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HEADLESSNESS AND EXTRAPOSITION: ANOTHER LOOK AT THE SYNTAX OF אשר[1]

ABSTRACT
Typically, grammars analyze the majority of אשר clauses as either relative or complement clauses. However, often grammars, commentaries, and translations also treat אשר as a subordinating conjunction which introduces causal, purpose, result, and conditional clauses. In this paper, I shall propose that the most economical analysis assigns a binary role to אשר: it introduces only relative and complement clauses. A relative clause analysis of all "non-relative, non-complement" occurrences of אשר can be rescued by recognizing and including the syntactic phenomena of headless relatives and extraposed relatives in the analysis of Biblical Hebrew אשר clauses. The exegetical ramifications of this proposal are illustrated on the characterization of Solomon and Yahweh's blessing in 1 Kgs 3.12-13.

1. INTRODUCTION

Occam's Razor is the principle that if competing explanations for a set of data exist, the simplest explanation, and if possible the explanation based on known quantities, is preferable. In this paper we shall re-examine the syntax of the Hebrew word אשר in light of Occam's Razor. With just under 5,500 אשר clauses in the Masoretic Text of B19[A], there is an average of one אשר for every five verses. The focus of our discussion will be what types of clauses that this basic Hebrew word introduces. Typically, grammars analyze the majority of אשר clauses as either relative or complement clauses. However, often grammars, commentaries, and translations also treat אשר as a subordinating conjunction which introduces causal, purpose, result, and conditional clauses, as in (1), an example to which we will be returning towards the end of our analysis.

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(1)   הִנֵּה עָשִׂיתִי כִּדְבָרֶיךָ הִנֵּה נָתַתִּי לְךָ לֵב חָכָם וְנָבוֹן
                  [אֲשֶׁר כָּמוֹךָ לֹא־הָיָה לְפָנֶיךָ וְאַחֲרֶיךָ לֹא־יָקוּם כָּמוֹךָ]

'I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart, <u>so that</u> <u>there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be</u>.' (1 Kgs 3.12
NIV; see also NAS, RSV, KJV; cf. NRSV)[2]

In the following discussion, I shall propose that the most economical analysis assigns a binary role to אשר: it introduces only relative and complement clauses. Throughout this analysis, my syntactic explanations have been informed by the Principles and Parameters theory of Chomskyan generative linguistics. In particular I am operating within the framework of Chomsky's Minimalist Program as articulated in Chomsky 1995; however, I will only note crucial points of contact in my study.

2. אשר *INTRODUCING BH RELATIVE CLAUSES*

By far, the most common use for אשר is as a relative conjunction.[3] אשר relative clauses serve a function similar to attributive adjectives: they provide information about the modified noun which enables a listener/reader to distinguish the noun from other possible or real items in the field of discourse.[4] In (2), the English relative clause, *who visited us*, restricts the semantic domain covered by the constituent *friends*, narrowing the referent from any friends to the ones who visited. This semantic restriction is much the same as that of the adjective *black* with regard to the constituent *dog* in (3).

    (2) the friends who visited us
    (3) the black dog

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2   See also Keil 1877:42; DeVries (1985:46) takes the אשר in v. 12 to refer to לב and the אשר in v. 13 to refer to וכבוד עשר; Mulder (1998:148-149) takes the אשר in v. 12 to refer to לב but the אשר in v. 13 as a result clause.

3   אשר can also be considered an operator, a class of words that (in syntax) trigger syntactic movement within a clause, e.g. *Wh*-words have long been considered operators in English due to the difference in the syntax of *you hit the ball* versus *what did you hit?* In semantics, the term operator is reserved for items which affect the polarity or scope of a statement, e.g. negatives are operators because they affect the truth-conditional status of a statement.

4   This description applies only to restrictive relatives. Non-restrictive relatives do not serve to identify the referent of a constituent; they merely provide additional information concerning an already referential entity.

2.1. Headed (Dependent) אשר *Relative Clauses*

The constituent which is modified is typically referred to as a 'head'. In the majority of Biblical Hebrew examples, the head is a noun phrase, ranging from bare noun phrases, as in (4), to proper nouns, as in (5). However, אשר relatives may also modify entire clauses as illustrated in (6).

