ The simplest explanation seems to be that the root *'ml* was originally neutral, and only later acquired the meaning "trouble" in Hebrew. This is the more economical solution, since if the root historically had the connotation of FEELING SOMETHING BAD, then it would have to have become neutral in West and Central Semitic, as well as in parts of the HB. On the other hand, seeing the root historically as having a neutral connotation would require only a later semantic innovation to a negative connotation in Aramaic and parts of the HB. Thus, the neutral connotation in Qoheleth can be seen as a survival of the original neutrality of the root.²⁶²

A final issue is the theory that there exist metonymic senses that mean roughly 'product of labor.' This seems likely to be true. Eccl 2:18, 19 are cases of this second sense. Explication (4) does not work in these cases, since the context specifies that Qoheleth's *'āmāl* is something he must leave (*nwh*) for a person after him (Eccl 2:18), and again the context specifies that Qoheleth must give it away to another who will have power over it (*šlt*) (Eccl 2:19). Since these two contexts seem irreconcilable to definition (2), according to STA, they are to be defined separately. Whether Eccl 2:10, 24; 3:13; 5:17 are also included in this polysemous sense or not is

²⁶¹ See Foresti, "'āmāl in Koheleth: 'Toil' or 'Profit,'" 415-16; and B. Otzen, "אָמַל" in *TDOT*, 11:196-97. For the Old Aramaic, Foresti and Otzen point to Sefire and Barrakib. See KAI 222.A.26 and KAI 216.7-8.

²⁶² See *Ibid.*, 425.

a difficult issue. All of these contexts are about enjoying *‘āmāl*, and it is possible that Qoheleth is saying people enjoy the process of doing, or the product. These may be genuine contexts of ambiguity, as has been recognized by Fox who comments on the difficulty of distinguishing the senses.²⁶³ The definition of this second sense of *‘āmāl* may be hypothesized as the follows:

3) *‘āmāl* (physical) of someone (X)

something (Y)

someone (X) ‘performed the act of *‘āmal*’ [m].

because of this, after a long time, this someone (X) can think: something (Y) is mine.

The definition incorporates definition (2). This is justified since the *‘āmāl* belongs to the person who did the work to gain it. Another issue is the question of how to explain the pronominal suffixes when it occurs with *‘āmāl*. When Qoheleth talks about the person who inherits his *‘āmāl*, he still talks about it as his (Qoheleth’s) *‘āmāl*. This seems to be best explained by hypothesizing that *‘āmāl* can have suffixes indexing someone who does not now have the *‘āmāl*, but historically has connections to the *‘āmāl* through his work. This is similar to a painting, which is still the artist’s painting (Gogh’s painting), even if it belongs to a modern-day millionaire.

In this section, I have correlated the explications of *‘āmāl* and *‘āmal* with various texts, to show how the explications are coherent with the various contexts. The explications of *‘āmāl* and *‘āmal* derived from the text using STA are formed in such a way that the explications are affirmed by texts, but never contradicted or irrelevant. The explications have sentences that are so abstract, that if any one of them, like I WANT SOMETHING, were taken alone, it would be so

²⁶³ Fox, *A Time to Tear Down & A Time to Build Up: A Rereading of Ecclesiastes*, 99-101.

abstract that very many biblical scenes that do not use *‘āmāl* or *‘āmal* would also be explicable with the same line. However, with the combinations of the five or so sentences of the explications, the explications become so specific that it is significant that all scenes using *‘āmāl* or *‘āmal* do not violate the invariant explication.

One way to show that *‘āmāl* and *‘āmal* are sufficiently specific is to show that the translational glosses offered by other scholars do not match our explication. Words like *toil* or *work* or *occupation* are not equivalent in meaning to *‘āmāl*. *‘āmāl* differs in meaning from English *toil* (noun) and *to toil* (verb), since *toil* has a negative connotation unlike *‘āmāl*. Furthermore, *toil* has nothing to do with what I WANT. Rather, one often toils to do what someone else WANTS. We can say “I toiled away at my homework,” where the assumption is that ‘I’ do not want to do it, but my teacher wants me to do it.

‘āmāl and *‘āmal* also differ from English *work* since *work* can be used for *work* that has nothing to do with goals. We can say “My boss has found some work for me” without knowing what it consists of. Of course, this is not to say *work* is never associated with the idea that SOMETHING WILL BE MINE: We can say of a family dream of making a vineyard, “being involved in this work has been my dream.” But the idea that SOMETHING WILL BE MINE is certainly not invariant in English *work*. The same can be said of the verb *to work*, where we can say “I work for my boss” without any commitment to a projection in the future.

Occupation seems to have to do with a kind of thing people do, and also has to do with modern ideas like money. When we say, “my occupation is butcher,” we imply it is something we do FOR A LONG TIME, and something explainable as ALL PEOPLE LIVE DOING SOMETHING LIKE THIS, but we do not imply that we are a butcher because we think I WANT SOMETHING.

Although these words share some similarities with *‘āmāl* and *‘āmal*, they are not conceptually equivalent. Explications (1) – (3) give us a way to describe *‘āmāl* and *‘āmal* in a way that any single English word is incapable of doing. Moreover, this shows that we have defined *‘āmāl* and *‘āmal* sufficiently enough, to the extent that it is possible to start describing the difference between *‘āmāl* and *‘āmal* and English translational glosses.

These explications are not mere pedantic exercises that point out tiny differences between English and Hebrew. As we will see in defining *hebel*, the idea that *‘āmāl* and *‘āmal* contain the idea that I WANT SOMETHING will become crucial for correctly defining *hebel*, as the actors in the *hebel* scenes can now be seen as someone who WANTS.

5.2.3. *Yitrôn* and *Yôtēr*

The lexemes *yitrôn* and *yôtēr* occur frequently in Ecclesiastes; *yitrôn* occurs 10 times in the Hebrew Bible, exclusively in Ecclesiastes, and *yôtēr* occurs 9 times in the Hebrew Bible, 7 of those times in Ecclesiastes. As these words frequently occur in the context of *hebel*, they are crucial for understanding the meaning of *hebel*.

The two lexemes have often been understood in terms of “commercial profit” following Staples’ thesis. There are typically two strands of evidence cited by proponents of the commercial profit view. The first is the evidence of economic texts in Semitic languages that use cognate words in commercial contexts. Akkadian and Aramaic data are often used as evidence.²⁶⁴ But on further examination, the cognate evidence for commercial meanings turns out to have been overplayed. First, there is no Phoenician evidence, although according to

²⁶⁴ See T. Kronholm, “יָתֵר” in *TDOT*, 6:482; Dahood, “Canaanite-Phoenician Influence in Qoheleth,” 220-21, and Seow, *Ecclesiastes: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 103.

Dahood, Phoenician is conjectured to have used it in commerce and it is the likely source from which the commercial sense entered Qoheleth's vocabulary. Second, Akkadian uses cognates in commercial contexts but does not limit its usages to commercial contexts. Third, Aramaic evidence is limited to one attestation.²⁶⁵

The second strand of reasoning provided by proponents of the commercial view is biblical evidence. The claim is that biblical data supports a commercial meaning for *yitrôn* and *yôtēr*. However, the reasoning behind the hypothesis that commercial profit is in the background of these terms has often been limited; Staples merely asserts outright that this is the meaning.²⁶⁶ Schoors observes that *yitrôn* co-occurs with *'āmāl* and so "can only mean that the question is what profit man can have *from* all his toil."²⁶⁷ And so, Schoors' argument is based on his understanding of *'āmāl*. However, the fact that *'āmāl* has little to do with English *toil*, as we saw above, undercuts this argument: It has much more to do with goal-oriented activity, and sometimes has nothing to do with economic activity in Ecclesiastes. A pertinent example is in Eccl 3:9 where the question *ma(h) yitrôn hā'ôše(h)* reflects back on actions like loving and

²⁶⁵ W. E. Staples, "'Profit' in Ecclesiastes," *JNES* 4, no. 2 (1945): 87-96. In agreement to this definition, Lohfink translates most of his glosses as "profit," even in doubtful contexts such as Eccl 2:13 in his commentary. See Norbert Lohfink, *Qoheleth: A Continental Commentary*, trans. Sean McEvenue (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 51. For a summary of views on the matter see Schoors, *The Preacher Sought to Find Pleasing Words*, 423. As for cognates, there are many speculations about the relationship between these foreign terms to Hebrew. Akkadian *wtr* was used in economic contexts, although it was not limited to that context (see T. Kronholm, "תַּרְ" in *TDOT*, 6:482). The sole instance of *ytrm* in Aramaic is in TAD III, 3.11.6, that reads *hyh ytrn ksp' zy qym bšnt 6*, "this was the surplus of silver that remained in year 6." The text comes from late 5th century BCE Saqqara, in an economic text. This shows that Aramaic *ytrm* was used in economic contexts, but whether this was a specialized economic term remains an open question. Dahood has suggested that many Hebrew lexemes were a result of influence from commercial language in Phoenician. See Mitchell J. Dahood, "Canaanite-Phoenician Influence in Qoheleth," *Biblica* 33, no. 2 (1952): 220-21. Braun argues that *yitrôn* is influenced by the Greek οφελος but the theory has been convincingly refuted by Kim (see Rainer Braun, *Kohelet und Die Frühhellenistische Popularphilosophie* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1973), 47-48; Kim, "A Study of the Linguistic and Thematic Roots of Ecclesiastes," 109-13).

²⁶⁶ Staples, "'Profit' in Ecclesiastes," 87.

²⁶⁷ Schoors, *The Preacher Sought to Find Pleasing Words*, 424; emphasis in original.

hating, speaking and staying silent in Eccl 3:1-8. Similarly, in Eccl 2:11, *yitrôn* co-occurs with *'āmāl* but the context concerns Qoheleth's adventures into his fantasies. Although the fantasies are related to wealth, Qoheleth is framing his accomplishments as royal activities, rather than framing his success in economic terms in such a way that we would today call it 'commercial success.' Moreover, if he *was* using *yitrôn* in the sense of 'commercial profit,' surely, there was a commercial profit in Solomon's success. The fact that there is no *yitrôn* in Qoheleth's eyes indicates that the term is not 'commercial' in the text.

In fact, no usage of *yitrôn* is directly concerned with economic matters. Although it may be possible to say that *yitrôn* is being used metaphorically in every instance, it would seem to be a stretch to use the text of Ecclesiastes to argue that *yitrôn* has an economic sense. The only text that could be argued to have an economic tone is Eccl 7:12b. Eccl 7:12a compares wisdom to silver, which is an economic entity: *kî bəṣēl haḥokmā(h) bəṣēl hakkāsep*. Thus, it is possible to argue that wisdom is being metaphorically described as a valued commodity, and that this is to be transferred into the meaning of *yitrôn* in Eccl 7:12b. But here again, *yitrôn* in the second half of the verse seems not to be directly concerned with wisdom in the domain of economics: *wəyitrôn da 'at haḥokmā(h) təḥayye(h) bə 'ālehā*. The point being made has no direct relevance to commercial profit; it is about life in general.

Such analyses that attempt to see commercial meaning in *yitrôn* and *yôtēr* rightly include cognate data in their analyses but fail to verify whether the same commercial meaning is supported by Hebrew itself. Since cognates often differ in their respective meaning, the step of confirming whether the semantic value is the same in one language as that in other languages is a crucial step in analysis. In the case of *yitrôn* and *yôtēr*, the idea that the one Aramaic attestation,

and the occasional Akkadian usage in commercial contexts should overrule readings of the nineteen contexts in the HB must be rejected.

What I am suggesting is not that a commercial reading of *yitrôn* and *yôtēr* in Ecclesiastes is impossible. Rather, I acknowledge that metaphorical readings from commercial domains are possible. But I also acknowledge that an indefinite number of metaphorical glosses for *yitrôn* and *yôtēr* in Ecclesiastes are possible by those standards, since the bar is set low if metaphors are accepted as glosses; it would be possible to suggest that *yitrôn* and *yôtēr* meant ‘passing grade’ by such criteria. We could claim that Qoheleth has an academic ‘passing grade’ mindset that he applies to his analysis of the world, but he cannot find it in the world. Of course, such a proposal would be absurd, but the metaphor could still be read into Ecclesiastes. What I am claiming is that such arguments are not at all fruitful. As I will show, it is much more fruitful to examine the literal meanings of *yitrôn* and *yôtēr* in each context and to compute a meaning that fits every usage of for *yitrôn* and *yôtēr* respectively using STA.

A non-economic gloss suggested for *yitrôn* and *yôtēr* is ‘advantage,’ but this too is problematic.²⁶⁸ For example, if we return to Eccl 2:11, is it true that Qoheleth is saying there is no ‘advantage’ under the Sun? Eccl 2:10 states that Qoheleth had enjoyed the products of his desire, and that this was his portion. To say this is no ‘advantage’ would seem to be contradictory to what Qoheleth has just said, at least in the sense meant in normal English.

²⁶⁸ The idea that *yitrôn* and *yôtēr* means “advantage” is assumed in Fredericks’ argument. That it means this is crucial for his argument that *hebel* means “transient.” See Daniel C. Fredericks, *Coping with Transience: Ecclesiastes on Brevity in Life* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 48-63. The idea that *yitrôn* means “advantage” is also defended by Ingram, although he also argues that there is meant to be some ambiguity around that word. See Ingram, *Ambiguity in Ecclesiastes*, 130-49. Fox claims that it means either “advantage” or “profit,” depending on the context. See Fox, *A Time to Tear Down & A Time to Build Up: A Rereading of Ecclesiastes*, 112-13. Another non-economic gloss is offered by Ogden who claims that *yitrôn* does not have any commercial sense, and that it refers to “an inner contentment which abides throughout an enigmatic life, but it seems also to incorporate the possibility of some experience beyond death.” See Graham Ogden, *Qoheleth*, (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987), 22-26.

Seeing this problem, Fredericks, who attempts to translate *yitrôn* and *yôtēr* consistently as “advantage,” glosses *yitrôn* here as “lasting advantage.”²⁶⁹

Sometimes, the two lexemes *yitrôn* and *yôtēr* are even seen to have the same two senses as one another.²⁷⁰ Meanings such as ‘profit’ and ‘advantage’ are seen to cut across *yitrôn* and *yôtēr*, so that both *yitrôn* and *yôtēr* had these same two different senses (this in addition to, as all commentators agree, the additional adverbial senses of *yôtēr*). The earliest examples of this conflation of *yitrôn* and *yôtēr* are in the ancient translations, where there is no clear distinction between *yitrôn* and *yōter*. LXX consistently uses περισσεια, “surplus” for *yitrôn*, but also uses it twice to translate *yōter* (the other translations of *yōter* are περισσος and περισσευμα). The Targum uses מותר consistently for *yitrôn*, “surplus” and also uses it twice in translating *yōter*, (the other translation for *yōter* is יתיר). The Peshitta is the most complex in its translations: For *yitrôn* it uses ܠܗܘܢܐ, ܝܗܘܐ, ܠܗܘܝܗܘܐ. For *yōter* it uses ܠܗܘܢܐ, ܝܗܘܐ, ܕܠܗܘܝܗܘܐ. Such translations indicate at least that the meanings of no words in the respective languages matches perfectly with *yitrôn* and *yôtēr*, and it may also indicate a less than complete understanding of the meanings, since, as I will show, there are semantically invariant meanings to *yitrôn* and *yôtēr*.

Such a reading of *yitrôn* and *yôtēr* is potentially problematic, since the two different meanings do not line up with the natural fault line, the two phonologically and morphologically distinct words *yitrôn* and *yôtēr*. Instead, the two meanings are viewed as cutting across the two lexemes. This analysis arises due to the criteria of translatability; since “profit” and/or “advantage” seem to be together sufficient translations of both lexemes, they are both attributed

²⁶⁹ Daniel C. Fredericks, and Daniel J. Estes, *Ecclesiastes & The Song of Songs*, 87.

²⁷⁰ See for example, Fox, *A Time to Tear Down & A Time to Build Up: A Rereading of Ecclesiastes*, 112-13.

to each lexeme (this confusion of translatability with meaning will be further addressed in chapters 6 and 7). But STA gives us a way to test whether such an analysis is sustainable. If it turns out that the contexts of *yitrôn* and *yôtēr* contain the same semantic constituents, then the same explication will be derived. But if the semantic contexts differ, then STA will detect the difference and represent the meanings of the two lexemes differently. I will show that this is in fact the case, and that the two lexemes have differences that are explicable in terms of semantic primes but are invisible to translational analyses because both concepts have no conceptual equivalents.

5.2.3.1. *Yitrôn*

I will start with *yitrôn*. An analysis of the lexeme shows that there are a number of semantic features that consistently appear in or are implied in the context of *yitrôn*: 1) There is something called a *yitrôn*, surfacing in phrases that say, “X is a *yitrôn*.” 2) A *yitrôn* is characterized as benefitting someone. 3) An action that produces *yitrôn* is always implied in the context. 4) The agent of the action is the beneficiary of *yitrôn*. I have summarized the features in the table below:

Table 4.1: Summary of Features Associated with *yitrôn*

	Something is <i>yitrôn</i>	Beneficiary	Associated Action
Eccl 1:3	What (<i>ma(h)</i>)	Humans	<i>‘āmal</i>
Eccl 2:11	There is no (<i>’ē(y)n</i>)	Qoheleth	Qoheleth’s activities
Eccl 2:13a	Wisdom	Indeterminate person	Doing things wisely
Eccl 2:13b	Light	Indeterminate person	Doing things in light
Eccl 3:9	What (<i>ma(h)</i>)	A person who works	Doing (<i>’āsā(h)</i>)
Eccl 5:8	A king (who works fields)	The people of the land	Measuring food
Eccl 5:15	What (<i>ma(h)</i>)	A person (who dies)	<i>‘āmal</i>
Eccl 7:12	Knowledge	The possessor of wisdom	Wise/skilled actions

Eccl 10:10	Wisdom	A person with wisdom	Wise/skilled actions
Eccl 10:11	Skill of Charming (implied)	The snake charmer	Charming a snake

Table 4.1 shows that there are at least three components to the meaning of *yitrôn*. Some of these meanings were implied from the context, and others were derived from specific constructions, as we will see below.²⁷¹

First, the word *yitrôn* is always used in the phrase “X is *yitrôn*” or “there is/isn’t a *yitrôn*.” The semantics of the thing that is a *yitrôn* seems to be an instrument. That is, it seems to be something people use to do something. We can thus say the phrase is “X_{instrument} is *yitrôn*.” An example can be found in Eccl 7:12 where Qoheleth observes that “knowledge is a *yitrôn*; wisdom preserves its master.”²⁷² *wəyitrôn da ‘at haḥokmā(h) təḥayye(h) bə ‘āle(y)hā*. In this text, knowledge is used by its master to preserve himself. In this regard, it makes sense that people have traditionally glossed *yitrôn* as ‘advantage,’ since when ‘advantage’ is used in the phrase ‘X is an advantage,’ like ‘his upper-body strength is an advantage in climbing,’ where the entity ‘X’ is also an instrument. The component “X_{instrument} is *yitrôn*” will be expressed with the Semantic Primes, DO SOMETHING WITH X_{instrument}.

Like English *advantage*, *yitrôn* also has a beneficiary. The beneficiary is typically expressed with the construct in the nomun rectum, “*yitrôn* Y_{const},” but it may also be expressed by the preposition *l*. In Eccl 5:8 we have *wəyitrôn ‘ereṣ bakkōl hū(‘) melek ləśāde(h) ne ‘ebād* (reading the *qere*), where ‘*ereṣ*, the nomun rectum, is the beneficiary. In Eccl 5:15b we have a

²⁷¹ The analysis here goes beyond Shead’s *Radical Frame Semantics*, since STA is not bound by sentential boundaries and does not restrict the analysis of a valency to a certain semantic entity. See Shead, *Radical Frame Semantics and Biblical Hebrew: Exploring Lexical Semantics*.

²⁷² LXX and Peshitta read ‘knowledge of wisdom.’ On the other hand, the masoretic accent indicates that the text is to be read as having a disjunct between knowledge and wisdom. The difference between the two readings is semantically superficial, and for the moment, I will follow the masoretic reading.

case with the preposition reading: *ūma(h) yitrôn lō šeyya ʿāmōl lārū^ah*. The *lamed* preposition is likely to be what has traditionally been called the ‘*lamed* of advantage’ or the ‘benefactive dative.’²⁷³ In this case, the beneficiary is the indeterminate third person, expressed by the pronoun. Since the beneficiary benefits from something, we expect something like GOOD THINGS HAPPEN TO SOMEONE or the like to be included in the semantics. Furthermore, since the beneficiary is also someone who possesses *yitrôn*, we expect *yitrôn* IS MINE also to be in the definition.

A final component is the existence of an associated action: *yitrôn* always has an action that produces it in its context. For instance, Eccl 1:3 reads *ma(h) yitrôn lā ʿādām bəkol ʿāmālō šeyya ʿāmōl taḥat haššāmeš*; the action in this scene is *ʿamal*. Some proponents of the view that *yitrôn* means ‘profit’ have suggested that the *beth* in *bəkol* is *beth pretii*.²⁷⁴ But such suggestions depend on one’s definition of *yitrôn*, and what is important is that the use of *beth* does not at all disprove non-commercial definitions of *yitrôn*, since the meaning of the preposition is flexible. For now, we should note that the *yitrôn* is related to some action, so we expect the definition to be framed in terms of SOMEONE DID SOMETHING; to this we may add the instrument and thus produce the phrase, SOMEONE DID SOMETHING WITH *X_{instrument}*.

Having stated the basic components, I now work through some of the texts in a little more detail. Firstly, I suggest that the explication should include the component CAN. Above, I suggested the component SOMEONE DID SOMETHING WITH *X_{instrument}*. However, the construal seems not to be in terms of what people do, but in terms of what CAN be done.

²⁷³ See IBHS §11.2.10d.

²⁷⁴ See for example Robert D. Holmstedt, John A. Cook, and Phillip S. Marshall, *Qoheleth: A Handbook on the Hebrew Text* (Texas: Baylor University Press, 2017), 53. But note that the *beth* in the context of *yitrôn* in Eccl 3:9 and Eccl 5:8 are awkward if the *beth pretii* is pushed too far as an argument for a commercial sense of *yitrôn*.

The addition of CAN into the semantics is supported in Eccl 10:10b: *wəyitrôn hakšêr ḥokmā(h)* (reading the *qere*). The verse has produced several readings: a) The infinitive absolute can be read as an adverbial accusative, “wisdom is a *yitrôn* in working successfully.”²⁷⁵ b) The words *yitrôn* and *ḥokmā(h)* can be read as forming a broken construct chain reading, “The *yitrôn* of wisdom is success.”²⁷⁶ c) The *kethib* can be read to render the infinitive construct *hakšîr* to read “the *yitrôn* of wisdom is to succeed.”²⁷⁷ d) The *qere*, *hakšêr* can be repointed *hakkaššîr* following the Peshitta, to read an adjective “the skilled one” and thus read “the *yitrôn* of the skilled man is wisdom.”²⁷⁸ But whichever of the readings is adopted, the point being made is that wisdom is an instrument that can be used by those who have it: It is not that the wise always succeed, but that they CAN do so. This contrasts to v.8-10a, which is concerned with the potential adverse effects of not possessing wisdom; the idea of potentiality is articulated by a series of imperfects, for instance in v. 8: “a person who digs a pit can fall (*yippōl*) in it, as for the one who breaks through a wall, a snake can bite him (*yiššakennū*).” These misfortunes are not every day events and may never be encountered. But wisdom (or “skill”) CAN help people evade these misfortunes. Therefore, the point is that SOMEONE CAN DO SOMETHING WITH X_{instrument}.

Similarly, Eccl 7:12b supports the addition of CAN: *wəyitrôn da ‘at haḥokmā(h) təḥayye(h) bə ‘āle(y)hā*. The point is not that knowledge and wisdom always prolongs life, but that they are entities that CAN do so, depending on whether it is applied or not.

²⁷⁵ See Podechard, *L'Ecclésiaste*, 432.

²⁷⁶ See Longman, *The Book of Ecclesiastes*, 243-45.

²⁷⁷ Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, 324.

²⁷⁸ Fox, *A Time to Tear Down & A Time to Build Up: A Rereading of Ecclesiastes*, 305-06.

Some contexts indicate that *yitrôn* is construed as not being like the consequence of having other things; namely, the *yitrôn* of wisdom is different from folly, and the *yitrôn* of light is different from that of darkness according to Eccl 2:13: *wārā'îti 'āni šeyēš yitrôn laḥokmā(h) min hassiklūt kî(y)trōn hā'ōr min haḥōšek*.²⁷⁹ The meaning of Eccl 2:13 is clarified in Eccl 2:14a: *heḥākām 'ē(y)nā(y)w bārō(')šō wəhakksîl baḥḥōšek hōlēk*. That is, there is a difference between how the wise one and the fool live; whereas the wise one can see where he is going, the fool cannot. Therefore, there is an inherent comparison involved in this text. This comparative aspect is never contradicted or irrelevant. Moreover, seeing an implicit comparison makes other texts like Eccl 7:12; 10:10, 11 more intelligible. For example, Eccl 10:10b reads in the sense, “wisdom is a *yitrôn* in creating success,” *wəyitrôn hakšêr ḥokmā(h)*. This can be read in comparison to the one who has no wisdom and gets bitten by a snake or falls in the pit (v. 8). In fact, this reading improves the cohesion between the various scenes portrayed in Eccl 10:8-10. Therefore, we hypothesize the following semantics: **SOMEONE CAN DO SOMETHING WITH X_{instrument} NOT LIKE OTHER PEOPLE DO THIS SOMETHING WITH SOMETHING ELSE**. Such an inherent comparison is akin to the semantics of English *advantage*, which is always an ‘advantage over’ another, and may explain why that gloss seems to have gained some favor among commentators.

That *yitrôn* has to do with GOOD THINGS WILL HAPPEN is evident. In Eccl 7:12b we have *wəyitrôn da 'at haḥokmā(h) təḥayye(h) bə 'āle(y)hā*. The fact that someone can do things with

²⁷⁹ If we read here the preposition *k*, there is an unusual collapse of *kəyi-* > *kî*. But this would not be the only example, since this also happens in Jer. 25:36 and Job 29:21. The best explanation may be phonological: Initial *y-* may have been faint in pronunciation, leading to the current Masoretic vocalization. The weakness of initial *y-* is indicated by the sporadic interchange of *alef* and *yod* in Hebrew (both early and late) that suggests that *yod* was at best only weakly pronounced. See GKC §24e and C. D. Isbell, “Initial 'alef-yod Interchange and Selected Biblical Passages,” *JNES* 37, no. 3 (1978): 227-236. Another possibility is that this is *kî* “because” that has merged with *yitrôn* through epenthesis of *yod* and vowel sandhi. Semantically, both options are viable, as both a similarity and causal connection is consistent with the context.

wisdom is a benefit to that person. At other times, the good thing is construed as an immunity from bad things. Eccl 10:11 reads: *'im yiššōk hannāhāš bəlō(') lāḥaš wə'ē(y)n yitrôn ləba 'al hallāšōn*. Most commentators agree that what is being portrayed here is the practice of snake charming, and that *ba 'al hallāšōn* is pointing to the charmer and not the snake (cf. Isa 3:3; Jer 8:17; Psa 58:6).²⁸⁰ Similarly, LXX (ἐπαδοντι) and Peshitta (*lāḥōšā(')*) also read *ba 'al hallāšōn* as referring to a charmer. What exactly is the nature of the mistake made by the charmer is of some more controversy, since the particles *bəlō(')* can mean either 'before' (Job 15:32; Eccl 7:17) or 'without' (Prov 19:2; Num 35:22-23). Most commentators read the scenario of an able charmer being bitten by a snake that has not been charmed, whether that is because the snake bit before, or because the snake bit without it being charmed.²⁸¹ Slightly unique in this regard is Seow's view that reads 'without charming' as modifying 'snake' in the sense of 'a snake that cannot be charmed.'²⁸² This reading ignores the massoretic accents, but the idea of uncharmable snakes are not unknown in the HB, since they are referred to in Jer 8:17. But whether we see the snake as one that has not been charmed or an uncharmable snake, the text seems to be describing a scenario in which the ability to charm a snake is not a *yitrôn* to a person (i.e., one cannot/can no longer do something with the charming skill); and thus, the ability is construed as a protective benefit in Eccl 10:11, that is meant to stop snakes biting, but is inexistent in situations where the ability loses its potentiality to help the one who possesses it. Since the logic is that a certain instrument causes GOOD THINGS to HAPPEN, whether preserving life (Eccl 7:12b) or preventing

²⁸⁰ See for example Aarre Lauha, *Kohelet*, BKAT 19 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1978), 189; Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 732-33; Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes: A Commentary*, 173.

²⁸¹ Compare 'before' in Ogden, *Qoheleth*, 171-72; and the more general scenario of 'without' in Barton, *The Book of Ecclesiastes*, 172.

²⁸² Seow, *Ecclesiastes: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 318.

snake bites (Eccl 10:11), the semantics can be worded as BECAUSE OF THIS (the ability to do something with X_{instrument}) GOOD THINGS WILL HAPPEN TO SOMEONE. This logic is nowhere contradicted or irrelevant.

Additionally, there is an implicit comparison of the GOOD THINGS that will happen with the GOOD THINGS that happen to others. Wisdom leads to long life in Eccl 7:12b: *wəyitrôn da'at haḥokmā(h) təḥayye(h) bə'ālehā*; it is implied that fools, with whom the wise are compared in Eccl 7:1-11, do not have that same benefit. In Eccl 2:13, it is explicitly stated that having wisdom is unlike foolishness: *wəṛā'itī 'ānī šeyēš yitrôn laḥokmā(h) min hassiklūt kī(y)trôn hā'ōr min haḥōšek*. There is an explicit comparison between wisdom and folly here, expressed through the comparative *min*.²⁸³ The comparison is expanded on in Eccl 2:14 that explains that whereas the wise can see, the fool walks in darkness. The comparative component in these verses is never contradicted, and is not irrelevant to any of the usages, and so it should be part of the explication of *yitrôn*. I suggest that it is best expressed by tagging the phrase BECAUSE OF THIS (the ability to do something with X_{instrument}) GOOD THINGS WILL HAPPEN TO SOMEONE with the additional component **NOT LIKE GOOD THINGS HAPPEN TO OTHER PEOPLE**.

The framing of GOOD THINGS WILL HAPPEN TO ME needs further consideration. There is a subjective dimension to this component that has not yet been fully expressed. In Eccl 2:11, Qoheleth concludes *wə'ēn yitrôn taḥat haššāmeš*. Yet, plenty of GOOD THINGS had happened to Qoheleth; someone could say that Qoheleth's wealth is a *yitrôn* that had given him joy. However, with the idea of GOOD THINGS WILL HAPPEN TO ME, there is no objective measure, but only a range of subjective opinions. Among the range of subjective opinions that are possible, what seems to matter is whether the speaker, Qoheleth, can think that good things will happen to

²⁸³ See particularly Daniel Lys, *L'Ecclésiaste ou Que Vaut La Vie?* (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1977), 239.

him; Qoheleth answers this in the negative. That is, nothing is a *yitrôn* because other people say it is so, but rather, because the speaker thinks of it as being so. The same mechanics of perception and construal is operative in English *advantage*, where nothing is objectively an *advantage*; rather, people can argue whether something is an *advantage* or not.

This idea of subjective thinking can also be seen in Eccl 1:3a: *ma(h) yitrôn lā'ādām bəkol 'āmālō*. The indefinite pronoun leaves space for contestation. Such a contestation seems to happen on the matter of whether GOOD THINGS really happen in Eccl 1:10a: *yěš dābār šeyō(')mar rə'ē(h) ze(h) ḥādāš hū(')*. The narrative here assumes that newness is related to the possibility of the eye being satisfied (Eccl 1:8-9) and is therefore a GOOD THING. Qoheleth's opponents think there are GOOD THINGS whereas Qoheleth concludes that there are no GOOD THINGS since there is nothing new under the Sun (Eccl 1:9b) (I will shortly return to my interpretation of Eccl 1:3-11). Similarly, Eccl 2:11 is a subjective opinion of Qoheleth concerning his own achievements, that there is no *yitrôn*. It is not a matter of objective observation like whether there is a bird in the cage or not, but something that one comes to one's own conclusion on; even Qoheleth himself did not know whether there was a *yitrôn* or not until he had completed his own works. In terms of semantic primes, the idea of subjectivity in Eccl 1:3; 2:11 can be expressed through the semantic primes I THINK LIKE THIS in the component **I THINK LIKE THIS: GOOD THINGS WILL HAPPEN TO SOMEONE**.

The component “*yitrôn* IS MINE” remains to be explained. This component expresses that the *yitrôn* belongs to its beneficiary in its construal. Beyond the fact that there is always a beneficiary, there is not much hinting about how this component should be incorporated into the definition. However, this component would fit best as a logical consequence of all the other components. That is, the phrase **BECAUSE OF THESE THINGS** may be an appropriate way to

introduce the component. Moreover, since whether something is a *yitrôn* or not is contestable, the concept is best framed in terms of the communicative prime SAY rather than the non-communicable THINK. I suggest the explication BECAUSE OF THESE THINGS I CAN SAY: *yitrôn* IS MINE.

The explication for *yitrôn* can therefore be expressed as below:

- 4) *Yitrôn* (*X is a Yitrôn* (for Y (someone) who does Z (something)))
 - a) something
 - b) people can say what this something is with the word *yitrôn*
 - c) someone can say something about something with this word when this someone thinks like this:
 - d) it can be like this: Y can do something (Z) with X
 - e) not like other people do this something (Z) with something else
 - f) because of this I think like this: good things will happen to Y, not like good things happen to other people
 - g) because of these things Y can say: *yitrôn* is mine

The profile of the explication seems to be on component (d), I CAN DO SOMETHING WITH X, since *yitrôn* is often used in the phrase “X is a *yitrôn*.” That is, the focus naturally resides with the component that the immediate context relates to within the explication.

At this point, it may be worth addressing two more difficult contexts of *yitrôn* in a little more detail. First, Eccl 5:8 is a deeply controversial text: *wəyitrôn ʿereṣ bakkōl hū(ʿ) melek lāsāde(h) ne ʿēbād* (reading the *qere*). The controversial nature is illustrated by Thomas Krüger, who lists seven very different interpretations in discussing the controversy.²⁸⁴ Graham Ogden

²⁸⁴ Thomas Krüger, *Kohelet (Prediger)*, BKAT 19 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2000), 216

comments that “this is one of those verses whose interpretation we may never ascertain.”²⁸⁵

There are several layers of difficulty. Firstly, there is a textual difficulty. BHS has *hî(ʾ)* in the *kethib* but *hû(ʾ)* in the *qere*. The LXX is ambiguous concerning which reading it takes, but the Peshitta reads *hû(ʾ)*. Secondly, the meaning of *bakkōl* is not clear. Several interpretations have been given, including “in all respects” (Fox), “in its provision (revocalizing to the infinitive construct of the verb *kyl/kwl*)” (Seow), “for all” (Bartholomew).²⁸⁶ Additionally, there is the problem of what the verse means as a whole in this context.

It may be too ambitious to try to solve the crux, but our definition of *yitrôn* may help us to understand the semantic component of the problem better. The semantics of *yitrôn* would require the following elements that are each addressed by one or multiple options within the text:

a) An instrument to DO SOMETHING WITH. This role can only be fulfilled by the king; it seems unlikely that the land is involved since it is not construed as belonging to anyone, in contrast to if Qoheleth had chosen a term like *hēleq*. Thus, readings like Holmstedt, Cook, and Marshall’s “And the profit of land—he is over everything, a king of an arable country,” seems unlikely, since it has nothing to do with what people can DO SOMETHING WITH. b) A beneficiary. Only *ʾereš* read as “people of the land” (cf. Gen 11:1) can fit this role. c) An action. There are three possible candidates. First is the idea of working (*ʾbd*) the land. The second is *bakkōl* in the sense ‘in all ways’ that could refer to an indefinite action. The third reading would be to follow Seow in reading *kyl/kwl* by emending the vocalizations. The second and third reading is somewhat supported by the fact that the preposition *b* introduces the semantics of the actions also in Eccl

²⁸⁵ Ogden, *Qoheleth*, 81

²⁸⁶ See Fox, *A Time to Tear Down & A Time to Build Up: A Rereading of Ecclesiastes*, 234; Seow, *Ecclesiastes: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 204; Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, 214.

1:3; 3:9. d) Uniqueness. The instrument must contribute to a unique way to do an action and must result in unique results. If we understand Eccl 5:8b as referring to ‘a king dedicated to the cultivated field,’ then this is somewhat unique, and we expect the yield to be better than fields of another land.

I suggest that Eccl 5:8 is depicting a scene where people are measuring (and thereby stockpiling) food (*kwl*), within a kingdom where a king encourages the cultivation of land. This reading requires emending *bakkōl* to *bəkōl* (*b* preposition and the infinitive construct of *kwl*). The verb *kwl* occurs 38 other times in the HB, often in the context of feeding. The verb only occurs in the *Qal* once in Isa 40:12 where the scene seems to require a meaning like ‘filling up a measure’ (cf. Psa 80:6 where *šālīš* is a volumetric measure). The verb also occurs in the Yavneh Yam letter (KAI 200.5-6) and the Gezer Calendar (KAI 182.5), each in an agricultural context.²⁸⁷ Thus this emendation fits the agricultural context of Eccl 5:8. Also such an emendation would make sense of the larger context. A king for cultivating lands is contrary to the ruling oppressors mentioned in Eccl 5:7, who presumably were stealing food from their subjects (cf. *ōšeq* in Lev 5:23; Ezek 18:18; 22:12, 19; Psa 62:11). Such a comparison between a land of oppressors and a land with a good king is coherent to the meaning of *yitrôn*. Furthermore, the emendation explains the connection with the next verse, where the lovers of wealth would not be satisfied with produce (*təbû ’ā(h)*).²⁸⁸

The resulting semantics of Eccl 5:8 are as follows:

²⁸⁷ Although the letter <kl> could also be read as *klh* ‘to complete’ in the Yavneh Yam letter, Cross and others argue that it represents *kwl/kyl*. See Frank Moore Cross Jr. “Epigraphic Notes on Hebrew Documents of the Eighth-Sixth Centuries B.C.: II. The Muraba’at Papyrus and the Letter Found Near Yabneh-Yam,” *BASOR* 165 (1962): 44; cf. Dennis Pardee and S. David Sperling, *Handbook of Ancient Hebrew Letters: A Study Edition* (Chico: Scholars Press, 1982), 21. On this note, one wonders whether the oppression and the violation of justice in Eccl 5:7 is akin to the scenario recorded in the Yavneh Yam letter.

²⁸⁸ See Seow, *Ecclesiastes: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 218-19.

5) *wāyitrôn ʿereṣ bākōl hū(?) melek lašāde(h) ne ʿēbād*

- a) the people of the land (X) can measure food with ‘the king for cultivation’
- b) not like oppressed people measure food with oppressors.
- c) because of this I think like this: good things will happen to the people of the land (X), not like good things happen to the oppressed people.
- d) because of these things the people of the land (X) can say: *yitrôn* is mine

The explication of the meaning offered in (5) merges the explication of *yitrôn* in (4) with the specific context in Eccl 5:8, and helps us to organize the scene in Eccl 5:8 through the lens of *yitrôn*. The strength of the interpretation is that it is rooted in a definition of *yitrôn* that is derived systematically from all its usages, and in showing that the use of this definition increases the relevance of Eccl 5:8 within its context, both with v. 7 and v. 9. Namely, the people of the land in v. 8 have a country that is better than the people of the oppressive regime in v. 7, and Qoheleth’s point is that even though this is true, the people who love wealth are not satisfied (v. 9).

A less controversial, but equally challenging text is Eccl 1:3: *ma(h) yitrôn lā ʿādām bākōl ʿāmālō šeyya ʿāmōl taḥat haššāmeš*. The scope of this question has been a point of contention. Some commentators see the question as rhetorical, and to be answered in the negative.²⁸⁹ Others see the question as being addressed throughout the book and presented at the outset as a thematic

²⁸⁹ See for example, Fox, *A Time to Tear Down & A Time to Build Up: A Rereading of Ecclesiastes*, 165; Longman, *The Book of Ecclesiastes*, 65.

introduction to the topic.²⁹⁰ But many such theories crucially misapprehend *yitrôn* as being a commercial term, and therefore find it difficult to make a conceptual link between *yitrôn* and the initial poem. In contrast, I suggest that the question is primarily applicable to the initial poem in Eccl 1:4-11.²⁹¹

Various elements of the question posed in Eccl 1:3 are conceptually inherited in Eccl 1:4-8. The term *'ādām* in Eccl 1:3 focuses the reader on the idea of humanity, and as becomes clear from Eccl 1:5-7, humans are contrasted with other elements in creation. Another keyword in Eccl 1:3 is *'āmal* that includes the idea of long-term action that is goal oriented. It is such long-term action that creation is portrayed as pursuing. The movements of the Sun and rivers is perpetual and long-term.

A second interesting element of the poem is that the Sun and the river are construed anthropomorphically, as if to invite a comparison with humanity. The portrayal of the Sun's rising and setting, and the river's perpetual flowing uses verbs of movement that portrays motion in a way that is equally applicable to man, in terms like coming and going. Such language could have been avoided if words like 'to flow' (*nzl*) was used. Moreover, the Sun is portrayed with the

²⁹⁰ See for example, Ludger Schwienhorst-Schönberger, *'Nicht im Menschen Grundet das Glück' (Koh 2,24): Kohelet im Spannungsfeld Jüdischer Weisheit und Hellenistischer Philosophie*, Herders Biblische Studien 2 (Freiburg: Herder, 1994), 19; Lohfink, *Qoheleth: A Continental Commentary*, 37-38.

²⁹¹ There has recently been a considerable amount of discussion on the initial poetic section in Ecclesiastes. Most exegetes continue to bring in the idea of "cyclicality" or "recycling" to make sense of the poem. See particularly: Graham S. Ogden, "The Interpretation of ךך in Ecclesiastes 1:4," *JSOT* 34 (1986): 91-92; Michael Fox, "Qohelet 1.4," *JSOT* 40 (1988): 109; R. N. Whybray, "Ecclesiastes 1.5-7 and the Wonders of Nature," *JSOT* 41 (1988): 105-12; Katherine J. Dell, "The Cycle of Life in Ecclesiastes," *VT* 59 (2009): 181-89; Nili Samet, "Qohelet 1,4 and the Structure of the Book's Prologue," *ZAW* 126, no. 1 (2014): 92-100. However, there has been little effort to correlate the meaning of *yitrôn* with the text, even though it introduces the section. I have not yet found an exegete that adopts the reading I have given here that takes seriously the role played by Eccl 1:3 as a guide for reading the poem.

verb *š'p* (to pant/to desire) (cf. Psa 19:5-7) that clearly betrays the anthropomorphic conception of Qoheleth.

An interesting element in the poem is the *rū^aḥ*. Although most modern commentators read 'wind,' this was not always the standard interpretation. In the most ancient interpretation, the LXX translates *rū^aḥ* as πνευμα showing that the translator saw the *rū^aḥ* as meaning 'spirit' rather than ανεμος 'wind,' which the translator uses elsewhere for *rū^aḥ* where he thinks the latter is referred to (see Eccl 5:15; 11:4). The same pattern persisted among the church fathers and rabbinic literature, until the middle ages.²⁹² Typically, the spirit was seen as belonging to the Sun, and so it was claimed that in its daily route, the Sun also went north and south before returning east.²⁹³ Thereby it is implied that the Sun too has some kind of a spirit, and so a purpose, in moving through its course; it is not a mechanical movement. And thus, although one must be careful not to imply too much about the background knowledge of the readers, a historical argument can be made that the Sun and river are being construed as beings that are capable of performing the act of *'āmal*, with both a purpose and a long-term action.

I suggest that the typical modern categorization of the Sun and the river in Eccl 1:4-7 as part of what we call in English 'nature' is an anachronism, and that rather, the Sun and river can be seen as non-human agents that are actively pursuing long-term action. It is in comparison to these non-human agents that humans (*'ādām*) are being compared, through the concept *yitrôn*. The concept of *yitrôn* for humans is evoked first in Eccl 1:3, and later implicitly in Eccl 1:8. In

²⁹² See Sara Japhet, "'Goes to the South and Turns to the North' (Ecclesiastes 1:6): The Sources and History of the Exegetical Traditions," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 1 (1993): 289-322. Typical of the pre-modern view of the Sun is what is articulated by Maimonides: "The spherical bodies, on the other hand, have life, possess a soul by which they move spontaneously." See Moses Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, trans. Michael Friedlander (New York: George Routledge & Sons, 1904), 159.

²⁹³ See for example Jerome, *St. Jerome: Commentary on Ecclesiastes*, 37-38.

this verse, humans are portrayed as having unique instruments, the mouth, eyes, and ears, unlike the Sun and river. Moreover, the implicit assumption is that these instruments are things that can be used to fulfil one's desire, as they are described in terms of *yġ* (implying action), *šb*, and *ml* (implying desire). This description of desire combined with action implies that the concept evoked here is *'āmal*. Although the specific actions relating to *'āmal* are not explicitly stated, Qoheleth later gives several examples throughout the book (e.g., Eccl 2:1-11; 4:8). But more importantly, Qoheleth denies the utility of these instruments, as he declared that words are wearisome (*kol haddābārīm yāġē'im lō' yūkal 'iš lādabbēr*), that the eye is not satisfied by seeing (*lō' tišba' 'ayin lir 'ōt*), and that the ear is not filled by hearing (*wəlō' timmālē' 'ōzen miššāmō^a*). This lack of satisfaction does not distinguish humans from the non-human beings, but makes them equals, since the same description is given for the sea not being filled in Eccl 1:7 (*wəhayyām 'ēnennū mālē'*).

The interpretation of Eccl 1:3-8 in terms of *yitrôn* can be represented as follows:

- 6) *yitrôn* in Eccl 1:3-8
 - a) Humans cannot:
 - b) perform the act of *'āmal* with the mouth/eyes/ears not like the Sun/the river
perform the act of *'āmal* with something else.
 - c) because of this I do not think like this: good things will happen to humans,
not like good things happen to the Sun/the river.
 - d) because of these things humans cannot say: *yitrôn* is mine

The adaptation of our explication of *yitrôn* to Eccl 1:3-8 in (6) may help us to better understand the poem in relationship to the question of *yitrôn* that directly precedes it. More importantly, it

helps us to get beyond anachronistic interpretation, and to attempt to understand the poem in terms of how *yitrôn* and *‘āmal* are used everywhere else in the book.

In summary, the term *yitrôn* is primarily a term describing the potential of an instrument in doing a certain activity. In terms of manual labor, skill is a *yitrôn* (Eccl 10:10); in terms of measuring food, a good king is a *yitrôn* (Eccl 5:8); in terms of taming a snake, charming skills are a *yitrôn* (Eccl 10:11). These instruments help people in a specific way: they differentiate the person that has it from the one who does not. Because of the instrument, that person can do that thing differently from others, and good events follows the activity, in a way that is unlike the good things that happen to others. In cutting trees, skill (*ḥokmā(h)*) helps one to do so without exerting excess strength (Eccl 10:10). Presumably, such a person is less weary after work, and so the skill is a *yitrôn*. A land with a good king can stockpile food with less fetters than other lands (Eccl 5:8); presumably, this allows its inhabitants to enjoy having plenty.

In terms of activity aimed at fulfilling his desire (*‘āmal*), Qoheleth observes that there is no *yitrôn* (Eccl 2:11), that is, there is no instrument, whether his heart or his wisdom or his wealth, that would differentiate his actions from those of his predecessors (component (e)) in a way that separates his fortunes from other people (component (f)). GOOD THINGS happen, but these things are no different from the GOOD THINGS of others; even the fool can have the same experience from Qoheleth’s *‘āmāl*, if he manages to inherit his possessions, showing that wisdom is not a *yitrôn* (Eccl 2:18-20). In three places, he wonders about the *yitrôn* in performing the act of *‘āmal* by asking “what is the *yitrôn*?” (Eccl 1:3; 3:9; 5:15). He seems to ask this question to investigate whether he can find a positive answer, but each time he implies that there is in fact no *yitrôn*. The world’s activities have by nature always been the same, despite the fact that people continue to think there will be something new; this illusion that there is

something new arises from the clouding effect of human desire. Contrary to this desire, the world continues to be repetitive and so people share the fate of other non-human agents and have no *yitrôn* over them (Eccl 1:3-11). Moreover, since the human preoccupation with performing *‘āmāl* after what they want is ultimately from God, and since the decision of whether one enjoys the *‘āmāl* or not is also from God, humans have no *yitrôn*; they cannot use any leverage to put themselves ahead of others (Eccl 3:10-14). Finally, death is a common lot to all humanity, and so everything is ultimately levelled (Eccl 5:15). Therefore, there is nothing that can be used as a *yitrôn* when it comes to *‘āmāl* for Qoheleth. That is, according to Qoheleth, humans have no instrument that can control the outcome of long-term goal-oriented work like *‘āmāl*. The clear *yitrôn* that can be seen in every-day activities like cutting a tree, or charming a snake, evaporates in the frame of long-term goal-oriented work.

5.2.3.2. *Yōtēr*

The semantic invariant of *yitrôn* is not the same as that for *yōtēr*. Consider Saul’s excuse for not devoting everything belonging to the Amalekites to destruction in 1 Sam 15:15:

wayyō(‘)mer šā ‘ūl mē ‘āmālēqī hēbī ‘ūm ‘āšer ḥāmal hā ‘ām ‘al mēṭab haššō(‘)n wəḥabbāqār

lāma ‘an zəbō^aḥ laYHWH ‘ēlōhe(y)kā wə ‘et hayyōtēr heḥēramnū. Several features distinguish

this context from the use of *yitrôn*: 1) *yōtēr* is not used in the phrase ‘X is *yōtēr*.’ Rather, it is

used as an object of the verb, “we devoted to destruction (*heḥēramnū*).” 2) The context does not

explicitly mention the GOOD THINGS HAPPENING. Perhaps the point is that devoting the sheep to

destruction would lead to good things happening to the people. But this seems irrelevant in the

context of Samuel’s questioning of what the bleating of the sheep is (v. 14). 3) There is no

explicit comparison with other people; neither would such a comparison be relevant to the context.

Another example is in the epilogue to Ecclesiastes in Eccl 12:12: *wəyōtēr mēhēmā(h) bānī hizzāhēr ʾāšōt səpārīm harbē(h) ʿē(y)n qēš wəlahag harbē(h) yəgīʿat bāsār*. Again, 1) The word *yōtēr* is not in the phrase “X is *yōtēr*,” and instead, *yōtēr* serves as the adjunct of the verb *zhr*, 2) It is difficult to see how *yōtēr* relates to GOOD THINGS HAPPENING. 3) There is no explicit or implicit comparison with others, and it is irrelevant. Quite clearly, it is not sufficient to say that *yōtēr* means the same thing as *yitrôn*.

How then, should *yōtēr* be defined? I wish to focus here on 1 Sam 15:15, Eccl 6:8, 11; 7:11; 12:12. The four other usages are either adverbial (Eccl 2:15; 7:16; Esth 6:6, signaled by a non-nominal slot for *yōtēr* and thus indicating the adverbial nature of the usage) or a special construction (Eccl 12:9, where the construction *yōtēr še* is used). Since 1 Sam 15:15 and Eccl 12:12 are the most unambiguous contexts, I start with a more detailed examination of these two verses. Eccl 6:8, 11; 7:11 are also important sources of information, but since these are all difficult texts to understand, I will examine them after my initial discussion of 1 Sam 15:15 and Eccl 12:12.

The noun *yōtēr* is defined partly through the phrase THERE ARE SOME THINGS. I CAN THINK OF THESE THINGS AS TWO PARTS. If we reflect on Saul’s use of *yōtēr* in 1 Sam 15:15, the noun assumes that the plunder is being seen, not as a unity, but as a multiplicity. Moreover, the multiplicity is being divided specifically into two parts. One part of the plunder is being sacrificed, the other part was devoted to destruction. Here again, the division is subjective: There is no objective reason to think about the plunder in terms of two parts, but this is how Saul construes the world. Therefore, it is appropriate to include I CAN THINK OF THESE THINGS in the

definition. The same seems to apply to Eccl 12:12, where “my son” is being told to beware of *yōtēr mēhēmā(h)*.²⁹⁴ There is one part, that is designated as *hēmā(h)*, and there is another designated by *yōtēr*. The following part of the verse also supports this reading, as the author suggests there should be limitations to the making of books. Again, the division is a subjective division created by the author.

The TWO PARTS should be defined through DOING. In the case of Saul, the two parts were a matter of doing; whether sacrificing or devoting to destruction. In the case of Eccl 12:12 the DOING has to do with the same action; the making of books. However, the person DOING is not restricted to the speaker in both cases and seems to be an indeterminate someone, since presumably, Saul was not alone in devoting things to destruction. Moreover, the action needs not to have been done in the past but needs only to be something that could potentially be done in both cases. Thus, I represent this as SOMEONE CAN DO SOMETHING WITH ONE PART, and SOMEONE CAN DO SOMETHING WITH THIS OTHER PART.

The TWO PARTS are defined symmetrically in terms of DO SOMETHING WITH. In applying STA, I found it impossible to define one part as good and the other bad; although this asymmetry exists in some contexts, it does not exist in others, and so the definition seems to leave the goodness/badness of the action indeterminate. Neither do the actions have to be different (e.g., Eccl 12:12 and the making of books), although they are often different.

The only asymmetry in our explication concerning the TWO PARTS derives from the use of the semantic prime ONE PART versus THIS OTHER PART. The difference cannot be explained by

²⁹⁴ Fox claims that the phrase *wāyōtēr* “and an additional thing is” signals the beginning of a postscript (see Fox, *A Time to Tear Down & A Time to Build Up: A Rereading of Ecclesiastes*, 356). But Seow has cited many ANE and Postbiblical Hebrew parallels of books ending with a warning not to go beyond what has been set down, and he has thereby convincingly refuted this argument (see Seow, *Ecclesiastes: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 388).

other paths. For instance, it is not a matter of temporal differences: At times, it is the second part that has already been dealt with in the past; the *yōtēr* in 1 Sam 15:15 is the part that had already been dealt with by destruction. But in Eccl 12:12, it is the *yōtēr* that had not yet been written. The difference between the two is not in terms of past/present but in terms of OTHER-ness.

What is meant by OTHER is a change in focus within the text to the thing not yet known. In the two instances, the focus is on the first part of the TWO PARTS, but switches to the second part of the TWO PARTS by usage of *yōtēr*. Recall in 1 Sam 15:15 that the livestock designated for sacrifice that were not *yōtēr* was mentioned first. Also recall that the part that is not called *yōtēr* is mentioned using the 3rd person plural pronominal suffix *-m*; that is, it assumes that the one part is known, whereas the second part (i.e., the *yōtēr*) is not yet focused. Since the immediate context in both 1 Sam 15:15 and Eccl 12:12 is on DOING SOMETHING WITH THIS OTHER PART, the profile seems to be on the idea of THIS OTHER PART.

Finally, the fact that this OTHER PART is referred to by *yōtēr* in order to say something about it must be put into the definition. Since the word *yōtēr* is a way of organizing and talking about this other part, this idea can be included in the definition: I CAN SAY SOMETHING ABOUT THIS OTHER PART WITH THE WORD *yōtēr*. The definition for *yōtēr* is thus the following:

- 7) *yōtēr*
 - a) something (X).
 - b) people can say what this something is with the word *yōtēr*
 - c) someone can say something about something with this word when this someone thinks like this:
 - d) it can be like this: there are some things
 - f) I can think of these things as two parts
 - g) someone can do something with one part
 - h) someone can do something with this other part (X)

- i) I can say something about this other part (X) with the word *yōtēr*

The explication represents the semantic structure of only two contexts, but it can be further tested in three texts, Eccl 6:8, 11; 7:11.

The first text, Eccl 6:8 is concerned with a comparison between the wise and the fool: *kî ma(h) yōtēr leḥākām min hakkāsîl ma(h) le ‘ānî yōdē^a ‘ lahālōk neged haḥayyîm*. The definition in (7) seems to fit this context, and certainly does not contradict it. The context here is about appetite (v. 7, 9).²⁹⁵ The statement in v.8 seems to be answering the question about how the appetite operates. Since nobody’s appetite is filled, Qoheleth asks what is *yōtēr* for the wise, in comparison to the fool, in terms of appetite. In other words, the things that fill the appetite is being divided up into TWO PARTS, and he asks what the part that only the wise has access to is, with the implication that one can potentially do something good with the OTHER PART. Since he has already answered universally that the appetite is never filled in v.7, the answer is that there is no *yōtēr* for the wise. Since the verse does not contradict our definition in any way, but rather, seems to produce a relevant reading of the verse, we may stick with our definition.

Admittedly *yitrôn* would also fit Eccl 6:8. In fact, the context is very similar to Eccl 2:13 where *yitrôn* is used. Since both words are about “doing something with something” and both include the prime OTHER, it is not a surprise that the immediate context is similar for the usages of each of these words. That is, the idea of invariance does not entail that each word has a unique context in which only that word may be used.

²⁹⁵ See Fox, *A Time to Tear Down & A Time to Build Up: A Rereading of Ecclesiastes*, 244-45. In terms of the connection between v. 7 and 8, the particle *kî* should be read as “I say so because.” For an explanation of the so-called “speaker-oriented *kî*,” see Walther Theophilus Claassen, “Speaker-Oriented Functions of *kî* in Biblical Hebrew,” *JNSL* 11 (1983): 29-43.

However, an argument can be made that *yōtēr* fits the context better than *yitrôn* in Eccl 6:8 for several reasons. First, if *yōtēr* were replaced by *yitrôn* in Eccl 6:8, the verse would continue to make sense, but would become less relevant to the context. *Ma(h) yitrôn* would need to be answered by something like “wisdom.” This would place the focus on the ability of wisdom to satisfy the appetite/desire that is never filled. On the other hand, with *yōtēr*, the question *ma(h) yōtēr* would be answered by something that the wise CAN DO SOMETHING WITH, beyond what the fool can do, such as the hypothetical thing that fills the appetite/desire. The latter seems marginally more relevant, since v. 7 is talking about filling (*ml*) of the appetite, and because Qoheleth seems to find a minor *yōtēr* for the wise man in v. 9: the wise man has the sight of the eyes, unlike the fool who walks according to his desire (cf. Eccl 2:14a). Secondly, the argument in v. 8 already assumes a set of abilities, wisdom and folly. That is, the verse seems not to be about what the advantageous ability (*yitrôn*) is, but the verse is discussing the two such potentially advantageous abilities, as a follow up to v. 7, by focusing on the difference between the wise man and the fool. To regress back to the idea of abilities (*yitrôn*) would make less sense. Finally, v. 8b seems to mirror v. 8a in inquiring: *ma(h) le ‘ānī yōdē^a ‘ lahālōk neged haḥayyîm.*²⁹⁶

²⁹⁶ There are some textual variants: LXX has διοτι in place of Hebrew *ma(h)*, possibly reflecting Hebrew *kî*. Explaining *ky* is difficult. It may be a case of parablepsis, where the eyes accidentally jumped back to *mh* in v. 8a and subsequently added the *ky* before *mh*, and then *mh* was elided all together. The opposite is also possible, where original *ky* became *ky mh* through parablepsis, and then *ky* was elided. But since the LXX makes little sense out of the verse, and MT makes more sense in terms of its meaning, I will follow the MT. Syriac presents a different type of problem. The whole of v. 8 is translated as if MT *yōtēr* was read as *yitrôn*. As it seems that the Peshitta was confused with the meaning of *yōtēr* and *yitrôn* as evident from their inconsistent translations of the two terms, it is likely that the vorlage read *ytr*. But having read *yōtēr* as if it meant *yitrôn*, the translator seems to have assumed the meaning here is the same as that in the use of *yitrôn* in Eccl 2:13, and assumes that the wise must have an advantage as in Eccl 2:13, and interprets v. 8a to mean “because there is an advantage to the wise one more than the foolish.” (The derivation of an unknown sense from beyond the immediate context is common in the Peshitta. See M. P. Weitzman, *The Syriac Version of the Old Testament: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 42-43. Having not been able to make sense of v. 8b in connection to v. 8a, the translator seems to have read *lmh* by reduplication of the lamed from *kāsîl* and linked v. 8b to v. 9 by interpreting it to mean “why does the poor man know how to go among the living?”

The semantics of the preposition *l* is best read as that of possession, reading “what belongs to the poor man” (cf. 1Kings 12:16).²⁹⁷ And therefore, if the second half of the verse is about possession, it seems likely that the first half too is about something possessed as a result of having wisdom. The implied type of thing possessed is the extra benefits of knowledge that could be operated on (i.e., THIS OTHER PART).

Eccl 6:11 can also be read in terms of (7). The verse is about words that increase *hebel*: *kî yēš dābārîm harbē(h) marbîm hābel ma(h) yōtēr lā ’ādām*. The gist of the text in translation seems to be “I say so because, there are many words that increase *hebel*, what is *yōtēr* for man?”²⁹⁸ Although Eccl 6:10-12 is a difficult set of verses to interpret, I read the text in a way similar to Longman and Seow: God is the one who calls things their names, including man, in creation; this naming has more significance than what we call “naming” in English, since it also has the idea of the appointment of what he is as a being.²⁹⁹ Man has been named as *’ādām*, and he cannot argue with God (v.10). However, there are many people who presume that God has not created boundaries, and who use many words to fight their boundaries; these include claims of knowing what is good for man and claims about knowing the future (v. 12). Qoheleth responds

²⁹⁷ See Holmstedt, Cook, and Marshall, *Qoheleth: A Handbook on the Hebrew Text*, 191. But there has been some disagreement on the interpretation of v. 8b, as some have read it in the sense “what good does it do for the poor.” See Krüger, *Kohelet (Prediger)*, 240.

²⁹⁸ The present verse has proved difficult for commentators to interpret. A selection of readings helps to illustrate the variation in interpretation: Fox interprets the verse as having an unmarked conditional, “For, if there are many words, they only increase absurdity, and what is the advantage for man?” (See Fox, *A Time to Tear Down & A Time to Build Up: A Rereading of Ecclesiastes*, 247-48.). Lohfink translates “There happen many words that only multiply breath. Of what profit are they to a person?” (see Lohfink, *Qoheleth*, 89.), but it is not clear what is meant by “there happen.” Gordis acknowledges the particle *yēš* but does not translate it in his translation: “Many words merely add to the futility —what advantage does man derive from it?” (Robert Gordis, *Koheleth —The Man and His World*, 3rd ed. (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 172, 263-64.). Fredericks translates *dābār* as “matters” in his translation: “Since there are many things that increase impermanence, what advantage is there for man?” (Fredericks and Estes, *Ecclesiastes & The Song of Songs*, 158.). Seow translates in the sense “wordiness is not worthiness” in his translation: “Indeed, there are many words that increase vanity. What advantage do human beings have?” (Seow, *Ecclesiastes: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 229, 233.).

²⁹⁹ See *ibid.*, 230-33, and Longman, *The Book of Ecclesiastes*, 176-78.

that such words are *hebel*. Our definition for *yōtēr* fits this context, as the context assumes two types of things: The things that are within the boundary of normal humanity, and those that try to go beyond. Qoheleth asks what these things are that go beyond human capacity: what is *yōtēr* for humans? The implicit answer assumed is nothing, since the OTHER PART does not even exist.

The word *yitrôn* would be less relevant if it replaced *yōtēr*: Eccl 6:11 is talking about the destiny of all humans (*lā'ādām*), and there is no OTHER PEOPLE to compare with in the context. Bringing in other creations as a point of comparison is possible, but seems somewhat disjointed within the context. However, *yōtēr* is highly relevant as it highlights the fact that there is no OTHER PART that goes beyond human bounds. Some may think that this *yōtēr* exists, so that they could know the future or know the good in life (v. 12), but Qoheleth contests this idea.

Our last text, Eccl 7:11, also uses *yōtēr* in a manner coherent to our explication in (7): *tōbā(h) ḥokmā(h) 'im naḥālā(h) wəyōtēr lārō 'ē(y) haššāmeš*. Most commentators agree that *wəyōtēr* modifies *ḥokmā(h) 'im naḥālā(h)* so that *ḥokmā(h) 'im naḥālā(h)* is good (*tōbā(h)*) and is also a *yōtēr*. The interpretation of the verse hangs on the meaning of *'im*. Does it mean “Good is wisdom (which is accompanied) with an inheritance,” that is, only a certain kind of wisdom (i.e., one accompanied by an inheritance) is good?³⁰⁰ Or does *'im* mean something like ‘along with,’ so that the correct interpretation is “Good is wisdom, like an inheritance”?³⁰¹ Since v. 12 considers wisdom separately, it seems likely that wisdom alone is already good, and it is unnecessary to suggest that Qoheleth is saying that a particular wisdom, a wisdom which is supported by an inheritance, is good. Both wisdom and an inheritance are good on their own. Therefore, I favor the latter translation of the text.

³⁰⁰ Fox argues for this translation, since in the story of the poor wise man (Eccl 9:15) wisdom alone is not always good. See Fox, *A Time to Tear Down & A Time to Build Up: A Rereading of Ecclesiastes*, 256.

³⁰¹ See Seow, *Ecclesiastes: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 239.

Our definition of *yōtēr* in (7) fits well with both the idea of wisdom and inheritance. Both can easily be seen as THIS OTHER PART. Wisdom is a *yōtēr* since it is something beyond what the normal person has; what the normal person has is seen as one part, what the wise has over and above the normal person is construed as THIS OTHER PART. Similarly, an inheritance is also THIS OTHER PART, beyond the normal belongings of a person. It is also easy to imagine many things that one can DO SOMETHING WITH for both wisdom and an inheritance. In fact, v. 12 states such an example, where Qoheleth says that wisdom prolongs life.

In the case of Eccl 7:11, both *yitrôn* and *yōtēr* fit the context, as evidenced by the use of *yitrôn* a verse later in v. 12. The very fact that Qoheleth feels the need to use both *yitrôn* and *yōtēr* in close proximity shows that they have different, but associated meanings. Qoheleth highlights that wisdom and inheritance can be seen as THIS OTHER PART OF TWO PARTS (*yōtēr*), and also that one can use wisdom to the effect that good things happen to the one that has it (*yitrôn*).

In this section, I have produced an explication for *yōtēr* that is never contradicted, that is relevant in every context, and that strings together the similarities of the respective textual contexts in a way that makes it explicit and verifiable. It turns out that *yōtēr* and *yitrôn* have been confused in modern scholarship for a good reason: Both focus on the idea of DOING SOMETHING WITH SOMETHING. However, the similarity in meaning does not justify treating the meanings as identical. As we have seen, many contexts using *yōtēr* would fail to capture the full significance with *yitrôn*. Moreover, as I have demonstrated, it is possible to distinguish the two lexemes from the texts we have, using NSM explications.

Single English words cannot express what my explications express. Words like *excess*, *extra*, *profit*, and *surplus* do not get to the idea of *yōtēr*. Although these English terms are close

to the meaning of *yōtēr*, they express some ideas that are contrary to *yōtēr*. An *excess* is “too much” and construes the thing as an accidental thing, something with no purpose. *Extra* assumes a norm that is surpassed, and the norm is defined by something like I KNOW WHAT PEOPLE THINK ABOUT THIS. Saying “I have an extra seat” implies knowledge of what people think about the situation about the seats and proposes something that goes beyond those thoughts. Such ideas are irrelevant to *yōtēr*. A *profit* is mostly used in financial situations, and even non-financial uses (e.g., I gained a profit from discussing it with my boss) assume that the thing gained is a product of doing something, entailing little that the something gained is going to be used. A *surplus* assumes that work was done to gain it, and similarly to *profit*, it does not assume that the thing that is a surplus is going to be acted upon.

English *advantage* is similar to *yitrôn*.³⁰² Like *yitrôn*, *advantage* too is possessed by someone, and used by someone, and involves competition. But *advantage* is not the same as *yitrôn*, since *advantage* has some similarities with *game*: it implies that people want something to happen, and that they do not yet know what will happen. Moreover, *advantage* does not assume that the person that has it CAN THINK: GOOD THINGS WILL HAPPEN TO ME. An *advantage* is still not something that someone is confident will crystallize. Perhaps it has the idea that I CAN THINK: AFTER SOME TIME, MAYBE SOME GOOD THINGS WILL HAPPEN TO ME but this is not the same as *yitrôn*.

Thus, these explications have allowed us to gain access to the thoughts embedded into the text, and at the same time, they allow us to avoid being misled by English thought in a way that could distract and mislead us from the text’s meaning.

³⁰² It should be noted that *advantage* has at least two senses, one of them being specific to the phrase “take advantage.” It is the other sense, that is not the phrase “take advantage” being discussed here.

5.2.4. *Rə 'ût rû^aḥ, Ra 'yôn rû^aḥ, and Ra 'yôn lēb*

Rə 'ût rû^aḥ appears frequently with *hebel*. The phrase occurs 7 times in the Hebrew Bible, every time in Ecclesiastes. The phrase occurs 6 times with *hebel* (Eccl 1:14; 2:11, 17, 26; 4:4; 6:9), and once without *hebel* (Eccl 4:6).

The one occurrence of *rə 'ût rû^aḥ* without *hebel* in Eccl 4:6 is a proverb that does not provide enough context to decipher the meaning of *rə 'ût rû^aḥ*: *ṭōb məlō(ʿ) kap nāḥat mimməlō(ʿ) ḥopnayim 'āmāl ûrə 'ût rû^aḥ*. The proverb uses *rə 'ût rû^aḥ* to describe a situation that is opposite rest (*nāḥat*). This provides a hint concerning its meaning. Also, it is possible to surmise that *rə 'ût rû^aḥ* has connections to *'āmāl*. However, this is far from a full picture.

The fact that *rə 'ût rû^aḥ* occurs almost always in conjunction with *hebel* in the phrase “*hebel ûrə 'ût rû^aḥ*,” presents an interesting challenge to STA. Since the phrase shares the scenic context with *hebel*, it is difficult to distinguish the scene of *hebel* from *rə 'ût rû^aḥ*. One possible way may be to see what more scenes described by *hebel ûrə 'ût rû^aḥ* say compared to those scenes that are described only as *hebel*. I have tried to distinguish between those scenes described as *hebel ûrə 'ût rû^aḥ* from those that are simply described as *hebel*, but I can see no difference.

There are two possible types of explanation for this phenomenon. First, it could be that the meanings are identical. Any proponent of this position would need to explain why two

identical meanings are used in conjunction, and furthermore, why the two constructions can each occur separately without the other.³⁰³

The second explanation is that the meanings are different but associated, such that the scenes they describe overlap. That is, each of the terms draw attention to different portions of the same scenes. If so, the meaning of *rə'ût rû^ah* is no longer recoverable through STA, since the only context where *rə'ût rû^ah* appears without *hebel* is not very informative. Nevertheless, this second explanation seems to be the more likely one: *hebel* and *rə'ût rû^ah* have different but associated meanings.

In order to begin teasing out the differences in meaning, it is possible to make some basic observations about the relationship between *hebel* and *rə'ût rû^ah*. In terms of scenes, the scenes depicted in Ecclesiastes are likely to be primarily about *hebel*, since this is the topic of the book (Eccl 1:2; 12:8). Moreover, the phrase *rə'ût rû^ah* always appears after *hebel*, so it is given a secondary place textually. This may indicate that *rə'ût rû^ah* describes a smaller element of meaning contained within the *hebel* scene, and secondary to the bigger picture.

The ancient translations also offer some bearing on the meaning of *rə'ût*: LXX translates the phrase as *προαιρεσις πνευματος*, and as *προαιρεσις* can mean “inclination, affection” (LSJ), it seems that LXX has taken the root to be **ršy* “to desire.” Targum uses *təvîrût rûḥā(h)* ‘breaking’ of the wind, while Syriac has *turrāfā dərūḥā(h)* “vexation, weariness” of the wind, and the Vulgate has *adflictio spiritus*, “shattering of the breath” and these thereby align themselves with the root **ršš* “to break.”

³⁰³ Miller argues something close to this idea, suggesting that when *rə'ût rû^ah/ra'yōn rû^ah* and *hebel* are used together, *rə'ût rû^ah* serves as a “guarding term” to signal that *hebel* means “insubstantial.” He suggests that the commonality in the usages of *rə'ût rû^ah/ra'yōn rû^ah* is that they all indicate the attempt to achieve the impossible. See Miller, *Symbol and Rhetoric in Ecclesiastes*, 92-95. Although this seems to be an observation that covers most usages, I have found that there are also texts that do not conform. For instance, both Eccl 4:4, and Eccl 4:6 seem to have nothing to do with insubstantiality.

Another important clue to the meaning of *rə'ūt rū^aḥ* is the phrase itself, consisting of the words *rə'ūt* and *rū^aḥ*. Although *rū^aḥ* is a common term in the Hebrew Bible, *rə'ūt* is only found in Ecclesiastes, and we must go to comparative Semitic evidence to speculate on its meaning. *Rə'ūt* could be derived from PS **ršy* “to desire” (Aramaic loan, elsewhere realized in Hebrew as *ršh* “to be pleased” in BH), from PS **rğy* “to shepherd” (cf. Hebrew *rō'e(h)*), from PS **ršš* “to break” (Aramaic loan? cf. BH *ršš*), or from PS **r'* “to do evil.” Both BDB and HALOT suggest *rə'ūt* is cognate to PS **ršy* ‘to desire.’ Fox relates the root to *ra'yōn* (possibly related to PS **ršy*) as used in Biblical Aramaic meaning ‘thought.’³⁰⁴ Schoors, in his recent lexicographic study, also opts for PS **ršy* ‘to desire.’³⁰⁵

Also, the related term *ra'yōn* is probably from the same root, so may give us a further hint concerning the identification of its root. The suffix *-ōn* is commonly (but not exclusively) used for abstract meanings.³⁰⁶ *Ra'yōn* occurs 3 times, once with *hebel* (Eccl 4:16), and twice without it (Eccl 1:17; 2:22). However, the 2 occurrences without *hebel* occur in different phrases, *ra'yōn rū^aḥ* and *ra'yōn lēb*.

In the LXX, Targum, Syriac, and Latin versions, *ra'yōn rū^aḥ* and *ra'yōn lēb* are translated in the same way as *rə'ūt rū^aḥ*. This shows that they had seen *ra'yōn* and *rə'ūt* as sharing a verbal root but did not seek to distinguish the nuances of the two words. The exception to this is Syriac in its translation of *ra'yōn lēb*, where it is translated *šibyānā dəlubbē(h)*, ‘desire

³⁰⁴ See Fox, *A Time to Tear Down & A Time to Build Up: A Rereading of Ecclesiastes*, 45-49.

³⁰⁵ See Schoors, *The Preacher Sought to Find Pleasing Words*, 439-42.

³⁰⁶ Hans Bauer and Pontus Leander, *Historische Grammatik der Hebräischen Sprache des Alten Testaments* (Halle: Verlag von Max Niemeyer, 1922), 498.

of the heart’ The exception shows that the Syriac translator may not have been sure of the correct root, and in this instance, was affected by the lexeme *lēb*.³⁰⁷

A further clue to the meanings of *rə ʾūt rū^aḥ*, *ra ʾyōn rū^aḥ* and *ra ʾyōn lēb* is the contextual elements that surround these words. It is noteworthy that *rə ʾūt rū^aḥ* co-occurs with the root *ʾāmāl* in Eccl 2:11; 4:4, 6. Of these, Eccl 4:6 is an instance without *hebel*. Moreover, *ra ʾyōn lēb* co-occurs with *ʾāmāl* (but not *hebel*) in Eccl 2:22. Since *ʾāmāl* has to do with WANTING, this raises the possibility that WANTING is involved. In fact, there are other words to do with WANTING that are also found near *rə ʾūt rū^aḥ*. In Eccl 2:26 *rə ʾūt rū^aḥ* co-occurs with *ʾinyān*, “preoccupation;”³⁰⁸ in 4:4 it co-occurs with *qin ʾā(h)*, “jealousy;” in 6:9 *rə ʾūt rū^aḥ* occurs in a context about the insatiability of human desire. Since *rə ʾūt* and *ra ʾyōn* are found frequently in the context of WANTING, it seems likely that *rə ʾūt* and *ra ʾyōn* go back to PS **ršy* “to desire.” Therefore, although it is difficult to certify what exactly the phrases like *rə ʾūt rū^aḥ*, *ra ʾyōn rū^aḥ* and *ra ʾyōn lēb* mean, we can speculate, with good reason, that WANTING is part of their definition.³⁰⁹ Thus, *rə ʾūt rū^aḥ* and *ra ʾyōn rū^aḥ* are likely to have something to do with “WANTING of the wind.”³¹⁰

Beyond these preliminary observations about *rə ʾūt rū^aḥ* and *ra ʾyōn rū^aḥ*, we may add that their meanings are associated with *hebel* in such a way that their scenes overlap. The exact

³⁰⁷ The trend not to distinguish the two continues into modern scholarship (see for instance Schoors, *The Preacher Sought to Find Pleasing Words*, 439-42).

³⁰⁸ The term *ʾinyān* also plays a key role in Ecclesiastes. However, since it’s semantics overlaps to a great degree to English “preoccupation,” it does not need detailed explanation here.

³⁰⁹ One oddity of this conclusion is that if *rə ʾūt* goes back to PS **ršy*, then Ecclesiastes has both the Aramaic form and the Hebrew form *ršh* (Eccl 9:7) of the same root. This would mean that etymological twins (words originating from the same proto-form but deriving through different languages) existed in Qoheleth’s vocabulary. However, the phenomenon of etymological twins is not unusual (e.g., English “cave” and “cavern” from Latin and German respectively) and so it cannot be used to rule out the derivation of *rə ʾūt* from PS **ršy*.

³¹⁰ It should be noted that there is an additional ambiguity here: *rū^aḥ* can mean both “wind” and “spirit” (see Eccl 11:4-5 for an example of this distinction). Since LXX uses πνευμα for both *rə ʾūt rū^aḥ*, *ra ʾyōn rū^aḥ*, it seems that *rū^aḥ* was interpreted as the “spirit” by the ancient translator.

meaning of *rə 'ût rû^{ah}* and *ra 'yôn rû^{ah}* cannot go any further beyond speculation. Therefore, we must be content with the twin observations that *rə 'ût* and *ra 'yôn* most likely go back to PS **ršy* “to desire,” and that in terms of specific semantics, it overlaps in its scene with *hebel*.

5.3. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explicated the meanings of *'āmāl*, *'āmal*, *yitrôn*, and *yôtēr*, and I have made an etymological argument that *rə 'ût rû^{ah}*, *ra 'yôn rû^{ah}*, and *ra 'yôn lēb* derive from PS **ršy* “to desire.” These explications and observations will form the basis for the study of *hebel* in the next chapter.

A prominent theme in this chapter was in refuting the idea that commercial terms were prevalent in Ecclesiastes, and exemplified in the terms *'āmāl*, *'āmal*, *yitrôn*, and *yôtēr*. This theory was dependent on a combination of comparative data and an untested assumption that commercial meanings were also applicable to Ecclesiastes. Little effort had gone into proving that commercial meanings matched the textual profile of Ecclesiastes. I have argued that while etymological study is important, such studies must first present evidence for the same meaning in the usages within Hebrew contexts. Therefore, I have emphasized the importance of deriving the meaning of lexemes from the text where it is possible. The explications in this chapter that are a product of STA were not the commercial terms that have previously been hypothesized. I have thereby shown that even if these lexemes had been popularized through commerce, those meanings are not directly relevant to Ecclesiastes.

The resulting explications have also shown that *'āmāl*, *'āmal*, *yitrôn*, and *yôtēr* were meanings in the Hebrew that have no English counterparts whose semantic values are perfectly coextensive with these Hebrew lexemes, although there are lexemes that exhibit some overlap.

Several issues remain to be resolved. Firstly, we have explicated some keywords in Ecclesiastes, but this is not to say that the concepts are understandable. The concepts can be explained and understood through NSM explications, but we do not process these terms so easily, since we do not chunk together meaning in the same configuration that Hebrew does; the challenge for us is to familiarize ourselves with these new meanings. This issue will be addressed in chapter 7.

Another issue is translatability. These lexemes have previously been translated into English in such a way that they made the book of Ecclesiastes intelligible. Indeed, many scholars have based their theories on the meaning of these terms by picking the English word that seemed best to fit the contexts. However, this caused *yitrôn* and *yôtēr* to be treated as having the same meaning(s) in many studies. Such studies do not do justice to the textual evidence, as I have shown. This raises a methodological question: What is the method of analysis of Hebrew lexemes that has been producing such readings of the text? This will be discussed in the following chapter. Also, it raises the question of what the relationship is between a word and its translation, in terms of semantics. This will be discussed in chapter 7.

Finally, this chapter has shown us that STA can take us only so far. The three terms *rə'ût rū^ah*, *ra'yôn rū^ah*, and *ra'yôn lēb* were not analyzable to the extent that their meanings could be distinguished from *hebel*. This case illustrates the importance of using multiple tools in philological analysis. Comparative Semitic studies must be used when we cannot discern the specific meaning through STA.

As I noted towards the beginning of this chapter, this chapter was not about *how* STA is applied. A commentary of how STA is applied to a word will be exemplified in the next chapter through a running commentary of its performance. There I will show the various considerations

that go into the process, and most importantly, I will show that invariant components are not simply a more pretentious version of a facile and intuitive guess about the meaning of a word. The process is empirical, and therefore methodologically superior to previously applied methodologies.

Chapter 6: *Hebel* in Ecclesiastes

6.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, I identified and explicated seven key terms, *‘āmāl*, *‘āmal*, *yitrôn*, *yôtēr*, *rə ‘ût rû^aḥ*, *ra ‘yôn rû^aḥ* and *ra ‘yôn lēb*. I showed that semantic explications derived from STA can explain the meanings of four of the terms, *‘āmāl*, *‘āmal*, *yitrôn*, *yôtēr*. In doing so, I identified some methodological problems in conventional definitions of these terms.

In this chapter, I will investigate the meaning of *hebel* using STA. In particular, I will focus on the methodology of STA and aim to show *how* STA assigns meaning to lexemes. I will do this through a verse by verse investigation of the occurrences of *hebel* in Ecclesiastes. Much of the discussion will turn out to be irrelevant to the meaning of *hebel*, but I have included this here since there is a benefit in becoming familiar with the process of thought that STA entails: Familiarity with the on-the-ground process affects confidence in the explications created through it.

The second aim of the chapter will be to show beyond doubt that there is a semantic invariant for *hebel*, and that it can be derived from textual meaning. An exposure of the process will show that there is no convenient dismissal of textual data, and that in fact many initial candidates are trimmed off from the definition as soon as evidence against them is found.

The final aim of this chapter is to lay out the thought processes involved in conventional methodologies adopted in lexical analyses. The discussion on *hebel* is an ideal place for this discussion, since a variety of methodologies have been used in trying to uncover the meaning of *hebel*. I will show that these methodologies have erroneous assumptions about the nature of meaning, and so they need correction.

6.2. Theories on Hebel in Ecclesiastes

Hebel occurs 38 times in Ecclesiastes.³¹¹ The lexeme *hebel* has accumulated a large number of glosses through the centuries.³¹² LXX glosses *hebel* with *mataiotēs*, while Peshitta and Targum use *həbēl* (the cognate). Perhaps the most influential reading of *hebel* is the vulgate *uanitas*, that has subsequently filtered into our English translation.

English glosses abound within the literature, and I present them here as a list in alphabetical order: Abel (the person), Absurd, Beyond Mortal Grasp, Breath, Bubble, Chaos, Enigma, Fleeting/Temporary, Foul, Fruitless/Ineffectual/Unavailing, Futile, Incongruous/Ironic, Incomprehensible, Insubstantial, Meaningless, Vanity, Worthless, Zero.³¹³

³¹¹ It is also possible that *hebel* actually occurs 39 times, according to whether <hkl> is emended to <hbl> in Eccl 9:2; see for instance Fox, *A Time to Tear Down & A Time to Build Up: A Rereading of Ecclesiastes*, 291. However, since this is a context sensitive study, I have chosen to be cautious of including textually uncertain occurrences.

³¹² This work concentrates on glosses made in English, mostly in the 20th and 21st century. For surveys of pre-19th century approaches, see Christian D. Ginsberg, *Coheleth, Commonly Called the Book of Ecclesiastes: Translated from the Original Hebrew, With a Commentary, Historical and Critical* (London: London, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1861), 27-243, and Eric S. Christianson, *Ecclesiastes Through the Centuries* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 17-141. For a bibliography of works on Ecclesiastes written between 1523 – 1875 see Stuart Weeks, *The Making of Many Books: Printed Works on Ecclesiastes 1523–1875* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2014).

³¹³ The proponents of each of the glosses are listed. It should be noted that not all the proponents believe that the gloss works comprehensively, and others claim there is polysemy. “Abel-ness” (the person) is proposed by Russell L. Meek, “The meaning of חֶבֶל in Qoheleth: An intertextual Suggestion,” in *The Words of the Wise Are like Goads: Engaging Qoheleth in the 21st Century*, ed. Mark J. Boda, et al. (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2013); “Absurd,” in Camus’ sense, was first proposed by Michael V. Fox, in idem., “The Meaning of Hebel for Qohelet,” and upheld also in his most recent commentary, Fox, *A Time to Tear Down & A Time to Build Up: A Rereading of Ecclesiastes*. However, it should be noted that a similar meaning was already proposed in French literature. See E. Podechard, *L’Ecclésiaste*, 233; Barucq, “Question sur le Sens du Travail: Qo 1,2; 2:21-23,” 66-71. The reading was followed by A. Schoors, *The Preacher Sought to Find Pleasing Words*, 119-29; Eben Scheffler, “Qohelet’s Positive Advice,” *OTE* 6 (1993): 248-71; and Eric S. Christianson, *A Time to Tell: Narrative Strategies in Ecclesiastes* (JSOTSup, no. 280; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998). “Beyond Mortal Grasp” was suggested by Seow in Choon-Leong Seow, “Beyond mortal grasp: The Usage of *hebel* in Ecclesiastes,” *ABR* 48, no. 1 (2000): 1-16. “Breath” is a gloss that seeks to preserve the metaphorical source and allow the reader to decipher the meaning in reading. See Lohfink, *Qoheleth: A Continental Commentary*. “Bubble” was a metaphorical gloss suggested by Hopkins, and by this he means something that sparkles like a bubble, but that disappears when it is grabbed. See Ezekiel Hopkins, *The Vanity of the World* (London: King’s Arms and Golden Lion, 1685), 2. “Chaos” was suggested by Rudman as the common denominator of all usages. See Dominic Rudman, “The Use of חֶבֶל as an Indicator of Chaos in Ecclesiastes,” in *The Language of Qoheleth in its Context: Essays in Honour of Prof. A. Schoors on the*

The very fact that so many glosses have been produced for *hebel* is itself a subject of interest. Part of the reason for the proliferation of glosses is the intense interest the book of Ecclesiastes has drawn from readers, but this alone cannot account for the variety seen above. The fuller explanation is to be found in the methodologies adopted by the various exegetes. Exegetes use a variety of methods to reach their conclusions. I have named and summarized these methods below:

- a) Translational Matching Method: Ask how well different English words fit in translation of a passages. The word that satisfies the most contexts is correct.

Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday, OLA no. 164, ed. A. Berlejung and P. van Hecke (Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters, 2007), 121-41. "Enigma" was proposed by Ogden (although he means by it something positive, not obvious from the gloss itself), and later followed by Bartholomew. See Graham S. Ogden, "'Vanity,' It Certainly is Not," *BT* 38, no.3 (1987): 301-07; and Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, 93-96. "Fleeting/Temporary" has perhaps its strongest recent proponent in Fredericks, who has argued for it in a book and a recent commentary. See Fredericks, *Coping with Transience*; and Daniel C. Fredericks and Daniel J. Estes, *Ecclesiastes & The Song of Songs*, Apollos Old Testament Commentary 16 (Nottingham: Apollos, 2010). The gloss "fleeting/temporary" is also supported by Dor-Shav and Schultz: Ethan Dor-Shav, "Ecclesiastes, Fleeting and Timeless: Part I," *JBQ* 36, no.4 (2008): 211-21; Ethan Dor-Shav, "Ecclesiastes, Fleeting and Timeless: Part II," *JBQ* 37, no.1 (2009):17-23; Richard L. Schultz, "A Sense of Timing: A Neglected Aspect of Qoheleth's Wisdom," in *Seeking out the Wisdom of the Ancients: Essays Offered to Honor Michael V. Fox on the Occasion of his Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. Ronald L. Troxel, Kelvin G. Friebel, and Dennis R. Margary (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 257-67. "Foul" is one of multiple glosses, and perhaps the most original of the glosses, suggested by Miller in Miller, *Symbol and Rhetoric in Ecclesiastes: The Place of Hebel in Qoheleth's Work*. "Fruitless/Ineffectual/Unavailing" is suggested by Barton without much comment. See George Aaron Barton, *The Book of Ecclesiastes*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1912), 72. "Futile" is defended by Crenshaw in his commentary, James L. Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes: A Commentary* (London: SCM Press, 1988). "Incongruous" and "irony" are suggested as approximating the meaning by Good. See Edwin M. Good, *Irony in the Old Testament* (London: SPCK, 1965), 168-83. "Incomprehensible" is a gloss suggested by Staples. I have distinguished this gloss from "enigma," since Staples' views are unique: He derives the meanings from a putative Moabite foreign god *hubla*. According to Staples, the meaning shifted to "cult mystery" and eventually "incomprehensible." See W. E. Staples, "The 'Vanity' of Ecclesiastes," *JNES* 2, no. 2 (1943): 95-104. "Insubstantial" is one of several glosses that is suggested by both Miller and Whybray. See Miller, *Symbol and Rhetoric in Ecclesiastes* and R. N. Whybray, "Qoheleth as a Theologian," in *Qoheleth in the Context of Wisdom*, ed. A. Schoors (Leuven: University Press and Uitgeverij Peeters, 1998), 239-65. "Meaningless" was defended in Longman's commentary. See Longman *The Book of Ecclesiastes*. "Vanity," the most traditional view, was defended recently by Murphy, Eaton, and Ellul. See Roland E. Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, WBC 23A (Dallas: Word Books, 1992); Michael Eaton, *Ecclesiastes: An Introduction & Commentary*, TOTC 16 (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1983), 56; Jacques Ellul, *Reason For Being* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 53-55. "Worthless" is suggested by Sneed in response to Fox's idea of interpreting *hebel* as 'absurd' in Mark Sneed, "הָבֵל as 'Worthless' in Qoheleth: A Critique of Michael V. Fox's 'Absurd' Thesis," 879-94. "Zero" is suggested without much comment by Harold L. Ginsberg, "The Structure and Contents of the Book of Koheleth," in *Wisdom in Israel and in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Martin Noth and D. Winton Thomas (Leiden: Brill, 1955), 138-39.

- b) Active Metaphor Method: Assume that semantic unity exists in the source domain ‘breath,’ and go on to attribute various meanings to specific contexts.
- c) Untranslatable: Assume that *hebel* is untranslatable, but a unified meaning. The exegete must offer a way to indicate this untranslatability.

The translational matching method (a) is the most common method among exegetes. The method is simple. Different English words are tested in the slots where *hebel* belongs, and the word that seems to fit the most contexts is chosen as the meaning of *hebel*. I include within this category those works that suppose there is polysemy, since the reasoning may still be the same. Polysemy is identified when one word does not seem to match all the slots, and so a second word is needed, making this fundamentally the same method.

An examination of the argumentation shows that the principle that the correct understanding is the translation that matches all contexts is used to refute opposing theories. For instance, Miller reasons that “Fredericks must acknowledge that this sense for the term will not work in every passage.”³¹⁴ In another instance, Lee argues that “while ‘vanity,’ ‘futility,’ and other such synonyms are appropriate translations of *hebel* in many contexts, they fail to convey the manifold nuances of the Hebrew and are not appropriate for every occurrence of the word in the book.”³¹⁵

I see two problems with the translational matching method. Firstly, the translational matching method assumes that all foreign words have an English translation equivalent. This is

³¹⁴ Miller, *Symbol and Rhetoric in Ecclesiastes*, 13.

³¹⁵ Eunny P. Lee, *The Vitality of Enjoyment in Qohelet's Theological Rhetoric*, BZAW 353 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2005), 30.

incorrect. In bilingual studies, it has been shown that there is often no exact translation equivalent, and that this is true more so for abstract lexemes than for concrete lexemes, since in abstract lexemes, there is in general less conceptual overlap.³¹⁶ There may in the end be no direct translation equivalent for *hebel*. Although it is not clear whether these interlocutors believe that their glosses are perfect fits or not, their argumentation seems not to adequately address the problem of the possibility that there is no translation equivalent to *hebel*.

Secondly, the method assumes that if it is possible to find one gloss fitting every context, that we can be confident in that gloss. This is not entirely correct. If we take the view that there is one meaning for *hebel*, having a meaning that fits every context is a prerequisite for a definition. However, fitting every context is not an adequate test for the correctness of the definition. Part of the reason is that there is no single objective way to see the world, and that different viewpoints are always in competition. This point has already been argued extensively by Lakoff.³¹⁷ For instance, it would be possible to say the first two of the below about a soldier's death in battle, but not the third:

- 1) It was a brave death.
- 2) It was an unfortunate death.
- 3) *It was a location.

³¹⁶ Annette M. B. De Groot, "Bilingual Lexical Representation: A Closer Look at Conceptual Representations," in *Orthography, Phonology, Morphology, and Meaning*, ed. Ram Frost and Leonard Katz (Amsterdam: Elsevier Science Publishers B. V, 1992), 392.

³¹⁷ Lakoff uses the term 'analytic truth' to describe the approach being argued against here. See particularly Lakoff, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal About the Mind*, 130-35.

Sentences (1) and (2) are both plausible as sentences that may be said in reaction to the fall of a soldier, but (3) seems irrelevant and wrong. What becomes clear is that there is a range of plausible words that could complete the sentence “It was X” concerning a certain scene, even when they modify the same noun.

Similarly, when Qoheleth says that “youth and the dawn of life are *hebel*” (Eccl 11:10), many words can fit the slot of *hebel*, including ‘futile,’ ‘absurd,’ ‘enigma,’ etc. It would even be possible to accumulate evidence from other places in Qoheleth that supports the gloss, for each of these glosses. But the wrong question is being asked when we ask if *our perspective on hebel* can plausibly match all the usages of *hebel*. The important question is whether we can pinpoint what *Qoheleth’s perspective*, indicated by *hebel*, is, and this question is best answered through an informed lexicographic study.

The second method, the active metaphor methodology, is in a way a more sophisticated version of the translational matching method. Instead of simply claiming that there is one meaning to *hebel*, it claims that it is both one and multiple in meaning: In terms of the source domain (e.g., breath), there is only one meaning, but in terms of the metaphorical target domain (e.g., insubstantial, foul, transient), there are multiple meanings. Therefore, Qoheleth can start and end his book with the exclamation “all is *hebel*,” and thus imply he is talking about one thing (breath), while at the same time employing multiple senses within the book. Such a methodology is best articulated by Miller in his metaphorical reading of *hebel*.³¹⁸

³¹⁸ See Miller, *Symbol and Rhetoric in Ecclesiastes*. He has also written a shorter summary of his theory in Douglas B. Miller, “Qoheleth’s Symbolic Use of *hebel*,” *JBL* 117 No.3 (1998): 437-54. His theory is followed and further modified by Weeks, in Stuart Weeks, *Ecclesiastes and Scepticism* (LBS no. 541; New York, T & T Clark, 2012; and Gary D. Salyer, *Vain Rhetoric: Private Insight and Public Debate in Ecclesiastes* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001).

Very few would disagree with the idea that *hebel* was metaphorically derived from the concrete meaning of “breath” or something of the like. But the difficulty with the active metaphor method is that it is unnecessarily sophisticated with a superficial metaphorical layer, all for the sake of claiming that it is one sense that is meant by *hebel*. Meanwhile in the exegesis of specific texts, it is polysemous in its readings, with the claim that contextual adaptations of the metaphor generate correct readings of the text. And in identifying the correct meaning of the metaphor in each context, correctness is identified on the basis of the translational matching method; that is, if the specific gloss that the metaphor generates matches the context, it is deemed as a correct reading.

This uncomfortable coupling of monosemy and polysemy is rightly criticized by Ingram. Ingram observes that the active metaphor methodology does not escape Fox’s argument that “If Qoheleth were saying, ‘X is transitory; Y is futile; Z is trivial,’ then the summary, ‘All is *hebel*’ would be meaningless. Indeed, it would be specious reasoning or a rhetorical device—arguing from disparate categories that share only a multivalent label.”³¹⁹

Moreover, the argument of proponents like Miller assumes outright that *hebel* cannot have one single meaning, since according to him, “every gloss offered for *hebel* in all of its contexts fails in one or more of them.”³²⁰ But why does he think this? His argument against a single meaning, following the translational matching method, is that English glosses (at least in his opinion), do not work; but this is not enough to demonstrate that Qoheleth could not have had one meaning in mind, since English does not exhaust the inventory of all possible meanings. Although it is undoubtedly true that *hebel* is at some level metaphorical (including the possibility

³¹⁹ FOX, *A Time to Tear Down & A Time to Build Up: A Rereading of Ecclesiastes*, 36. For Ingram’s argument on the matter, see Ingram, *Ambiguity in Ecclesiastes*, 101.

³²⁰ Miller, *Symbol and Rhetoric in Ecclesiastes*, 7.

that it is a dead metaphor), the primary issue is what *hebel* means in the target domain (i.e., in context), and whether a single meaning would suffice to describe its full range of usages or not. If a simpler explanation in terms of a single meaning is possible, this simpler argument should be given priority over the more sophisticated explanation that posits polysemy through active metaphors.

The final method that deems *hebel* as untranslatable by a single gloss is more of a resignation than a method. Having found no adequate gloss for *hebel* but assuming one concept underlies all usages, it simply claims that *hebel* is untranslatable. Typically, multiple senses are used to express the untranslatable, with the recognition that it is not fully expressive of the real meaning. This puts the expressions offered beyond scrutiny, and so is not necessarily helpful.

For Garrett, this approach is a concession, since he wants to translate *hebel* using multiple glosses, yet he also sees that Qoheleth seems to mean one thing by *hebel*. He concludes, “It may be that the modern, Christian reader can do no better than to import *hebel* into his or her vocabulary, much as has been done with *agape* and to a lesser extent *koinonia*.”³²¹

I include in this fold Hopkins’ creative analysis of *hebel*. Presumably, he sees that using normal English is unsatisfactory, and suggests the gloss *bubble*. However, the gloss has a specific meaning that overlaps with the metaphorical entailments of English *bubble*:

As Bubbles blown into the Air, will represent great variety of Orient and Glittering Colours, not (as some suppose) that there are any such really there, but only they appear to us, through a false reflexion of light cast upon them: so truly this World, this Earth on which we live, is nothing else but a great Bubble blown up by the Breath of God in the midst of the Air where it now hangs. It sparkles with ten thousand Glories; not that they are so in themselves, but only they seem so to us thro’ the false Light, by which we look

³²¹ Duane A. Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs* (NAC; Nashville: Broadman Press, 1993), 283. See also Seow, *Ecclesiastes: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 102, who suggests using ‘vanity’ as a code word for whatever *hebel* means. This approach seems to have been abandoned by him two years later, when he preferred to be more specific and uses the gloss “beyond human grasp.” See Seow, “Beyond mortal grasp: The Usage of *hebel* in Ecclesiastes.”

upon them. If we come to grasp it, like a thin Film, it breaks and leaves nothing but Wind and Disappointment in our Hands.³²²

This attempt at using a code word ‘bubbles’ to represent a complex semantic explanation represents a valiant effort to go beyond English to explain *hebel*. In some respects, it understands how whole scenes can be packed into a single lexeme. As will become clear later, this explanation shares significant similarities with my own.

I agree with the basic premise of this third method; *hebel* is untranslatable by a single English gloss. However, there *are* sound methods through which to express the meaning of the untranslatable: NSM offers ways to analyze semantics across cultures, and the methodology can equally be applied to Biblical Hebrew to express the meaning of *hebel*. Furthermore, STA can help a definition to go beyond “matching” by generating a meaning that maximally matches every context.

6.3. Goals of the Analysis

In his study on the history of exegesis of Ecclesiastes, Roland Murphy closes his article by commenting on the lesson learnt from his study of Ecclesiastes: “How many far-fetched theories have been hazarded by modern writers who are locked up in their own crippling presuppositions?”³²³ Indeed, no study can escape some sort of assumption that will condition and constrain it. However, this is not to say that the present work will simply add to the list of theories about *hebel* without making a unique contribution. I consider the contribution of the

³²² Hopkins, *The Vanity of the World*, 2.

³²³ Murphy, “Qoheleth Interpreted,” 336.

present work primarily as one of methodology; it introduces almost entirely *methodological* presuppositions, without introducing *interpretative* presuppositions, in its reading of *hebel*.

Although the final product will be an explication of *hebel*, the claim that will be made is that this definition is created in a way that maximally eliminates any semantic presuppositions on the part of interpreters whose native language is not Classical Hebrew; these may be semantic presuppositions arising from one's own native language, philosophy, religious dogma, and other sources of the like. Instead, I begin with methodological presuppositions: how humans learn meaning, how meaning is structured, how best to reconstruct this meaning, etc.

6.4. An STA Analysis of *Hebel* in Qoheleth

6.4.1. Ecclesiastes 1:12-15

In STA, the order of analysis is unimportant. Here we begin our analysis towards the start of the book in Eccl 1:12-15. The unit is well partitioned from the previous section; Eccl 1:12 starts with the phrase "I am Qoheleth" after the initial poetic section in Eccl 1:3-11. On the latter end, Eccl 1:16-18 seems to be a different scene, since the pursuit there is wisdom, and not "all the events under the Sun" as in Eccl 1:12-15.³²⁴ Within the unit Eccl 1:12-15, *hebel* occurs in Eccl 1:14.

Eccl 1:14

I saw all the deeds that are done under the Sun, and behold, everything was *hebel* and a chasing after the wind.

³²⁴ This division is typical among commentators. See for example Krüger, *Kohelet (Prediger)*, 131; and Naoto Kamano, *Cosmology and Character: Qoheleth's Pedagogy from a Rhetorical-Critical Perspective*, BZAW 312 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2002), 27-43.

ראיתי את־כל־המעשים שנעשו תחת השמש והנה הכל הבל ורעות רוח:

STA specifies that the whole context be assigned as the meaning of *hebel* on the first usage analyzed. The meaning is still very specific, and so it is not yet describable in terms of NSM explications. But we expect that such specificity will disappear with the second context.

6.4.2. Ecclesiastes 2:1-11

Stage 2 of STA begins in the second context, Eccl 2:1-11. Most commentators take Eccl 2:1-11 to be a unit, but some prefer to see Eccl 2:1-3 as belonging to the previous unit.³²⁵ I follow Fox's view that Eccl 2:1-3 forms a general overview and conclusion of the account given in Eccl 2:4-11.³²⁶ *Hebel* occurs twice in this unit:

Eccl 2:1

I said in my heart, "Come now, I will test you with joy. Enjoy pleasure!" But behold, this also was *hebel*.³²⁷

³²⁵ Against the more typical view that I adopt here, Seow and Fredericks take the view that 2:1-3 belong with 1:12-18. See Seow, *Ecclesiastes: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 149-150, and Fredericks and Estes, *Ecclesiastes & The Song of Songs*, 79-80.

³²⁶ Fox, *A Time to Tear Down & A Time to Build Up: A Rereading of Ecclesiastes*, 176-79.

³²⁷ In contexts where *lēb* is used with a post-verbal pronoun, Holmstedt has suggested that it be read as an adjunct that modifies the main verb. i.e., "I said — I with my heart." He further suggests that in Qoheleth, the heart serves as a full-fledged character that is a collaborator in Qoheleth's experiment. Although Holmstedt's linguistic argument that the post-verbal pronoun and noun phrases act as an adjunct is convincing, this second literary aspect of his argument is less so. While some of the examples he cites such as Eccl 1:13, 16 serve his argument well, other cases are not given due attention in his article. Verses such as Eccl 2:15; 3:17, and 18 seem to have the heart acting not as a "full-fledged" character, but just as in other parts of the HB as an integral part of the self. This is most clear in Eccl 2:15 where it is the self (*'ānī*) that is wise, in contradiction to elsewhere where the heart was said to be wise (Eccl 1:17; 2:3). Although it is true that the heart plays an important role in Ecclesiastes, it seems to be a more moderate one than Holmstedt theorizes; rather, the heart plays a role as an unknown and uncontrollable part of

אמרתי אני בלבי לכה־נא אנסכה בשמחה וראה בטוב והנה גמ־הוא הבל:

Eccl 2:11

When I turned to (consider) all my works that my hands had done, and the *'āmāl* I had performed the act of *'āmāl* for in working, behold, all was *hebel* and a desiring after the wind. And there was no *yitrôn* under the sun.

ופניתי אני בכל־מעשי שעשׂו ידי ובעמל שעמלתי לעשות והנה הכל הבל ורעות רוח ואין יתרון תחת השמש:

The two usages here may be compared to Eccl 1:12-15 in order to abstract an invariant. Since Eccl 2:1-11 is a long scene, this is a good place to start the comparison. It can be divided into three temporal stages. These can be summarized as follows:

3) **ABSTRACTNESS**

- a) something
- b) people can say what this something is with the word *hebel*
- c) someone can say something about something with this word when this someone thinks like this:
- d) it can be like this:

BACKGROUND

- e) I thought like this about some things (T): these things (T) are a *yitrôn* [m], these

oneself. See Robert Holmstedt, “אני וְלִבִּי” The Syntactic Encoding of the Collaborative Nature of Qohelet's Experiment,” *JHS* 9, no. 19 (2009): 1-27.

things (T) are mine

- f) I thought: when I do something (U) with these things (T) many good things (V) will happen to me
- g) I can think of these good things (V) as two parts:
- h) I will feel something because of one part.
- i) I will feel something very good at all times because of this other part (W)
- j) I wanted this other part (W)
- k) because of this (component (j)), I cannot not think about doing these things (U); this is bad

STAGE 1

- l) because of this (the BACKGROUND) I thought like this: I will do something (U) with something (T) (Eccl 1:13a; 2:1a)

STAGE 2

- m) after this, I did something (U) with something (T) for a long time
- n) because of this (component (m)) I saw many things (Eccl 1:14a; 2:3-10a)

STAGE 3

- o) now at the time when I think about this thing I did (U), I think like this:
- p) there is no other part (W), there is no *yitrôn* [m], because God [m] has done something bad (X)
- q) I don't think like this: I can do something (Y); because of this (Y), after this (Y), things (Z) will be like these things (Z) were before God [m] did these things (X)
- r) I cannot think like this: there is a *yitrôn* [m] (Eccl 1:13b, 14b-15; 2:1b-2, 10b-11)

6.4.2.1. Stage 1

I will describe the stages 1-3 in order, then return to the background. The first temporal stage (STAGE 1) is one where Qoheleth decides what he wants to do. Eccl 2:1a and Eccl 1:13 express this stage. The stage seems to consist of a “thinking” in Eccl 2:1a, expressed by *'āmartī 'ānī bālabbî*. Moreover, since the thinking is not attributed to others but to the self, and construed

as occurring in the past, this first temporal stage seems to be framed in semantic primes by I THOUGHT. Eccl 1:13 has many similar characteristics to Eccl 2:1, reading *nātatī 'et libbī lidrōš wālātūr baḥōkmā(h) 'al kōl 'āšer na 'āšā(h) taḥat haššāmeš*. The verb *nātan* is being used metaphorically with *libbî*; it clearly indicates a mental affirmation, a thought.

However, Eccl 1:13 seems to be more specific than THOUGHT. It expresses what we call in English a “determination.” Qoheleth makes a decision about what to do, and subsequently follows it. If we return to Eccl 2:1, it too expresses this determination. It expresses the determination in the imperative *lākā(h) nā(') 'ānassākā(h) bāsimḥā(h) ūr'ē(h) bāṭōb*. Although the ways that the meaning is expressed are very different, there is an overlap in meaning expressible by I WILL DO SOMETHING WITH SOMETHING. It should be noted that there seems to be no abstract similarity in the substance of what is to be done: “Exploring with wisdom everything that is done under the heavens,” and “testing the heart with joy” are very different things, apart from the fact that they are both SOMETHING. The same may be said of the SOMETHING that Qoheleth DOES SOMETHING WITH; joy and wisdom are very different things that share no features apart from the fact that they are SOMETHING. Thus, we have, I THOUGHT LIKE THIS: I WILL DO SOMETHING WITH SOMETHING.

A little more abstraction may be done concerning this temporal stage to make it more specific. The thought I WILL DO SOMETHING WITH SOMETHING seems to not simply be a random determination that Qoheleth made out of thin air; there is more logic involved. There is some optimism, as DOING SOMETHING WITH SOMETHING should lead to some good, and not bad. The phrases in Eccl 2:1 *'ānassākā(h) bāsimḥā(h) ūr'ē(h) bāṭōb* implies an expected positive result. Similarly, in Eccl 1:13, *lidrōš wālātūr baḥōkmā(h)* seems also to follow this positive expectation.

Therefore, some positive abstraction should be made. This theme in fact continues into the subsequent temporal stages and so is best explained later.

6.4.2.2. Stage 2

4) SUMMARY OF STAGE 2:

m) after this, I did something (U) with something (T) for a long time

n) because of this (component (j)), I saw many things (Eccl 1:14a; 2:3-10a)

The second temporal stage is a stage in which Qoheleth explores the world in the way he determined in the first temporal stage. This second stage is expressed most fully in Eccl 2:3-10a, where this temporal stage is metaphorically expressed in v. 3 as “I explored with my heart,” *tartî bəlibbî*, and as “until I could see what is good,” *‘ad ‘ašer ‘er ‘e(h) ‘ēy ze(h) tōb*.

The exercises seem to be construed in terms of SEE. The verbs *twr* and *r’h* share this common denominator. It is important to note that the semantic prime SEE is not limited to what we may call physical sight. When we examine our own uses of English *see*, the distribution of uses goes beyond physical sight. There are various uses that lie along the scale from physical to non-physical: Seeing a bird, seeing a mirage, seeing someone’s behavior, seeing the argument, etc. Furthermore, according to Wierzbicka, it is evident that SEE should not be constrained by something to do with eyes from the fact that the blind also use the word. SEE seems, therefore, to be a source of knowledge that is different from other primes like THINK and FEEL.³²⁸ Following

³²⁸ Wierzbicka, *Semantics: Primes and Universals*, 78-82.

from this, both Hebrew lexemes and the scenes they denote are describable through the prime SEE.³²⁹

According to STA, the idea of SEEING must not be contradicted by our starting point Eccl 1:12-15. We find, in fact, that v. 14 supports the hypothesis that SEEING is part of the meaning of *hebel*, as we have *r'h* being used: *rā'îṭî 'et kol hamma 'ăšîm šenna 'ăšû taḥat haššāmeš*. This phrase, just like Eccl 2:3-10a, describes how Qoheleth saw the things he had been determined to see.

The objects of SEEING may be compared. Where the object of seeing is *kol hamma 'ăšîm* in Eccl 1:14, the object is the indeterminate thing, *'ē(y) ze(h) ṭōb libnē(y) hā 'ādām 'ašer ya 'ăšû taḥat haššāmayim* (Eccl 2:3), that is, “what is good for people to do.” This indeterminate thing is materialized through numerous different pursuits as described in v. 4-10a. There seem to be no similarities between the objects of SEE in Eccl 1:14 and Eccl 2:3, apart from the fact that there is an object. Therefore, we may describe the abstract entity that specifies the similarity as SOMETHING; i.e., I SAW SOMETHING. It is also possible to question whether an adjective may be added here. In neither case is it implied that the entity being seen is one thing. Rather, the phrase *kol hamma 'ăšîm* in Eccl 1:14 and the long list provided in Eccl 2:4-10a suggests that MANY THINGS were seen. Therefore, our provisional definition should be I SAW MANY THINGS.

The second temporal stage of SEEING is described along with actions in Eccl 2:4-10a. The actions vary widely. There seems to be little commonness in building houses and acquiring slaves, for example. Moreover, the specifics of the actions are contradicted in Eccl 1:12-15, as the action implied in Eccl 1:13 is *lidrōš wəlātūr baḥokmā(h) 'al kol 'ašer na 'ăšû taḥat haššāmeš*;

³²⁹ The observation that SEEING plays a prominent role in Qoheleth's thoughts is not new. See particularly Michael V. Fox, “Qoheleth's Epistemology,” *HUCA* 58 (1987): 137-55, and Weeks, *Ecclesiastes and Scepticism*, 121-28.

searching everything that is done is very different from building houses. However, the fact that it was Qoheleth who did these things, and that it is a multitude of actions performed is similar in both scenes. Moreover, in both scenes, Qoheleth DOES SOMETHING WITH SOMETHING, whether wisdom (Eccl 1:13) or joy (Eccl 2:1). Therefore, I DID SOMETHING WITH SOMETHING is the correct level of abstraction for this component. Furthermore, the component FOR A LONG TIME may also be added here, since applying wisdom to search *kol hamma 'ăšîm* is something that takes a long time; so also, are Qoheleth's projects in Eccl 2:4-10a.

The logical connection between the two components, SEEING and DOING in this second temporal stage seems to be BECAUSE OF: It is because Qoheleth DID SOMETHING that HE SEES MANY THINGS. It is because he searched with wisdom the things that happened in the world, that he saw the things that happened in the world (Eccl 1:13-14), and it is because Qoheleth pursued pleasure in numerous ways that he saw what was good for humanity to do (Eccl 2:3-10a). Thus, the second scene can be schematized into I DID SOMETHING WITH SOMETHING FOR A LONG TIME. BECAUSE OF THIS I SAW MANY THINGS.

There remains the question of how the second stage should be connected to the first. Two options are plausible; the semantic prime BEFORE would foreground STAGE 1 (like in the sentence: Before I did these things, I was determined), and the semantic primes AFTER THIS would foreground STAGE 2 (like in the sentences: I was determined. After this, I did these things). Since in the second stage, it is the second stage that is foregrounded, there is no reason to use BEFORE. Therefore, AFTER is to be used to express the temporal logic here. Since STAGE 2 builds on stage 1, the schematization should be: STAGE 1, AFTER THIS, STAGE 2.

Before moving on to the final scene, I would like to return to the logic behind the determination of Qoheleth to do certain things. Eccl 2:3 again gives a hint concerning this logic:

‘ad ‘ašer ‘er’e(h) ‘ēy ze(h) ṭōb libnē(y) hā ‘ādām ‘ašer ya ‘āšū taḥat haššāmayim. The activity sought to find what was good for humanity to do. Furthermore, this activity to find the good is led by the heart and flesh (*tartî bālibbî limšōk bayayîn ‘et bāsārî*). In Eccl 2:10a, the logic of the actions is that it is led by desire *wākōl ‘ašer šā ‘ālū ‘ēnay lō(‘) ‘āšaltî mēhem*; Qoheleth is led by a search for good, and the good in this context seems to be defined through the eyes’ desire.

Lastly, the uses of *‘āmāl* and *‘āmal* in Eccl 2:10b-11a assume a background of WANTING something, since *‘āmāl* and *‘āmal* are defined through WANTING; just like if a scene in English used the phrase “I worked for my dream” would indicate to the reader that some sort of WANTING was involved, so too do *‘āmāl* and *‘āmal* indicate WANTING was involved in the background.

Therefore, in terms of semantic primes, there seems to be a component WANT involved. There is yet some vagueness concerning where exactly this component of WANTING fits into the stage: Is Qoheleth determined to do something because he simply wants to do the actions themselves? Or is there something he wants that is not the actions themselves, but something that he hopes will result from the actions? The resolution of this issue must be reserved until the next temporal stage explored below.

6.4.2.3. Stage 3

5) SUMMARY OF STAGE 3:

- o) now at the time when I think about this thing I did (U), I think like this:
- p) there is no other part (W), there is no *yitrôn* [m], because God [m] has done something bad (X).
- q) I don’t think like this: I can do something (Y); because of this (Y), after this (Y), things (Z) will be like these things (Z) were before God [m] did these things (X).
- r) I cannot think like this: there is a *yitrôn* [m]. (Eccl 1:13b, 14b-15; 2:1b-2, 10b-11)

The third and final temporal scene consists of a reflection on the past two temporal scenes. The scene is presented most clearly in Eccl 2:10b-11. The final phrase in v.10, *wəze(h) hāyā(h) helqî mikkol 'āmālî* seems to transition towards a new evaluative scene in line with v. 11. The first half of v.11, *ūpānîti 'ānî bəkol ma 'āsay še 'āsū yāday ūbe 'āmāl še 'āmaltî la 'āsōt* also sets up the basis for the third scene, rooting the evaluation in the second scene. The second half of v.11, *wəhinnē(h) hakkōl hebel ūrə 'ūt rū^ah wə 'ē(y)n yitrôn taḥat haššāmeš*, gives an evaluation of the previous temporal stage. The particle *hinnē(h)* is presentative and serves to direct attention to information perceived by the speaker.³³⁰ The phrase *hakkōl hebel ūrə 'ūt rū^ah wə 'ē(y)n yitrôn taḥat haššāmeš* is an evaluative comment on the preceding temporal scenes. The same change of scene is expressed by the phrase *wəhinnē(h)* in Eccl 1:14b and Eccl 2:1 indicating a similar transition to an evaluation of what precedes. Since this evaluation is made as Qoheleth writes, the semantic prime NOW is appropriate.

How can the final scene be schematized? First, we may hypothesize that this is a thought. Since Eccl 1:14b; 2:1b, 11b are all propositions, it must be either THINK, SAY, or KNOW. The only substantial clue about the semantics is in Eccl 2:11 in the verb *pānîti*. Since he computes the conclusion, *hakkōl hebel*, it is not something he already KNOWS. Moreover, the point seems not to be in the fact he is communicating (SAYING) the idea, but that this is something he personally noticed. Therefore, the semantic primes I THINK seem to be the most appropriate here; this hypothesis should stand until disproved.

³³⁰ See JM§105d. New approaches to the particle are published frequently (for instance, Cynthia L. Miller-Naudé and Christo HJ van der Merwe, “Hinne and Mirativity in Biblical Hebrew,” *HS* 52, no. 1 (2011): 53-81), but the substance of the idea that the particle is presentative has not dramatically changed.

The topic of thought in these three occurrences of *hebel* always includes the construction “X is *hebel*.” The subject of the construction differs in the three occurrences here. *Hakkōl* appears in Eccl 1:14 and 2:11, raising the possibility that the scene is construed in terms of ALL THINGS. However, Eccl 2:1 has *hū*’ as the subject, contradicting the hypothesis that ALL THINGS is included in the definition. The demonstrative pronoun *hū*’ in Eccl 2:1 points back to the preceding situation: thus, the semantic prime THIS may underlie the semantics here. THIS survives the process of abstraction among our three initial passages, since although *hakkōl* is not the same as a determinative, it too may be referring back anaphorically to what was previously said.

In fact, *hakkōl* in Eccl 1:14b seems to refer back, at least partially, to *kol hamma ‘āśīm*. In Eccl 2:11b, *hakkōl* seems to be related to Eccl 2:11a, *ūpānītī ‘ānī bəkol ma ‘āśay še ‘āsū yāday ūbe ‘āmāl še ‘āmaltī la ‘āsōt*. Thus, *ma ‘āśay še ‘āsū yāday ūbe ‘āmāl še ‘āmaltī la ‘āsōt* seems to be a strong candidate for what is meant by *hakkōl*. Thus, THIS seems to be invariant. However, it may be possible to be more specific: All the uses seem to be referring to THIS THING I DID. Both Eccl 1:14b and Eccl 2:11b have actions (verbal nouns) as the referent. Moreover, Eccl 2:1b has a demonstrative, and the antecedent is likely to comprise of the actions Qoheleth commands to his heart in Eccl 2:1a: “Come now, I will test you with joy. Enjoy pleasure!” *lākā(h) nā(‘) ‘ānassākā(h) bəšimhā(h) ūr ‘ē(h) bəṭōb*. This seems to support the hypothesis that the semantics involve THESE THINGS I DID.

The word *hebel* in the phrase “X is *hebel*” does not need to be included in constructing its meaning: The word is a phonological sign that prompts the mind to access a concept, and the meaning is determined by the context. However, there is a possibility that *hebel* in Ecclesiastes is a sense that depended on a live metaphor: In this case, it may be necessary to include in the definition THIS IS LIKE *hebel* (vapor(?) [m]). That is, the idea that *hebel* (vapor) [m] may have

helped people to access the correct meaning of *hebel* in Ecclesiastes. In this case, it would become necessary to define the concrete meaning of *hebel* but since concrete nouns are much more complex than the abstract in terms of NSM, it is difficult to reconstruct the specific concrete meaning from texts alone. But since the concrete meaning is secondary to the primary contextual meaning, it will not be discussed in detail here.

The phrase *wə 'ē(y)n yitrôn* seems also to be invariant within stage 3. The meaning of *yitrôn* will be repeated here for the sake of reference:

- 6) *Yitrôn* (*X is a Yitrôn* (for Y (someone) who does Z (something)))
 - a) something
 - a) people can say what this something is with the word *yitrôn*
 - b) someone can say something about something with this word when this someone thinks like this:
 - c) it can be like this: Y can do something (Z) with X
 - d) not like other people do this something (Z) with something else.
 - e) because of this I think like this: good things will happen to Y, not like good things happen to other people.
 - f) because of these things Y can say: *yitrôn* is mine

That the concept of *yitrôn* is involved in the semantics of *hebel* seems to be reinforced by the phrase *lišhoq 'āmartî məhōlāl ūšimḥā(h) ma(h) zō(h) 'ōšā(h)* in Eccl 2:2.³³¹ More specifically, the second phrase concerning *šimḥā(h)* seems to bear resemblance to the meaning of *yitrôn*. The phrase asks, “what does this (*šimḥā(h)*) do?” And *šimḥā(h)* is also mentioned in Eccl 2:1 as an

³³¹ Seow emends *məhōlāl* to *me<h> hōlēl* (Seow, *Ecclesiastes: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 126). Although this is possible, the semantic argument made for this emendation is not entirely convincing.

instrument, *ʿānassəkā(h) bəšimḥā(h)*. Thus, in this context, the phrase coheres with the component of *yitrôn*, I CAN DO SOMETHING WITH X. The underlying complaint in *ma(h) zō(h) ʿōśā(h)* seems to be best expressed in terms of *yitrôn*: The point is not that there is nothing that one can do with *šimḥā(h)*. There are clearly many things that can be done with *šimḥā(h)*. Rather, the complaint is best read as expressing a similar point to *ʿē(y)n yitrôn*: The point is that *šimḥā(h)* does not allow Qoheleth to do something NOT LIKE OTHER PEOPLE DO THIS SOMETHING WITH SOMETHING ELSE (component (e)), and does not allow Qoheleth to think BECAUSE OF THIS GOOD THINGS HAPPEN, NOT LIKE GOOD THINGS HAPPEN TO OTHER PEOPLE (component (f)). Therefore, the semantics of *ma(h) zō(h) ʿōśā(h)* can thus be expressed in the larger frame of *yitrôn*.

The first phrase in Eccl 2:2, *lišḥoq ʿāmartî məhōlāl*, is clearly metaphorical, since the referent of *məhōlāl* is normally animate. Although the semantics of the phrase is difficult to penetrate, I suggest that it be read in terms of I CANNOT THINK LIKE THIS: THERE IS A *yitrôn* [m] in agreement with the second half of the verse. Something that is ‘madness’ cannot be thought as a *yitrôn*.

Some differences between the expressions in Eccl 2:2 and Eccl 2:11 must be resolved. The interrogative *ma(h) zō(h) ʿōśā(h)* in Eccl 2:2 seems to be expressing the inability aspect in our explication: I CANNOT THINK LIKE THIS: THERE IS A *yitrôn* [m]. This is different from the primes I THINK LIKE THIS: THERE IS NO *yitrôn* [m] as we hypothesized for Eccl 2:11. Not all people who CANNOT THINK LIKE THIS: THERE IS A *yitrôn* [m] at the same time THINK: THERE IS NO *yitrôn* [m], and vice versa. Therefore, there is an important difference between these two expressions. However, there is at the same time an overlap in referent, since some people who CANNOT THINK LIKE THIS: THERE IS A *yitrôn* [m] at the same time THINK: THERE IS NO *yitrôn* [m]

and vice versa. Therefore, these two components are mutually exclusive of one another, and both may be included in the definition, until further evidence proves otherwise.

The phrase *wəḥesrōn lō(ʿ) yūkal ləhimmānōt* in Eccl 1:15b may also be related to *hebel*. Whether this is a proverb or whether it is directly related to *hebel* has often been debated.³³² But it is evident that the verse is not to be taken literally; the fact itself that what is lacking cannot be counted is irrelevant to the context. I suggest that it be read using a concept similar to *yōtēr*. I repeat here the definition of *yōtēr* for the sake of reference:

- 7) *yōtēr*
 - a) something (X).
 - b) people can say what this something is with the word *yōtēr*
 - c) someone can say something about something with this word when this someone thinks like this:
 - d) it can be like this: there are some things
 - f) I can think of these things as two parts
 - g) someone can do something with one part
 - h) someone can do something with this other part (X)
 - i) I can say something about this other part (X) with the word *yōtēr*

The Hebrew *ḥesrōn* is a hapax legomenon, but the root, cognate data, and ancient translations suggest that it meant something like English *lacking*.³³³ Several components of

³³² For recent proponents of the idea that it is a proverb (see Lys, *L'Ecclésiaste ou Que Vaut La Vie?*, 162-65; and Lohfink, *Qoheleth*, 48). But Seow takes the intermediate view that says Eccl 1:15 reinforces what came previously. See Seow, *Ecclesiastes: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 146-48). Gordis takes the view that v. 15 should be integrated with the previous verse, translating “behold all is vanity and chasing of wind, a crookedness not to be straightened, a void not to be filled” (see Gordis, *Koheleth*, 148).

³³³ For the cognate data, see HALOT’s entry for *ḥesrōn*. LXX translates ὑστερημα (meaning “deficiency/shortcoming/need” according to LSJ), Targum and Syriac translate *ḥesrōn* using the cognate *ḥassir* (meaning “lacking” according to CAL and Payne Smith’s *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*).

wəḥesrōn lō(ʾ) yūkāl laḥimmānōt overlap with *yōtēr*: The idea of dividing something into TWO PARTS in the concept *yōtēr* agrees with the idea of *lacking*. The idea that THIS OTHER PART is being profiled also applies to *ḥesrōn*, since the context states that the *ḥesrōn* cannot be counted. Therefore, the twin ideas of TWO PARTS and THIS OTHER PART are part of the semantics in v. 15.

The idea of using TWO PARTS and THIS OTHER PART to describe the semantics is further justified by Eccl 2:10: *wəkōl ʾāšer šāʾālū ʿē(y)nay lō(ʾ) ʾāṣaltî mēhem lō(ʾ) māna ʿtî ʾet libbî mikkol šimḥā(h) kî libbî sāmē^aḥ mikkol ʾāmālî wəze(h) ḥāyā(h) ḥelqî mikkol ʾāmālî*. The components TWO PARTS and THIS OTHER PART help to explain what is being expressed here. We may hypothesize that the *ḥēleq* in Eccl 2:10 refers to the ONE PART. The *ḥēleq* is characterized as a thing that Qoheleth feels good about. However, these good things that Qoheleth had found are clearly not what Qoheleth set out for in Eccl 2:3 in the expression *ʿē(y) zeh ṭōb*; what Qoheleth saw was not what he had set out in expectation to find. This conceptually overlaps with the *ḥesrōn* in Eccl 1:15b. We may define the thing Qoheleth had expected to find as THIS OTHER PART, and we may distinguish it from ONE PART by defining THIS OTHER PART as something contrary to the types of things Qoheleth had found in Eccl 2:10-11. Therefore, something like THERE IS NO OTHER PART may be the semantics assumed in *hebel*. We will return again to what consists this OTHER PART later.

The phrase *mə ʾuwwāt lō(ʾ) yūkāl litqōn* in Eccl 1:15a remains to be discussed. The phrase seems to implicitly blame God for the current state of affairs. This is evident in the later use of a similar phrase in Eccl 7:13: *rə ʿē(h) ʾet ma ʾāšē(h) ḥā ʾēlōhîm kî mî yūkāl lətaqqēn ʾēt ʾāšer ʾiwwātō*. The phrase is a metaphor and the meaning in context can be explained using semantic primes. I suggest the following explication: (THERE IS NO OTHER PART) BECAUSE God [m] HAS DONE SOMETHING BAD. I DON'T THINK LIKE THIS: I CAN DO SOMETHING. BECAUSE OF THIS, AFTER

THIS, THIS THING WILL BE LIKE THIS THING WAS BEFORE GOD [m] DID THESE THINGS (The explication includes God [m] but this will require a separate study so will remain unexplicated).

The explication is supported by Eccl 1:13 that says of Qoheleth's quest to try and search everything is done under the Sun, *hū' 'inyan rā' nātan 'ēlōhīm libnē(y) hā'ādām la'ānōt bō*. This placement of blame on God is characteristic in Eccl 1:12-15. The explication proposed here remains invariant, since Eccl 2:1-11 is silent on whom to blame for Qoheleth's situation, and therefore our explication remains uncontradicted.

The discussion on the third temporal stage has led to the following schematization: NOW I THINK ABOUT THIS THINGS I DID, I THINK LIKE THIS: "THERE IS NO OTHER PART, THERE IS NO *yitrôn* [m], BECAUSE God [m] HAS DONE SOMETHING BAD." I DON'T THINK LIKE THIS: "I CAN DO SOMETHING. BECAUSE OF THIS, AFTER THIS, THESE THING WILL BE LIKE THESE THING WERE BEFORE GOD [m] DID THESE THINGS." I CANNOT THINK LIKE THIS: "THERE IS A *yitrôn* [m]." But a problem arises. The explication as it stands seems to suggest that this is all Qoheleth thinks about now, and this seems to go beyond the text. I suggest that the idea of AT THE TIME WHEN should be added to produce the explication: NOW, AT THE TIME WHEN I THINK... Adding AT THE TIME WHEN makes it clear that we do not need to think Qoheleth is stuck on this idea.