(4) Bare (unmodified, indefinite) Noun Phrase[5]

וַיְדַבְּרוּ דָבָר בִּשְׁמִי [שֶׁקֶר אֲשֶׁר לֹא צִוִּיתִם]

'And they spoke a word in my name, a falsehood which I did not command them'
(Jer 29.23)

(5) Proper Noun[6]

וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָי [יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר־הִתְהַלַּכְתִּי לְפָנָיו] יִשְׁלַח מַלְאָכוֹ אִתָּךְ

'Then he said to him: Yhwh whom I walked before will send his angel with you'
(Gen 24.40)

(6) Entire Clause[7]

וּמָלְאוּ בָתֶּיךָ וּבָתֵּי כָל־עֲבָדֶיךָ וּבָתֵּי כָל־מִצְרַיִם -- אֲשֶׁר לֹא־רָאוּ
אֲבֹתֶיךָ וַאֲבוֹת אֲבֹתֶיךָ מִיּוֹם הֱיוֹתָם עַל־הָאֲדָמָה עַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה

'And your houses and the houses of all of your servants and the houses of all of Egypt will be filled [with locusts, v.4] — which your fathers and your ancestors have never seen from the day you came to exist upon the land until this day.' (Exod 10.6)

Whatever the head of the an אשר relative is, it can occur in any position within the larger – or matrix – clause. For instance the head, with its

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5   For example, also see Gen 20.9; Exod 21.13; Lev 20.11; Num 19.20; 2 Kgs 23.25; Ps 8.4; Qoh 8.14.

6   For example, also see Isa 49.7; Josh 13.21; Judg 18.29; 1 Sam 29.5; 2 Sam 6.21; 1 Kgs 11.23; Ps 105.25.

7   Although relative clauses with an entire clause as the antecedent is not uncommon cross-linguistically (e.g. English: Adam fell down the stairs—which wasn't a good thing), a relative clause modifying an entire clause is not so common in the Hebrew Bible. In regard to אשר, Gaenssle (1915:58) compares this function to Syriac *d* and Akkadian *ša* as well as Latin *quale* and lists the following verses as examples in the Hebrew Bible: Exod 10.6; Jer 7.31; 32.35; Esth 4.16. I have identified the following as additional examples: Josh 4.23; 2 Sam 4.10; Jer 19.5; 48.8; 2 Chr 3.1. Ps 139.15 is another possible, although more ambiguous, example.

relative clause, may serve as the subject of the verb (7), the object (8), or an adjunct (e.g. within a prepositional phrase) (9).

(7) [עַם אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יָדַעְתָּ] יֹאכַל פְּרִי אַדְמָתְךָ וְכָל־יְגִיעֶךָ
  '*a people which you do not know* shall eat the fruit of your land and all of your *produce*' (Deut 28.33)

(8) [אֶת־הָעִנְיָן אֲשֶׁר נָתַן אֱלֹהִים לִבְנֵי הָאָדָם לַעֲנוֹת בּוֹ] רָאִיתִי
  '*I have seen the task which God has given to mankind to busy himself with*' (Qoh 3.10)

(9) לֹא־כֵן הָרְשָׁעִים כִּי אִם־[כַּמֹּץ אֲשֶׁר־תִּדְּפֶנּוּ רוּחַ]
  '*Not so, the wicked; rather (they are) like the chaff which a wind blows*' (Ps 1.4)

2.2 Headless (Independent) אשׁר Relative Clauses

In our present discussion, a crucial property of אשׁר relative clauses is the fact that they may lack an overt head. These relatives are often referred to as headless relative clauses. The superficial difference between the two types is illustrated by the minimal pair in (10)-(11).

(10) וַיֵּרַע [הַדָּבָר אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂה דָוִד] בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה
  '*And the thing which David did was wicked in the eyes of Yhwh*' (2 Sam 11.27)

(11) וַיֵּרַע בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה [**e** אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה]
  '*And (e) what he did was wicked in the eyes of Yhwh*' (Gen 38.10)

The prototypical relative in (10) has a head, הַדָּבָר, whereas the similar relative in (11) does not. I have indicated the covert head with the notation *e*, to indicate a syntactically present but phonologically empty head.