6.4.2.4. Background

Earlier, I argued that the underlying logic behind Qoheleth's determination to DO SOMETHING WITH SOMETHING was a positive thing, and something to do with WANTING. The last temporal stage shines more light on Qoheleth's determination: Qoheleth's denial of the existence of a *yitrôn* and THIS OTHER PART only makes sense if he had earlier thought there was a *yitrôn*

and an OTHER PART. These ideas may be brought together to hypothesize that it was THIS OTHER PART that Qoheleth wanted.³³⁴

Additionally, that the underlying logic had something to do with WANTING is implied in Qoheleth's use of *rə 'ût rû^ah*. As we discussed in the previous chapter, the term seems to be best derived from PS **ršy* "to desire."

Since there are no explicit hints in the text, I have reconstructed the background as follows:

8) BACKGROUND

- e) I thought like this about some things (T): these things (T) are a *yitrôn* [m], these things (T) are mine
- f) I thought: when I do something (U) with these things (T) many good things (V) will happen to me
- g) I can think of these good things (V) as two parts
- h) I will feel something because of one part
- i) I will feel something very good at all times because of this other part (W)
- j) I wanted this other part (W)
- k) because of this (component (j)), I cannot not think about doing these things (U), this is bad

The explication is somewhat lengthy, but most of it is inferred from the fact that Qoheleth later thinks there is no *yitrôn*, and that THIS OTHER PART is missing. More specifically, Qoheleth must have thought that he had a *yitrôn* (component (e)), and that he was hopeful of doing something with it (component (f)). Furthermore, Qoheleth must have had an idea of THIS OTHER PART

³³⁴ This underlying ambition is also recognized by Weeks. Speaking of human ambitions, Weeks claims that human ambitions fuel their work, yet they can be thwarted by divine will. He then asserts that "those ambitions are at the heart of Qoheleth's claims about *hebel*." Weeks, *Ecclesiastes and Scepticism*, 157.

(components (i) - (j)). Since THIS OTHER PART seems to be something missing in the result of his activities (Eccl 1:13-14; 2:10-11), it is the results of his actions that are thought of as TWO PARTS (component (g)).

Component (i) hypothesizes that Qoheleth thought he would FEEL SOMETHING VERY GOOD AT ALL TIMES BECAUSE OF THIS OTHER PART. Some evidence for this component can be seen in Eccl 2:10. After fulfilling his fantasies, Qoheleth felt very good, since he embraced joy. But clearly, Qoheleth is not satisfied. In Eccl 1:13, the problem seems to be that his actions themselves were a bad preoccupation: *hū*’ (the works that happen under the Sun, including his own) *‘inyan rā*’. Although these texts only hint at what Qoheleth expected from THIS OTHER PART, an intuitive guess is that Qoheleth did not FEEL SOMETHING VERY GOOD AT ALL TIMES, since both Eccl 1:13 and Eccl 2:10 would certainly not fulfil this requirement. Furthermore, Qoheleth’s works in Eccl 2:4-10 seem to be suited for fulfilling his desire to FEEL SOMETHING VERY GOOD AT ALL TIMES.³³⁵ This standing hypothesis will be tested with successive texts.

Finally, as I have already pointed out multiple times, the idea of WANTING has been inferred throughout the two scenes. Component (j) ascertains that it is THIS OTHER PART that he WANTS. To this, component (k) may be added, since Qoheleth talks about a “bad preoccupation,” *‘inyan rā*’, in Eccl 1:13. This component seems also to be relevant to Eccl 2:1-11: the works mentioned in Eccl 2:1-11 are not about turning the kettle on or filling out forms; they are clearly greater aims that one could conceivably be preoccupied with.

³³⁵ A similar argument about Qoheleth’s expectation is made by Fox, who sees Qoheleth as expecting the consequences of good behavior to be “final and irreversible.” See Michael V. Fox, “The Inner Structure of Qoheleth’s Thought,” in *Qoheleth in the Context of Wisdom*, ed. A. Schoors (Leuven: University Press and Uitgeverij Peeters, 1998), 235. See also for an argument about how Qoheleth’s view is centered on eternity, Barucq, *Question sur le Sens du Travail: Qo 1,2; 2:21-23*,” 69.

Explication (8) above may be transformed into the background of the three temporal stages, since all of the stages assume this background logic. It may be placed before temporal stage 1 and joined to stage 1 by using the idea of BECAUSE OF THIS.

The profile of *hebel* seems to be on STAGE 3: THERE IS NO OTHER PART (Z). There are several reasons for placing the profile here: 1) This section summarizes the essence of the meaning that the scene builds towards. 2) The word *hebel* occurs mostly after *hinnē(h)*. Since *hinnē(h)* is expressed by NOW, placing the profile close to it is appropriate. 3) The immediate context of the phrase “X is *hebel*,” is a thought that results from a reflection on Qoheleth’s past observations, WHEN I THINK ABOUT THESE THINGS I DID (U). 4) The idea that there is no *yitrôn* is stated separately in Eccl 2:11 so seems to be related, but it is not the focused element itself. The same can be said for the idea of God [m] DOING SOMETHING BAD. Therefore, the component THERE IS NO OTHER PART (W) has been underlined to signal that it is the focus of the explication.

Finally, it is already clear that *hebel* has an abstract meaning; it is a way of thinking about something. In addition to the information about the context, the idea that *hebel* is an abstract noun may be added. NSM expresses this information through the formula:

9) ABSTRACTNESS

- a) something
- b) people can say what this something is with the word *hebel*
- c) someone can say something about something with this word when this someone thinks like this:
- d) it can be like this:

6.4.3. Ecclesiastes 2:12-17

The unit Eccl 2:12-17 is bound by its theme, the inspection of wisdom and folly in relation to death. By employing STA, the text can be used to test whether any of its elements contradict or are irrelevant to the explication that has been built to this point. If it happens that an element appears that can be added to the explication that does not contradict and is not irrelevant to the previous texts, this can be added to the explication. If there is no need to add or take away, this in itself is significant too, for it shows that our explication may faithfully represent the cognitive entity that controlled Qoheleth's use of *hebel*.

The analysis henceforth will be made by placing the relevant text in the left column and placing the relevant parts of the explication in the right column. The layout will help to correlate our explications with the text. Translations have been provided only in texts that have been controversial and which require translation to clarify the reading taken in the analysis. Where a semantic component has been deleted due to a textual unit, it will be shown crossed out in the right column (e.g., ~~I FELT BAD~~), and where a new component has been added, it will be written in bold (e.g., **I FELT SOMETHING GOOD**). Texts underlined will continue to show profiled elements within the explication.

<p>Eccl 2:12a וּפְנִיתִי אֲנִי לְרֵאוֹת תְּקֻמָּה וְהוֹלֵלוֹת וְסִכְלוֹת</p>	<p>STAGE 1: I THOUGHT LIKE THIS: I WILL DO SOMETHING (U) WITH SOMETHING (T). The verb <i>r'h</i> implies more than SEE here, as becomes clear from Qoheleth's investigation that ensues. The idea of <i>drš</i> and <i>twr</i> from Eccl 1:13 are probably the kinds of actions meant by <i>r'h</i> here. The WITH SOMETHING component is missing here but implied in Eccl 2:15 in the verb <i>hākamtī</i>.</p>
<p>Eccl 2:12b For what is the man who comes after the king with</p>	<p>BACKGROUND: I WILL FEEL SOMETHING VERY GOOD AT ALL TIMES BECAUSE OF THIS OTHER PART (W). This is the first time that we encounter this logic. We may schematize the component as belonging also in STAGE 1 as follows: BECAUSE I THOUGHT ABOUT SOMETHING</p>

<p>what has already been achieved?³³⁶</p> <p>כִּי מָה הָאָדָם שִׁיבוֹא אַחֲרַי הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶת אֲשֶׁר־כָּבַר עֲשׂוּהוּ</p>	<p>(the specifics of the text are irrelevant to the previous texts and so have been abstracted). However, this component would be weak in terms of relevance, since it seems tangential to the essence of the temporal scene; i.e., it seems not to be important in Eccl 1:13-15 and Eccl 2:1-11 that Qoheleth was determined because he THOUGHT ABOUT SOMETHING. Moreover, the reasoning for Qoheleth's actions are already expressed in the BACKGROUND. Because of this, an addition of a component in STAGE 1 would be somewhat superfluous.</p> <p>I suggest that this text be seen as surfacing the BACKGROUND. The question posed by Qoheleth in this verse reflects an interest in the future that assumes I WILL FEEL SOMETHING VERY GOOD AT ALL TIMES BECAUSE OF THIS OTHER PART (W). Qoheleth wants to figure out whether this is truly the case or not.</p>
<p>Eccl 2:13-14</p> <p>וְרָאִיתִי אֲנִי שְׂגִישׁ וְתִרְוֹן לְחֻכְמָה מִן־ הַסִּכְלוֹת כִּי־תִרְוֹן הָאֹר מִן־הַחֹשֶׁךְ: הַחֻכָּם עֵינָיו בְּרָאשׁוֹ וְהַכְּסִיל בַּחֹשֶׁךְ הוֹלֵךְ וְיִדְעָתִי גַם־אֲנִי שֶׁמִּקְרָה אֶחָד יִקְרָה אֶת־כָּלָם</p>	<p>STAGE 2: BECAUSE OF THIS (component (m)) I SAW MANY THINGS.</p> <p>The idea of DOING SOMETHING WITH SOMETHING, which is also a part of STAGE 2, is not mentioned here. However, it could be assumed that the DOING is implicitly assumed, the idea being one of searching with wisdom like in Eccl 1:13. This would be relevant for a reading, adding more cohesiveness to the scene.</p> <p>BACKGROUND: I THOUGHT: WHEN I DO SOMETHING (U) WITH THESE THINGS (T) MANY GOOD THINGS (V) WILL HAPPEN TO ME. I CAN THINK OF THESE GOOD THINGS (V) AS TWO PARTS. I WILL FEEL SOMETHING BECAUSE OF ONE PART. I WILL FEEL SOMETHING VERY GOOD AT ALL TIMES BECAUSE OF THIS OTHER PART (W).</p> <p>The idea of there being a <i>yitrôn</i> here does not contradict the explication, since the frames differ; The <i>yitrôn</i> in the explication of <i>hebel</i> would be in reference to a <i>yitrôn</i> of wisdom in making Qoheleth FEEL SOMETHING VERY GOOD AT ALL TIMES. On the other hand, the <i>yitrôn</i> of wisdom mentioned</p>

³³⁶ The translation of the second half of the verse has been controversial. For instance, Fox asserts that the text makes no sense as it stands, and emends to “for what will the man be like who will come after <me, who will rule> over what <I earned> earlier?” (Fox, *A Time to Tear Down & A Time to Build Up: A Rereading of Ecclesiastes*, 182-83). The translation “who will rule” is a result of emending *melek* (king) to *mōlēk* (to rule). It is conceivable that the verb *mlk* means through metaphorical extension “to own/control,” but in Qoheleth’s language *šlṭ* is used in such cases. Instead of introducing an emendation, I have tried to understand the text as it stands. I have taken *’ēt ’āšer* as “with what” (see Deut 29:14 for a parallel use of *’ēt ’āšer*). Qoheleth seems to be asking in a pessimistic tone what the man with (in the sense of possession) the achievements of his predecessors is. The question is relevant to the context, since if the next generation is only inheriting what has already been done, they are not impressive, and so hope must be placed elsewhere. Moreover, it foreshadows the direct answer to the question in Eccl 2:18-21.

	<p>in Eccl 2:13-14a is in reference to the action of living everyday life (as implied by <i>hlc</i> used metaphorically in Eccl 2:14a).³³⁷</p> <p>The idea of the ONE PART and THIS OTHER PART is relevant to this text, since the text is saying that through his investigation of wisdom and folly, good things happened: He found that there is a <i>yitrôn</i> to wisdom, and he can do something with this knowledge. This fits well with the idea of the ONE PART that has been hypothesized to make Qoheleth FEEL SOMETHING.</p> <p>The tragedy seems to be that there was no OTHER PART that he could use to FEEL SOMETHING VERY GOOD AT ALL TIMES, since death overtakes both the wise and the fool. This is important to our explication since the section confirms the hypothesis that THIS OTHER PART is defined through AT ALL TIMES, since this would explain why death would frustrate Qoheleth.</p>
<p>Eccl 2:15 וְאָמַרְתִּי אֲנִי בְלִבִּי כְּמִקְרָה הִכְסִיחַ גַּם־אֲנִי יִקְרַנִּי וְלָמָּה חִכְמָתִי אֲנִי אֶז יֹתֵר וְדִבְרֹתַי בְּלִבִּי שְׂגַם־זֶה הַכֹּל</p>	<p>STAGE 3: NOW AT THE TIME WHEN I THINK ABOUT THIS THING I DID (U), THESE THINGS I SAW, I THINK LIKE THIS: <u>THERE IS NO OTHER PART (W)</u>.</p> <p>Several things are worth discussing:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The idea that the last stage is about THINKING was yet uncertain earlier, but our hypothesis is confirmed here by the phrases <i>wə'āmartî 'ānî bəlibbî</i> and <i>wədibbartî bəlibbî</i>. 2) The idea that Qoheleth would die too, just as the fool, is only indirectly covered by WHEN I THINK ABOUT THESE THINGS I DID (X); the observation here in v. 15 is more precisely a <i>result</i> of the things he did. This result is expressed in STAGE 2 as BECAUSE OF THIS I SAW MANY THINGS. <p>I suggest adding THESE THINGS I SAW to STAGE 3 too. The phrase may be added as follows: NOW AT THE TIME WHEN I THINK ABOUT THIS THING I DID, THESE THINGS I SAW. This new explication is consistent with previous texts, and so it conforms with STA.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3) Our present explication accounts for the phrase <i>wəlamṁā(h) ḥākamtî 'ānî 'āz yōtēr</i>. The semantics seems to be symptomatic of the component (I THINK LIKE THIS:) THERE IS NO OTHER PART (Z). The rhetorical question arises from a realization that he did not achieve what he WANTED through becoming wise (i.e., THIS OTHER PART (Z)). However, the phrase seems to have pragmatic overtones beyond its literal reading, which require further additions to our explication. The rhetorical question could be described as deriving from <i>frustration</i> at least in terms of modern Anglo sentimentality. Even if we take precautions and avoid modern sentiments, it seems very likely that something

³³⁷ See for a similar view about differences in scope of *yitrôn* of wisdom in Qoheleth, Weeks, *Ecclesiastes and Scepticism*, 101.

	<p>like I FEEL VERY BAD could be lurking behind the rhetorical question. This issue will be dealt with in more detail with v. 17a below.</p>
<p>Eccl 2:16 כי אין זכרון לחכם עם-הקסיל לעולם בשקבר הימים הבאים הכל נשפח ואיך ימות הקכם עם-הקסיל</p>	<p>STAGE 3: NOW AT THE TIME WHEN I THINK ABOUT THIS THING I DID (U), THESE THINGS I SAW, I THINK LIKE THIS: This scene belongs to STAGE 3 and it is reflective towards STAGE 2. He is aware that he thinks <i>hebel</i> BECAUSE he saw these things. The question that arises is whether the semantics of <i>hebel</i> should include an additional component in stage 3, I THINK LIKE THIS BECAUSE I SAW MANY THINGS. That is, how relevant is the fact of Qoheleth's awareness of his own reasoning to the meaning of <i>hebel</i>?</p> <p>The open-endedness of STA becomes clear in cases such as this. It is possible to see the semantics here as being symptomatic of what we have already in STAGE 3. But it is also possible to add an additional component into STAGE 3, with slight superfluousness as it would contribute little to the scene.</p> <p>The most realistic response to this conundrum is to hypothesize that this is the nature of invariance: There can sometimes be multiple possible invariants. This is natural, since different people may arrive at slightly different abstractions of scenes. As in this present case, these abstractions would be very similar, such that both explications are invariant. It is important to stress that nowhere is it said that there may only be one invariant for a word. For the present case, I will refrain from adding I THINK LIKE THIS BECAUSE I SAW MANY THINGS to STAGE 3 since that connection is already indirectly made at the start of STAGE 3, and I judge that it would add details that is slightly superfluous, and not very relevant.</p>
<p>Eccl 2:17a וְשָׂנְאֵתִי אֶת-הַחַיִּים כִּי רַע עָלַי הַמַּעֲשֵׂה שְׂנֵעֲשֵׂה תַחַת הַשָּׁמַשׁ</p>	<p>STAGE 3: BECAUSE OF THIS, I FEEL SOMETHING BAD TOWARDS DOING SOMETHING (U). The first <i>waw</i> should be read as a conjunction, not as <i>wəqatal</i>. The meaning of the conjunction is “so.” This reading seems to be implied by the context, where the hate for life comes from his previous thoughts.</p> <p>The phrase <i>wāsānē’ṭi ’et haḥayyîm</i> seems to include the idea “I FEEL SOMETHING VERY BAD TOWARDS ALL THINGS PEOPLE DO” (if we take <i>ḥayyîm</i> to mean ALL THINGS PEOPLE DO as a result of metonymy from “life”) More specifically, the second clause goes on to talk about works (<i>ma’āše(h)</i>), and so it is appropriate to assume it is what people do that makes Qoheleth feel bad. Furthermore, it seems to be his own works, which are included within the works that PEOPLE DO, that make him FEEL BAD. This seems more coherent to the <i>hebel</i> scene as a whole.</p>

	<p>Also, it would be a relevant abstraction that applies to the previous scenes in Eccl 2:1-11 and Eccl 1:12-15.</p> <p>The idea of FEELING SOMETHING BAD is absent from our current explication, so needs to be expressed through a new component. It belongs at the end of stage 3 since it is a logical consequence: BECAUSE OF THIS, I FEEL SOMETHING BAD TOWARDS DOING SOMETHING (U).</p> <p>The second phrase <i>kî ra ' ālay hamma 'āše(h) šenna 'āšā(h) taḥat haššāmeš</i> gives the reason for why Qoheleth FELT SOMETHING BAD. Again, like in Eccl 2:16 above, we may add BECAUSE I SAW MANY THINGS to the explication, but this would be somewhat superfluous and so it will not be included for now.</p>
<p>Eccl 2:17b כִּי־הִכַּל הַכֹּל וְרַעוּת רִוּחַ</p>	<p>STAGE 3: <u>THERE IS NO OTHER PART (W)</u></p> <p>Unlike the previous uses of <i>hebel</i>, <i>hebel</i> is not what the narrative builds up to, but given as a reasoning for why all the works under the Sun are bad. There is nothing here that contradicts our explication.</p>

By employing STA, it has been found that none of the previous content has been contradicted in Eccl 2:12-17. On the other hand, there have been a few items that have been added to the definition. The explication that has been made, to this point, has been summarized below. The parts in bold represent those components that have been added:

8) **ABSTRACTNESS:**

- a) something
- b) people can say what this something is with the word *hebel*
- c) someone can say something about something with this word when this someone thinks like this:
- d) it can be like this:

BACKGROUND

- e) I thought like this about some things (T): these things (T) are a *yitrôn* [m], these things (T) are mine
- f) I thought: when I do something (U) with these things (T) many good things (V) will happen to me
- g) I can think of these good things (V) as two parts:

- h) I will feel something because of one part.
- i) I will feel something very good at all times because of this other part (W)
- j) I wanted this other part (W)
- k) because of this (component (j)), I cannot not think about doing these things (U); this is bad

STAGE 1

- l) because of this (the BACKGROUND) I thought like this: I will do something (U) with something (T)

STAGE 2

- m) after this, I did something (U) with something (T) for a long time
- n) because of this (component (m)), I saw many things (S)

STAGE 3

- o) now at the time when I think about this thing I did (U), **these things I saw (S)**,
- p) I think like this:
- q) there is no other part (W), there is no *yitrôn* [m], because God [m] has done something bad (X)
- r) I don't think like this: I can do something (Y); because of this (Y), after this (Y), things (Z) will be like these things (Z) were before God [m] did these things (X)
- s) I cannot think like this: there is a *yitrôn* [m]
- t) **because of this (Components (o) – (s)), I feel something bad towards doing something (U)**

6.4.4. Ecclesiastes 2:18-26

The section Eccl 2:18-26 can loosely be divided into two units, Eccl 2:18-23 and Eccl 2:24-26.

The first unit, Eccl 2:18-23 is connected closely through the connector *kî* that occurs 3 times in v. 21-23, making it indivisible. Eccl 2:24-26 is separable from v.18-23, since there are no explicit connectors like *kî* that connect the section with what was already said. However, the whole of chapter 2 is bound by the theme of Qoheleth's *'āmāl*, and for example, the idea of the wise and fool continues into v. 19; therefore, it is worth looking at these units together.

Ecclesiastes 2:18-23

<p>Ecc1 2:18a וְשָׂנֵאתִי אֲנִי אֶת־כָּל־עֲמָלִי שֶׁאֲנִי עֹמֵל תַּחַת הַשָּׁמַשׁ שֶׁאֲנִי חֹנֵן לְאָדָם שִׁיְהִיָּה אַחֲרָי:</p>	<p>STAGE 3: BECAUSE OF THIS, I FEEL SOMETHING BAD TOWARDS DOING SOMETHING (U). The section Ecc1 2:18-20 starts at the end of our explication; despite this textual reversal, the chronological order is still coherent with our explication. The <i>‘āmāl</i> in this section must mean the physical thing that results from Qoheleth’s <i>‘āmal</i>, since it is the antecedent of the verb <i>nwh</i> “to leave,” later in the verse. Thus, it is the results of the things he has done that he hates, making it slightly different in its meaning to our invariant that includes DOING. However, a relative clause modifies <i>‘āmāl</i> and profiles the fact that he is the worker who produced it. Therefore, while the text is not a clean surfacing of our invariant, the connection to DOING SOMETHING (X) is made in the relative clause. There are two viable options at this point: 1) To keep the current invariant, 2) To change the invariant to I FELT SOMETHING BAD TOWARDS SOMETHING (rather than TOWARDS DOING SOMETHING). Although both explications are possible, the former option will be taken because I judge it to be more relevant to the other components in the explication. STAGE 3: NOW AT THE TIME WHEN I THINK ABOUT THIS THING I DID (U), THESE THINGS I SAW (S). The text also seems to assume that the hatred towards his works results from (i.e., BECAUSE OF THIS) his works (i.e., WHEN I THINK ABOUT THESE THINGS I DID (U)) and from what he has seen about those works (i.e., THESE THINGS I SAW (S)), that is, the fact that he must leave his work to another.</p>
<p>Ecc1 2:18b-19a וּמִי יוֹדֵעַ הַחֶכֶם יְהִיָּה אוֹ סֹכֵל וְיִשְׁלַט בְּכָל־עֲמָלִי שֶׁעָמַלְתִּי וְשֶׁחֲכַמְתִּי תַּחַת הַשָּׁמַשׁ</p>	<p>STAGE 3: NOW AT THE TIME WHEN I THINK ABOUT THIS THING I DID (U), THESE THINGS I SAW (S). The text fits neatly into the semantic invariant at the start of STAGE 3. It mentions both actions (<i>‘āmāl</i> and <i>hākam</i>) and observations (the fact he does not know the nature of the one who inherits his works), and it sets up for Qoheleth’s <i>hebel</i> statement. The specifics concerning the observations are irrelevant to the previous scenes, and so are abstracted away.</p>
<p>Ecc1 2:19b גַּם־יְהִי הַבָּל</p>	<p>STAGE 3: <u>THERE IS NO OTHER PART (W).</u> The phrase fits neatly into our explication. It should be noted that the <i>hebel</i> here points at something slightly different from Ecc1 2:11. Both refer back to the same acts of <i>‘āmal</i>. However,</p>

	<p>the two <i>hebel</i>s differ in the accompanying observations.³³⁸ The thing that would potentially make Qoheleth FEEL SOMETHING VERY GOOD AT ALL TIMES here was the potential of knowing that the product of his <i>‘amal</i> would be looked after well, and it is this potential that has been denied in his observations.³³⁹</p>
<p>Eccl 2:20 וְסִבּוֹתַי אֲנִי לֹא אֶתְּלֹבֵי עַל כָּל־ הָעֵמֶל שְׁעֵמְלָתִי תַחַת הַשָּׁמַשׁ</p>	<p>BACKGROUND: I WANTED THIS OTHER PART (W) The root <i>y š</i> means “to give up hope.”³⁴⁰ Thus, the text seems to assume that there was a WANTING, even though the immediate context does not state this. Therefore, the idea of an expectation is probably encapsulated in <i>hebel</i> as our explication hypothesizes in the BACKGROUND. Concerning the scene itself, it moves on to a fourth stage beyond what we have seen in all the previous uses of <i>hebel</i>. It is a scene after NOW, that tries to get over the BAD FEELING. It must be questioned whether this fourth temporal stage is also a part of <i>hebel</i>. Since this is the only time this stage has appeared, and because the fact that Qoheleth gives up his expectations seems irrelevant to the previous contexts, it seems unlikely that this is part of the meaning of <i>hebel</i>.</p>
<p>Eccl 2:21a כִּי־יֵשׁ אָדָם שְׁעֵמְלוֹ בְּחִקְמָה וּבְדַעַת וּבְכִשְׁרוֹן וּלְאָדָם שְׁלֵא עֲמַלְבוֹ יִתְּנֶנּוּ חֶלְקוֹ</p>	<p>STAGE 3: NOW AT THE TIME WHEN I THINK ABOUT THIS THING I DID (U), THESE THINGS I SAW (S). The text states facts about what can happen in the world. The word used here is <i>yēš</i>, which is best approximated by the semantic prime THERE IS. Thus, it seems to be competing with SEE in terms of the place it occupies in the scene. How should STA deal with such a competition between two primes? Does this show that there is no invariant, but instead more of a prototype structure to meaning? We may first approach the problem by reviewing the possible relationships between primes. Semantic primes cannot be explicated in terms of other semantic primes, but they can be related to one another. Primes like PEOPLE and SOMEONE are clearly related, but it does not follow that one can be defined in terms of another. A second way that primes are related is within</p>

³³⁸ Fox explains the antecedent as not simply pointing to the actions, but the whole complex situation (see Fox, “The Meaning of Hebel for Qohelet,” 417). Although I agree that the antecedent is not just the action, the antecedent seems also not to be the whole complex situation; it is better narrowed down to what is DONE and SEEN. Others see a narrower referent. For instance, Lys claims the referent is the the works of Qoheleth (see Lys, *L’Ecclesiaste ou Que Vaut La Vie?*, 266-67.) Although the works is part of the referent, it is better understood in the context of Qoheleth’s observations too.

³³⁹ Fox comments that there are two injustices here: 1) The fact that the recipient may be a fool; 2) The fact that a person (wise or foolish) will inherit the work of another. See Fox, *A Time to Tear Down & A Time to Build Up: A Rereading of Ecclesiastes*, 187. This is plausible, but since the latter is brought up again later, it is likely that the emphasis is on the former here. See Ogden, *Qoheleth*, 45.

³⁴⁰ Fox, *A Time to Tear Down & A Time to Build Up: A Rereading of Ecclesiastes*, 188.

sentential contexts; since sentences can be created with primes, there will always be a syntagmatic relation between the components of a sentence. It is this second way in which *yēš* seems to be related to SEE.

I see two ways that the two may be related in Qoheleth's mind: 1) THERE IS X, BECAUSE OF THIS I SAW X, 2) I SAW X, BECAUSE OF THIS, I KNOW: THERE IS X. By testing Qoheleth's logic, it may be possible to judge between the two options. If SEEING is subordinated to existence (THERE IS) in Qoheleth's logic, then it is possible to abstract THERE IS as the common denominator, since SEEING is construed as a result of existence. If on the other hand, existence is subordinated to SEEING in Qoheleth's logic, like option 2 above, then it is possible to abstract SEEING as the common denominator, since existence is construed as knowledge of something he SAW.

By looking at places where Qoheleth explicitly states his logic between SEEING and existence, it becomes clear that the latter is the case; existence is construed as knowledge of something he SAW. We have sentences like the following: *wā'er'e(h) hebel taḥat haššāmeš yēš 'ehād wə'ē(y)n šēnī* (Eccl 4:7-8), *yēš rā 'ā(h) ḥōlā(h) rā 'itī* (Eccl 5:12), *yēš rā 'ā(h) 'āšer rā 'itī* (Eccl 6:1), *yēš rā 'ā(h) rā 'itī taḥat haššāmeš* (Eccl 10:5). The former two are in contexts with *hebel*, and the latter without. Nevertheless, we can be confident that in Qoheleth's logic, the knowledge of something's existence is the result of SEEING. Therefore, our text can be construed in terms of SEE.

The opposite logic, where SEEING is construed as a result of existence, never occurs. Moreover, including a notion of THERE IS in the explication cannot be justified, since it seems irrelevant in Eccl 1:14 and Eccl 2:3-10. In these texts, Qoheleth's logic is not predicated on the existence of what he SAW, but rather, on the very fact that he SAW; for instance, if we reworded parts of Eccl 2:5 as "there was a garden I built," it would be irrelevant, and very different from the logic of our present text, which uses *yēš* to point to an extreme example of something he SAW.

Another issue here is the causal connection between what Qoheleth DID (*'āmal*) and what he SAW. Qoheleth observes that earnings (*'āmāl* here means the result of *'āmal*, see above) are sometimes lost to people who do not even pursue (*'āmal*) them. At first sight, it is not clear that he SAW THESE THINGS BECAUSE he DID SOMETHING. However, it is important to remember that *'āmal* is not the same as English *toil* and may even include activities like being protective of earnings. Therefore, the causative connection in STAGE 2 is justified here too.

<p>Eccl 2:21b גַּם־זָה הֶבֶל וְרָעָה רַבָּה</p>	<p>STAGE 3: <u>THERE IS NO OTHER PART (W)</u>. THIS IS VERY BAD. That the <i>hebel</i> judgment here fits the definition is self-evident. But the idea of great evil is not in our definition. This thought is not contradicted or irrelevant to previous texts, and so may be added through the primes (I THINK LIKE THIS:) THIS IS VERY BAD. The idea partially overlaps with the idea that God has DONE SOMETHING BAD, and also the idea that I FEEL SOMETHING BAD TOWARDS DOING SOMETHING.</p>
<p>Eccl 2:22 כִּי מִהֵנָּה לְאָדָם בְּכָל־עֲמָלוֹ וּבְרַעְיוֹן לִבּוֹ שֶׁהוּא עֹמֵל תַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם:</p>	<p>STAGE 3: NOW AT THE TIME WHEN I THINK ABOUT THIS THING I DID (U), THESE THINGS I SAW (S). The text starts with <i>kî</i> (I say so because), explaining why the previous statement was said. In doing so, Qoheleth returns back to the things he was thinking about that led him to the <i>hebel</i> judgment. But the statement also assumes the background of our explication, since it addresses the expectations of SOMETHING GOOD HAPPENING as a result of DOING SOMETHING. It also addresses the desires of the heart (I WANT), expressed here in terms of <i>‘āmāl</i> and <i>ra ‘yōn libbō</i>. Qoheleth questions these things, asking what man gets from these things, using <i>beth pretii</i>.</p>
<p>Eccl 2:23a כִּי כָל־יָמָיו מְכַאֲבִים וְכַעַס עֲנִינוּ גַם־ בְּלִילָה לֹא־שָׁכַב לִבּוֹ</p>	<p>STAGE 3: NOW AT THE TIME WHEN I THINK ABOUT THIS THING I DID (U), THESE THINGS I SAW (S). I THINK LIKE THIS: ... THIS IS VERY BAD. The text here is again a prelude to the coming <i>hebel</i> judgment. It is typical of such a prelude. But here, we find additional support of the idea that THIS IS VERY BAD, since we find specific reasoning for the idea.</p>
<p>Eccl 2:23b גַּם־זָה הֶבֶל הוּא</p>	<p>STAGE 3: <u>THERE IS NO OTHER PART (Z)</u>. This is the third time that the action of <i>‘āmāl</i> has been called <i>hebel</i>. However, the observation (what Qoheleth SAW) has been different each time. Since it is a different combination of DOING and SEEING that is called <i>hebel</i>, Qoheleth can say “<i>gam</i> (also) this is <i>hebel</i>” on each occasion where he is talking about the action of <i>‘āmāl</i>.</p>

Ecclesiastes 2:24-26

<p>Eccl 2:24a אִין־טוֹב בְּאָדָם מִשְׂיֹאֵכַל וְשִׂתָּה וְהִרְאָה אֶת־נַפְשׁוֹ טוֹב בְּעֲמָלוֹ</p>	<p>STAGE 3: NOW AT THE TIME WHEN I THINK ABOUT THIS THING I DID (U), THESE THINGS I SAW (S), I THINK LIKE THIS: <u>THERE IS NO OTHER PART (W)</u> The statement made here by Qoheleth seems to be about things he SAW, as implied in the second half of the verse (<i>gam zō(h) rā ‘ūtī</i>). An interesting feature of STAGE 3 is justified here.</p>
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<p>(Emendation in bold: <i>še</i> > <i>mišše</i> “except that.”³⁴¹)</p>	<p>STAGE 3, unlike STAGE 2, is about thinking about the things SEEN. Such semantics make sense here, where the thought that <i>'ē(y)n tōb</i> seems to reflect <u>THERE IS NO OTHER PART (W)</u>. Moreover, the statements assume that GOOD THINGS can be divided into TWO PARTS and that Qoheleth was expecting something which is beyond simply GOOD. This justifies our inclusion of TWO PARTS within the BACKGROUND. The point is that there were some things like eating, drinking, and enjoyment that made Qoheleth FEEL GOOD (corresponding to ‘I WILL FEEL SOMETHING BECAUSE OF ONE PART’ in the BACKGROUND) but that there was nothing better than these things.</p>
<p>Ecc1 2:24b-2:26a גם־זוה רָאִיתִי אֲנִי כִּי מִיַּד הָאֱלֹהִים הִיא: כִּי מִי יֵאָכֵל וּמִי יִחַוֵּשׁ חוּץ מִמֶּנּוּ: כִּי לְאָדָם שׁטוֹב לִפְנֵי נֶתֶן תְּכַמֶּה וְדַעַת וְשִׂמְחָה וְלַחֲוֹטָא נֶתֶן עֲנָן לְאָסוּף וְלִכְבוֹד לְתַת לְטוֹב לִפְנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים: (Emendation in bold: <i>mimmennî</i> > <i>memmennū</i>³⁴²)</p>	<p>STAGE 3: NOW AT THE TIME WHEN I THINK ABOUT THIS THING I DID (U), THESE THINGS I SAW (S), I THINK LIKE THIS: <u>THERE IS NO OTHER PART (W)</u>, THERE IS NO <i>yitrôn</i> [m], <u>BECAUSE God [m] HAS DONE SOMETHING BAD (X)</u>. <u>I DON'T THINK LIKE THIS: I CAN DO SOMETHING; BECAUSE OF THIS, AFTER THIS, THIS THING WILL BE LIKE THIS THING WAS BEFORE GOD [m] DID THESE THINGS (X)</u>. BECAUSE God [m] DOES THINGS. BECAUSE OF THIS, MANY THINGS (X) HAPPEN LIKE GOD [M] WANTS. THESE THINGS (X) ARE NOT THINGS I WANTED. I CANNOT THINK LIKE THIS: THINGS WILL HAPPEN LIKE I WANT. The thought moves on to God's involvement in the matter, and thereby reinforces the idea that for Qoheleth, God's participation may have been a part of <i>hebel</i>. However, the explication must be emended, since the text contradicts the idea that God [m] HAS DONE SOMETHING BAD in several ways: 1) It is not a thing God HAS DONE, but what he DOES habitually. 2) What God DOES is both GOOD and BAD. 3) The idea articulated here is more along the lines of the issue of who</p>

³⁴¹ I follow many commentators in emending the text (for example, see Fox, *A Time to Tear Down & A Time to Build Up: A Rereading of Ecclesiastes*, 185; Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 24.). Elsewhere in the book we have *mē'āšer* (Eccl 3:22) for the same meaning, and this seems to justify the emendation. However, there is a chance that there is some grammaticalization here: Perhaps *še* had been emancipated from *min*, so that it could mean “except” without it. It is often difficult to adjudicate whether an ancient text exhibits a real change or not, since multiple explanations are possible. For a similar linguistic argument see Holmstedt, Cook, and Marshall, *Qoheleth: A Handbook on the Hebrew Text*, 114-15. It will suffice to say that whether the problem is textual or linguistic, all commentators agree that the meaning here is “except that.”

³⁴² It is a common view among commentators that an emendation to the third person is necessary, as retaining the first person here would contradict the argument being made by Qoheleth (see Podechard, *L'Écclésiaste*, 283; Seow, *Ecclesiastes: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 140-41). The most recent argument for retaining the first person is given by Holmstedt, Cook, and Marshall (Holmstedt, Cook, and Marshall, *Qoheleth*, 116-18); they argue that v. 25 should be read as parenthetical, and translated as “For who can eat, and who can worry, except for ME?” This is a plausible reading the verse, but within the larger context of v. 24 and v. 26, this makes little sense.

	<p>decides what will happen, with the implication that these things that happen are not what Qoheleth WANTS.</p> <p>These ideas can be used to reformulate the invariant as follows: (THERE IS NO <i>yitrôn</i> [m], BECAUSE) God [m] DOES THINGS, BECAUSE OF THIS, MANY THINGS (X) HAPPEN LIKE GOD [m] WANTS. THESE THINGS (X) ARE NOT THINGS I WANTED. Both the man who performs the act of <i>‘āmal</i> with a preoccupation (such as Qoheleth) and the man who enjoys life are under God’s control, and not under their own control. Moreover, both options, whether good or bad, do not qualify here for what Qoheleth WANTED. This explication explains why Qoheleth would describe God’s works as <i>mə ‘uwwāt</i> in Eccl 1:15, if we assume that the crookedness is seen as a result of what God DOES, and if the results of what God DOES are not desirable to Qoheleth (hence the negative connotation).</p> <p>The text here talks about the fact that God DOES THINGS LIKE GOD [M] WANTS, but also approaches the issue from the other side too by asking, “who can eat and who can enjoy, apart from by him?” (Eccl 2:25). Qoheleth goes on to say that even whether people become preoccupied or not is God’s choice, not human choice (Eccl 2:26). That is, Qoheleth denies the power of human effort in accomplishing what they WANT, whether that be enjoying life, or obsessing over something. Thus, our current explication can also be replaced by the component: I CANNOT THINK LIKE THIS: THINGS WILL HAPPEN LIKE I WANT. This explication further covers Eccl 1:15 <i>mə ‘uwwāt lō ‘yūkal litqōn</i>, since it is much more abstract than the explication we had previously.</p> <p>Therefore, the component, I DON’T THINK LIKE THIS: I CAN DO SOMETHING (Y); BECAUSE OF THIS (Y), AFTER THIS (Y), THIS THING (Z) WILL BE LIKE THIS THING WAS BEFORE GOD [m] DID THESE THINGS (Z), that was designed to explain <i>mə ‘uwwāt lō ‘yūkal litqōn</i> (Eccl 1:15) should be deleted. There are two reasons: First, our new component here covers part of the meaning of this older component, making it somewhat superfluous. Second, it is difficult to see the relevance of it in this text. As a result, we have a new explication in STAGE 3. The ideas expressed deny what was assumed in the BACKGROUND, and therefore it adds cohesiveness to the whole explication, by making STAGE 3 a logical contingent to the BACKGROUND.</p>
<p>Eccl 2:26b גַּם־זֶה הַכֹּל וְרַעוּת רֹוּם</p>	<p>STAGE 3: <u>THERE IS NO OTHER PART (Z)</u> The phrase, as in the other occurrences of this phrase, fits our explication.</p>

The analysis of Eccl 2:18-26 had four occurrences of *hebel*, and the scenes contained therein have allowed us to trim our explication further. The explication that has been created is shown below:

9) **ABSTRACTNESS:**

- a) something
- b) people can say what this something is with the word *hebel*
- c) someone can say something about something with this word when this someone thinks like this:
- d) it can be like this:

BACKGROUND

- e) I thought like this about some things (T): these things (T) are a *yitrôn* [m], these things (T) are mine
- f) I thought: when I do something (U) with these things (T) many good things (V) will happen to me
- g) I can think of these good things (V) as two parts:
- h) I will feel something because of one part.
- i) I will feel something very good at all times because of this other part (W)
- j) I wanted this other part (W)
- k) because of this (component (j)), I cannot not think about doing these things (U); this is bad

STAGE 1

- l) because of this (the BACKGROUND) I thought like this: I will do something (U) with something (T)

STAGE 2

- m) after this, I did something (U) with something (T) for a long time
- n) because of this (component (m)), I saw many things (S)

STAGE 3

- o) now at the time when I think about this thing I did (U), these things I saw (S),
- p) I think like this:

- q) there is no other part (W), there is no *yitrôn* [m], ~~because God [m] has done something bad (X)~~ **because God [m] does things.**
- r) **because of this, many things (X) happen like God [m] wants.**
- s) **these things (X) are not things I wanted.**
- t) **This ((U) and (S)) is very bad.**
~~I don't think like this: I can do something (Y); because of this (Y), after this (Y), things (Z) will be like these things (Z) were before God [m] did these things (X)~~
- u) I cannot think like this: **things will happen like I want**, there is a *yitrôn* [m]
- v) because of this (Components (o) – (u)), I feel something bad towards doing something (U)

6.4.5. The Remaining Uses of *hebel* in Ecclesiastes

The remaining uses of *hebel* will be placed in this section and will be followed by a final explication for *hebel*. As will become clear, the explication we have now is already very close to the final explication, and so there is no need to divide up the usages into small sections and to provide an analysis after each usage as I have been doing to this point.

Ecclesiastes 3:19

Hebel is used here as a reason (*kî*) for why humans and beasts are the same. Although Ecclesiastes 3:19 participates in a larger context, it would be wrong to attribute the whole context to this usage of *hebel*. This is not to say most of chapter 3 is irrelevant to *hebel*, since the theme of the book is *hebel*. But for now, it will be the occurrences and their contexts that will be under study.

<p>Eccl 3:19 כִּי מִקְרָה בְּנִי־הָאָדָם וּמִקְרָה הַבְּהֵמָה וּמִקְרָה אֶחָד לָהֶם כְּמוֹת זֶה כִּן מוֹת</p>	<p>STAGE 3: <u>THERE IS NO OTHER PART (Z)</u>. <i>Hebel</i> here is being used as reasoning (<i>kî</i>, “because”) to support the main argument made earlier in the verse.</p>
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<p>זֶה וְרוּחַ לְפָל וּמוֹתָר הָאָדָם מִן־ הַבְּהֵמָה אֵין כִּי הַפֶּל הַבְּבֵל</p>	<p>Therefore, in this occurrence, the meaning of <i>hebel</i> is assumed, rather than expressed. As a consequence, it is not possible to do any more than to see whether our explication suffices in explaining its usage.</p> <p>The point being made by Qoheleth seems not to be that animals and humans share the same fate in every way, for such a proposition would be ludicrous. Rather, he points to one way that they share the same fate: death.</p> <p>According to our explication, the reasoning can be explained as follows. Qoheleth has done many things and has seen there is nothing that makes him FEEL SOMETHING VERY GOOD AT ALL TIMES. Moreover, he knows that in terms of this ultimate goodness, there is no <i>yitrôn</i>, that is, an instrument that can be used to differentiate himself from others. Here, he applies this reasoning to humanity as a whole; it is in the sphere of FEELING VERY GOOD AT ALL TIMES through human actions that there is nothing that differentiates humanity from animals. This is expressed in the phrase, <i>mōtar hā ‘ādām min habbāhēmā(h) ‘āyin</i>.³⁴³ Humans have no instrument to put themselves ahead of animals. Humans may try to differentiate themselves, but they fail, and this is evidenced by the fact that they both die.</p> <p>The idea that human death is seen through the perspective of perpetual failure of humans to overcome it seems to be supported in the greater context. In v. 22, Qoheleth discusses what the best thing humans can and cannot <i>do</i> is in light of their inability. Qoheleth was not thinking of death in terms of something that simply happens, but in terms of something that happens despite human efforts to transcend it.</p> <p>The idea of God’s involvement as the one in control is also seen in the greater context (v. 18), again, hinting that <i>hebel</i> and God were linked in Qoheleth’s mind.</p>
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Ecclesiastes 4:4

³⁴³ The word *mōtar* was not dealt with above with *yitrôn* and *yōtēr*, since it occurs only 3 times, and the two other times are in proverbs where the context is not very illustrative of its meaning. Without sufficient context to reconstruct its meaning, I have assumed here that its meaning is something like “advantage.”

Eccl 4:4 is a part of a loosely connected set of sayings.³⁴⁴ Although there are similarities in theme between Eccl 4:4 and Eccl 4:5-6, which also talks about work, there is no need to look beyond Eccl 4:4 for the direct context of *hebel*.

<p>Eccl 4:4a וְרָאִיתִי אֲנִי אֶת־כָּל־עֲמָל וְאֵת כָּל־ כְּשָׁרוֹן הַמַּעֲשֵׂה כִּי הִיא קִנְאֵת־אִישׁ מִרְעֵהוּ</p>	<p>BACKGROUND: I THOUGHT PEOPLE THINK LIKE THIS ABOUT SOME THINGS (T): THESE THINGS (T) ARE A <i>YITRÔN</i> [M], THESE THINGS (T) ARE MINE.</p> <p>I THOUGHT PEOPLE THINK: WHEN I DO SOMETHING (U) WITH THESE THINGS (T) MANY GOOD THINGS (V) WILL HAPPEN TO ME. I CAN THINK OF THESE GOOD THINGS (V) AS TWO PARTS. I WILL FEEL SOMETHING BECAUSE OF ONE PART. I WILL FEEL SOMETHING VERY GOOD AT ALL TIMES BECAUSE OF THIS OTHER PART (W).</p> <p>I WANTED PEOPLE WANT THIS OTHER PART (W). BECAUSE OF THIS, I COULD NOT PEOPLE CANNOT NOT THINK ABOUT DOING THESE THINGS (U), THIS IS BAD</p> <p>STAGE 1: BECAUSE OF THIS I SOMEONE (R) THOUGHT LIKE THIS: I WILL DO SOMETHING (U) WITH SOMETHING (T).</p> <p>STAGE 2: AFTER THIS, I THIS SOMEONE (R) DID SOMETHING (U) WITH SOMETHING (T) FOR A LONG TIME. BECAUSE OF THIS I SAW MANY THINGS (S).</p> <p>STAGE 3: NOW AT THE TIME WHEN I THINK ABOUT THIS THING I THIS SOMEONE (R) DID (U), THESE THINGS I SAW (S), I THINK LIKE THIS: ...</p> <p>I CANNOT THINK LIKE THIS: THINGS WILL HAPPEN LIKE I WANT, THERE IS A <i>YITRÔN</i> [M].</p> <p>BECAUSE OF THIS, I FEEL SOMETHING BAD TOWARDS DOING SOMETHING (U).</p> <p>The context here requires some rethinking of our explication. It seems here that while it is Qoheleth making the observations and thinking, that the object of his observations is not his own actions as in the previous occurrences, but the actions of others. This is evident since the terms <i>kōl 'āmāl</i> and <i>kōl kišrōn</i>, that alone could imply all of Qoheleth's work, is followed by <i>qin'at 'iš mērē 'ēhū</i>. Thereby, the observations are made about people in general. In other words, Qoheleth is assuming that other people think the same way he does, and so he can gain insights from the actions of others, just like he gains insight from his own actions.</p> <p>In order to accommodate this text into our explication, there must be a distinction made between the person making</p>
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³⁴⁴ For instance, Seow calls Eccl 4:1-16 “*ʾôb*-sayings” (See Seow, *Ecclesiastes: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 185).

	<p>the observation that <u>THERE IS NO OTHER PART (Z)</u>, and the person doing the action; in the present case, the action of <i>'āmāl</i>. A solution for this problem would be to hypothesize that the person doing the THINKING in STAGE 1 is not “I” but SOMEONE, and that the person DOING SOMETHING in STAGE 2 and 3 is also not “I” but SOMEONE. Such an explication remains consistent with previous formulations, since the previous occurrences can be explained by saying that SOMEONE can be the speaker (Qoheleth) too.</p> <p>The problem is not solvable in the same way in the BACKGROUND. Changing “I” to SOMEONE does not seem adequate, since that would make STAGE 3 less relevant; why should Qoheleth think about the lack of the <u>OTHER PART (Z)</u>, and feel bad, if the desire belonged to someone else? The solution is to use the semantic prime PEOPLE. By replacing the personal historical thought and desire, I THOUGHT, I WANT, in the BACKGROUND with the generalized habitual idea of PEOPLE THINK, PEOPLE WANT, it is possible to accommodate the underlying thought of both Qoheleth and the person who is doing the action.</p> <p>In fact, the idea of reconfiguration of the background in terms of PEOPLE is coherent with some assumptions Qoheleth had previously made. In Eccl 1:13, Qoheleth had said that everything that is done under the Sun was a bad preoccupation that God gave people (<i>bānê hā'ādām</i>). The inquiry into “what is good for man to do” (Eccl 2:3) makes better sense if Qoheleth assumes his audience share his own assumptions that are expressed in the background section of our explication.</p> <p>Apart from the reconfiguration of persons discussed above, the text fits the beginning of STAGE 3 of our present explication. The use of <i>'āmāl</i> and <i>kišrōn</i> (skill) assume action (DO). Moreover, the use of <i>kišrōn</i> suggests that Qoheleth is thinking in a way coherent to STAGE 2, where actions are seen in tandem with the instrument used (I DID SOMETHING WITH SOMETHING).</p> <p>For Qoheleth, the fact that skills and <i>'āmāl</i> are a product of jealousy (<i>qinā(h)</i>) seems to make it impossible for PEOPLE to FEEL SOMETHING VERY GOOD AT ALL TIMES, probably because <i>qinā(h)</i> itself is a bad feeling.</p>
<p>Eccl 4:4b גַּם־זֶה הַבָּל וְרַעוּת רוּחַ</p>	<p>STAGE 3: <u>THERE IS NO OTHER PART (W)</u>.</p>

This section, like the previous one, belongs within a collection of sayings that are only loosely connected. Our present text is connected strongly to Eccl 4:9-10, which continue the theme introduced in vv. 7-8. Whereas vv. 7-8 look at the unfortunate fate of a person who is alone, vv. 9-10 looks at the benefits of not being alone. But the unity in theme should not cloud the fact that these are different scenes being described.

<p>Eccl 4:7 וְשִׁבְתִּי אֲנִי וְאָרְאָה הֶבֶל תַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם</p>	<p>STAGE 2: AFTER THIS, THIS SOMEONE (R) DID MANY THINGS WITH SOMETHING (T) FOR A LONG TIME. BECAUSE OF THIS I SAW <u>MANY THINGS (S)</u>.</p> <p>The context (see v. 8 below) seems to fit our explication. But there is a notable difference with previous occurrences: <i>Hebel</i> here does not occur in the phrase “X is <i>hebel</i>.” Instead, a <i>hebel</i> is SEEN. The object of SEE is the scene depicted in v 8.</p> <p>The explication to this point has assumed that the profile is on THERE IS NO OTHER PART (Z). However, here, the profile is clearly on the MANY THINGS that he describes in v. 8. That is, <i>hebel</i> could best be reworded as MANY THINGS in this context. I suggest that this is a focal difference that does not require a change in the invariant. It is merely focal difference that requires a change in the profile. The profile switch seems to be triggered by the verb meaning SEE. This change in focus will be discussed later in greater detail.</p>
<p>Eccl 4:8a יֵשׁ אֶחָד וְאֵין שְׁנַיִם גַּם בֶּן וְאָח אֵין-לוֹ וְאֵין קֶץ לְכָל-עֲמָלוֹ גַּם-עֵינָיו לֹא- תִשָּׁבַע עֲשָׂר וּלְמִי אֲנִי עֹמֵל וּמְחַסֵּר אֶת-נַפְשִׁי מִטּוֹבָה</p>	<p>STAGE 3: NOW AT THE TIME WHEN I THINK ABOUT THIS THING THIS SOMEONE (R) DID (U), THESE THINGS I SAW</p> <p>The scene here fits STAGE 3 in its lead up to the <i>hebel</i> judgment (for a discussion on <i>yēš</i>, see Eccl 2:21a above). It also supports various aspects of the BACKGROUND. Firstly, although it is only stated explicitly later in the verse, the man in the scene clearly fits the idea that PEOPLE CANNOT NOT THINK ABOUT DOING THESE THINGS, THIS IS BAD; The man has dedicated his life to his <i>‘āmāl</i>.</p> <p>Secondly, the scene depicts someone who does not FEEL SOMETHING VERY GOOD AT ALL TIMES BECAUSE OF THIS OTHER PART (Z). The man does not feel good in this life, as he is not satisfied with his riches. But the situation is even worse; the man realizes that his efforts do not last. He has nobody to inherit his achievements.</p> <p>Finally, our bipartite division of the results of <i>‘āmāl</i> is confirmed here. The one part is explicated: I WILL FEEL SOMETHING BECAUSE OF ONE PART. This seems to be supported here, where the ONE PART caused FEELING SOMETHING BAD, whereas in previous occasions, like in Eccl 2:1-11, the ONE</p>

	PART caused Qoheleth to FEEL SOMETHING GOOD. Thus, to explicate this ONE PART as FEEL SOMETHING and to leave whether it is GOOD or BAD underspecified seems to account well for the usages. Moreover, to explicate it in terms of FEELING seems also to be correct, since that is the common denominator in the occurrences. It is particularly clear in the present text, where the FEELING of the man is emphasized in the verb <i>śb</i> '.
<p>Ecc 4:8b גַּם-נָהּ הִבֵּל וְעִנָּן רָע הוּא</p>	<p>BACKGROUND: PEOPLE CANNOT NOT THINK ABOUT DOING THESE THINGS; THIS IS BAD. STAGE 3: <u>THERE IS NO OTHER PART (Z)</u>. The verse is quite a typical <i>hebel</i> judgment. But a distinct character of the phrase here is the fact that it co-occurs with '<i>inyan rā</i>'. I have already explained that the idea of preoccupation (<i>inyan</i>) is coherent with the background. The idea of preoccupation was placed in the background since in Ecc 1:13, it seems not to be a part of the evaluation, but a part of background knowledge about people, and not something Qoheleth discovered NOW. Adding another similar statement in STAGE 3 will add very little. The present text does not contradict the idea that preoccupation is simply something Qoheleth knows as background knowledge, so it will be left in the BACKGROUND.</p>

Ecc 4:13-16

This text is also among the loose collection of sayings in Ecclesiastes chapter 4. The unit is relatively isolated in its theme to its adjacent sayings.

<p>Ecc 4:13-16a Better is a poor but wise young man (X) than an old but foolish man (king before X), who does not know to be warned anymore. I say so because one (X) came out from prison to rule, even also one (king before X) was born in royalty and became poor. I saw all the living, walking under the Sun, with the next young man (Y) who stood after him (X). There was no end to all the people, who he</p>	<p>STAGE 2: AFTER THIS, THIS SOMEONE (R) DID SOMETHING (U) WITH SOMETHING (T) FOR A LONG TIME. BECAUSE OF THIS I SAW MANY THINGS (S). STAGE 3: NOW AT THE TIME WHEN I THINK ABOUT THIS THING THIS SOMEONE (R) DID (U), THESE THINGS I SAW (S), The scene fits our explication, since the poor wise young man can be seen as the one who does many things, and Qoheleth is the observer of these events. The action being done by the young man is that of ruling with wisdom, and this brings him many benefits. The way his success is described is reminiscent of Qoheleth's own success in Ecc 2:4-9, where the greatness is emphasized; all the living are with the young man, and there is no end to all the people before whom he lives. This young man is wise, unlike the previous king who was a fool, and so succeeds beyond the foolish king.</p>
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<p>(X) was before. Yet, later people will not rejoice in him (X).³⁴⁵</p> <p>טוב ילד מספן ותקם ממלך זמן וכסיל אשר לא ידע להנהר עוד: כי מבית הסורים יצא למלך כי גם במלכותו נולד רש: ראיתי את-כל- החיים המהלכים תחת השמש עם הילד השני אשר יעמד תחתיו: אין קץ לכל-העם לכל אשר-היה לפניהם גם האחרונים לא ישמחו-בו</p>	<p>Despite the wisdom and success of the wise young man (X), there were boundaries to his success. As our explication predicts, his success was something that did not last for ALL TIME; the king dies, and people no longer rejoice in him. This event causes Qoheleth to reflect on himself as a wise king; he infers that neither his own reign nor his wisdom are things that can make him FEEL SOMETHING VERY GOOD AT ALL TIMES.</p>
<p>Eccl 4:16b כִּי-גַם-זֶה הִבֵּל וַרְעִיוֹן רוּחַ</p>	<p>STAGE 3: I THINK LIKE THIS: <u>THERE IS NO OTHER PART (W)</u>. The initial <i>kî</i> should be read as ‘indeed’ since it affirms the preceding scene. It cannot be ‘because’ (as in Eccl 3:19) since that would be a tautology; saying the scene happened because also this scene is <i>hebel</i> adds nothing. The sense of ‘I say so because’ is also possible, but the difference with ‘indeed’ is minimal. The <i>hebel</i> judgment is typical, and no additional comments need to be made.</p>

Eccl 5:6

Hebel occurs at the end of the unit, Eccl 4:17-5:6, which is about behavior before God. The unit is unlike many of the previous occurrences of *hebel* where whole units are referred to as describing a *hebel* scene, since the referent of *hebel* is not specified here with a demonstrative. I will center the discussion here on Eccl 5:6, which is the immediate context.

<p>Eccl 5:6</p>	<p>ABSTRACTNESS: <u>SOMETHING</u> The context here does not do much to explain what <i>hebel</i> means, but assumes its meaning is known. Nevertheless, it seems to match our definition. In the present verse, the idea of <i>hebel</i> occurs with <i>hālōm</i> “dream.” The word <i>hālōm</i> occurs one</p>
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³⁴⁵ The passage needs translation since the referents of the pronouns and “the second young man” is ambiguous. Although I have provided a translation for the sake of clarity, other readings of the pronouns are also viable, due to the genuine ambiguity of the pronouns. What is important is that the different readings all coalesce on the idea that even the glory of the wise is temporary. For a summary of various readings, see Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 354-68

<p>When amidst dreams and <i>hebels</i> and many words, indeed, fear God!³⁴⁶</p> <p>כִּי בָרַב תְּלִמּוֹת וְהִבְלִים וְדַבָּרִים הַרְבֵּה כִּי אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים יִרָא</p>	<p>more time in v. 2 in the context: <i>kî bā` haḥlōm bārōb` inyān wəqōl kāsîl bārōb dābārîm</i>.</p> <p>Seow suggests two readings of the idea of a dream.³⁴⁷ The first is the idea that bad dreams occur when one is preoccupied. This was plausibly known by Qoheleth, since the idea can be found in Akkadian and Greek. However, it seems irrelevant to the second half of v. 2 that is in parallelism with it, as well as the theme of the unit to which it belongs.</p> <p>The second option is to see it as meaning “anything that is an illusion and not a reality –something that is ‘unreal.’”³⁴⁸ This is a well-known idea in Ancient Egyptian literature, and so also plausibly known by Qoheleth. This idea is much more relevant to the context. We may translate v. 2 as, “for illusions come with much preoccupation and the voice of a fool with many words.” This reading matches the second half of the verse, since the fool can be seen as the one who chases illusions.</p> <p>If we accept this second interpretation of <i>ḥālōm</i>, v. 6 can be read with our explication of <i>hebel</i>, since THERE IS NO OTHER PART (W) is coherent with the illusory nature of <i>ḥālōm</i>. Moreover, there are two associations made with <i>ḥālōm</i> that can be brought into the reading in v. 6. The fact that <i>ḥālōm</i> is related to preoccupation (<i>inyan</i>) in v. 2 is coherent with <i>hebel</i>; it seems that both share in that background. The idea of the fool (<i>kāsîl</i>) in v. 2 seems also to be related to <i>hebel</i>, since it is he who has many words (v. 2, 6).</p> <p>Presumably, the point being made is that it is the fool that sacrifices (Eccl 4:17), prays (Eccl 5:1), and vows rashly (Eccl 5:5) (actions) with his mouth (instrument), because he THINKS: WHEN I DO SOMETHING (U) WITH THESE THINGS (T) MANY GOOD THINGS (V) WILL HAPPEN TO ME, and they think I WILL FEEL SOMETHING VERY GOOD AT ALL TIMES BECAUSE OF THIS OTHER PART (W). I WANT THIS OTHER PART (W). Such acts are foolish since they arise from wrong motives. The fool does not know, as Qoheleth does, that this leads to nothing. Indeed, he may eventually realize that it was an error (Eccl 5:5), but the observation that it was a <i>hebel</i> is too late in that case.</p>
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³⁴⁶ This verse has proved difficult to interpret, and commentators have proposed various emendations. Here I have not emended the text, by reading the text in a way akin to Gordis and Fredericks. See Gordis, *Koheleth*, 249-50, and Fredericks and Estes, *Ecclesiastes & The Song of Songs*, 128-30.

³⁴⁷ Seow, *Ecclesiastes: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 198-200.

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 199.

	<p>The idea that the remedy of the situation is to fear (<i>yr'</i>) God is also coherent with our explication of <i>hebel</i>. The idea of fearing (<i>yr'</i>) God has to do with the idea of feeling powerless in front of a powerful being, in tandem with the idea that because of God, MAYBE SOMETHING BAD WILL HAPPEN (in our context concerning foolish vows, it can lead to God being angry (v. 5)).³⁴⁹ This is coherent with Qoheleth's insight concerning the world, expressed in STAGE 3 as: GOD [M] DOES THINGS, BECAUSE OF THIS, MANY THINGS (X) HAPPEN LIKE GOD [M] WANTS. THESE THINGS (X) ARE NOT THINGS I WANTED. THIS ((U) and (S)) IS VERY BAD. I CANNOT THINK LIKE THIS: THINGS WILL HAPPEN LIKE I WANT, THERE IS A <i>yitrôn</i> [m]. <i>Hebel</i> and fearing God are two theories about God, that inform how people should think. The person who knows things are <i>hebel</i> is also the one who fears (<i>yr'</i>) God.</p> <p>Thus, our explication resonates with various aspects of the greater context and informs us of what specifics Qoheleth may have had in mind when talking about regulating behavior before God. Certainly, it goes beyond glosses like vanity, absurdity, brevity, etc. in its relevance to the context.</p> <p>Finally, the profile should be moved to ABSTRACTNESS: <u>something</u>, since <i>hebel</i> is construed in its immediate context as a THING, as it appears with other things (dreams and many words). This feature of profile shifts may give the impression that <i>hebel</i> is polysemous, but as I will show in the next chapter, that is not the case.</p>
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Ecc 5:9

Ecc 5:9-6:9 forms a literary unit, with many similar themes being integrated in a series of smaller units.³⁵⁰ The unit Ecc 5:9-11 consists of a series of sayings about dissatisfaction. The

³⁴⁹ See Myhill, "What is Universal and What is Language-Specific in Emotion Words? Evidence from Biblical Hebrew," 104, where Myhill explicates *yr'* as: "X thinks: I feel close to something big now. Because of this, I feel small. This big thing can do something bad to me. Maybe something bad will happen to me. I can do some things, and not do some things, so that I can think that this bad thing won't happen." It should be noted that Myhill's use of Semantic Primes does not conform entirely with NSM.

³⁵⁰ Fredericks presents a strong argument that analyzes Ecc 5:9-6:9 as a single unit. He identifies three overlapping structural organizations that justify this organization. For details see Daniel C. Fredericks, "Chiasm and Poetic Structure in Qoheleth 5:9-6:9," *JBL* 108, no.1 (1989): 17-35.

sayings are independent of one another, although they are linked by theme. Therefore Eccl 5:9 may be treated individually.

<p>Eccl 5:9a אֶהְבֶּב כְּסוּף לֹא־יִשְׁבַּע כְּסוּף וּמִי־אֶהְבֶּב בְּהִמּוֹן לֹא תְבוּאָה</p>	<p>STAGE 3: NOW AT THE TIME WHEN I THINK ABOUT THIS THING THIS SOMEONE (R) DID (U), THESE THINGS I SAW (S). Here again, it is the work of another man that Qoheleth saw. This distinction between the SOMEONE that DOES things and “I” was introduced in Eccl 4:4, and it seems to account for this context too, confirming our current explication. The scene should be seen as things that Qoheleth thinks about as a result of what he SAW that eventually results in the thought that <u>THERE IS NO OTHER PART (W)</u> and thus STAGE 3, rather than STAGE 2.</p>
<p>Eccl 5:9b גַּם־זֶה הֶקֶל</p>	<p>STAGE 3: <u>THERE IS NO OTHER PART (W)</u> The phrase is typical. But unlike the Eccl 5:6, the profile here is again on the more typical section of the explication.</p>

Eccl 6:1-2

This unit is an independent unit with its own scene. But it is related to the previous unit in theme, since the previous unit in Eccl 5:17-19 discusses the ideal life, which the man in Eccl 6:1-2 fails to achieve.³⁵¹

<p>Eccl 6:1-2a יֵשׁ רָעָה אֲשֶׁר רָאִיתִי תַחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְרַבָּה הִיא עַל־הָאָדָם: אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר יִתְּנוּ־לוֹ הָאֱלֹהִים עֲשָׂרָה וּנְכֹסִים וְכָבוֹד וְאֵינְנו חֹסֵר לְנַפְשׁוֹ מִכָּל אֲשֶׁר־יִתְּנוּ וְלֹא־יִשְׁלִטְנוּ הָאֱלֹהִים לְאָכַל מִמֶּנּוּ כִּי אִישׁ נִכְרִי יֵאָכְלֶנּוּ</p>	<p>STAGE 3: NOW AT THE TIME WHEN I THINK ABOUT THIS THING THIS SOMEONE (R) DID (U), THESE THINGS I SAW (S), I THINK LIKE THIS: ... GOD [M] DOES THINGS, BECAUSE OF THIS, MANY THINGS (X) HAPPEN LIKE GOD [M] WANTS. THESE THINGS (X) ARE NOT THINGS I WANTED. THIS ((U) and (S)) IS VERY BAD. This unit follows the closely related unit, Eccl 5:17-19. The action done by the man here is most likely <i>‘amal</i>, following Eccl 5:17. This seems also to be supported by the implication</p>
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³⁵¹ In Fredericks' model, Eccl 6:1-2 is chiasmically the parallel unit to Eccl 5:17-19. See *ibid.*, 26-28.

	<p>that this person WANTS many things, as implied by words like <i>'wh</i> and <i>nepeš</i>, since <i>'āmal</i> is closely related with WANTING.</p> <p>Qoheleth observes (SEE) that there are people who get everything they want: <i>'ē(y)nennū ḥāsēr lanapšō</i>. This should not be interpreted as the man being sated, since such an assertion would be contrary to Qoheleth's logic, as he denies the idea that people are sated elsewhere in this section (Eccl 5:9; 6:9). Rather, the tragedy of this man lies in the fact that he cannot consume what he has, since God has denied that possibility.</p> <p>This matches with the idea that GOD [M] DOES THINGS, BECAUSE OF THIS, MANY THINGS (V) HAPPEN LIKE GOD [M] WANTS. THESE THINGS (V) ARE NOT THINGS I WANTED. God's work is contrary to what Qoheleth wants (to FEEL SOMETHING VERY GOOD AT ALL TIMES), and this seems to be how God's work is defined in <i>hebel</i>; it is characterized by its opposition to peoples' most deep-seated wish for secure happiness, and this is VERY BAD (<i>rā ā(h)</i>).</p>
<p>Eccl 6:2b זֶה הַבֵּל וְחָלִי רָע הוּא</p>	<p>STAGE 3: <u>THERE IS NO OTHER PART (W)</u>... BECAUSE OF THIS, I FEEL SOMETHING BAD TOWARDS DOING SOMETHING (V). The phrasing here is typical of the <i>hebel</i> judgment, but with the addition of the idea of an evil sickness. The metaphor of sickness is difficult to unpack with any certainty, but the idea I FELT SOMETHING BAD TOWARDS DOING SOMETHING (X) is a plausible meaning of the phrase that is coherent with our explication. In addition, I suspect the idea that SOMETHING BAD WAS HAPPENING TO THIS SOMEONE (U) FOR SOME TIME is also involved in the metaphor, since this fits well with the present context. However, this would contradict Eccl 2:1-11 where Qoheleth's actions do not seem to be construed as something bad happening to Qoheleth. Therefore, there is no need to add anything to our explication.</p>

Eccl 6:3-5

Within the literary unit Eccl 5:9-6:9, Eccl 6:3-6 forms a smaller unit about the conditions of a bad life. *Hebel* occurs in Eccl 6:4, and gives a reason (*kī*) for v. 3. I will deal here with Eccl 6:3-5, but not v. 6, since v. 6 seems to be a different scene from the one being discussed in vv. 3-5.

<p>Eccl 6:3-5 אִם-יִוֹלֵד אִישׁ מְאֹה וְשָׁנִים רַבּוֹת יִחְיֶה וְרַב שִׂיחָיו יִמְיִשְׁנֵיו וְנָפְשׁוֹ לֹא-תִשְׁבַּע מִן-הַטּוֹבָה וְגַם-קִבְרָה</p>	<p>ABSTRACTNESS: <u>SOMETHING</u>. PEOPLE CAN SAY WHAT THIS SOMETHING IS WITH THE WORD <i>HEBEL</i>. STAGE 3: I THINK LIKE THIS: <u>THERE IS NO OTHER PART (W)</u> THERE IS NO OTHER PART (W)</p>
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<p>לא־הִיתָה לוֹ אֲמֶרְתִּי טוֹב מִמֶּנּוּ הַנָּפֶל: כִּי־בִהָבֵל בָּא וּבַחֲשָׁךְ יֵלֵךְ וּבַחֲשָׁךְ שָׁמוֹ יִכְסֶה: גַּם־שֵׁמֶשׁ לֹא־ רָאָה וְלֹא יָדַע נַחַת לְנֶה מְנָה:</p>	<p>The context here first describes a relatively fortunate man (v. 3), and then gives a reason for why the stillborn is better than him (v. 4-5). One issue in this unit is the interpretation of v. 4. It is not clear whether it is describing the man or the stillborn.</p> <p>I follow Fox who interprets that v. 4 is talking about the man, and v. 5 is talking about the stillborn (“even the one who neither saw nor knew the Sun has more repose than he”), since all the things described in v. 4 could apply to the man: The man’s life seems to be described in terms of <i>hebel</i>, and the lack of remembrance for the man is being stated. However, it seems to be difficult to attribute v. 4 to the stillborn, who has not ‘come’ in the sense it means elsewhere and has no name that is to be covered.³⁵²</p> <p>Whether our explication of <i>hebel</i> fits this context hangs on the question of whether the situation of the man is something Qoheleth would observe and think: THERE IS NO OTHER PART (W). The scene painted in v. 3 seems appropriate to Qoheleth thinking this; the man has ONE PART but not the OTHER PART (W), since he has many children and lives many years, but he is not satisfied, and he is quickly forgotten. The tragedy that Qoheleth sees is that he has no rest (<i>naḥat</i>) because he is chasing after a <i>hebel</i> without realizing it.</p> <p>Another issue is the phrasing <i>bahebel bā’</i>. This may be translated as “he came into <i>hebel</i>.” Clearly, the verb “to come” is a metaphor about life, with the underlying conceptual metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY. The source domain may be depicting a man literally coming into breath (<i>hebel</i>). In the target domain (LIFE), we may hypothesize that Qoheleth sees the life of the fortunate man as characterized by the pursuit of desire that is not sated, and a lack of remembrance. When Qoheleth thinks about what he saw the hypothetical man did in his life, he thinks THERE IS NO OTHER PART (Z).</p> <p>The idea that someone comes into <i>hebel</i> implies that the profile is not on THERE IS NO OTHER PART (Z). I suggest that there are two profiles here: One in the source domain of vapor, and the other on the target domain on the ABSTRACTNESS section of our explication, <u>SOMETHING</u>. The man enters into this <u>SOMETHING</u>, which is the entity that represents the scenario explicated in the remainder of the explication as a whole. This is the third time that the profile has shifted, while at the same time, the invariant has been retained.</p>
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³⁵² Fox, *A Time to Tear Down & A Time to Build Up: A Rereading of Ecclesiastes*, 241-44.

Eccl 6:7-9

This unit is part of a larger section stretching from Eccl 5:9–6:9. The text gives three different observations that are all related in terms of *‘āmāl*, and so must be read together to understand *hebel*.

<p>Eccl 6:7-9a כִּלְעֵמֶל הָאָדָם לְפִיּהוּ וְגַם־הַנֶּפֶשׁ לֹא תִמְלֵא: כִּי מֵהַיּוֹתֵר לְתֹכֶם מִן־הַכֶּסֶּל מֵהַלְעֹנֵי יוֹדַע לְהֵלֵךְ נֶגְדַת הַחַיִּים: טוֹב מִרְאֵה עֵינַיִם מִהִלְדֹּנְקֶשׁ</p>	<p>STAGE 3: NOW AT THE TIME WHEN I THINK ABOUT THIS THING THIS SOMEONE (R) DID (U), THESE THINGS I SAW (S) The text gives three different observations concerning <i>‘āmāl</i>. The first two observations (v.7 and v. 8) are typical of the kind of observation that leads to the <i>hebel</i> judgment; there is a fundamental failure of <i>‘āmāl</i> in resulting in what it WANTS to obtain. The last saying (v. 9a) is the most difficult due to the idioms that are difficult to penetrate. Fox interprets it as saying that “the immediate experience of pleasure is better than the ‘wandering of appetite.’”³⁵³ I suggest that Fox is correct in seeing the appetite as wandering, but I prefer, similarly to some pre-modern commentators, to read the <i>mar’ē(h) ‘ēnayim</i> as discernment that the wise have.³⁵⁴ Such a reading fits the context, which is comparing the wise man and the foolish man, better. Furthermore, the reading is supported by Eccl 2:13-14 that gives a similar characterization of the wise man. Thus, the two options given in the last saying contrast the way of the wise with that of the fool: The wise man is aware of where his heart is guiding him, whereas the fool simply follows his desires without reflection on where he is headed. Such an interpretation is coherent with our idea of <i>hebel</i>, since the wandering appetite would represent the people who WANT THIS OTHER PART (W), in our explication. The problem being addressed by Qoheleth is that people are doomed not to get what they WANT.</p>
<p>Eccl 6:9b גַּם־זֶה הֶבֶל וְרַעוּת רוּחַ</p>	<p>STAGE 3: <u>THERE IS NO OTHER PART (W)</u> The judgment here concerns the observations Qoheleth made about <i>‘āmāl</i> in Eccl 6:7-9. It presents no problem to our explication.</p>

³⁵³ Ibid., 246.

³⁵⁴ See Jerome and Bonaventure who see the eyes as the faculty of reasoning in Jerome, *St. Jerome: Commentary on Ecclesiastes*, 79-89; Bonaventure, *Works of St. Bonaventure: Commentary on Ecclesiastes*, ed. Robert J. Karris and Champion Murray (New York: The Franciscan Institute, 2005), 247-48. Note also that although *mar’ē(h)* often means ‘appearance,’ there seems to be polysemy when it occurs with ‘eyes’ (*‘ayin*), so that it has more to do with the seeing of an agent. See for instances where it is clearly not translatable through ‘appearance’: Lev 13:12; Deut 28:34, 67; Isa 11:3; Ezek 23:15; Eccl 11:9.

Eccl 6:10-12

The unit Eccl 6:10-12 is found between the previous unit, Eccl 5:9-6:9, and the “better than” sayings in Eccl 7. The unit continues the examination of life found in Eccl 5:9-6:9. Although it is difficult to see progression in the narrative, Eccl 6:10-12 certainly continues the examination about life started earlier. In fact, the same phrase, *ma(h) yōtēr* is found in Eccl 6:11, which was also used in Eccl 6:8. As far as our examination of *hebel* is concerned, Eccl 6:10-12 depicts a *hebel* that is different from vv. 7-9, and must be considered as a separate scene.

<p>Eccl 6:10 What is has already been named, and it is known that people are called Adam. And one cannot argue with one stronger than him.</p> <p>מה־יִשְׁתִּיחַ כְּבָר נִקְרָא שְׁמוֹ וְנֹדַע אֲשֶׁר־הוּא אָדָם וְלֹא־יִוָּכַל לְדִין עִם שְׂתַקִּיף מִמֶּנּוּ</p> <p>In bold: The <i>qere</i> has been adopted here. Since the two readings are effectively the same (the <i>ketiv</i> uses the article <i>ha-</i> to indicate the relative clause), the choice between the two readings is of no consequence.</p>	<p>STAGE 3: NOW AT THE TIME WHEN I THINK ABOUT THIS THING THIS SOMEONE (R) DID (U), THESE THINGS I SAW (S), I THINK LIKE THIS: ...BECAUSE GOD [M] DOES THINGS. BECAUSE OF THIS, MANY THINGS (X) HAPPEN LIKE GOD [M] WANTS. THESE THINGS (X) ARE NOT THINGS I WANTED. THIS ((U) and (S)) IS VERY BAD.</p> <p>I CANNOT THINK LIKE THIS: THINGS WILL HAPPEN LIKE I WANT, THERE IS A <i>yitrôn</i> [m].</p> <p>The verse can be seen as a mixture of observation and evaluation of what Qoheleth has seen. The idea is that things have already been named, and it is known that people are called Adam. The idea of a name plays a key role here. As stated earlier (See the discussion of <i>yōtēr</i> in this verse in chapter 5), the idea of names is related to divine designation of the being’s purpose. Here it is humans who are in focus: Their purpose and limits are already designated. It is implied that the person who designated people as humans is God, and that Qoheleth is not pleased with the resulting limitations, as he complains that “one cannot argue with one stronger than him.”</p> <p>The text seems to cohere with STAGE 3, since when he thinks about things he has seen, he thinks: GOD [M] DOES THINGS, BECAUSE OF THIS, MANY THINGS (X) HAPPEN LIKE GOD [M] WANTS. THESE THINGS (X) ARE NOT THINGS I WANTED. THIS ((U) and (S)) IS VERY BAD. In fact, the text goes further since it implies people cannot do anything about this fact. This coheres with our explication I CANNOT THINK LIKE THIS: THINGS WILL HAPPEN LIKE I WANT, THERE IS A <i>yitrôn</i> [m].</p>
<p>Eccl 6:11 כִּי יִשְׁדָּבְרִים הַרְבֵּה מִרְבִּים הַקָּל מִה־יִתֵּר לָאָדָם:</p>	<p>ABSTRACTNESS: <u>SOMETHING</u></p> <p>The point being made here is that there are people who try to fight their God-given limits, as stated in v. 10, and this is done</p>

	<p>partly through words. But they end up only increasing <i>hebel</i>. Many actions that do not acknowledge the limit of humanity are <i>hebel</i> since such actions cannot achieve what they set out to achieve, often assuming people can FEEL SOMETHING VERY GOOD AT ALL TIMES. Examples of such actions seem to be given in v. 12, such as trying to find out what is good for humanity and trying to know the future.</p> <p>A specific contextual idea in our context that supports our explication is the phrase, <i>ma(h) yōtēr lā`ādām</i>. This assumes a bipartite structure, which is coherent with our background; I CAN THINK OF THESE GOOD THINGS (V) AS TWO PARTS. Moreover, the very act of questioning it implies that Qoheleth thinks, I CANNOT THINK LIKE THIS: THINGS WILL HAPPEN LIKE I WANT.</p> <p>Since “increasing” (<i>marbîm</i>) construes <i>hebel</i> as a physical thing, we must assume that the profile is on SOMETHING.</p>
<p>Ecc 6:12 כִּי מִיִּיּוֹדֵעַ מִה־טוֹב לְאָדָם בְּחַיִּים מִקֹּפֶר יִמְיָחַי הֶבְלִו וַיַּעֲשֶׂם כַּצֵּל אֲשֶׁר מִיִּגִּיד לְאָדָם מִה־יִּהְיֶה אַחֲרָיו תַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם:</p>	<p>ABSTRACTNESS: SOMETHING</p> <p>STAGE 3: NOW AT THE TIME WHEN I THINK ABOUT THIS THING THIS SOMEONE (R) DID (U), THESE THINGS I SAW (S), I THINK LIKE THIS: THERE IS NO OTHER PART (Z) THERE IS NO OTHER PART (W)...I CANNOT THINK LIKE THIS: THINGS WILL HAPPEN LIKE I WANT, THERE IS A <i>yitrôn</i> [m].</p> <p>The text gives a reason for the preceding verse by asking two questions that each reflect the idea that Qoheleth cannot think that things “WILL HAPPEN LIKE I WANT.” Moreover, since it is implied in the rhetorical questions that nobody, including the wise, can tell the future, we can see here the surfacing of the idea that Qoheleth CANNOT THINK that THERE IS A <i>yitrôn</i> [m].</p> <p>The phrase <i>wāya`āšēm kaššēl</i> (“he works in them (the days) like a shadow”) emphasizes the transitory nature of life (see Job 8:9 for a similar use of <i>šēl</i>). It is a surfacing of two components in our explication. First, the idea that I WILL FEEL SOMETHING VERY GOOD AT ALL TIMES is denied, since he is only a shadow. Secondly, the idea of DOING SOMETHING (U) in STAGE 1 and 2 seems also to be relevant, since life is construed as something that people DO SOMETHING in.</p> <p>The phrase <i>mispar yāmē(y) hayyē(y) heblō</i> is also coherent with our explication. Qoheleth thinks STAGE 3: NOW AT THE TIME WHEN I THINK ABOUT THIS THING THIS SOMEONE (R) DID (U), THESE THINGS I SAW (S), I THINK LIKE THIS: THERE IS NO OTHER PART (W) concerning people’s days. The action that is being seen by Qoheleth in this <i>hebel</i> is the unspecified action <i>‘šh</i> that follows the <i>hebel</i> phrase. Life can be considered a <i>hebel</i> because it is temporary like a shadow.</p> <p>One characteristic of the use of <i>hebel</i> here is its use with the 3rd person pronoun. The pronoun seems to point at the person</p>

	<p>DOING, i.e., SOMEONE (U). This is coherent with the structure proposed earlier, whereby the SOMEONE (U) doing the action is different from the observer expressed in the explication by “I.”</p> <p>Another characteristic is the use of <i>hebel</i> in a construct chain. Since the immediate context does not focus on any part of the explication, but instead focuses on the totality of the scene, the profile seems to be on the whole that is reified as <u>SOMETHING</u>.</p>
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Eccl 7:5-6

Eccl 7:1-12 is a series of ‘better than’ sayings about wisdom and folly. Many of these sayings take the structure “better is X than Y,” including Eccl 7:5-6. The sayings are thematically related to one another but autonomous.

<p>Eccl 7:5-6a</p> <p>טוב לִשְׁמֹעַ צְעֵרָת חָכָם מֵאִישׁ שֹׁמֵעַ שִׁיר קְסִילִים: כִּי קָוֹל הַסִּירִים תַּחַת הַסִּיר כֵּן נֶחֱזַק הַקְּסִיל</p>	<p>STAGE 3: NOW AT THE TIME WHEN I THINK ABOUT THIS THING THIS SOMEONE (R) DID (U), THESE THINGS I SAW (S)</p> <p>The ambiguity of <i>ze(h)</i> in the <i>hebel</i> judgment (v. 6b) has been recognized by many commentators. This has resulted in a variety of suggestions about its referent: Fredericks suggests the referent is v. 6 alone, i.e., the fool’s laughter.³⁵⁵ Lohfink suggests the referent is the culture of higher society that praises itself through proverbs such as that given in vv. 5-6.³⁵⁶ Miller sees the referent as “the many words” in Eccl 6:11, that are exemplified by the proverbs.³⁵⁷ Gordis suggests the referent is to the advice that it is better to hear the rebuke of the wise.³⁵⁸ Fox suggests that the referent was originally found between v. 6 and v. 7 but is now missing.³⁵⁹ The confusion is understandable, given the fact that in Qoheleth’s world, everything is <i>hebel</i> (Eccl 1:2; 3:19; 12:8).</p> <p>I see the problem here as threefold. 1) Unlike previous occurrences, the text preceding the <i>hebel</i> judgment is a proverb, not a scene. 2) In terms of procedure, given the proverbial context, the exegete is inclined to rely on his/her own definition of <i>hebel</i>, and to look to the thing that best fits</p>
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³⁵⁵ Fredericks and Estes, *Ecclesiastes & The Song of Songs*, 168-69.

³⁵⁶ Lohfink, *Qoheleth*, 94.

³⁵⁷ Miller, *Symbol and Rhetoric in Ecclesiastes*, 133.

³⁵⁸ Gordis, *Koheleth*, 270.

³⁵⁹ Fox, *A Time to Tear Down & A Time to Build Up: A Rereading of Ecclesiastes*, 253-54.