Like headed relative clauses, headless relatives can occur in any position within the matrix clause. For instance, the headless אשׁר relative in (12) serves as the object of the imperative verb.

(12) וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלַי בֶּן־אָדָם [אֵת e אֲשֶׁר־תִּמְצָא] אֱכוֹל
  '*And he said to me: Son of Man, eat (e) what you find*' (Ezek 3.1)

In summary, the most significant feature which we have seen in our brief overview of אשׁר relatives is that they may or may not have an overt head. Let us now examine the basic properties of אשׁר complement clauses.

3. אשר AS A COMPLEMENTIZER

The second most common use of אשר is to mark the clausal complement of a verb.[8] As a complementizer marking an object clause, אשר operates much like the Hebrew word כִּי when כִּי introduces an object clause. The following is a minimal pair using the same verb + complementizer combination: (13) presents אשר introducing an object clause and (14) presents כִּי introducing an object clause.[9]

(13) וּבַמִּדְבָּר אֲשֶׁר רָאִיתָ [אֲשֶׁר נְשָׂאֲךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ]

   *'And in the wilderness where you saw **that Yahweh, your god, carried you**'* (Deut 1.31)

(14) וַיֹּאמְרוּ רָאוֹ רָאִינוּ [כִּי־הָיָה יְהוָה עִמָּךְ]

   *'Then they said: We saw clearly **that Yahweh is with you**'* (Gen 26.28)

We cannot understand אשר as a relative in (13). With אשר *relatives* there is a position inside the relative clause which corresponds to the head (whether the head is overt or covert). Often in Biblical Hebrew that position is marked by a resumptive pronoun or resumptive adverb (such as the Hebrew word שָׁם); however, the position may also be left as a gap within the relative clause. What is significantly different about אשר *complement* clauses, like (13), is that there is no such open or resumed position within the clause.

4. NON-RELATIVE, NON-COMPLEMENT USES OF אשר

Up to this point, we have briefly covered the basic characteristics of אשר relative and אשר complement clauses. Now we must consider the categories which act collectively as a wastebasket for the apparently non-relative and non-complement occurrences of אשר. The most popular English grammars of Biblical Hebrew (GKC, WOC, JM, and Van der

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8   אשר complement clauses should not be confused with אשר clauses preceded by the particle אֵת, often thought to mark the accusative case. The latter type of clause is more accurately a headless relative which stands in the object position; this is distinct from the use of אשר to introduce an object clause.

9   The following is a complete list of אשר complement clauses which I have uncovered in my study of אשר in the entire Hebrew Bible: Gen 24.3; Exod 11.7; Lev 5.5; 26.40; Num 32.23; Deut 1.31; 3.24; Josh 4.7; 1 Sam 15.20; 18.15; 24.19; 2 Sam 1.4; 2.4; 14.15; 1 Kgs 22.16; Isa 37.21; 38.7; Jer 28.9; Ezek 20.26; Zech 8.20; 8.23; Ps 10.6; 89.52 (2x); Job 9.5; Qoh 3.22; 5.4, 17; 6.10;. 7.18; 7.22, 29; 8.3, 12, 14; 9.1; Esth 1.19; 2.10; 3.4; 4.11; 6.2; 8.11; Dan 1.8; Ezra 2.5, 63; Neh 2.10; 7.65; 8.14-15; 10.31; 13.1, 19, 22; 1 Chr 21.8; 2 Chr 2.7; 18.15.

Merwe, Naudé, & Kroeze) as well as the lexicon of Brown-Driver-Briggs list a combined sixty-four examples of אשר used in a non-relative and non-complement manner.

4.1. Causal[10]

Contextually some אשר clauses appear to provide the cause for the preceding event, as in (15).

(15) וַיָּמָת בֶּן־הָאִשָּׁה הַזֹּאת לָיְלָה [אֲשֶׁר שָׁכְבָה עָלָיו]
    *'During the night this woman's son died **because she lay on him**'* (1Kgs 3.19 NIV)

4.2. Purpose[11]

Alternatively, some אשר clauses seem to contribute the purpose of the preceding event (16).