	<p>his/her definition as the referent. 3) The proverb advises positive action, but this seems to be contradicted by calling it <i>hebel</i>: Therefore, exegetes have looked to other dimensions of the admonition, such as the act of its utterance, or the culture of the utterance.</p> <p>In terms of STA, the first goal is to work out what the context here is. I proceed with the assumption that it is vv. 5-6, since all other occurrences seem to have referred to what directly preceded them. Moreover, it is a realistic reconstruction of the reading convention of ancient readers; they would have looked to what directly preceded, unless it was irreconcilable to their understanding of the meaning of <i>hebel</i>. Therefore, I will start with the assumption that the proverb in v. 5 is the referent of <i>hebel</i>; it is the most salient referent, since v. 6 is subordinate to v. 5.</p> <p>Elements of v. 5 can be slotted into our explication. The act being referred to in v. 5 is ‘to hear,’ and this must have to something to do with the DOING in our explication. I suggest that ‘hearing’ is seen as a specific type of ‘being wise’ (<i>ḥākam</i>), since listening to rebuke and discipline is repeatedly seen as a wise course of action in Proverbs (Pro 13:1, 8; 15:5, 31-32).</p> <p>The question is then, whether being wise can be both good and <i>hebel</i>. With our explication, good things can be <i>hebel</i>. The fact that something is better than another does not qualify it as something that is not <i>hebel</i>. At the same time, neither does our gloss diminish the value of the proverb, like the glosses <i>transitory</i> and <i>absurd</i> would do; the proverb is valid, and it is only frustrating if someone is trying to use the proverb for one’s own mission to FEEL SOMETHING VERY GOOD AT ALL TIMES. In the present case, both the listening to rebuke and the listening to the song of fools are categorized as the ONE PART that do not make people FEEL SOMETHING VERY GOOD AT ALL TIMES. Therefore, they are both describable as <i>hebel</i>.</p>
<p>Ecc1 7:6b</p> <p>וְגַם־זֶה הֶבֶל:</p>	<p>I THINK LIKE THIS: <u>THERE IS NO OTHER PART (Z)</u></p> <p>An unusual feature of this <i>hebel</i> judgment is the use of the <i>waw</i> conjunction to introduce it. This is the only instance that this happens. One option is to see it as disjunctive: “But this too is <i>hebel</i>.” This is plausible, given the disruption that the <i>hebel</i> judgment creates in the context. Another option is to read the <i>waw</i> as a complementizer, introducing the subordinate element of a verb meaning THINK.³⁶⁰ This is also plausible,</p>

³⁶⁰ For the *waw* as a complementizer, see JM §177h. It should also be noted that a coordinator becoming a complementizer is unattested in other languages (see Bernd Heine and Tania Kuteva, *World Lexicon of*

	<p>since the <i>hebel</i> judgment interrupts the ‘better than’ sayings with Qoheleth’s opinion. Moreover, the fact that this is a thought is relevant, according to our explication of <i>hebel</i>. Both options seem to cohere with our explication, and so for now, I will remain neutral concerning the meaning of the <i>waw</i> conjunction.</p> <p>Why does Qoheleth need to mention <i>hebel</i> amongst proverbs? In our explication, <i>hebel</i> is a way of thinking about things in the world. Qoheleth habitually analyzes the world by dividing its contents, by seeing whether something makes him FEEL SOMETHING VERY GOOD AT ALL TIMES or not. Given that Qoheleth’s main thesis is that everything is <i>hebel</i>, it is relevant that Qoheleth relativizes the goodness of hearing the rebuke of the wise, by inserting here his thought that even listening to the rebuke of the wise is <i>hebel</i>; even the wise are not exempt from <i>hebel</i> (see Eccl 1:12-15). By reminding his reader perpetually of this fact, Qoheleth can guide his readers towards a fear of God (see explanation of Eccl 5:6 above).</p>
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Eccl 7:15

The previous section of “better than” sayings ends at Eccl 7:14. In Eccl 7:15-20, the discourse moves onto the topic of how to think about righteousness and wisdom.

<p>Eccl 7:15 אֶת־הַפֶּלַח רָאִיתִי בַיּוֹם הַבְּלִי גַשׁ צָדִיק אֲבָד בְּצַדְקוֹ וְיֵשׁ רֶשַׁע מֵאֲרִיף בְּרַעְיוֹתָו</p>	<p>STAGE 3: NOW AT THE TIME WHEN I THINK ABOUT THIS THING THIS SOMEONE (R) DID (U), THESE THINGS I SAW (S), I THINK LIKE THIS: <u>THERE IS NO OTHER PART (W)</u></p> <p><i>Hebel</i> is found in a construct chain here, modifying <i>yôm</i>. Since <i>yôm</i> is in the plural, it is reasonable to assume that a long period of time is assumed. This period of time corresponds to STAGE 2 of our explication: FOR A LONG TIME. The phrase is not as specific as “this is <i>hebel</i>” since it does not indicate that he is about to talk about a specific thing that is <i>hebel</i>. However, it nevertheless forces the reader to recall <i>hebel</i>, and thereby creates an expectation that something to come should be related to <i>hebel</i>.</p>
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Grammaticalization (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). Therefore, the use of the coordinator as a complementizer in Hebrew is a significant phenomenon. Judging from the frequency of the phrase *wāhinnē(h)* being used at the start of a complement clause, the usage of *waw* alone as a complementizer seems to have spread from *wāhinnē(h)* into contexts with *waw* alone without *hinnē(h)*. In fact, *wāhinnē(h)* is used 3 times (Eccl 1:14; 2:1, 11) to introduce the *hebel* judgment, which is a thought. Given this use of the parent construction *wāhinnē(h)* elsewhere, it is conceivable that Qoheleth also used the newer construction *wā* to introduce his *hebel* judgment.

	<p>Another feature of <i>hebel</i> here is its use with the 1st person pronoun. This seems to point to the observer ‘I’ within the explication, in this case Qoheleth. This presents no difficulties.</p> <p>In the context of the clause, <i>hebel</i> participates as an adverbial phrase within a sentence with the verb to see (<i>r’h</i>). The verb can be slotted into STAGE 2, which has the component I SAW MANY THINGS, since the seeing occurs within the time frame of “my <i>hebel</i>.” The object of <i>r’h</i> is <i>hakkōl</i>, and the referent of <i>hakkōl</i> is the two events mentioned in the second half of the verse: The righteous one perishing in his righteousness, and the wicked one enduring.</p> <p>SEEING the righteous perishing and the wicked one enduring results in Qoheleth thinking <u>THERE IS NO OTHER PART (Z)</u>. According to our explication, <i>hebel</i> always requires an action that SOMEONE DOES coupled with a sight. If we can reconstruct this action in a way that is coherent with the context, as the ideal audience would have done, then our explication does not need to be emended.</p> <p>A noticeable part of the context is that there is an asymmetry in the observation that sometimes the righteous one perishes in his righteousness, and the wicked one endures: It does not mention the possibility of the righteous enduring or the wicked one perishing. This asymmetry implies that these aspects are somehow salient and unexpected. Therefore, we may reconstruct that the action meant in this verse is “being righteous” and that this would lead to someone FEELING SOMETHING VERY GOOD AT ALL TIMES.</p> <p>This reconstruction is justified by the following context that talks about ‘being righteous’ with the phrase <i>’al t̄h̄i ṣaddīq harbē(h)</i> (v. 16a), as it shows that this idea may have been present in Qoheleth’s mind and prompted the next thought.</p> <p>In the context, the most prominent idea modifying <i>yōm</i> seems to be <u>THERE IS NO OTHER PART (Z)</u>; although “days” seems to refer to STAGE 2, the fact that the phrase occurs with a first-person pronoun and within a context that refers back to the past seems to be suggestive of the idea that Qoheleth is referring back to the past with a present judgment that it was <i>hebel</i>.</p>
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Eccl 8:9b-10

Chapter 8 consists of a chain of thoughts that are loosely related through the theme of authority, good, evil, and wisdom. I have partitioned Eccl 8:9b-10 as the context of the *hebel* mentioned in

Eccl 8:10, since this seems to be a separate scene. However, there seem to be some related thoughts on either side of this unit that infer things about, but do not directly reflect on, the topic of Eccl 8:9b-10.

<p>Eccl 8:9b-8:10a (There is a) time when a man has control over another, to his (the other's) harm.³⁶¹ And then (after making the observations (v. 9a)) I saw the wicked being bought to the grave and they would proceed (in mourning) from the holy place. But they would be forgotten in the city that they did thus.³⁶² עת אָשֶׁר שָׁלַט הָאָדָם בְּאָדָם לְרַע לוֹ: וּבְכֹן רָאִיתִי רְשָׁעִים קְבָרִים מוֹבָאִים וּמִמָּקוֹם קְדוֹשׁ יֵהָלְכוּ וְיִשְׁתַּכְּחוּ בְּעִיר אָשֶׁר בְּנִי-עֵשׂוֹ In bold, emendation: <i>qābūrīm wābā'ū > qābārīm mūbā'im</i>³⁶³</p>	<p>STAGE 3: NOW AT THE TIME WHEN I THINK ABOUT THIS THING THIS SOMEONE (R) DID (U), THESE THINGS I SAW (S). In this section, there is a <i>hebel</i> judgment concerning the actions of the wicked. Most commentators assume that the judgment is pointed towards the injustice that the scene portrays.³⁶⁴ However, if we follow STA and find commonalities in this scene with the previous one, we find that the <i>hebel</i> judgment is not due to injustice of the honored wicked, but with the lack of anything that is VERY GOOD AT ALL TIMES that results from the actions of wicked. Qoheleth says in v.9a that he examined all works, and this seems to include both good and evil. In this scene, the problem is that the wicked are always forgotten, even if they have an honorable burial, and furthermore, they are forgotten even in the city that they had worked (this is consistent with Qoheleth's later statement in Eccl 9:5 that all are eventually forgotten). Qoheleth's observation of this leads to his <i>hebel</i> judgment. An action has always been related to <i>hebel</i> so far in our analysis. The action related to <i>hebel</i> here seems to be the bad treatment of subordinates made in v. 9b. This examination of</p>
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³⁶¹ The first word 'ēt can stand alone to mean “there is a time,” starting a new unit of thought. For a similar construction where words for time stand alone to signify this meaning, see Eccl 3:1. Also, note that the same meaning is meant in the proximity in Eccl 8:6 *yēš 'ēt*, making it more plausible that he meant the same in v. 9.

³⁶² Many commentators translate the final phrase, “those who acted honestly were forgotten in the city” by reading *kēn* as “honest” (See for example, Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 81.) However, this reading has many problems: 1) This would be the only use of the word *kēn* “honest” in Ecclesiastes. 2) It seems unnatural as the antonym of *rāšā'*. In fact, in vv. 12-14, *šaddîq* and *yir'ē(y) hā'ēlōhîm* are used to refer to the people who are opposite of the *rāšā'*. 3) When *kēn* and 'šh appear together, 48 out of 49 occurrences are in the sense “thus they did.” The one occurrence of *kēn* meaning “honest” when co-occurring with 'šh is in Jer 48:30, but the context is much clearer, with synonyms of “honest” in the context. 4) It would not be clear how “the city” (*ir*) is relevant here, since it works to limit the places where the honest are forgotten. 5) The idea of “injustice” seems not to be relevant here. Qoheleth is not so much concerned with the injustice of the wicked, but with the fact that they are worse off than the righteous (vv. 12-13).

³⁶³ The text is among the most challenging in Ecclesiastes, and many emendations have been suggested. Notable is that LXX reads *qābūrīm wābā'ū* as *qābārīm mūbā'im*. This reading is preferable, for MT *wābā'ū* is difficult to make sense out of: Why is it in the *wāqatal* when the following verb is in the *yiqtol*, and what would it mean for them to “come” if the deictic center is not clear?

³⁶⁴ See for example Seow, *Ecclesiastes: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 286, and Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 84-85.

		evildoers seems to be continued in v. 11, where it is explained why people do evil (‘ <i>ǎšōt rā</i> ’).
Ecc1 8:10b	גַּם-יָהּ הַקֶּבֶל	<p>I THINK LIKE THIS: <u>THERE IS NO OTHER PART (W)</u></p> <p>Qoheleth’s thought process in witnessing the scene is not that it is unjust, but that being wicked does not accomplish the goal of the wicked to FEEL SOMETHING VERY GOOD AT ALL TIMES. This reading of the <i>hebel</i> judgment is not only faithful to the principle of invariance, but also, it seems to be more relevant to the context that weighs what is better, good or evil (v. 12-13).</p> <p>The following verse v. 11-12 seems to be a thought loosely related to <i>hebel</i>, that explains the desire to do evil itself as coming from a lack of speedy judgment; a similar reasoning was used to explain why ‘<i>āmāl</i>’ was <i>hebel</i> due to it deriving from jealousy in Ecc1 4:4.</p>

Ecc1 8:14

As in Ecc1 8:9b-10, the passage here belongs in a set of loosely related thoughts on authority, good, evil, and wisdom. Ecc1 8:14 seems to contain the whole scene of the two occurrences of *hebel*, since there is a clear introduction to the scene, and a clear end. The verses on either side are related in theme but are not a part of the scene itself, and so they have not been included in the analysis.

Ecc1 8:14aa	יִשְׁ-הֶבֶל אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשֶׂה עַל-הָאָרֶץ	<p>STAGE 2: I SAW <u>MANY THINGS</u></p> <p>The immediate context of <i>hebel</i> is the existential particle <i>yēš</i>. However, as we saw in Ecc1 2:21, existence is often construed as a consequence of seeing (i.e., I SAW SOMETHING, BECAUSE OF THIS, I KNOW X EXISTS[m]). Therefore, as in Ecc1 4:7, we can interpret this usage as a shift in profile from STAGE 3 to STAGE 2, I SAW <u>MANY THINGS</u>.</p> <p>The phrase <i>yēš hebel</i> is followed by a relative clause that modifies it: ‘<i>ǎšer na ‘ǎšā(h) ‘al hā ‘āreš</i>. The agent of the verb <i>na ‘ǎšā(h)</i> seems to be God, since the actions in Ecc1 8:14aβ are simply described as happening (<i>maggīa</i>’).³⁶⁵ This reading is consistent with other usages of ‘<i>ǎšā(h)</i>, where it is explicitly stated that God’s hand is behind everything, although what it is</p>
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³⁶⁵ Fox takes this reading too, but translates occasions when God is the agent as “happens.” Although this is a good translation, I have not used it here since it seems to deemphasize the fact of God’s agentivity. See Fox, *A Time to Tear Down & A Time to Build Up: A Rereading of Ecclesiastes*, 103-06.

	cannot be grasped (Eccl 3:14; 7:14; 8:17). This is also consistent with our explication, STAGE 3: GOD [M] DOES THINGS.
Eccl 8:14aβ אֲשֶׁר יֵשׁ צְדִיקִים אֲשֶׁר מִגִּיעַ אֲלֵהֶם כְּמַעֲשֵׂה הַרְשָׁעִים וְיֵשׁ רְשָׁעִים אֲשֶׁר מִגִּיעַ אֲלֵהֶם כְּמַעֲשֵׂה הַצְּדִיקִים	STAGE 3: NOW AT THE TIME WHEN I THINK ABOUT THIS THING THIS SOMEONE (R) DID (U), THESE THINGS I SAW (S). The scene here slots well into our explication. The action assumed here is probably something like “fearing God” (Eccl 8:12-13) or “being righteous” (Eccl 7:16). Qoheleth is shifting between the two poles, good and evil. He had thought about evil and argued that it is better to fear God in Eccl 8:9-13. Now he thinks about the repercussions of doing good. But in this scene, Qoheleth sees that even the act of fearing God does not produce the result he WANTS.
Eccl 8:14b אֲמַרְתִּי שְׂגֹם־זֶה הַבָּל	STAGE 3: I THINK LIKE THIS: <u>THERE IS NO OTHER PART (W)</u> The text here uses <i>‘amar</i> , to introduce the <i>hebel</i> judgment, but as we have already seen, this is a surfacing of the invariant THINK.

Eccl 8:16-9:10

The usage of *hebel* in v.9 is found in the greater context of the unit stretching from Eccl 8:16-9:10. Since *hebel* occurs in the phrase “the days of your life of *hebel*” (*yāmē(y) ḥayyē(y) heble(y)kā*) and “your days of *hebel*” (*yāmē(y) heble(y)kā*) (as in Eccl 7:15), there is no specific thing that Qoheleth calls *hebel* as in the phrase “X is *hebel*.” Instead, the meaning of *hebel* depends on what Qoheleth thinks about people’s lives. In order to test our definition of *hebel*, our explication will be correlated with what Qoheleth says about life in this section.

Eccl 9:9 כָּל־יָמֵי חַיֵּי הַבָּלָה ... כָּל יָמֵי הַבָּלָה	STAGE 3: NOW AT THE TIME WHEN I THINK ABOUT THIS THING THIS SOMEONE (R) DID (U), THESE THINGS I SAW (S), I THINK LIKE THIS: <u>THERE IS NO OTHER PART (W)</u> The immediate contexts of these phrases are construct chains with the head “day,” as in Eccl 7:15. However, there is a major difference from Eccl 7:15: The pronominal suffix is not “me” but “your.” It seems, according to our explication, that the pronominal suffix is pointing at SOMEONE (R), since in <i>hebel</i> , the speaker corresponds to “I” so that slot cannot be taken by another. This seems to be coherent with the general context. Nowhere does Qoheleth imply that others are observing things and thinking that <u>THERE IS NO OTHER PART (W)</u> . Rather, the fact that he is advising the reader implies that the reader only
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	<p>has a dim understanding that life is <i>hebel</i>. Thus, it seems that the point here is that the reader's days are days in which the reader thinks, WHEN I DO SOMETHING (U) WITH THESE THINGS (T) MANY GOOD THINGS (V) WILL HAPPEN TO ME and thinks that I WANT THIS OTHER PART (W). But of course, Qoheleth thinks about such days that <u>THERE IS NO OTHER PART (W)</u>. In other words, there are two contrasting perspectives involved concerning the days.</p> <p>Our explication is coherent with his ideas about life as set out in the section Eccl 8:16-9:10. According to Qoheleth, life is full of preoccupation, and so people cannot sleep (Eccl 8:16). This corresponds to BACKGROUND: BECAUSE OF THIS, PEOPLE CANNOT NOT THINK ABOUT DOING THESE THINGS, THIS IS BAD. Even if people try to understand life, they are unable to. This includes the wise who have a <i>yitrôn</i> (Eccl 8:17). This corresponds to STAGE 3: I CANNOT THINK LIKE THIS: THINGS WILL HAPPEN LIKE I WANT, THERE IS A <i>yitrôn</i> [m]. All people eventually share the same fate of death, and they will eventually be forgotten (Eccl 9:3, 5). This observation is diametrically opposed to BACKGROUND: PEOPLE WANT THIS OTHER PART (W). Qoheleth's view of people's lives also contains the idea that God is ultimately in control (Eccl 9:7). This corresponds to STAGE 3: GOD [M] DOES THINGS, BECAUSE OF THIS, MANY THINGS (V) HAPPEN LIKE GOD [M] WANTS.</p> <p>As a consequence, Qoheleth advises people to enjoy parts of life that they can, while they can. Specifically, he advises people to enjoy food, drink, clothing, oil, and marriage; these are not things that make people FEEL SOMETHING VERY GOOD AT ALL TIMES. It is precisely because life is <i>hebel</i> that he advises that people should enjoy these things.</p> <p>Since these ideas on life are consistent with our explication of <i>hebel</i>, and we expect to find these elements in the context of <i>yāmē(y) heble(y)kā</i> (Eccl 9:9), we may be confident with the correctness of our explication.</p>
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Eccl 11:8

This verse is part of a chapter that is concerned with what to do, given that life is *hebel*. As in the previous occurrence, *hebel* stands somewhat aloof from its context. There is a need to unpack the flow of the whole verse to situate *hebel* in its setting.

Eccl 11:8	STAGE 3: <u>THERE IS NO OTHER PART (W)</u>
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<p>I say so because, if a man should live many years, he should rejoice in them all. And let him remember concerning the days of darkness that all that comes will very much be <i>hebel</i>.³⁶⁶</p> <p>כִּי אִם־שָׁנִים הָרַבָּה יִהְיֶה הָאָדָם בְּכָל־יְשָׁמָח וַיִּזְכֹּר אֶת־יָמֵי הַחַשְׁמָד כִּי־הָרַבָּה יִהְיֶה כָּל־שִׁבְאָה הַבָּל</p>	<p>The verse contains many metaphorical elements, making it difficult to interpret. Opinions vary widely for the referent of ‘darkness.’ This problem is related to another equally vexing problem; the meaning of “all that comes” (<i>kol šebbā</i>). I will unpack these problems before addressing the verse as a whole.</p> <p>Seow argues that “darkness” is coreferential with bad days in Eccl 12:1 (<i>yāmē(y) hārā ‘ā(h)</i>), which he sees as referring to unpleasant days, including old age.³⁶⁷ On the other hand, Crenshaw argues that it means both old age and death.³⁶⁸ Both arguments on “darkness” can be supported to an extent by other usages in Ecclesiastes, since “darkness” is used to describe both a condition in life (Eccl 5:16), and to describe death (Eccl 6:4). However, the argument that the verse is talking about death seems contradictory to texts where Qoheleth says that nobody knows what happens after death (Eccl 3:21; 10:14), since in the present verse he seems to know that “the days of darkness” are <i>hebel</i>.</p> <p>Rather, it is likely that the days of darkness here are akin to Eccl 5:16, where somebody fails to enjoy life. In this reading, the life Qoheleth wants people to live is the opposite of darkness. It is light, as described in the preceding verse: <i>ūmātōq hā ‘ōr wəṭōb la ‘ē(y)nayim</i> (Eccl 11:7a).</p> <p>Concerning the second problem in the verse, <i>kol šebbā</i>, Fox and Crenshaw suggest that it means death.³⁶⁹ But the idea that <i>kol šebbā</i> means death is unlikely, since as I have already explained above, it is unlikely that Qoheleth would comment about death in a way as if he understands it, when elsewhere</p>
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³⁶⁶ I have interpreted the verb *zkr* as having the following valencies: 1) Agent: an unidentified person, 2) Object of remembrance: days of darkness (marked by *’et*), 3) Proposition to be remembered: that they (the days of darkness) will be many (marked by *kī*). For other examples of *’et* and *kī* being used in this way with the verb *zkr*, see Exo 13:3 and Deut 8:18. Another issue here is the *hebel* judgment. Most commentators see the *hebel* judgment as a separate clause. However, this leaves the judgment floating without a coordinator, subordinator, or a demonstrative pronoun to link it with the preceding clause; this would be the only judgment of its kind. It may be that the *hebel* judgment is part of what is to be remembered: The subordinate clause under the subordinator *kī* can be read as one phrase with the order adverb-verb-subject-object. Although the adverb *harbē(h)* normally occurs after the verb, it can also occur before the verb (see Psa 51:4 and Eccl 5:19). The remainder of the phrase, *yihyū kol šebbā’ hebel* would then follow the conventional VSO ordering. For a similar understanding of the syntax of the verse, see Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 780.

³⁶⁷ Seow, *Ecclesiastes: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 348. The same argument is also made in Fredericks and Estes, *Ecclesiastes & The Song of Songs*, 236.

³⁶⁸ See Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 183, and similarly: Fox, *A Time to Tear Down & A Time to Build Up: A Rereading of Ecclesiastes*, 317; Gordis, *Koheleth*, 334-335; Lohfink, *Qoheleth*, 135.

³⁶⁹ See Fox, *A Time to Tear Down & A Time to Build Up: A Rereading of Ecclesiastes*, 317, and Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 183.

he confesses his ignorance of it. Seow and Lohfink suggest that it means the generations that come.³⁷⁰ This interpretation shares themes with other sections of Qoheleth, since the next generation is a recurring theme in the book (Eccl 2:18; 4:8; 5:14; 6:3). However, nowhere else is it stated that the future generations themselves are *hebel*. Moreover, it is not clear how future generations would fit in the context of personal advice to the present generation. I suggest that the phrase *kol šebbā'* should be interpreted as “things that happen in the future.” This use of *bw'* for future events is also found in Eccl 2:16 and Eccl 12:3.³⁷¹ Such a reading fits comfortably in the context, since Qoheleth is about to advise the youth to enjoy the present (v. 9).

According to our explication, the phrase *kol šebbā' hebel* imposes Qoheleth's view that THERE IS NO OTHER PART (W) onto every future event where people DO MANY THINGS. This is relevant to the context, since Eccl 11 is about how to live life, given the fact that everything is *hebel*. Moreover, this interpretation works well with v.10, since together, the two *hebel* judgments would say that both youth and the future are *hebel*.

Hebel also seems to be relevant in the context of the verse. The beginning of v. 8 encourages readers to rejoice in their lives. This advice is something that occurs often in close proximity to a usage of *hebel*, perhaps implying that the advice is contingent on the fact that everything is *hebel* (Eccl 2:24; 5:18; 8:15; 9:9).

The verse would then be advising people to rejoice; but given their propensity to do things that are *hebel*, they will experience many days where there is no enjoyment (i.e., darkness). Qoheleth is aware that people will find themselves in darkness as they try to enjoy life. He therefore seems to preempt their despair with a word of consolation: The days of darkness that come will be *hebel*. By remembering that the darkness is linked to the kinds of events Qoheleth called *hebel*, the reader can realize that they themselves seek to FEEL SOMETHING VERY GOOD AT ALL TIMES; it is as a result of this that there is no enjoyment. But for Qoheleth, it is through recognition of *hebel* that one can correct one's ways and live a

³⁷⁰ See Seow, *Ecclesiastes: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 348-349; Lohfink, *Qoheleth*, 135.

³⁷¹ Seow, who sees *kol šebbā'* as pointing to future generations, argues erroneously that Qoheleth uses *yihye(h)* for future events, but never *bā'*. This contradicts his reading of Eccl 2:16 where he says that *bā'* is used to refer to the future. See Seow, *Ecclesiastes: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 136, 348-49.

	<p>life of mundane enjoyment. In fact, this is the very process that Qoheleth experienced himself throughout the book, and best illustrated in Eccl 2:1-11.³⁷² In a sense, then, the assertion that the people’s darkness is <i>hebel</i> is rooted in his observations of his own life. In the same manner as Qoheleth saw his own life, so also people will continue to DO many kinds of things with their <i>yitrôn</i> to obtain what they desire, and these actions will inevitably be judged as <i>hebel</i>.</p> <p>Since this is an assertion about an imaginative future of an unspecified audience member, we cannot test our explication here with a specific scene like we have in other texts. However, the very fact that our explication is a statement about human nature makes it a likely candidate for a generic statement about the future: As stated in our BACKGROUND, <i>hebel</i> is a theory about PEOPLE; they are prone to seek things that would make them FEEL SOMETHING VERY GOOD AT ALL TIMES, and they will DO THINGS only to be disappointed.</p>
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Eccl 11:9-10

These verses follow the previous usage of *hebel*, and along with Eccl 12:1, consist of some final encouragements before the enigmatic closing poem in Eccl 12:2-7.

<p>Eccl 11:9-10a שִׂמְחָה בַּחוּר בְּגִלְדוֹתָיָהּ וַיִּטְיֶבָה לִבָּהּ בַּיָּמִים בְּחֹרוֹתָהּ וְהִלָּךְ בְּדַרְכֵי לִבָּהּ וּבְמַרְאֵי עֵינָיָהּ וְדַע כִּי עַל-כָּל-אֲלֵהָ יִבְיֵאֵר הָאֱלֹהִים בְּמִשְׁפָּט: וְהָסֵר כַּעַס מִלִּבָּהּ וְהִעֲבֵר רָעָה מִבְּשָׂרָהּ</p>	<p>These verses are not talking about a <i>hebel</i> but are describing things people should do <i>because</i> youth and ungrayed hair are <i>hebel</i>. The issue for STA is whether the explication of <i>hebel</i> is adequate in giving a reason for the advice being given here. See below.</p>
<p>Eccl 11:10b For youth and black hair are <i>hebel</i>. כִּי-הֵיילִדוֹת וְהַשְׁחָרוֹת הֵבֵל:</p>	<p>STAGE 3: NOW AT THE TIME WHEN I THINK ABOUT THIS THING THIS SOMEONE (R) DID (U), THESE THINGS I SAW (S), I THINK LIKE THIS: <u>THERE IS NO OTHER PART (W)</u></p> <p>It is tempting to translate <i>hebel</i> as “temporary,” following Frederick’s gloss.³⁷³ With this gloss, Eccl 11:9-10 would be encouraging people to enjoy youth, because it is temporary and</p>

³⁷² For a similar perspective on this verse, see Graham Ogden, “Qoheleth XI 7-XII 8: Qoheleth’s Summons to Enjoyment and Reflection,” *Vetus Testamentum* 34, no. 1 (1984): 31-32.

³⁷³ See Fredericks and Estes, *Ecclesiastes & The Song of Songs*, 229.

fleeting. However, according to STA, polysemy is a last resort, and if the environment allows our definition, there is no need for a second sense of *hebel*.

Our explication would require youth and black hair to correspond to THESE THINGS THIS SOMEONE (R) DID (U), THESE THINGS I SAW (S). On the surface, there is no correspondence between the explication and the text. However, v. 9 seems to give deeper insight into what is meant by youth: Youth is a time where the heart is active in impressing its desires on humanity. Qoheleth encourages people to act in accordance with their heart: *hallēk bədarkē(y) libbākā* (Eccl 11:9aβ). Furthermore, it is implied that what is done is not always good, since he says that God will bring people to judgment for their actions: *wādā kī ‘al kol ‘ēlle(h) yəbî ‘ākā hā ‘ēlōhīm bammišpāt*.

Youth is also an experience, through which Qoheleth expects people to be able to remove vexation and misfortune from themselves: *wəhāsēr ka ‘as millibbekā wəha ‘ābēr rā ‘ā(h) mibbāsārekā*. What is meant by removing vexation and misfortune? Seow suggests that it refers to general unpleasantness that one also eventually experiences in old age.³⁷⁴ Crenshaw suggests that this points to the blotting out manifestations of evils.³⁷⁵ However, texts in Ecclesiastes using the words *ka ‘as* and *rā ‘ā(h)* tell a different story. It is often the people who think I WILL FEEL SOMETHING VERY GOOD AT ALL TIMES BECAUSE OF THIS OTHER PART (W), and who WANT THIS OTHER PART (W), and who CANNOT NOT THINK ABOUT DOING THESE THINGS who end up with *ka ‘as* (See Eccl 2:23, 5:10, and perhaps 1:18), and *rā ‘ā(h)* (Eccl 6:1; 2:21).

I suggest the following reading: Qoheleth wants his readers to be conscious of their own actions, as he was (Eccl 2:3, 9), and he does this by encouraging people to follow their hearts. But he encourages them to do this with wisdom, as implied by *ūbamar ‘ē(y) ‘ē(y)ne(y)kā* that elsewhere seems to refer to wisdom (Eccl 2:14; 6:9). In contrast, many of the people whose lives he mentions walked according to their hearts but without wisdom-driven self-reflection; they were presumably unconscious of their heart driving them into a foolish life, like the man who toils without having a brother or son, and finally asks himself, “for whom have I been performing the act of ‘*āmal?*” (Eccl 4:7-8). Further, he wants them to know that they

³⁷⁴ Seow, *Ecclesiastes: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 350.

³⁷⁵ Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 184.

	<p>may face judgment due to their hearts (Eccl 11:9b), i.e., GOD [m] DOES THINGS, BECAUSE OF THIS, MANY THINGS (X) HAPPEN LIKE GOD [m] WANTS. But he seems also to imply that their hearts may as well be manifested in action, rather than hidden in the unconscious, and harmful to them.³⁷⁶</p> <p>But Qoheleth does not encourage the youth to live according to their hearts for the sake of being condemned, but in order that they may be able to mature beyond a life of <i>hebel</i>. An experiential knowledge that everything is <i>hebel</i>, gained through action, may lead to some being able to live a life with no vexation and misery (Eccl 11:10a). Indeed, vexation cannot be banished from the heart unless one deals with the fundamental problem of <i>hebel</i> that Qoheleth addresses and illustrates throughout the book; if one is still intent on wanting THIS OTHER PART (W), then that person will inevitably be vexed.</p> <p>This is related to remembering the creator, and thereby knowing one's place in the world (Eccl 12:1a): A person who is beyond <i>hebel</i> knows that GOD [m] DOES THINGS, BECAUSE OF THIS, MANY THINGS (X) HAPPEN LIKE GOD [m] WANTS. But the chance of recognizing <i>hebel</i> disappears in old age, so one must be quick (Eccl 12:1b). In short, Qoheleth seems to be advising the youth to do what he himself did in his own life, as described most clearly in Eccl 2:1-11.</p> <p>Given such a depiction of youth in vv. 9-10a, it seems reasonable to suggest that <i>hayyaldût wahaššahârût</i> have significance attached to them beyond their usual meanings. More specifically, there may be some metonymy here from "the time of youth" to "the things people desire and do in their youth." He is commenting that because what people do is <i>hebel</i> anyway, people should follow their heart and think about their desires and actions, and thereby get rid of vexation. In this reading, our explication is consistent with the context.</p> <p>By superimposing our definition of <i>hebel</i> onto this usage of <i>hebel</i>, I have shown how our explication may be relevant in this context. There is no need to emend our explication.</p>
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Eccl 1:2, 12:8

³⁷⁶ The author of Eccl 12:14 seems to point to this idea too, with the idea of hiddenness. The hiddenness may be pointing to unconscious actions that lead to misery. For instance, things like greed are seldom noticed by oneself, but lead to hoarding of goods, and this ultimately is a form of self-harm (Eccl 5:9, 12).

The investigation ends with a discussion of the opening and closing *hebel* judgments. These usages have very little context. Although it would be possible to say the whole book is the context, it is difficult to test the meaning of *hebel* with the whole book, since it would be challenging to determine what parts of the book are most relevant to the opening and closing statements, unless one already knew what *hebel* means.

<p>Eccl 1:2 הָבֵל הַבָּלִים אָמַר קִהְלֵת הַבָּל הַבָּלִים הַכֹּל הַבָּל</p>	<p>STAGE 3: I THINK LIKE THIS: <u>THERE IS NO OTHER PART (W)</u> Several features in the context need explanation. First, the use of <i>'amar</i> here is more communicative than other usages and may have the genuine meaning of SAY, but since what he SAYS is a consequence of what he THINKS, this is not a problem for our explication. Secondly, there is the question of what <i>hābēl hābālīm</i> means. The construction is often referred to as a superlative.³⁷⁷ However, there is some discussion among exegetes of what exactly is meant by a ‘superlative. Fox claims it means of “the highest degree.”³⁷⁸ Seow interprets it as meaning “absolute or the ultimate <i>hebel</i>.”³⁷⁹ The former seems to emphasize a scalar aspect <i>hebel</i>, whereas the latter seems to emphasize a uniqueness of <i>hebel</i>. This problem concerning the meaning of the superlative here is aggravated by a lack of sentential context, since it is an exclamatory phrase.</p> <p>I suggest that the construction <i>hābēl hābālīm</i> means something like “everything is completely <i>hebel</i>,” or in terms of semantic primes, “I THINK LIKE THIS: ALL THINGS ARE <i>hebel</i>. I CANNOT NOT THINK LIKE THIS ABOUT ALL THINGS. Such an interpretation is plausible, and furthermore, it is not contradictory to our explication.</p> <p>Finally, there is a question of whether it is plausible that “all” is <i>hebel</i>. This is not only plausible, but a truism if we use our explication: It is experientially apparent that there is nothing that we can do to make ourselves FEEL SOMETHING VERY GOOD AT ALL TIMES.</p>
<p>Eccl 12:8 הָבֵל הַבָּלִים אָמַר הַקֹּהֶלֶת הַכֹּל הַבָּל</p>	<p>STAGE 3: I THINK LIKE THIS: <u>THERE IS NO OTHER PART (Z)</u> The verse is substantially the same as Eccl 1:2. There are some small differences, like the addition of the article on Qoheleth, and the lack of a second superlative construction. But since the</p>

³⁷⁷ See JM§1411 and GKC§133i.

³⁷⁸ Fox, *A Time to Tear Down & A Time to Build Up: A Rereading of Ecclesiastes*, 162.

³⁷⁹ Seow, *Ecclesiastes: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 101.

	idea expressed is the same, there is no need for further discussion.
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This section has resulted in very little change to our initial explication. Below is the explication that we have reached in this section:

10) ABSTRACTNESS:

- a) something
- b) people can say what this something is with the word *hebel*
- c) someone can say something about something with this word when this someone thinks like this:
- d) it can be like this:

BACKGROUND

- e) ~~I thought~~ **people think** like this about some things (T): these things (T) are a *yitrôn* [m], these things (T) are mine
- f) ~~I thought~~ **people think**: when I do something (U) with these things (T) many good things (V) will happen to me
- g) I can think of these good things (V) as two parts:
- h) I will feel something because of one part.
- i) I will feel something very good at all times because of this other part (W)
- j) ~~I wanted~~ **people want** this other part (W)
- k) because of this (component (j)), ~~I~~ **people** cannot not think about doing these things (U); this is bad

STAGE 1

- l) because of this (the BACKGROUND) ~~I~~ **someone (R)** thought like this: I will do something (U) with something (T)

STAGE 2

- m) after this, ~~I~~ **this someone (R)** did something (U) with something (T) for a long time
- n) because of this (component (m)), I saw many things (S)

STAGE 3

- o) now at the time when I think about this thing **this someone (R)** did (U), these things I saw (S),
- p) I think like this:
- q) there is no other part (W), there is no *yitrôn* [m], because God [m] does things.
- r) because of this, many things (X) happen like God [m] wants.
- s) these things (X) are not things I wanted.
- t) this ((U) and (S)) is very bad.
- u) I cannot think like this: things will happen like I want, there is a *yitrôn* [m]
- v) because of this (Components (o) – (u)), I feel something bad towards doing something (U)

6.5. Conclusion

This chapter has described in some detail the practical process of STA. The veracity of STA hangs on some basic theoretical tenets that can be tested by its practice: 1) Texts manifest the meaning of abstract words. If texts do not manifest the meaning of abstract words, then it should not be possible to reconstruct the meaning of words through a textual corpus. 2) Semantic invariance is a cognitive phenomenon and can be identified in texts. If invariance is merely a scholarly idealism, then it is predicted that texts will manifest polysemy to the extent that invariance must be abandoned.

I have shown through a verse by verse description of the process that the meaning of *hebel* can be reconstructed through examination of a textual corpus, and that there is a significant semantic invariant that cannot be trimmed down any further. This is all the more significant when we consider that many hypothetical invariants were trimmed off through examination of the texts, since this shows that the process was strong enough to reject many potential components and to select an invariant from the kaleidoscope of textual meanings in Qoheleth.

At a practical level, the description offered in this chapter shows that abstraction of similarity is not a mechanical process. While there were portions of the definition that could be gleaned from the surface of the text, others required deeper thought. In particular, hypotheses concerning the BACKGROUND of *hebel* had to be created from sparse data. But these hypotheses were later vindicated by evidence from additional texts. The subjective calculation required in STA is a strength, not a weakness, since STA is trying to mimic human interaction with meaning; the algorithm is vague enough to allow the hypothesizing of creative components that can explain textual data. Despite the complicated analyses of certain components of meaning described in this chapter, I believe that none of these components are beyond the ability of normal people to create. People constantly fill in the spaces in their mental definitions from sparse data in intuitive ways.

Finally, given the existence of an invariant, the Translational Matching Method and the Active Metaphor Method must be abandoned, since they only identify a portion of the commonalities that permeate all the usages of *hebel*. Meaning is more diverse than the English lexicon by itself can express, so more sophisticated theories must be bought in to describe meaning in Hebrew. If we are to try to model the Hebrew mind, meaning must be determined using STA.

Chapter 7: Exploring the Explication of *Hebel*

7.1. Introduction

The previous chapter was concerned with deriving the semantic invariant from the usages of *hebel*. However, some aspects of the definition have not yet been sufficiently discussed. Having created a definition, we are now in an ideal position to reflect on these aspects. In this chapter I consider three issues:

(1) Variant profiles in *hebel*: I have already identified various profiles for *hebel* in the previous chapter. In this chapter, I will review some theories on polysemy to show what kind of polysemy is meant by variant profiling. Quite crucially, I will show that the idea of variant profiling does not violate the idea of the invariant.

(2) The relationship between modern language translations and *hebel*: The second issue is the relationship between modern language translations and *hebel*. In the previous chapter, I showed that the Translational Matching Method is an inadequate methodology for replicating the meaning of *hebel*. One may question this rejection of translational matching, since translations not only seem to match the meaning of the text in some instances, but also, they seem to breathe life into a foreign text; lively translations may seem too precious to sacrifice for an explication that seems lifeless. But it is not true that foreign language lexemes cannot be made as lively as native lexemes. I will build on the observations I made in the previous chapter, and show why translational matching has a strong appeal, even though it fails to do justice to the text.

(3) How to learn *hebel*: A final issue is the question of whether it is possible to breathe life into our explications, to make them familiar terms in our mental lexicons. I will draw on theories in

language acquisition, to show that it is possible to replicate the ancient mind, not just on paper, but also on the cognitive level.

7.2. Profiles of *Hebel*

An interesting result of our study of *hebel* was that there are some differences in profiling within the framework of the same invariant explication. Although this is not polysemy in terms of a definitional approach to polysemy, I will treat it as if it is polysemy in terms of STA, by specifying the triggers. The possible foci are presented below, followed by a description of the triggers:

1) ABSTRACTNESS: something / *hebel* is construed as a physical thing. (Eccl 5:6, 6:4, 11,

12)

STAGE 2: (I saw) many things / *hebel* is the object seen. This includes the idea of existence (*yēš*) in Ecclesiastes. (Eccl 4:7; 8:14)

STAGE 3: (I think like this:) there is no other part (Z) / elsewhere.

As stated earlier, *hebel* is not polysemous in terms of a definitional approach. However, it would be an unsatisfactory analysis if the differences in contextual focus were completely ignored.

Using elements of Croft and Cruse's **dynamic construal of meaning**, I will show how differing foci can be coherent with a single definition.³⁸⁰

³⁸⁰ William Croft and D. Alan Cruse, *Cognitive Linguistics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 92-108.

Croft and Cruse's dynamic construal of meaning seeks to explain meaning as something created online (i.e., while listening or reading). In their approach, words and phrases in themselves have only the potential to create meaning. For instance, the phrase *lie down* has the potential to mean different things. *Lie down* will result in different construals depending on whether *a man* or *a dog* is the subject. For the *man*, we may imagine someone lying in bed in various bodily positions, whereas for a dog, we imagine it lying on its belly with its hind legs folded and its front legs facing forwards in a typical dog-like fashion. It is only when *lie down* participates in a full sentence that its meaning is understood. Croft and Cruse call this moment where the picture forms the point of **crystallization**. All words are still vague before reaching this point, with potential to crystallize, but not meaningful by themselves. Crystallization represents the end-point of a process of construal.

Croft and Cruse also propose two further points in this process. The first point is the **purport**. The purport is the raw material contributed by a word to the process of construal. It is that meaning associated with a particular series of phonemes, and it may include homonyms. The purport is yet unstructured, so that different senses are not yet distinguished; structuring of meanings happens later in the process of construal. For instance, the purport of *bank* includes both the potentials to mean the financial institution, or the strip of land next to the river. This collection of all possible meanings that a word can crystallize into is called the **semantic potential** of a word. Whether the purport can be expressed in a tangible fashion is not an issue in Croft and Cruse's model. Rather, the purport does not need to be specific, since understanding comes later in the process of construal, at the point of crystallization. The second point extends from the purport to the point of crystallization, and it is called the **pre-meaning**. At this point, the meaning is only partially understood, so that the meaning is narrowing down but not

crystallized. If we return to the example of English *bank*, somewhere in the pre-meaning, the meaning is narrowed down such that the meaning is either the river bank or the financial institution. That is, elements of the semantic potential in the purport are discarded. The process of construal is therefore as below:

2) Purport (Semantic potential) > Pre-Meaning > Crystallization (full understanding)

There is an important difference between the Dynamic Construal Model and NSM as shown below in table 3.1. Whereas the dynamic construal model sees words as only potentially meaningful, NSM sees the meaning as much more specified in the shape of definitions. Instead of the purport being the range of understandings that can arise from a word, NSM would see the purport as being the range of semantic invariants associated with a word. Despite this difference between the two schools of thought, it is useful to think about the process of construal in terms of the dynamic construal model, since NSM lacks its own theory of online construal of meaning.

In the purport (the lexicon), a word is associated with multiple explications. In the case of *hebel*, this will include the senses known from outside Ecclesiastes, along with our definition. Next, the context triggers the selection of one of these definitions. In the case of *hebel* the knowledge that our explication is typical of Qoheleth will trigger the selection of our definition. This is followed by the selection of a focus. The different foci of *hebel* as described in (1) are observable at the point of crystallization of meaning, when the context is specified.

The difference between Croft and Cruse's model and NSM is one of the scale of a unit of meaning. For Croft and Cruse, a unit of meaning entails the understanding that is created by the context. In the case of *hebel*, the meaning of "I saw a *hebel*" and "this is *hebel*" would differ in

Table 3.1: An NSM appraisal of the dynamic construal model.

Purport	> Pre-meaning	> Crystallization
<p>Croft and Cruse</p> <p>“Semantic potential” E.g., for “bank”: The strip of land next to a river or the financial institution, and the background knowledge of these things known by the speaker. This knowledge is yet unstructured. The semantic potential is the accumulation of all knowledge concerning these things that may later be activated.</p>	<p>“Polysemy” Narrowing down of meaning. E.g., “the willow on the bank” narrows down the meaning to the river bank. Furthermore, it focuses on a place not directly adjacent to the water, unlike the phrase “the boat near the bank.” The phrase renders the homonym “a financial bank” unavailable. But the phrase is still subject to further construal.</p>	<p>“Moment of understanding” The context has fully narrowed down the meaning. The construal may have created a typical understanding of “bank,” or it may have led to a novel understanding.</p>
<p>NSM</p> <p>“Multiple definitions” E.g., for “bank”: the semantic explication (i.e., the definition) of the strip of land next to a river, or the financial institution; if there are polysemous senses, these also have separate definitions. But unlike Croft and Cruse’s model the meaning is already tangible and structured.</p>	<p>“Selection of definition” One of the definitions is selected via the context. E.g., if “the willow” appears in the context, a river bank’s explication is selected. Unlike with Croft and Cruse’s model, this definition itself is not subject to change, although specification of the focus is possible.</p>	<p>“Focusing” A part of the definition is put into focus. In the case of <i>bank</i>, a specific section of the definition is put into focus for the sake of understanding. This is not to say that the remainder of the definition is rendered irrelevant. Rather, the remainder remains in the background, in such a way that any violation of the background by the context is prohibited.</p>

their view, since what in our view is merely one component of meaning, albeit a focused aspect of the meaning, is *the* meaning in Croft and Cruse’s model. But Croft and Cruse’s model overlooks the fact that even in crystallization, the invariant remains active. That is, the type of context that can surround a word is limited by the word’s invariant. Any context that violates the definition is disallowed.

It would be much better to enlarge the scope, and to hypothesize that the definition itself is the meaning of a word, and further to hypothesize that one component may be selected for focus later in the stage of construal. The merit of taking the definition as the most significant unit of meaning is that it is the most active unit of meaning, and it can be reconstructed from the fact that it shapes the context in such a way that it is not violated. On the other hand, the focus is subject to the invariant, in that it must be selected from the invariant, and it is also subject to the context, in that the context determines the component that will be placed under focus. In far as it is predictable from other factors, it is much less significant.

This distinction between focus and definition is an important one in deciphering the meaning of abstract lexemes. Without this distinction, our minds will concentrate on the focus in each usage, since that is where meaning crystallizes. Perhaps there will be a dim awareness that there is something more to meaning than the focus, but it would be difficult to articulate what we mean. The distinction between focus and definition allows us to integrate our experience of the text, by reuniting impressions of similarities between usages and differences between usages; variant foci may nonetheless have a single concept in the background. It is the task of the lexicographer to take a step back from the stage of crystallization and to organize the analysis of a word in terms of both focus and definition.

In summary, the focus (i.e. the profile) is something that is only found in usages, at the point of crystallization, and it is not to be confused with the meaning of *hebel* that is found in the mental lexicon. The idea of the focus in abstract lexemes allows us to articulate why we feel there is difference in meaning in some usages and at the same time we feel that there is commonality with other usages.

7.3. The Relationship between the Modern Mind and the Ancient Mind

Since around the 1980s, the number of linguistic studies on bilingualism has ballooned.

Bilingualism, which until then had been a minor topic, has become a subject for international conferences and journals.³⁸¹ The study of bilingualism has produced models of the bilingual mind that are relevant to our present study of *hebel*. In this section I will use these models to investigate how the mind works as it acquires a new language, and how words in one language relate to words in another language.

Models of the bilingual lexicon seek to explain various phenomena in phonology, orthography, semantics, and processing.³⁸² Here, we are concerned with models that represent the semantics of the two languages. Among models that explain the relationship between words of two languages, the latest model is the Modified Hierarchical Model (MHM).

MHM is a sophisticated model of the bilingual lexicon that attempts to model conceptual differences between languages. The recognition of conceptual differences in the model itself is a major advance, since previous models, such as the Revised Hierarchical Model, had not recognized the conceptual differences among languages. Instead, for these earlier models, learning the meaning of a word meant simply identifying the translation equivalent's concept in one language with the second language's phonological form.³⁸³

³⁸¹ Pavlenko, *The Bilingual Mind: And What It Tells Us about Language and Thought*, 20.

³⁸² For a summary of models of the bilingual mind, see Judith F. Kroll and Fengyang Ma, "The Bilingual Lexicon," in *The Handbook of Psycholinguistics*, ed. Eva M. Fernández and Helen Smith Cairns (NJ: John Wiley & Son, 2018), 294-319, and de Groot, "Bilingual Memory," 171-91.

³⁸³ See Judith F. Kroll and Gretchen Sunderman, "Cognitive Processes in Second Language Learners and Bilinguals: The Development of Lexical and Conceptual Representations," in *The Handbook of Second Language Acquisition*, ed. C. J. Doughty & M. H. Long (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 104-29, for a description of the Revised Hierarchical Model. The model's lack of recognition of the complexities of semantics has been pointed out in Aneta Pavlenko, "Conceptual Representation in the Bilingual Lexicon and Second Language Vocabulary Learning," in *The Bilingual Mental Lexicon: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, ed. Aneta Pavlenko (Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 2009), 125-60.

MHM recognizes that there are three types of possible semantic relationships between the concept in language 1 (L1) and language 2 (L2): 1) Equivalence of concepts between L1 and L2, so that acquiring the concept of a word in L2 merely means connecting the L2 phonological form with the concept of the translation equivalent in L1. 2) Partial equivalence of concepts between L1 and L2, so that acquiring the concept of a word in L2 involves starting with the concept of the L1 translation equivalent and modifying the concept to fit L2. 3) Nonequivalence of concepts between L1 and L2, so that acquiring the concept of a word in L2 requires acquiring a new concept altogether.³⁸⁴ These three types of relationships can be modelled by MHM, diagrammed in Figure 1.

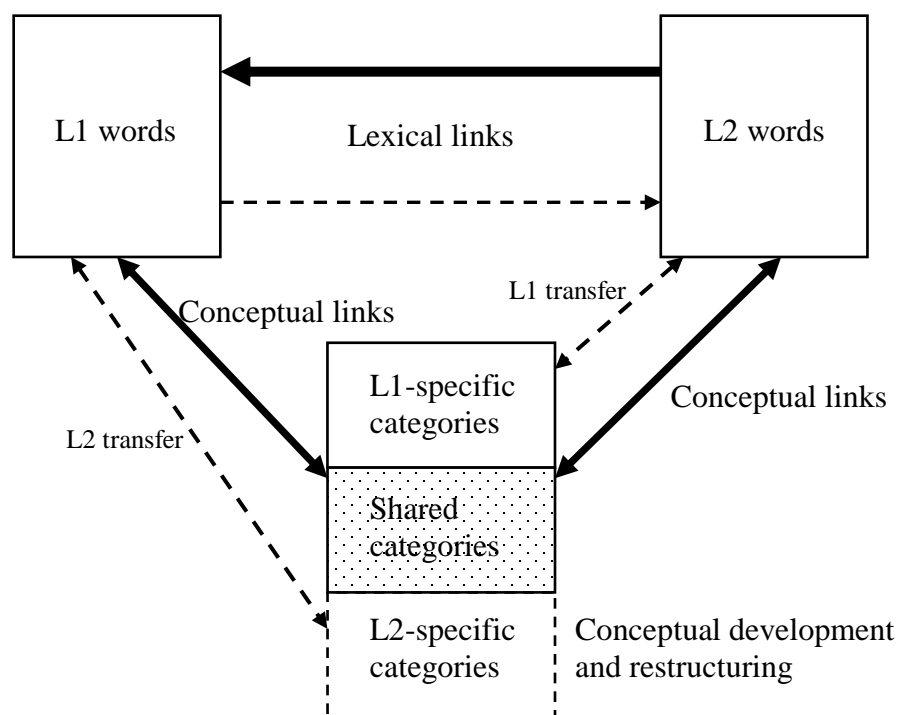


Figure 1: The Modified Hierarchical model.³⁸⁵

³⁸⁴ See *ibid.*, 132-42.

³⁸⁵ Adapted from Pavlenko, "Conceptual Representation in the Bilingual Lexicon and Second Language Vocabulary Learning," 147.

A few terms in MHM need explanation. **Lexical links** are connections between two word-forms. In modes of equivalence relying solely on lexical links, the words of the two languages are not mediated by concepts, but instead are directly connected to one another via these lexical links. The existence of the link may be exposed in translation, where we are conditioned to think of a certain L1 word as soon as we see a certain L2 word. For instance, Hebrew *nātan* may instantly activate the English word *to give* without involving conceptual arbitration. It should be noted that the link from L1 to L2 is weaker than the link between L2 to L1. This reflects the common experience that it is harder to translate from L1 to L2 than it is to translate from L2 to L1. This is diagrammed in figure 1 through the bold arrow from L2 to L1, and a fainter arrow from L1 to L2. **Conceptual links** are connections between word-forms and concepts. These are the links we need to understand a certain concept when we hear or read the word-form. The arrows are double-headed, since the concept activates the words and the words activate the concept. **L1/L2 transfer** is the transfer of language-specific concepts into the other language's word. For instance, if we think that *hebel* means *absurd*, then we are likely to transfer the ideas contained in the word *absurd* to *hebel* even though this meaning is not properly attributable to *hebel* according to our definition. Finally, **conceptual development** is the process whereby the learner begins to learn L2-specific concepts that do not exist in L1.

An earlier naïve view of second language lexical acquisition theorized that the goal of acquisition was to hinder reliance on lexical links to L1, and to create conceptual links between L2 words and its concepts. However, this view had assumed that L2 words were seldom linked to concepts without arbitration of L1 words. This assumption has been proved false, since there

is evidence that these conceptual links exist already early on in second language acquisition.³⁸⁶

In the more recent revised view of second language acquisition proposed by MHM, second language acquisition is centered on conceptual restructuring in terms of L2 conceptual structures. Evidence for correct L2 conceptual development is to be seen in correct usage of the L2 word, such that it is used in the correct range of contexts.

Pavlenko suggests that to achieve the goal of second language acquisition, students should first recognize that there are differences in concepts between languages. The task of the teacher is to highlight what these differences are. In order to test competent learning, students should not be tested by their ability to translate L2 to L1, since this would merely test the strength of lexical links between L2 and L1. Neither should the test be focused on the students' ability to define the word in L2, since correct definition does not necessarily entail correct acquisition.³⁸⁷ Rather, the test should be whether students have the ability to use words in the correct range of usages in L2.³⁸⁸

In applying MHM to *hebel*, it is important to note that MHM's meaning of "concepts" is not entirely coherent with what NSM calls "explications." Psycholinguists mean by "concept" the physical contexts and the information gained by interaction with these contexts.³⁸⁹ For instance, in order to see the connection between concrete concepts and words, psycholinguists may use the picture-recognition task. This is the task in which participants are asked to name a

³⁸⁶ Evidence of the existence of conceptual links early on in second language acquisition is the very reason that Kroll has abandoned her model, the Revised Hierarchical model. Thus, language acquisition can no longer be seen as the process of simply acquiring conceptual links. See Kroll and Ma, "The Bilingual Lexicon," 297-300.

³⁸⁷ The term "define" is used here in the more usual sense, and not in the narrow sense meant in the rest of this work.

³⁸⁸ See Pavlenko, "Conceptual Representation in the Bilingual Lexicon and Second Language Vocabulary Learning," 150-51.

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 131-32.

certain picture by its word, where the assumption is that the picture stands for a concept of the word. The accumulation of all possible contexts and the memory of the visual, auditory, perceptual, and kinesthetic information associated with a certain word is the concept. In the case of abstract lexemes, this may be replaced by scenes; the acquisition of the ability to select all specific contexts that are applicable to a certain word is the acquisition of the concept of that word.³⁹⁰

On the other hand, what NSM means by an explication is what can be abstracted as an invariant from all contexts. Thus, the semantic invariant belongs in another dimension, which is related to but distinct from what MHM calls concepts. In order to apply MHM to our discussion of *hebel*, I have modified MHM. I will refer to the revised version of MHM as ‘MHM+’ and this is diagrammed below in Figure 2; the figure applies MHM+ to *hebel* and *the absurd*.

MHM+ adds an extra level, the semantic invariant, below what MHM calls “concepts.” The semantic invariants of *hebel* and the *absurd* are diagrammed as schematic representations of the common denominator of all scenes they are used in. The semantic invariant is connected to the scenic contexts above; it should be noted that MHM+ changes what Pavlenko calls “concepts” to “scenic contexts.”³⁹¹ The relationship between the scenic context and the semantic invariant is simple. People use the scenic contexts in order to abstract an invariant to store in their mind. The invariant in turn may be used to generate scenes and to impose frameworks on scenes seen in everyday life. That is, knowledge of the invariant, whether conscious or

³⁹⁰ See *ibid.*, 140.

³⁹¹ The central position that the invariant takes in this work is different with Pavlenko’s idea of semantics, since she sees semantics as being the mapping of words to concepts. In other words, semantics for Pavleno is the referential range of a certain word. See for example Pavlenko, “Conceptual Representation in the Bilingual Lexicon and Second Language Vocabulary Learning,” 148-49.

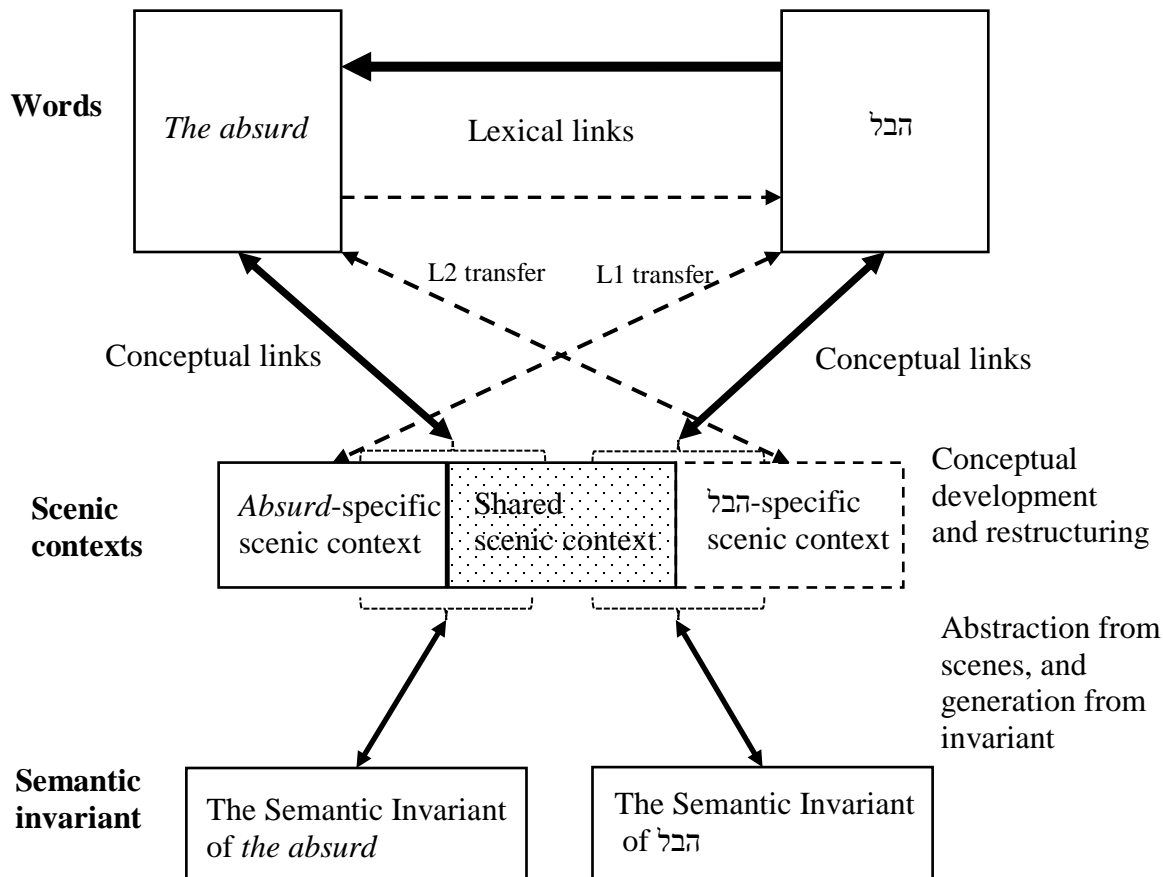


Figure 2: The Modified Hierarchical Model+ applied to *the absurd* and *hebel*

unconscious, is a precondition for competent use of a given lexeme, such that usage is only in contexts that do not violate any of the invariants.

MHM+ helps us to differentiate the different levels at which people talk about the meaning of *hebel*. Discussions can be limited to a certain level, so as not to bring confusion with other levels of meaning. This is important in the discussion of the lexicon in one language, but more so in the discussion of translational phenomena in two languages.

We may first attempt to compare *hebel* and its translational equivalent *the absurd* at the level of the semantic invariant.³⁹² But this turns out to be a futile exercise. There are some clear similarities, such as the temporal development of “the thought that someone has about something,” and the general “bad feeling” that one feels. However, the similarity is difficult to quantify beyond a general impressionistic analysis.

³⁹² The semantic invariants of the lexemes are repeated here for the sake of reference:

The Absurd (Camus)

something.

people can say what this something is with the words *the absurd*.

someone (X) can say something about something (Z) with the words *the absurd* when X thinks like this: it can be like this: some time before, X thought like this: I know Z.

because of this X felt something good. after this X saw something in one moment. now X cannot say: I know Z.

now X thinks like this: before this, I had thought some things about X. these things were not true. X thought these things (I know Z) because X did not want to think: I don't know Z. because of this, X feels something bad.

Hebel (Ecclesiastes)

ABSTRACTNESS:

a) something

b) people can say what this something is with the word *hebel*

c) someone can say something about something with this word when this someone thinks like this:

d) it can be like this:

BACKGROUND

e) people think like this about some things (T): these things (T) are a *yitrôn* [m], these things (T) are mine

f) people think: when I do something (U) with these things (T) many good things (V) will happen to me

g) I can think of these good things (V) as two parts:

h) I will feel something because of one part.

i) I will feel something very good at all times because of this other part (W)

j) people want this other part (W)

k) because of this (component (j)), people cannot not think about doing these things (U); this is bad

STAGE 1

l) because of this (the BACKGROUND) someone (R) thought like this: I will do something (U) with something (T)

STAGE 2

m) after this, this someone (R) did something (U) with something (T) for a long time

n) because of this (component (m)), I saw many things (S)

STAGE 3

o) now at the time when I think about this thing this someone (R) did (U), these things I saw (S),

p) I think like this:

q) there is no other part (W), there is no *yitrôn* [m], because God [m] does things.

r) because of this, many things (X) happen like God [m] wants.

s) these things (X) are not things I wanted.

t) this ((U) and (S)) is very bad.

u) I cannot think like this: things will happen like I want, there is a *yitrôn* [m]

v) because of this (Components (o) – (u)), I feel something bad towards doing something (U)

The comparison between words may best be done in another dimension of MHM+, the scenic context. The scenic context may involve both physical and textual scenes; of course, the latter includes texts like Ecclesiastes. This dimension seems to be the dimension on which we experience things as similar.

In the case of *the absurd* and *hebel*, scenic comparison would involve a correlation of the types of scenes that each lexeme could apply to. If the matter is simply whether a word *can* fit or not, *absurd* fits many of the scenic contexts that *hebel* occupies. These would be “shared scenic context” in figure 2. But there are also usages of *the absurd* that would not fit *hebel*. Consider the following:

- 3) Likewise the stranger who at certain seconds comes to meet us in a mirror, the familiar and yet alarming brother we encounter in our own photographs is also the absurd.³⁹³

This scene seems very unfamiliar to the usages of *hebel* in Ecclesiastes, and even if we attempt to correlate the scene with our invariant, it is impossible to reconcile the scene with the explication of *hebel*. Therefore, (3) may be considered as an “*absurd*-specific scenic context” in Figure 2. Also, there are scenes in Ecclesiastes that do not seem to fit *the absurd*:

³⁹³ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, 15.

4) Eccl 11:10b

Fox's translation: for youth and juvenescence are fleeting.³⁹⁴

כִּי־הַיְלָדוֹת וְהַשְׁחָרוֹת הַקָּל:

This is the single instance where Fox translates *hebel* as 'fleeting' rather than 'absurd.' Although he later defends this translation with the explanation that the basic meaning here is coherent to with *absurd*, the very fact that it is not reflected in translation suggests there may be a less appropriate fit here than desired.³⁹⁵

But similarity in scenic context should not be measured solely by looking at how many *hebel* scenes can be replaced by an English gloss like *the absurd*. Although this is an indication of similarity, there is also the question of how well a certain word fits a context. As already discussed, stage-based lexemes draw attention to a series of events, and it is possible to get a general impression of how well a word fits the context. In fact, the semantic invariant of *hebel* derived by the application of STA is by virtue of its procedure the meaning that is maximally accommodating of the various contexts, while at the same time being invariant. On the other hand, *the absurd* ignores various elements of the context. It does not consider the desires of Qoheleth that, we saw, repeatedly arose in the various literary contexts. Neither does it account for the fact that Qoheleth seems to take a long time to arrive at his conclusions, and it is not a momentary idea like *the absurd*.

In this section, we have focused on the relationship between *the absurd* and *hebel*. Similar observations may be made with any of the other glosses via MHM+. The model captures

³⁹⁴ Fox, *A Time to Tear Down & A Time to Build Up: A Rereading of Ecclesiastes*, 316.

³⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 318-19.

what we mean when we say that the meaning of a certain English word is similar or fits *hebel*; this is at the level of the scene, rather than at the level of the invariant. The danger of scenic similarity is that the scene is so multivalent that many words from many different languages may seem to fit *hebel*, even though an analysis of the context itself through STA tells a different story about the meaning of *hebel*. The ability to think in our own native habits may in fact be a liability rather than an advantage in understanding Qoheleth.

7.4. Bridging the Gap: How to Acquire Hebrew Concepts

So far, we have identified the semantic invariant of *hebel* and explored what this means in terms of our bilingual capacities. But we have not yet discussed how we can use the definition in order to internalize that meaning. The issue cannot be easily resolved through memorization of the explication, at least if our aim is to be able to imitate the way Hebrew speakers would have read the text. The problem has been widely discussed in studies of bilingualism and second language acquisition, and it is necessary to integrate findings from these studies if we are to attempt to become ideal readers of the Hebrew text.

We have already discussed the unique nature of the semantic invariant; merely matching foreign language words with our translation equivalents is an inadequate method for learning a word in another language. Here, I wish to address further the nature of the semantic invariant as *language-specific* in nature. There are two further key questions here:

- 5) a) The problem: What exactly do we mean when we say that *languages* have their specific concepts?
- b) The solution: How can we go beyond translation?

7.4.1. The Problem: Language Effects

A key term that addresses the problem of learning foreign language vocabulary is **language effects**. By this is meant the stabilized pattern of selective attention, and the co-activation of the linguistic forms and their meanings.³⁹⁶ The details of the meaning of language effects is best explained along with an example.

Pavlenko's experiment concerning the English term *privacy* may be used as an illustration of the term "language effect."³⁹⁷ The experiment sought to investigate the nature of the untranslatability of *privacy* into Russian: does the absence of the word in Russian imply that Russians have no concept for privacy, or merely that they know what it means, but that they happen not to have a word for it? In order to investigate the phenomenon, Pavlenko designed an experiment to test whether native Russian-speakers had the concept, and what relation there was between the concept and language. Two short films were created. The films were silent movies that tried to capture what we mean by *privacy*: A young woman is sitting on a bench and starts writing something. Soon after, a man sits on the same bench. After a while, the woman stands up and leaves. Of course, the point of the movie is that she felt that the man had entered her personal space, and so she left. The same story was shot twice, once in North America, once in Kiev.

Participants were all Russians, with their dominant language being Russian. The first group were Russian university students who had never lived in or visited an English-speaking country. Although the whole group could speak English, their experiences with English was limited mostly to classroom learning. The second group was Russian university students living in

³⁹⁶ See Pavlenko, *The Bilingual Mind: And What It Tells Us about Language and Thought*, 82.

³⁹⁷ Pavlenko, "Eyewitness Memory in Late Bilinguals: Evidence for Discursive Reality," 257-81.

the United States. They had learnt English in natural environments in the United States. The two groups were split into further halves, so that half would watch the film set in Kiev, and the other half would watch the film set in North America. Having seen the film, the students were interviewed and asked what they saw. Each half of each group was further split into half (giving a total of eight groups): Half were questioned in English, and asked to describe the story in English, while the other half were asked questions in Russian and asked to describe the story in Russian. By doing so, Pavlenko aimed to narrow down the possible variables affecting the students: 1) The visual context (Kiev or North America), 2) The language of their interview (Russian or English), 3) The context of their acquisition of English (classroom or natural environment in the United States).

The results of the experiment showed that the visual context and the language of the interview had no significant effect on the responses of the student. However, there was a noticeable effect on the recounting of the story according to the context of acquisition of the students. None of the students who had acquired English in classrooms in Russia described the story in terms that evinced conceptualization in terms of privacy. The students who had only learned English in the classroom instead described the story in terms of the man unsuccessfully flirting with the woman, loss of comfort on the part of the woman, interruption of activity, etc.³⁹⁸

In contrast, even when reporting the events of the movie in Russian, the group of students who had lived in the United States could refer to the concept of privacy. Some would speak of the man being too close and would also say that the action was intrusive, and thus evince that the story was being conceptualized in terms of privacy. Others struggled to circumvent the lack of

³⁹⁸ Ibid., 271.

translation and would codeswitch to English. For instance, here is a translation of part of a reflection interview conducted after the experiment in Russian:

Or take, for instance, *privacy*...what *privacy*?...in Russian this doesn't exist, I cannot say in Russian, you know, well, I can say "I want to be alone," but this sounds too dramatic, yes? ...when you say in English "*I need my privacy*" this is more like an everyday thing and no one, it doesn't bother anyone...³⁹⁹

Notable in these responses is the insistence to see the story in terms of *privacy*, even when Russian does not have a word for it. This is evidence that people's thoughts are not confined to the language that they are speaking. Existence of the concept in a language is convenient, but it is not a necessity for using the concept in recounting a story.

Another interesting finding was that there was evidence for different foci between the classroom English learners and the ones that learned English in natural environments. None of the classroom learners mentioned the closeness of the man to the woman in their narratives. It seems that a lack of the concept of *privacy* meant also a lack of attention to distance between the pair. On the other hand, the Russian students who lived in the United States noticed that the pair were too close and recounted this in their narratives. This is not to say that the classroom learners lacked attention to detail. It is a matter of a lack of cognitive resources to pay attention to everything, since visual information is robust: It would be equally legitimate to notice the color of the bench, the gender of the actors, or their facial expressions. However, humans pick and choose what to pay attention to within the kaleidoscope of sensory information entering their

³⁹⁹ Ibid., 275.

minds, and thus make sense of what would otherwise be nothing more than a mix of nearly infinite impressionistic data. This effect of a word “privacy” on people’s thoughts can be described as a language effect; it is a habit of paying attention to certain things at the expense of others.

Privacy, then, is a way of thinking, and a way of paying attention to things happening around us. Although the word form ‘privacy’ is not a necessity for thinking in its terms, the word represents the primary cultural tool to communicate the habit of thinking in its terms, and also, the primary cultural tool to transmit the habit of thought to others who are unaware of the idea.⁴⁰⁰

This habit is what is captured by NSM explications of abstract lexemes. In the ABSTRACTNESS section of our explication of *hebel* is described the fact that people know the habit and that they talk about it using a particular word (i.e., a phonological string). Furthermore, the main body of the explication gives an explanation of what these habits are.

But it would be naïve to try and capture these words in a way that does not recognize what language they belong to, as if we are merely talking about a ‘word effect,’ rather than a language effect. The habit of thinking is fundamentally a concept, and the word ‘privacy’ is only one possible output of the habit. Other outputs include action. Since it was only those Russians who had lived in English-speaking countries who could think in terms of *privacy*, it must be concluded that living with those who spoke English, and thus having developed the habit of thinking in terms of *privacy*, was a crucial element of learning. Living in English speaking countries would lead not only to frequent encounters with the word *privacy* and other related

⁴⁰⁰ The term “linguistic relativity” is avoided here, since it has become a contentious term. The ideas that were popularized by Sapir and Whorf have often been misquoted, and misrepresented, to the point that the use of the terms “linguistic relativity” and “the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis” causes confusion. With the rise of cognitive linguistics and other theories that recognize language effects on thought, more nuanced discussion concerning the link between language and culture is necessary. Simply concluding that language influences or determines thought is too simplistic. See Pavlenko, *The Bilingual Mind: And What It Tells Us about Language and Thought*, 1-39, 124.

words like *personal space*, but it would often lead to social situations where the habits of thinking are enacted in non-verbal encounters. This would inevitably lead to the learner having to learn the habits. It is in this sense that a word should not be dissociated from its language and culture.

We may now reaffirm our initial definition of language effects as “stabilized patterns of selective attention, and the co-activation of the linguistic forms and their meanings” but with some clarifications. First, the language effect is fundamentally an effect on the mind, and not an effect at the level of the word. Second, a language effect of language A may be present, even if the speaker is speaking in language B. Third, the language-specific aspects of language effects must be taken seriously, in order to better understand why these habits exist, and how they are learnt. These aspects of language effects address our first question in (5a), “What exactly do we mean when we say that languages have their specific concepts?”

Pavlenko’s study can be applied to our study of *hebel*. Just as the language in which the film was recounted did not matter, so too, whether we describe *hebel* in Hebrew or English is a superficial matter. The important thing is that the language effects are learnt and encoded into our minds, so that these habits can be replicated, even while speaking in English. This would involve internalization of our definition of *hebel*, along with the related terms *‘āmāl*, *‘āmal*, *yitrôn*, and *yôtēr*. What remains to be answered is *how* these concepts can be internalized.

7.4.2. The Solution: Going Beyond Translation

The question of how we can go beyond translation (5b) requires innovative steps. In Pavlenko’s experiment, knowing a language through classroom experience was not enough to cause students to start paying attention to details that English speakers who use the word *privacy*

would. This was not due to a lack of understanding of *privacy* on the part of the classroom learners. In fact, an interview conducted after the experiment revealed that some of the classroom learners of English could define what privacy was and provide examples of it.⁴⁰¹ That is, they knew of *privacy*, but it had not become a habit to think in terms of *privacy*. Only the students who had active experience of living in the United States could think habitually in these terms. Pavlenko concludes that it is social interaction in native environments that creates this habit of thinking, since the existence or absence of a real social environment is the primary difference between her two groups.

This raises the question of how habits can be created in ancient languages, where social interaction is impossible. Studies on second language acquisition typically focus on earlier stages of acquisition, and when later stages of acquisition at native level are concerned, the availability of native environment is often assumed.⁴⁰² Therefore, some innovation is required on our part. I suggest five strategies:

Strategy 1: The first strategy is to avoid translation into L1 in repeated reading of the Hebrew text. By this is meant both conscious translation, and unconscious translation whereby English lexemes keep arising in the mind without deliberate effort. The active avoidance of L1 in foreign language learning is a common strategy, and the advantages of not using these lexemes is backed

⁴⁰¹ Ibid., 270. But it should be noted that it is not clear what is meant by “definition” here, and it is certainly not the same as what NSM sees as an explication.

⁴⁰² Most studies are devoted to the early stages of learning vocabulary, and where more advanced learning is the subject, only general methods of learning are suggested, such as “extensive practice” and “extensive reading.” See Annette M. B. de Groot and Janet G. van Hell, “The Learning of Foreign Language Vocabulary,” in *Handbook of Bilingualism: Psycholinguistic Approaches*, ed. Judith F. Kroll and Annette M. B. de Groot (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 21. Moreover, what is meant by advanced learners is normally somebody still learning in a foreign language class. See for example Paul Bogaards, “Lexical Units and the Learning of Foreign Language Vocabulary,” *Studies in Second Language Acquisition* 23 (2001): 321-43, where his advanced learners are fourth-year students in a Dutch secondary school.

up by empirical study.⁴⁰³ The aim of such an exercise is to weaken the lexical link between *hebel* and L1 lexemes. The benefit of a weakened L1 link is that L1-specific scenic contexts will not be recalled when reading, and this will lead to less L1 conceptual transfer into *hebel*. In turn, this will force us to recall *hebel*-specific scenic contexts in thinking about *hebel*.

Strategy 2: A second strategy aims to compensate for the lack of social interaction with natives. Social interactions should be an important element in learning, since language is social in its very nature, and it is in this environment that language is learnt. It is a well-known phenomenon that people only tend to learn as far as they are pushed, and if, for example, an immigrant working at a factory is consistently excused for his poor English by his colleagues, that will most likely be the level at which his English proficiency will remain.⁴⁰⁴ Perhaps the closest environment we have that could potentially compensate for native social interaction is the classroom. Although there are many obvious differences, there are many things that could be done in a Hebrew Bible classroom that would encourage closer replication of Hebrew thought. It cannot be helped that classes will test students in their ability to translate Hebrew into L1, but it may be possible to ask students stimulating questions: “How does *hebel* differ from *fleeting*?” “Was there anything that made you think “X is *hebel*” in something you have seen recently?” These questions may be coupled with the lecturer’s own stories about *hebel*. It should be stressed that these exercises may

⁴⁰³ See Judith F. Kroll, Erica Michael, and Aruna Sankaranarayanan, “A Model of Bilingual Representation and its Implications for Second Language Acquisition,” in *Foreign Language Learning: Psycholinguistic Studies on Training and Retention*, ed. Alice F. Healy and Lyle E. Bourne Jr. (Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1998), 365-95. Strictly speaking, the results concern initial acquisition of concrete lexemes, but the implication of the study extends also to abstract lexemes.

⁴⁰⁴ The technical term for language learners stopping short of full proficiency is “fossilization.” See Yaron Matras, *Language Contact* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 75.

be done in English, as long as the habitual patterns of attention follow Hebrew *hebel* rather than typical English thought patterns.

Strategy 3: A third strategy is for people to familiarize themselves with the explication of *hebel*. According to Paul Nation, learning the core meaning common to all usages, and consciously analyzing the semantic features involved is an important part of vocabulary learning.⁴⁰⁵ The explication represents a schema of common meanings, and the semantic features that lie within the word, and so it would be an appropriate definition to read and familiarize oneself with. Moreover, if we follow Pavlenko's idea that L2 learning is a process of restructuring target-like conceptual categories, and in the case of abstract lexemes, gaining the ability to recognize the range of appropriate situations to use the abstract lexeme, then the semantic invariant would be an appropriate touchstone that could facilitate native-like processing of information.

Strategy 4: A fourth strategy is for people to generate their own scenes of *hebel*, and to repeatedly read scenes that others have created using *hebel*. Finding examples and reading examples that fit a category are effective ways to learn meaning, according to studies in second language acquisition.⁴⁰⁶ Both exercises aim to replicate natural learning processes: People have the ability to abstract semantic patterns from usages, and in turn, also have the ability to use semantic patterns to use the word competently.

Strategy 5: Finally, I suggest that a novel phrase should be used as a code-word to translate *hebel*, in order to refer to *hebel* in our English conversations and in translations. An avoidance of simple, single word translational glosses will help to avoid transfer of familiar English meanings.

⁴⁰⁵ I. S. P. Nation, *Learning Vocabulary in Another Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 102-03.

⁴⁰⁶ Nation, *Learning Vocabulary in Another Language*, 105, 240-41.

Many candidates may be considered for the code-word. Although usage of the Hebrew sound *hebel* is a viable option, it may be more advantageous to use a more memorable code-word that could jog the memory into recalling the correct scenario in an imagistically engaging way. In fact, studies have shown that memorizing exercises that involve both verbal and imagistic cues are often more successful.⁴⁰⁷ Moreover, there is little drawback in using a novel phrase; there is little scenic context that is attached to a novel phrase, and so there is little L1 transfer onto *hebel*. The use of “bubble” as a gloss for *hebel* by Hopkins belongs to this category. Hopkins created a code word “bubble” that jogs the memory into remembering the specific meaning Hopkins has in mind, which is really a scenario. I repeat his definition for the sake of reference:

As Bubbles blown into the Air, will represent great variety of Orient and Glittering Colours, not (as some suppose) that there are any such really there, but only they appear to us, through a false reflexion of light cast upon them: so truly this World, this Earth on which we live, is nothing else but a great Bubble blown up by the Breath of God in the midst of the Air where it now hangs. It sparkles with ten thousand Glories; not that they are so in themselves, but only they seem so to us thro’ the false Light, by which we look upon them. If we come to grasp it, like a thin Film, it breaks and leaves nothing but Wind and Disappointment in our Hands.⁴⁰⁸

The reader of the definition is blocked from seeing “bubble” as a literal bubble. Rather, the reader is led back to the memorable scenario that represents *hebel*.

⁴⁰⁷ For instance, we may be able to remember French *pain* (bread) better if we have the image of people poking one another with bread. The technique whereby both words and episodes are used in memorization is called dual coding. See Allan Paivio and Alain Desrochers, “Mnemonic Techniques in Second-Language Learning,” *Journal of Educational Psychology* 73, no. 6 (1981): 788-89.

⁴⁰⁸ Hopkins, *The Vanity of the World*, 2.

7.4.3. A Short Guide to *Hebel*

We are now in the position to exemplify what teaching material for *hebel* may look like. I will exemplify a short guide to *hebel* below. The guide is designed to be read before somebody reads Ecclesiastes. The aim is that readers, both academic and non-academic, would become familiar with *hebel* through familiar scenarios, and that it would facilitate a better reading of the book of Ecclesiastes.

A Guide to *Hebel* in Ecclesiastes

Hebel is a word that cannot be translated into English, but this does not mean that we cannot understand the term. To understand the term, it is important to understand the scenario that is assumed by *hebel*. Just like *disappointment* is about a scenario where somebody thinks something will happen, is sure of it, but it does not happen, and the person feels bad as a result, so also *hebel* is about a set of events that happen consecutively. It is only untranslatable because we are not familiar with the sequence of thinking that Hebrew-speakers had; but we are vaguely aware of the kind of thing they are talking about.

Below I will present two technical definitions. The first definition is a definition of *yitrôn*, a word you will need to understand *hebel*. The second is a definition of *hebel* itself. As you read the definition of *hebel*, when you see *yitrôn*[m] inside the definition of *hebel*, refer back to the definition of *yitrôn* and try and figure out how it fits. The language will seem unnatural but try and follow it the best you can. Also, read the definition slowly, and try and imagine what is being talked about. After the technical definition will be a less technical explanation, and a less technical scenario. I have used the term ‘serpent’s illusion’ as a code word for *hebel*, but do not get distracted by how unusual it sounds: Sometimes, unusual expressions are easier to remember than familiar sounding expressions. As you read about *hebel*, try not to think, ‘don’t you mean English word X?’ because it is not that meaning. Also, pay attention to every detail and how the story flows. In particular, pay attention to things you think are insignificant, since these

details are the ones you must learn.

Technical Definition of *Yitrôn*

Yitrôn (*X is a Yitrôn* (for Y (someone) who does Z (something))

- a) Something
- b) People can say what this something is with the word *yitrôn*.
- c) Someone can say something about something with this word when this someone thinks like this:
 - d) “It can be like this: Y can do something (Z) with something (X)
 - e) not like other people do this something (Z) with something else.
 - f) Because of this I think like this: “good things will happen to Y, not like good things happen to other people.”
- g) Because of these things Y can say: “*yitrôn* is mine.”

Technical Definition of *Hebel* (Serpent’s Illusion)

ABSTRACTNESS:

- a) Something.
- b) People can say what this something is with the word *hebel*.
- c) Someone can say something about something with this word when this someone thinks like this:
 - d) It can be like this:

BACKGROUND

- e) People think like this about some things (T): “these things (T) are a *yitrôn* [m], these things (T) are mine.”
- f) People think: “When I do something (U) with these things (T) many good things (V) will happen to me.
- g) I can think of these good things (V) as two parts:
 - h) I will feel something because of one part.
 - i) I will feel something very good at all times because of this other part (W).”
- j) People want this other part (W)

- k) Because of this (component (j)), people cannot not think about doing these things (U); this is bad.

STAGE 1

- l) Because of this (the BACKGROUND) someone (R) thought like this: “I will do something (U) with something (T).”

STAGE 2

- m) After this, this someone (R) did something (U) with something (T) for a long time.
n) Because of this (component (m)), I saw many things (S).

STAGE 3

- o) Now at the time when I think about this thing this someone (R) did (U), these things I saw (S),
p) I think like this:
q) “there is no other part (W), there is no *yitrôn* [m], because God [m] does things.
r) Because of this, many things (X) happen like God [m] wants.
s) These things (X) are not things I wanted.
t) This ((U) and (S)) is very bad.”
u) I cannot think like this: “things will happen like I want, there is a *yitrôn* [m].”
v) Because of this (Components (o) – (u)), I feel something bad towards doing something (U).

Explanation: The Serpent’s Illusion

I like to translate *hebel* as “serpent’s illusion.” I will tell you why. *Hebel* is about how our assumptions about life are overturned, the sad experience of realizing what you had thought for so long was wrong, like an illusion that disappears as you reach towards it. That worldview that is overturned is something familiar to us as well. I think about it in terms of the garden of Eden story, which is a paradigm of what humans think and do. In the story, God had told the humans that eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil would bring death to them. But the serpent lied to the woman. The serpent said of it, “you will surely not die, since God knows that on the day you eat from it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowers of good and evil.” The woman had something she could do. She was now in a unique position as somebody who knew

something new about the tree, and she could go up to the tree and eat from it. She thought she had the key to happiness. She would enjoy the taste of the fruit, but she would also gain divinity; eternal bliss perhaps. She wanted it, and she could not help thinking about it. So she became determined, and she ate from the tree.

Like Adam and Eve, we too marvel at the potentiality of a good feeling that will last, a “happily ever after.” We think ourselves as protagonists in a success story, with the ability to do special things. We see our own talents and try to exploit them in order to gain the “happily ever after.” The serpent whispers to us also in our everyday life and we, like the woman, act on these things. Some of us become preoccupied with wealth and we use all of our skills to gain as much of it as possible. We want the good life. We imagine the life of the rich person as a life of champagne, cigars, and casinos; a happy life spent with limitless money in a secure mansion. Others admire Plato and Aristotle, and they end up using their academic talent to pursue a great understanding of the world beyond others, thinking that something special lies at the end of their pursuit. And we all make plans for tomorrow in accordance with our aims. In fact, we know everyone is after the same thing, true happiness. That is how humans are. But in fact we are only chasing the illusions made by the serpent.