(16) וְלֹא־תַעֲלֶה בְמַעֲלֹת עַל־מִזְבְּחִי [אֲשֶׁר לֹא־תִגָּלֶה עֶרְוָתְךָ עָלָיו]
    *'You shall not go up by steps to my altar, **so that [= in order that] your nakedness may not be exposed on it**'* (Exod 20.26 NRSV)

4.3. Result[12]

Other אשר clauses seem to provide the result of the circumstances described in the preceding clause, as in (17).

(17) וְשַׂמְתִּי אֶת־זַרְעֲךָ כַּעֲפַר הָאָרֶץ [אֲשֶׁר אִם־יוּכַל אִישׁ לִמְנוֹת אֶת־עֲפַר הָאָרֶץ גַּם־זַרְעֲךָ יִמָּנֶה]
    *'I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth; **so that [= with the result that] if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted**'* (Gen 13.16 NRSV)

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10 Cf. Gen 30.18; 31.49; 34.13, 27; 42.21; Num 20.13; Deut 3.24; Josh 4.7, 23; 22.31; Judg 9.17; 1 Sam 2.23; 15.15; 20.42; 25.26, 26.23; 2 Sam 2.5; 1 Kgs 3.19; 15.5; 2 Kgs 12.3; 17.4; 23.26; Jer 16.13; Job 34.27; Qoh 8.11, 12; Dan 1.10.

11 See also Gen 11.7; 24.3; Ex 20.26; Deut 4.10, 40; 6.3 (2x); 32.46; Josh 3.7; 1 Kgs 22.16; Neh 8.14f.

12 See also Gen 13.16; 22.14; Deut 28.27, 35, 51; 1 Kgs 3.8, 12, 13; 2 Kgs 9.37; Mal 3.19.

4.4. Conditional[13]

Finally, many grammarians have noted that אשר occasionally introduces a conditional clause, as in (18)-(19), serving to mark the protasis in a manner similar to the Hebrew words אם and כי.

(18) ²⁶רְאֵה אָנֹכִי נֹתֵן לִפְנֵיכֶם הַיּוֹם בְּרָכָה וּקְלָלָה׃ ²⁷אֶת־הַבְּרָכָה [אֲשֶׁר תִּשְׁמְעוּ אֶל־מִצְוֹת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי מְצַוֶּה אֶתְכֶם הַיּוֹם] ²⁸וְהַקְּלָלָה אִם־לֹא תִשְׁמְעוּ אֶל־מִצְוֹת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם וְסַרְתֶּם מִן־הַדֶּרֶךְ אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי מְצַוֶּה אֶתְכֶם הַיּוֹם לָלֶכֶת אַחֲרֵי אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יְדַעְתֶּם

²⁶*'See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse —*
²⁷*the blessing **if you obey the commands of the LORD your God that I am giving you today**;* ²⁸*the curse **if you disobey the commands of the LORD your God and turn from the way that I command you today by following other gods, which you have not known**'* (Deut 11.26-28 NIV)

(19) וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר [אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁאָלוּן בְּנֵיכֶם מָחָר אֶת־אֲבוֹתָם לֵאמֹר מָה הָאֲבָנִים הָאֵלֶּה]

*'Then he said to the Israelites: **If your children ask their fathers in the future, "What are these stones?"**'* (Josh 4.21; see GKC §159cc)

These last four functions of אשר beg the question: How many functions can one function word fulfill? Are all cases when אשר is assigned a causal, purpose, result, or conditional function syntactically justifiable? Or are some perhaps motivated by translation technique and the target language, or even by exegesis? Clearly, אשר marks both relative and complement clauses, and the two are syntactically distinct and relatively simple to distinguish from one another. The problematic cases are those in which the אשר does not appear to introduce a relative clause, but also does not appear to introduce a complement clause, as in (18). However, such cases are truly rare.