Life is full of good things, but they are never good enough. If we really test whether our lives are what we want, the answer is always no, because the reality of life is cruel. We see a rich man, who we thought as a smart man living the dream, suddenly die. We see in our own pursuit of the “happily ever after,” that life is just life and nothing more. The illusion fades as we come to the sober realization that we are only humans. We all have brilliant talents, but our talents are never good enough. The talents are good enough for transitory joys of life, but not good enough for a “happily ever after.” Even the best of humanity hits a glass ceiling. Napoleon Bonaparte was a genius, and he had his days of glory. But where is his empire now? Did he become divine? Perhaps he had more overwhelming joys at his peak than most of us, but were his joys qualitatively different from ours? We should realize that we are only humans, and not God. After all, God is in control of the world, and he keeps us in our place. He says and does things contrary to what the serpent had led you to believe, and contrary to the things you

wanted. Even if you summoned all of your talent and all of your resources, the “happily ever after” is beyond your reach.

Having come to realize how things are, you think about the way things are. They are very bad. Because of this new revelation, you are now a different person. You no longer think yourself as special in your ability to gain something that nobody else has, and you can no longer think that things will come to pass like you want. Now you do not pursue wealth since you feel a grudge towards that pursuit. The serpent’s illusion no longer holds power over you.

A Story about Scholarship

I had always been gifted at academics. I thought that I would become a philosopher and gain more knowledge of the world. I guess that I had secretly fantasized about the glories of knowledge. Sure, there would be hardships and sobering truths, but I probably also thought there would be a picturesque true happiness there too. If I hadn’t wanted that true happiness, I wouldn’t have been so obsessed.

I had decided on my career as a philosopher by high school, and I aggressively pursued knowledge. I went to the best universities of the world and learned under the best professors. I was always steps ahead of others, and I met nobody who I thought was more talented than me. I figured out things that nobody had been able to work out before. I had a philosophy of what life was about, that was greater than any other, and I lived a happier life than my friends. But one day, I went to my professor’s funeral. I was greatly disturbed. Of course, I knew that people die. But his death had disturbed me more than I thought. It was not that I was scared of dying. I figured out that it was because my pursuits as a scholar were somehow connected to a desire for an impossibly ideal picture of eternal happiness. Sure, good things happened to me in my life, but I realized I was not after those good things. I wanted true happiness, but how can any true happiness reconcile itself with death? And if there is no true happiness, why had I been working so hard? Everything I had been chasing after was the serpent’s illusion. It is so innocent to want true happiness, but it is so deceptive.

Since then, I have changed a lot. Now, I live a sober life. I know how humans pursue things because, although nobody would admit it, we all want to be god-like. the

serpent has made the whole world mad. Now that I know it, I see it everywhere. I had been doing many activities because I had fallen under the deception of the serpent. I also see it in others. I can point to people's activities and say, "this is a serpent's illusion." But if even I had not the ability to find true happiness, neither can anyone else. In the end, God's rule is sovereign, and He decides what will happen. And we will never be like Him. We are humans, not gods. We have much less control over our lives than we naively believe. I can no longer think that I am the special one who will be eternally happy like I had secretly thought about myself. Now, I grudgingly continue as a scholar, no longer deceived by the serpent's illusion.

Exercises

- 1) Try and think of experiences in your life that are similar to the stories told above and retell them. But as you retell the story, follow the outline provided by the technical definition of *hebel*. Also, try and use the phrase "the serpent's illusion" in your story.
- 2) Read Ecclesiastes 2:1-11. As you read the text, try and see how the technical definition of *hebel* fits the story.
- 3) How does "the serpent's illusion" differ from the English word *fleeting*? How about *Incomprehensible*? Make sure to state both similarities and differences.

7.5. Conclusion

In this chapter we have explored the explication of *hebel* that was derived in the previous chapter. I introduced three areas in which the meaning of *hebel* could be explored further. First, the idea of variant profiling within a common semantic invariant helps us to reconcile the impression of common meaning in the usages of *hebel* in Ecclesiastes with the equally valid impression that there seems to be variation among these usages. I showed how both impressions can be integrated with a dynamic construal of meaning, such that our explication has no theoretical inconsistency.

Secondly, I described the relationship between lexemes in two different languages in terms of MHM+, to elucidate how our explication related to words in our own language. Most importantly, I showed that the scenic dimension and the invariant dimension should be distinguished as two related but separate things in the conceptual realm. These two dimensions have different functions: The scenic dimension is the place where similarity should be measured, and it is the invariant that controls the boundary of what consists of a valid scenic context.

Lastly, I assembled theories on second language acquisition to describe how *hebel* could be internalized into our mental lexicon. This final step is rarely discussed in Hebrew lexicography, but it is a crucial step if we are to recognize the importance of replicating language effects in acquisition of a second language. As I showed, it is possible, even in ancient languages, to learn and incorporate concepts into our mental lexicon.

A lexical analysis can only take us so far in understanding Qoheleth. Abstract lexemes are by nature schematic, and so knowledge of their explication contain little specific information about the thoughts of Qoheleth. A deeper understanding of what Qoheleth meant by *hebel* would require us to apply our explication to a reading of Qoheleth, so that the specific claims that are being made by Qoheleth can be understood as an ideal audience would have done so. This will be the task of the following chapter.

Chapter 8: Reading Ecclesiastes in its Own Terms

8.1. An Exposition of *hebel* in Ecclesiastes

So far, we have focused on the habits of thought exhibited by the writer, Qoheleth, through recovery of the habits that underlie some keywords in Ecclesiastes using STA, and we have also discussed how to learn such habits so that we also can think in patterns approaching those used by the author. This has given us the skills to organize incoming information in terms of Hebrew habits of thinking. The ambition of this chapter is to proceed to the next step, by showing how an ideal reader would have understood *hebel* in reading Ecclesiastes. In doing so, we transition from the definition of *hebel* to its significance within the story of Ecclesiastes.

The reading seeks to show that a sustained effort to think in a different way leads to a reading that differs significantly from many of the contemporary interpretations of Ecclesiastes. Many of the interpretations I offer in this chapter at the level of the verse are not radical departures from past interpretations. But our definition of *hebel* instructs us to see previously unnoticed links between various themes and *hebel*. Thus, it is not the readings at the verse level that is novel here, but it is the new connections seen between verses and themes and the organization of these into the larger story of *hebel* that is most significant in this reading.

It is far from obvious how a reading of *hebel* should be put in writing. Whereas a definition has a clear boundary (the invariant) and a clear internal organization (logical and temporal sequencing), a reading has no clear boundary and much less internal organization. In this chapter, I have opted to organize my reading like an encyclopedia article about *hebel* in Ecclesiastes, with specific connections being made between various themes and *hebel*. The

themes were selected in line with the definition of *hebel* created earlier, such that the themes together adequately address the whole definition.

8.1.1. Qoheleth

A key idea in our definition of *hebel* is that Qoheleth is tackling a question about PEOPLE in general. It is PEOPLE, including Qoheleth, that think in a certain way, but it is Qoheleth, personally, who questions the way people think. Qoheleth thereby comes to a different conclusion regarding the way things are in the world.

Such a way of thinking requires Qoheleth to see himself as sharing various characteristics with his audience. The memorable sections where Qoheleth claims he was better than all the kings before him may leave the impression that he perceived himself as different from his audience. However, at other times, it is clear that Qoheleth is arguing on the grounds that he is fundamentally the same as his audience. His initial question, “what is the *yitrôn* for humans (*'ādām*) in all his *'āmāl*?” (Eccl 1:3a) already specifies that his investigation concerns all humans; and subsequently his investigation of humans include both himself and others. His experimentation with his heart in Eccl 2:1-11 also aimed to know what was good for “the sons of man (*'ādām*),” (Eccl 2:3) showing that, while he claimed to be the best, he saw himself as a paragon of humanity, not beyond humanity.

In fact, Qoheleth seems to relate to his audience beyond what is expected of an observer, particularly in their suffering. Qoheleth sees tears of the oppressed and is concerned by the fact that there is no comforter (Eccl 4:1). Seeing the situation of the man who had performed the act of *'āmāl* without having a family, he interjects in his own voice: “for whom am I a worker and

depriving myself of pleasure?”⁴⁰⁹ And learning from the man’s situation as if it were his own, he concludes, that this too is *hebel* (Eccl 4:8b). Far from being a detached observer, Qoheleth is a fellow human, experiencing human suffering and eagerly seeking an answer to a common problem.

8.1.2. People

The people in Qoheleth share in their humanity with Qoheleth, but Qoheleth does not share their views. On two occasions, people are portrayed as voicing optimistic opinions that disagree with Qoheleth’s opinion. The first occasion is an unspecified person who says “see, this is new,” only for Qoheleth to refute that opinion (Eccl 1:10). On the second occasion, Qoheleth mentions a hypothetical wise man who claims to know all the works that happen under the Sun; this claim is again immediately refuted as wrong (Eccl 8:17). On the other hand, people’s opinions are never introduced and subsequently supported by Qoheleth. Some proverbs may be borrowed by Qoheleth, as implied in the epilogue (Eccl 12:11), but this is beside the point, since we are concerned for now about the way people are portrayed in the text.

Quite in contrast to the perceived optimism of the people, Qoheleth is pessimistic of human nature. One important way in which Qoheleth is pessimistic is in human morality.⁴¹⁰ He

⁴⁰⁹ See Fox, *A Time to Tear Down & A Time to Build Up: A Rereading of Ecclesiastes*, 222. At the very least, the interjection demonstrates an understanding of the man’s plight from the man’s point of view.

⁴¹⁰ This topic has recently been discussed by Schüle in relation to Genesis 6-8. Schüle acknowledges that humans are seen as evil in Ecclesiastes and goes on to compare the resulting morality that is advised in Genesis 6-8 and in Ecclesiastes. See Andreas Schüle, “Evil from the Heart: Qoheleth’s Negative Anthropology and its Canonical Context,” in *The Language of Qoheleth in its Context: Essays in Honour of Prof. A. Schoors on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday*, *Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta* 164, ed. A. Berlejung and P. van Hecke (Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters, 2007), 157-176.

consistently sees humanity as depraved. He observes in one place that “God made humans upright (*yāšār*) but they have sought out many schemes” (Eccl 7:29). In another place he states, “there is no righteous man on earth, who does good and does not sin” (Eccl 7:20). Furthermore, he states, “the heart of the sons of man is intent to do evil” (Eccl 8:11) and again, “the heart of the sons of man is filled with evil, and madness is in their heart during their life” (Eccl 9:3b).⁴¹¹

Moral depravity is no doubt linked to another characteristic of humans, insatiability. The insatiability of humanity is mentioned several times: Their eyes and ears are not filled (Eccl 1:9); one who loves money is never satisfied with money (Eccl 5:9); the appetite is never filled (Eccl 6:7).

The fundamental moral depravity and insatiability of humanity are both important assumptions in the book that together feed into our definition of *hebel*. Humans seek things that cannot be attained, and therefore they are unable to be satisfied. They have become creatures who seek the unattainable, because they are depraved and do not conform to their created purpose (Eccl 7:29). But such a perspective on humanity is unique to Qoheleth, who sees himself as surrounded by optimists. It is probably because Qoheleth sees his views as somewhat unique that he must declare to his people, that everything is *hebel*.

⁴¹¹ The phrase *mālē' lēb bənē(y) hā'ādām bāhem la'āsôt rā'* literally says “the heart of the sons of man has filled them (people) to do evil” but in essence this seems to mean “X is intent to do Y” (also Esth 7:5 and Exo 35:35). Fox, *A Time to Tear Down & A Time to Build Up: A Rereading of Ecclesiastes*, 285.

8.1.3. The Illusion of a *Yitrôn*

One of the aspects of human depravity is the incessant belief in a *yitrôn*. Since Qoheleth observes the pervasiveness of such an assumption about life, he questions it. Already in the third verse of the book he asks: “What is the *yitrôn* for humans (‘*ādām*)?” (Eccl 1:3a).

In Qoheleth’s worldview, humans have some capacities such as wisdom, laughter, or righteousness, that permit enjoyment of life. That some of these capacities are a *yitrôn* in everyday life is admitted by Qoheleth. For instance, wisdom is a *yitrôn* over folly, since it gives people awareness of dangers that others are oblivious to (Eccl 2:12-13). But the *yitrôn* that Qoheleth is concerned with is not that of the mundane. His questions seem to challenge the limits of humanity itself.

Already in the initial section about humans and nature (Eccl 1:2-11), he investigates the *yitrôn* humans have over other creations of God. Does the fact that humans have words, eyes, or ears consist of a *yitrôn* over nature? The implicit answer is no, since just as the sea is not filled, so also the ear is not filled. He also applies the framework of *yitrôn* to analyze his own wise works: Does the fact that he worked with extraordinary wisdom give him a *yitrôn*? Although there is what appears to be a *yitrôn* during his own lifetime, in the long run, the fact that both the wise and fool die means there is no lasting *yitrôn*, and this frustrates him (Eccl 2:13-17).

Having investigated human abilities more thoroughly, Qoheleth once again returns to his conclusion that there is no *yitrôn*: “the race is not to the swift, and the war is not to the strong” (Eccl 9:11). It is because he wanted there to be a long-term distinction for those who exercise their abilities that he despises that there isn’t: “This is a bad thing among all that happen under the Sun, that one thing happens to all” (Eccl 9:3).

It would be a mistake to read Qoheleth's view that there is no *yitrôn* as a piece of purely intellectual deliberation. Rather, it should be read in the context of human actions, since the fact that there is no *yitrôn* is extraordinary only when placed in contrast to actions of humans that are subconsciously motivated as if there were a *yitrôn*. For instance, for Qoheleth, human *'āmāl* and skill are a product of jealousy, an observation coherent with the competitive nature of *yitrôn* that requires a good result that is NOT LIKE OTHER PEOPLE (Eccl 4:4). We may also look to the rich man who hoards wealth and loses it (Eccl 5:12-15); the story shows that, not only is it possible that one loses riches in life, but also, it must be lost in death and so it is not a *yitrôn*. This story, which is presented as a tragic sickness (*rā' hōlā(h)*), only makes sense if the man himself acted on the assumption of a *yitrôn*. Furthermore, the tragedy is not in that he failed to understand an intellectual point about a *yitrôn*, but in the fact that he *acted* as if there were a *yitrôn*, since he had lived a stressful life by being misled by the illusion of a *yitrôn*, instead of enjoying life.

Therefore, the essence of *yitrôn* for Qoheleth is that its very possibility to provide lasting happiness is an illusion. That is, it is something that turns out not to exist when seriously investigated. But the illusion itself *does* exist; humans continue to act as if there is a *yitrôn*, showing that the illusion controls them.

8.1.4. The Heart

Humans are rarely in full control of their thoughts. In modern parlance we may talk about this using the terms subconscious, heart, emotion, and so on to describe such a phenomenon. For Qoheleth, the two main hubs of thought are himself (often *'ānî*) and his heart (*lēb*). One of the distinctions between the two is whether something is a more controllable/rational aspect or a less

controllable/rational aspect of oneself: The less controllable aspect of oneself is referred to as the heart (*lēb*).⁴¹²

Quite clearly, Qoheleth is in less control of his heart than other aspects of his mental faculties. When Qoheleth must prompt his own heart to search for what is good to do under the Sun, the heart plays a role that is at once part of Qoheleth, and yet an autonomous aspect of his character (Eccl 2:1-3). Thus, when the search is subsequently carried out by the heart, it goes after its own desires (Eccl 2:10).

Two other characteristics of the heart play an important role in Ecclesiastes. First, the heart is powerful over man. For instance, in discussing human depravity, it is noteworthy that Qoheleth places wickedness in people's hearts: "*the heart* of the sons of man are intent to do evil" (Eccl 8:11). In Qoheleth's view, it is the autonomous area of the mind that motivates people to act in wicked ways. The same characteristic of the heart is exhibited again, where the heart guides actions: "A wise heart goes to its right, a foolish heart goes to its left" (Eccl 10:2).

⁴¹² Studies that focus directly on the *lēb* and the concept of self have recently become more commonplace. For example, in a study that is devoted to the model of the self in Jewish thought, Newsom suggests that the *lēb* is "the locus of the person's moral will." See Carol A. Newsom, "Models of the Moral Self: Hebrew Bible and Second Temple Judaism," *JBL* 131, no. 1 (2012): 10. Among studies on Ecclesiastes, notable is Holmstedt who has given a syntactic argument for reading the heart in Ecclesiastes as a fully-fledged character. See Robert D. Holmstedt, "אִשְׁתֵּי הַלֵּב The Syntactic Encoding of the Collaborative Nature of Qoheleth's Experiment," *JHS* 9, no. 19 (2009): 1-27. However, both explanations seem only to capture one aspect of the use of *lēb* in Ecclesiastes. Morality is certainly part of the picture in Ecclesiastes (Eccl 8:11; 9:3b), but this alone does not exhaust all usages. There is also an aspect of the *lēb* being a character, but this also is not the whole picture, since the heart is also an integral part of the self. I suggest that *lēb* should be defined using STA, yielding the following:

***lēb* (Ecclesiastes)**

Something (X)

People can say what this something is with the word *lēb*

Someone can say something about something with this word when this someone thinks like this:

X is a part of someone (Y)

At the same time, X is like another person

X knows/thinks about/feels many things, at many times, not like Y knows/thinks about/feels many things

At many times, Y does not know things about X, things X knows/thinks about/feels

Sometimes, Y can know things about X, when Y thinks about X for a long time.

Sometimes, Y does something because X thinks: doing something is good

Y can say/do many things to X. Not at many times, something happens to X because of this

Elsewhere, Qoheleth discusses the man whose heart has striving (*ra'yôn*); his heart causes him to *'āmal* and his heart refuses to sleep (Eccl 2:22-23).

Second, the heart is often not known by its owner. Noteworthy in the example of the man whose heart has striving (*ra'yôn*) (Eccl 2:22-23) is that it is not implied that the striving is known by the man. Indeed, it is not even clear whether he recognizes that he is tired. If he had known so, we expect that he would have stopped behaving like he did. Again, it seems unlikely that people know themselves as being evil and having madness reigning within (Eccl 8:11; 9:3); it is precisely because it is something unknown and hidden that it is bearable. Furthermore, Qoheleth's experiment in Eccl 2:1-11 is done with the heart, and the heart seems to be an unknown element. It is because the heart is unknown that he must carry out the experiment: He is not simply observing what his heart observes, but he also observes his heart exploring.⁴¹³

Much of the BACKGROUND of our definition may be best seen as occurring in such an autonomous, unknown, but influential heart: *Hebel* makes best sense in a model where the mind is a complex of rationality and uncontrollable irrationality, known and unknown. The heart projects desires onto humanity that are wholly unrealistic yet compelling; it is these desires that a person ends up following. But since the heart itself is often unknown, the person is wholly unaware of the illusion. Because of this heart-centered problem, Qoheleth must rid his *heart* of hope (*ya'ēš 'et libbî*) (Eccl 2:21) when he recognizes *hebel*; the struggle is with a hidden, irrational, and powerful "other" that is also the very core of oneself. The locus of the problem of *hebel* is not the world, but the human heart.⁴¹⁴

⁴¹³ See Fox, "Qoheleth's Epistemology," 143.

⁴¹⁴ I have been unable to find any recent commentator who would subscribe to my interpretation of *hebel* that sees the central concern of Ecclesiastes as the depravity of human hearts. However, my interpretation is similar

8.1.5. Sin in Qoheleth

Humans in Qoheleth are not satisfied, not due to an absence of good things in the world, but because they seek more than the world provides; as we established in our definitions, things that would make someone FEEL VERY GOOD AT ALL TIMES. They think that if only they would use their *yitrôn*, their goal may be achieved.

It is likely that such desire for happiness happens in the heart, hidden from people's conscious mind. Only Qoheleth himself is portrayed as being aware of the problem, as he judges many things as *hebel*. Never is anyone else portrayed as determined to find if their ideals exist. Even for Qoheleth, the seeking after happiness happens mainly in his heart, as evident from the fact that when he fails to find a *yitrôn*, he goes on to let go of hope from his heart (*lēb*) (Eccl 2:20).

The hidden nature of the human heart underlies the puzzling self-harm that people do to themselves. In the case of Qoheleth's own drive after his heart's desire, there is only a faint realization of his own folly before his actions (Eccl 2:3). But the realization only intensifies *after* the actions when he asks, "what will be for man in all his '*āmāl*'?" (Eccl 2:22a). Similarly, the man who performs the act of '*āmāl*' without having a family asks only after the matter "for whom have I been a worker depriving myself of goodness?" (Eccl 4:8). The tragedy is in the fact that humans never regard what is so obvious until after they spend a considerable amount of time doing it.

to that of Luther, who states, "Thus the subject matter of this book is simply the human race, which is so foolish that it seeks and strives for many things by its efforts which it cannot attain or which, even if it does attain them, it does not enjoy but possesses to its sorrow and harm, as the fault not of the things themselves but of its own foolish affections." See Martin Luther, "Notes on Ecclesiastes," in *Luther's Works*, vol. 15, ed. and trans. Jaroslav Pelikan (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing, 1972), 10.

But this man with no family in Eccl 4:8 is never presented as transitioning from a dim awareness of his folly to a recognition that there is no *yitrôn* under the Sun; only Qoheleth, the wise man who correctly sees the crisis that humanity finds itself in, has been blessed with this recognition. Yet, this man with no family, having a dim understanding, is closer to the truth than others. The wicked who used to worship at the holy place are never portrayed as even questioning their own motives (Eccl 8:10); Qoheleth is the one who questions the purpose of their life, having seen that they were forgotten. Similarly, the wise man who is caricatured as proclaiming he knows the works that happens under the Sun seems completely unaware of the illusion that has led him to the wrong conclusion (Eccl 8:17).

Strong parallels may be drawn between Qoheleth's idea of mankind and the story of the garden of Eden in Genesis chapter three. The serpentine temptation consisted in humans thinking they could be divine, something more than human. Not satisfied by their daily perpetual supply of food, they chose to disobey God and to seek to become like Him.⁴¹⁵ The expected state of divinity, which presumably was perceived as better than life of working and eating in the garden, was not found when they ate from the tree, but human pursuit of it lives on in the people of Ecclesiastes. The same serpentine temptation is found in the hearts of Qoheleth's audience, who also assume their actions will accomplish greatness that is beyond man, something reserved for

⁴¹⁵ I have considered the explication "I will be like God [m]" to replace "I will feel something very good at all times." I feel that the former is insightful in that it covers many of the desires of people in Ecclesiastes, like the desire to know the future, the desire not to die, and the desire to be in control. It would also explain the adversity of God throughout. However, I have refrained from such an explication for three reasons. Firstly, I have not been able to explicate the word "God." This would be significantly more difficult than explicating abstract lexemes. If God were left unexplicated, the explication of *hebel* would have significant gaps in a very contestable segment, going against the spirit of NSM, which seeks to make testable and transparent definitions. Secondly, I feel that the most significant part of the seeking for divinity is covered by "I will feel something very good at all times." Thirdly, I have devoted this chapter to the explication of *hebel* where I explain the desire to want to be like God, and so the lack of "I will be like God [m]" in the explication can be compensated for. Of course, the drawback is that the present explication lacks the cohesion that it would have if it began with God in the BACKGROUND and ended with God in STAGE 3.

the divine.⁴¹⁶ In fact Qoheleth comments quite in line with the story of the fall that, “God made man upright, but they have sought many schemes” (Eccl 7:29). If humans have erred from their original purpose, then scheming as if their actions would have divine significance may already be considered as evil by Qoheleth, just as the fall of humanity from its original dignified status in Genesis itself was evil in its very nature.⁴¹⁷

Moreover, the eating of the fruit was followed by self-conceit on the part of the couple. Both the man and the woman failed to identify their own desire, and instead, the man blamed the woman and indirectly God, while the woman blamed the snake (Gen 3:12-13). The same lack of self-reflection is found in the people of Ecclesiastes, who lack awareness of their drives to action, while they themselves continuously aim to grasp the fruit of the tree in their own ways.

Therefore, evil in Ecclesiastes may be seen not so much as action, as it is seen as the state of the human heart. Harboring illusions of grandeur in the heart may itself already be wicked, whether it is done consciously or not. Indeed, the evil and madness Qoheleth observes in people’s hearts (Eccl 8:11; 9:3) in the context of the book seems to point to the desires that lead

⁴¹⁶ The use of the Garden Narrative here reflects my belief that Qoheleth used the same idea as the one there, perhaps due to his knowledge of the story. In fact, the connection between Genesis 1-11 and Ecclesiastes has been argued without opposition to the extent that William Anderson says, “I have not come across a single scholar who denies Qoheleth’s use of the Genesis material.” See William H. Anderson, “The Curse of Work in Qoheleth: An Exposé of Genesis 3:17-19 in Ecclesiastes,” *EvQ* 70, no. 2 (1998): 99n2. Likewise, recent studies on this matter have unanimously seen links between Ecclesiastes and Genesis: See for the most complete discussion of the links between Genesis and Ecclesiastes in Charles C. Forman, “Qoheleth’s Use of Genesis,” *JSS* 5 (1960): 256-63, and Katharine Dell, “Exploring Intertextual Links Between Ecclesiastes and Genesis 1-11,” in *Reading Ecclesiastes Intertextually*, ed. Katharine Dell and Will Kynes (London: Bloombury, 2014), 1-14. However, in recent discussions, references to the link between the serpent in the garden and Ecclesiastes have curiously been missing. But in Gregory of Nyssa’s homilies on Ecclesiastes, many references to the serpentine nature of the temptation in Ecclesiastes is made. He portrays the spiritual temptations in Ecclesiastes as a battle against the serpent; those who are drawn in by temptation, the serpent “drags her coil of desire for money over these, and with that necessarily goes licence, the hindmost part and tail of the bestiality of pleasure.” See Hall and Moriarty, “Translation: Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa: Homilies on Ecclesiastes,” 82. Despite my belief that there are strong conceptual parallels in the two texts, I am skeptical that arguments for allusions or echoes are useful; Qoheleth’s use of the concept of temptation stands, with or without an allusion to the garden narrative.

⁴¹⁷ See Kiuchi’s study of sin in the Hebrew Bible, where he claims that in its core lies the idea of self hiding: Nobuyoshi Kiuchi, *A Study of ḥātā and ḥāṭṭā’ t̄ in Leviticus 4–5* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003).

to actions like claiming to know God's works under the Sun (Eccl 8:17) rather than more transparently evil actions; if he was only talking about a select breed of especially evil people, he would not make such a generic statement about the evil of the human heart that covers all of humanity. Indeed, it is not just the wicked, but everyone portrayed in Qoheleth who exhibit actions that are at some level wrong and have shades of mad preoccupation. Everything is *hebel*.

If striving after things as if they would lead someone to FEEL VERY GOOD AT ALL TIMES is already wickedness, then a person with such a heart should be condemned for having such a heart. Awareness of the potential condemnation seems to underlie Qoheleth's advice that people should be aware of their own hearts concerning which he says, "know that for all these, God will bring you into judgment" (Eccl 11:9). Furthermore, an awareness of potential condemnation over what is concealed in the confines of the heart may also have caused the author of the epilogue to remark that God's judgment will be over every hidden thing (*ne'lām*), whether the work is good or evil (Eccl 12:14).

Naturally we may ask, if all pursuits of man secretly derive from their evil irrational heart, who could survive judgment? It would seem that it is only the man who has changed internally, and whose heart is no longer listening to the serpent's temptations. That process whereby somebody is cleansed of this wickedness is the process that is envisioned in the word *hebel*: A reflection on one's own wrong-headed attitude to life, and a reinstatement of God as divine.

8.1.6. Seeing and Learning

In our definition of *hebel*, seeing various things precipitates a change in one's assumptions about the world. It is possible to talk about such insights in terms of the English term "empiricism"

with some caution, as some scholars have done, since it is significant that “sight” is the most prominent source of knowledge in Qoheleth, in contradistinction to other wisdom writers who rarely allowed sight to be a source of knowledge.⁴¹⁸ But some caveats must first be identified.

If we mean that Qoheleth is an empiricist in the sense that anyone who saw what he saw would have to come to the same conclusion, this would be wrong. In Eccl 1:10, his opponent seems to be empirical in his thinking too, since he seeks to prove the hypothesis of whether there is anything new under the Sun by claiming “*see!* this is new!” Qoheleth’s contestation of this statement is grounded in the logic that it is not just anybody’s sight that is a source of knowledge. Instead, it is only his own seeing that counts as knowledge.

Qoheleth’s empiricism is also not restricted to “physical sight.” In fact, a large amount of what he sees is abstract. Abstract sights include things like “what is good for the sons of man” (Eccl 2:3), and the fact that something is “from God’s hand” (Eccl 2:24). Just like the semantic prime SEE, sight in Ecclesiastes is much wider than the kind that can be used as objective “evidence” as we see in our English culture; whether something can be proven “objectively” is of no concern.

But “empiricism” does capture that aspect of Qoheleth’s sight that is methodical.⁴¹⁹ He has a hypothesis that there is a *yitrôn* that would result in FEELING VERY GOOD AT ALL TIMES, and he has set out to find it. Any information that is relevant to this is seen. The fact that “all the *‘āmāl* of a man is for his mouth, and yet the appetite is not filled” (Eccl 6:7) is seen since it disproves the hypothesis. Similarly, the fact that “there are righteous people who receive what

⁴¹⁸ See particularly the influential article: Fox, “Qoheleth’s Epistemology.” Weeks has recently reviewed the material on the matter in Weeks, *Ecclesiastes and Scepticism*, 121-25.

⁴¹⁹ See Fox, “Qoheleth’s Epistemology,” 141-42.

should happen to the wicked” (Eccl 8:14) is seen and noticed because it disproves his hypothesis. In other words, he is not merely seeing whatever comes to him in a passive manner, but he is actively *looking for* things as he investigates the world.

Perhaps more surprising than the fact that Qoheleth sees things is the fact that the people do not see things. Some things like the works of God are designed so neither Qoheleth nor the people can see it (Eccl 3:11; 8:17). But others are seen by Qoheleth but not by the people, and furthermore, the people seem culpable for their lack of sight. The fact that the people think that there is something new under the Sun is implicitly blamed on them: “there is no remembrance (*zikkārôn*) to the former things” (Eccl 1:11a). Examples of such phenomena seem to be given later. Only Qoheleth sees the poor but wise man who saved a city, while the people fail to remember (*zkr*) him (Eccl 9:14-15). The death of the wicked too is seen and remembered by Qoheleth alone, while even the people who lived in the same city have forgotten (*škh*) them (Eccl 8:10). The problem, therefore, is not that the people have not physically seen certain things, but the fact that their hearts remain undisturbed. Events are conveniently forgotten, so that the heart’s illusion may survive.

Qoheleth seems to express such lack of insight as a lack of wisdom: One of the characteristics of wisdom in Ecclesiastes is that it gives people sight. Qoheleth states that the wise man has his eyes in his head and thus walks in the light, while the fool walks in darkness (Eccl 2:13-14). This is again reinforced later with the saying “better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of appetite,” (Eccl 6:9) which contrasts the wise man who has sight with the fool who simply chases his desire.⁴²⁰ In effect, the fool is the one who follows the delusions of his

⁴²⁰ No other recent commentator, to my knowledge, has taken this reading of the verse. But among older commentators, Jerome and Bonaventura take this reading. See Jerome, *St. Jerome: Commentary on Ecclesiastes*, 79-

heart seeking to use his *yitrôn*, without ever reflecting on how the heart's desire is incongruent to how the world is. Walking in such blindness pleases one's heart because it avoids short term crisis in one's heart, but it is foolish, not wise.

Despite the people's seemingly foolish blindness, Qoheleth insists that they *can* see, and that they *should* see *hebel*. Qoheleth commands the people multiple times to see: “*See* the work of God: who can straighten what he has bent?” (Eccl 7:13); “On a good day be joyful, and on a bad day, *see*: God has made both this and the other” (Eccl 7:14a); ““*See* this I have found’ says Qoheleth” (concerning the rarity of an ideal human) (Eccl 7:27a); “Only *see* this I have found: that God made humans upright but they have sought out many schemes” (Eccl 7:29). Similarly, Qoheleth's insistence that the people should see may underlie the recounting of his own sights in the *hebel* scenes. That is, he expects people to see what he sees through his recounting. The people are foolish, but they have the capacity to absorb wisdom.

In fact, Qoheleth seems to go further. It is not only Qoheleth's will, but also God's will that the people see things. It is God's will concerning humans “to *show* them that they are beasts” (Eccl 3:18b).⁴²¹ In this sense, Qoheleth sees himself as being the one who is able to observe and interpret God's will, and as the interpreter, he hopes to help people to reach the same conclusion as himself, that all is *hebel*.

Finally, the idea of sight as the source of healing is also linked intimately to experience in Ecclesiastes. In his final advice to his audience, Qoheleth advises people to “walk in the ways of your heart, and with the sight of your eyes” (Eccl 11:9aβ). The first phrase seems to urge people

89; and Bonaventure, *Works of St. Bonaventure: Commentary on Ecclesiastes*, ed. Robert J. Karris and Campion Murray (New York: The Franciscan Institute, 2005), 247-48.

⁴²¹ I follow many commentators in emending *lir'ôt* “to see” to *lar'ôt* “to show.” But even if the masoretic vowels were retained, the sense is still that the people should see things, by the will of God.

to experience life as Qoheleth himself did in chapter two.⁴²² The second phrase, “with the sight of your eyes,” specifies that such a dangerous procedure must be done with wisdom (i.e., contrite self-reflection), and thus seems to mirror Qoheleth’s own procedure that emphasized that his exploration was done with wisdom (Eccl 2:3, 9).⁴²³ Thus, Qoheleth not only expects that people should see his insights, but also that they should be able to see the same kinds of insights in their own lives through wisdom.

8.1.7. God’s Dominion

Knowledge of God and his purposes brings together the *hebel* scene to its logical closure. Not only does Qoheleth conclude that there is nothing that would make him FEEL VERY GOOD AT ALL TIMES, and that there is no *yitrôn*, but he also comes to see that God’s hand is involved in making things as they are, and His will cannot be challenged: “I know that all that God does, it will always be. To it, nothing can be added, and nothing can be taken away” (Eccl 3:14).⁴²⁴

⁴²² For a similar interpretation of the final advice, see Graham Ogden, “Qoheleth XI 7-XII 8: Qoheleth’s Summons to Enjoyment and Reflection,” *VT* 34, no. 1 (1984): 31-32. But the reading that the seeing is a phrase that denotes wisdom is not shared by Ogden.

⁴²³ Eccl 11:9 has raised concerns within rabbinic literature, since following one’s heart seems to directly contradict the command in Numbers 15:39 that commands people not to follow their hearts. My reading of the text here seems to offer a partial solution: Qoheleth is not merely telling people to follow their hearts uncritically, but to do so with wisdom so that they will at least be able to see their own repellent hearts. In regard to the connection between Eccl 11:9 and Num 15:39, see Kynes’ recent work, which attempts to explore the intertextuality between Eccl 11:9 and Num 13-15 in Will Kynes, “Follow your Heart and Do Not Say it Was a Mistake: Qoheleth’s Allusion to Numbers 15 and the Story of the Spies,” in *Reading Ecclesiastes Intertextually*, ed. Katharine Dell and Will Kynes (London: Bloombury, 2014), 15-27.

⁴²⁴ Rudman addresses the issue of determinism in Ecclesiastes. He concludes that the Stoic belief that everything in the universe is controlled by a single force is present in Ecclesiastes, but that the preoccupation with the place of blame for people’s actions is not found in Qoheleth. See Dominic Rudman, *Determinism in the Book of Ecclesiastes* (JSOTSup, no. 316; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2001). The idea of determinism has largely been followed in subsequent works such as Antoon Schoors “God in Qoheleth,” in *Schöpfungsplan und Heilsgeschichte: Festschrift für Ernst Haag zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. Renate Brandscheidt and Theresia Mende (Trier: Paulinus, 2002), 251-270.

Various human ideals are frustrated by the limits placed by God. It is God who places limitations on the ability of man, so that he cannot find out about all the works of God (Eccl 3:11). It is God who makes both good and bad days for people so that “man cannot find out about anything after him” (Eccl 7:14). It is God who denies immediate justice in the world and allows the wicked to thrive in the meanwhile (Eccl 3:17; 8:11). It is God who ordains life and death (Eccl 3:2a, 18-20). It is God who allows one man to thrive while another is given the job of collecting without enjoyment (Eccl 2:24-26; 5:18-6:2). Even the various preoccupations people have were given by God (Eccl 1:13; 2:26; 3:10). From the very preoccupation, through work, to the inevitable disappointment, God is seen as involved throughout the process.

The intervention of God in people’s desire for their heart’s illusion is not accidental, as if that were just how the world was created, but deliberate. Purpose clauses that explicitly state God’s intent show that Qoheleth sees God’s actions as deliberately addressing the problem of *hebel* that Qoheleth is raising, by frustrating known human desires like the desire to know the works of God (Eccl 3:11, 14, 18; 7:14). The implication is that God knows what people are striving for, and He deliberately makes them want it, so that they will find nothing. That is, the process of *hebel* is seen as God’s creation, and not simply a concept created by Qoheleth. This reasoning seems to underlie his insistence that God has already accepted people’s activities (Eccl 9:7b). Furthermore, Qoheleth’s advice that people follow their hearts (Eccl 11:9aβ) can be seen as advice that mirrors how God Himself already allows people to live.

Why does God want people to go through the miserable process of *hebel*? According to Qoheleth, the purpose is so that people would fear God. For instance, the *hebel* that Qoheleth saw, the righteous perishing in their righteousness and the wicked prolonging their wickedness, is explained by Qoheleth as ultimately aimed at resulting in the fear of God (Eccl 7:15-18).

An illustration from the perspective of human limitations may help to make the connection between fear and the things that happen in the world. One prominent way that humans come to fear is the idea of their limitations, since humans are capable of devastatingly little. The capacity to accumulate things, and the capacity to enjoy the things accumulated is given by God (Eccl 2:24-26; 5:18-6:2); that is, humans are not even capable of accumulating things, much less enjoy those things, unless God allows it to happen. Also, a man is portrayed as being unable to escape the temptation posed by an enticing woman unless he is good before God (Eccl 7:26). Thus, in Qoheleth's view, humans not only have no *yitrôn*, but also lack the skills to survive everyday life unless God helps them. They are not only subordinate creatures to God, but also entirely dependent on a God who is wholly unpredictable. Awareness of a lack of a *yitrôn* through which to control affairs, coupled with the awareness of the power of God whose actions cannot be predicted should, in Qoheleth's logic, result in a fear of God.

Thus, for Qoheleth, fear results from a sober realization of the relationship between God and humanity. Humans are evil at heart, overwhelmed by their heart's desire, and yet so powerless that their every action requires divine approval. God on the other hand judges humans, knows their hidden desires, and controls everything that happens. Humans are in constant danger as any of their actions could trigger their downfall: So Qoheleth reasons concerning the person who dares to make a vow saying, "why should God anger against your voice and destroy the work of your hand?" (Eccl 5:5b). Most frightening is that people do not recognize their precarious situation and harbor the false feeling that they are proximate to God, perhaps because they inwardly perceive themselves as godlike, and this leads to many words in prayer. Instead the correct attitude towards God is to be careful in uttering anything before Him, "since God is in heaven and you are on the earth" (Eccl 5:1). But without fear towards God, any pretense of care

for one's actions at the temple is surely meaningless. At the very least, the illusion that one is great like God and therefore that one can approach God without great care must be removed to evade disaster.

People who experience *hebel* initially lack a fear of God, since they crave super-human things that are restricted to God. And things that are reserved for God are more numerous in Qoheleth's view than his audience would admit: In fact, everyone seeks to go beyond human bounds in some way, and this is why Qoheleth declares that everything is *hebel*. This is the law among fallen humanity that Qoheleth has found. Only the person who can enjoy his everyday food, drink, and work, who is very self-critical, who has no ambition in any arena of life, who fears and acknowledges God's dominion, and who does not assume there is a tomorrow but accepts that even tomorrow is in God's control and not one's own, is in the right state of mind.

Such an ideal state of mind can only be achieved through the realization of *hebel*, that bitter realization that one's capacity to attain grandeur was an illusion and that in reality humanity is finite, weak, and dependent on God. The realization has life-changing significance of traumatic proportions, for not only does one change one's perspective, but one cannot think like one did before. Instead one resents one's past way of life. But the realization that everything is *hebel*, that makes one feel further from God than before, ironically draws one back close to God, since all who know that everything is *hebel* also fear God, and those who fear God no longer act before God in a way that brings divine displeasure (Eccl 4:17-5:6).

8.2. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explored how Qoheleth may have intended his own work to be read. While the semantics of *hebel* may first seem strange to us in the 21st century, a reading supported by an

NSM explication helps to guide us back through time, so that we can simulate how various ideas could converge together to form a coherent, readable text. That is, strangeness of an explication does not entail incorrectness, although it does entail a lot of mental effort to understand. Also, strangeness does not entail that the reading using the concept is irrelevant to us. In fact, our reading of *hebel* in Ecclesiastes deals with timeless issues that we too can sympathize with and comprehend in the 21st century.

In summary then, words are tremendously important in reading: The first step in a good reading is to think like the author did, and the best way to mimic how the author thought is a semantic study of his vocabulary using STA.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

This dissertation has been about language barriers that hinder our understanding of Biblical Hebrew *hebel*, and how those obstacles can be overcome using NSM. The attempt to find cultural elements in single words may have seemed unduly narrow. However, I have argued throughout that even a single word is imbued with significant amounts of cultural information, and that understanding a single word can help us to become more competent readers of the ancient text.

The definitions for *hebel*, *‘āmāl*, *‘āmal*, *yitrôn*, and *yôtēr*, as described in chapters five and six represent tailor-made concepts that have gone beyond off-the-shelf English concepts. By employing the theory and methodology of NSM, I have argued that these definitions are representations of the cognition of ancient speakers, and that they can instruct us about how to think about concepts from a perspective approaching that of native Biblical Hebrew speakers. Although we will never be able to go back in time and fully experience things as ancient speakers experienced them, it is possible to imitate and approximate their patterns of thought, and even to apply these meanings to modern world situations.

I have also spent a considerable amount of space explaining that cultural relativity cuts both ways. We must recognize that Hebrew was situated in its own culture. But we must also acknowledge that we ourselves are programmed to operate within the conceptual patterns of our own modern-day cultures. The extent to which the consequences of one's own native-language words were recognized and dealt with distinguishes this dissertation from all previous works on *hebel*, as well as all previous works in Hebrew lexicography. I expect that as Hebrew scholarship slowly changes its demography from a western-dominated demography to a more multicultural

and multilingual demography, the importance of agreeing in a universal metalanguage to describe Hebrew concepts will be recognized.

The most important way in which this study has sought to contribute to Hebrew lexicography is through the introduction and refinement of STA. The procedure envisioned in STA is simple. It is based on how people normally learn lexemes in their everyday lives. Moreover, the definitions resulting from STA are NSM explications that are readable even by people unaware of NSM, and understandable with a little patience. This contrasts with cognitive linguistic approaches to Hebrew lexicography that require substantial linguistic expertise, and which are typically scattered over several pages with multiple tables, diagrams, and statistics. I hope that NSM and STA will be more approachable to scholars in HB who do not have the time to familiarize themselves with the increasingly sophisticated ideas expressed in cognitive linguistics.

This study has only scratched the surface of Hebrew thought. Hundreds of other Hebrew lexemes are still available to be discussed using the procedure I have described. But through the study of only a handful of words, I hope to have shown that NSM is a fruitful theory for studying ancient languages through application of STA, and that STA is capable of capturing semantic generalizations that have been overlooked in previous studies. Finally, I hope to have shown that NSM explications of Hebrew lexemes are capable of illuminating significant details in Hebrew texts that can only be noticed through the lens of Hebrew thought.

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