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13 See also Lev 4.22; 25.33; Num 5.29; Deut 11.26-28; 18.22; Josh 4.21; 1 Sam 16.7; 1 Kgs 8.31, 33; Isa 31.4.

5. ALTERNATIVES TO NON-RELATIVE/NON-COMPLEMENT ANALYSES OF אשׁר

I suggest that the vast majority of the examples listed in the previous section under causal, purpose, result, or conditional should be treated as the relative use of אשׁר. Some of them, like the examples in (16)-(17) can simply be reanalyzed as typical relative clauses modifying the nearest antecedent, repeated in (20)-(21); there is no *syntactic* justification for an alternate analysis.

(20) וְלֹא־תַעֲלֶה בְמַעֲלֹת עַל־[מִזְבְּחִי אֲשֶׁר לֹא־תִגָּלֶה עֶרְוָתְךָ עָלָיו]

'You shall not go up by steps to my <u>altar which your nakedness may not be exposed on it</u>' (Exod 20.26)

(21) וְשַׂמְתִּי אֶת־זַרְעֲךָ [כַּעֲפַר הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אִם־יוּכַל אִישׁ לִמְנוֹת אֶת־עֲפַר הָאָרֶץ גַּם־זַרְעֲךָ יִמָּנֶה]

'I will make your offspring like <u>the dust of the earth which if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted</u>' (Gen 13.16)

Other examples are more problematic – those with no realistic antecedent immediately preceding the אשׁר clause. However, we may maintain a relative analysis if we reanalyze these examples in light of the following two filters: 1) headless relative clauses; and 2) the extraposition of relative clauses.

5.1. Headless Relatives (Again)

Unlike the exceptional case of (18) most of the so-called conditional uses of אשׁר can, and should, be analyzed as אשׁר headless relative clauses. In the case of the example in (22), it is not that the אשׁר introduces a conditional; rather, the אשׁר introduces a relative without an overt antecedent – it is a headless relative. A headed אשׁר relative clause which is similar to the example in (22) is given in (23) for comparison.

(22) וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר [אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁאָלוּן בְּנֵיכֶם מָחָר אֶת־אֲבוֹתָם לֵאמֹר מָה הָאֲבָנִים הָאֵלֶּה]

*'Then he said to the Israelites, "[e$_i$] **When**$_i$ your children ask their fathers (in the) future$_i$: What are these stones?"'* (Josh 4.21)

(23) ^{10}[יוֹם אֲשֶׁר עָמַדְתָּ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּחֹרֵב] . . . ^{11}וַתִּקְרְבוּן וַתַּעַמְדוּן תַּחַת הָהָר

*'(On the) day$_i$ **when**$_i$ you stood before Yhwh, your god, at Horeb. . . you drew near and you stood at the foot of the mountain'* (Deut 4.10-11)

In (23) the noun phrase יום serves as the head of the relative and the head and its relative as a whole functions as a temporal modifier for the main clause in Deut 4.11. Likewise, in (22) the headless relative functions as a temporal modifier to the verb "ask." In fact, the covert head noun phrase (represented by the *e* for phonologically *empty*) is resumed by the adverb מחר within the אשר clause, supporting a relative analysis.[14] The clearest explanation of (22) is achieved by comparing a non-relativized version with the relativized version that we have: *Your children shall ask you tomorrow/in the future* vs. *Tomorrow when your children ask you (tomorrow/in the future)*. While the resumption in the relative clause is not acceptable in English, it is a well-known phenomenon in Biblical Hebrew (e.g. it is syntactically analogous to the BH constructions in which we find phrases such as **the place** *which he put his tent* **there**).[15]

Now that we have discussed one solution for maintaining a relative analysis of אשר clauses, let us move on to the second, and in many ways, the more significant proposal: extraposition.

5.2. Extraposition

Before we move into our discussion of extraposition and אשר clauses, a note on terminology is in order. There was a time in the field of linguistics when the term *extraposition* was used for the general movement of constituents, either towards the front or the rear of a clause.[16] However, the time when the term could be used with such variability has long since passed; it was linguistic convention throughout the eighties and early nineties to reserve extraposition to describe the movement of a constituent towards the *end* of a clause (Ouhalla 1999:87; Crystal 1997:146; cf. Haegeman 1994:60-3). The English examples in (24)-(25)

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14 See Num 16.5; 33.55; and Mic 3.5 for headless relatives with a resumptive element.

15 For example, see Gen 3.23; Num 35.26; Jer 16.15.

16 It is possible that the broad definition of extraposition can be assigned to Jespersen, who defines extraposition as the case in which "a word, or a group of words, is placed, as it were, outside of the sentence as if it had nothing to do there" (1969:35; cf. 1964:95; 1949(3):72, 357; 1949(7):223). Also see Mallinson (1986) for a survey of usage of the term extraposition in linguistics leading up to the mid-1980s. Within the field of Biblical Hebrew linguistics, current linguistic conventions have often been overlooked and the older usage of extraposition has been adopted (see Khan 1988 and Zewi 1996a, 1996b), a move which has resulted in much terminological confusion.

serve to illustrate the placement of constituents at the end of a clause; the extraposed clause is in brackets and its "normal" position is marked with a coindexed *t(race)*:

(24) [A man who was wearing a red suit] entered the room

(25) [A man t_i] entered the room [who was wearing a red suit]$_i$

In (24), the relative clause modifies the noun phrase *a man* and, according to the typical relative clause construction in English, it follows immediately after the modified noun phrase. However, (25) exhibits discontinuity between the head *a man* and its relative *who was wearing a red suit*: a verb phrase intervenes.

In the analysis of extraposition which was standard in generative grammar until the early nineties (and continues to be defended),[17] extraposition was considered to be an example of *rightward movement*, or movement towards the front of the clause. By movement, I am referring to the generative notion that constituents are taken from one position (the 'deep-structure' position in which the constituents were inserted from the lexicon) and moved to another position (the 'surface-structure' position which produces the shape of a clause when we hear or read it). (26)-(27) present examples of extraposition from the subject and object positions respectively. In each example, the initial, or deep-structure, extraction site is marked by a coindexed *t(race)* and the arrows are used to indicate the landing site of the extraposed material.[18]

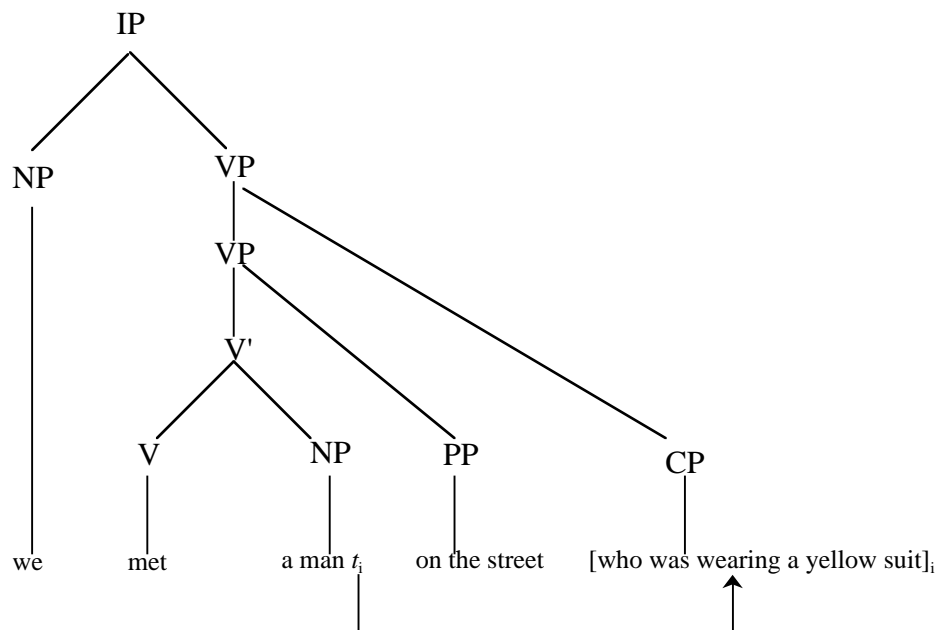(26) A man t_i entered the room [who was wearing a red suit]$_i$
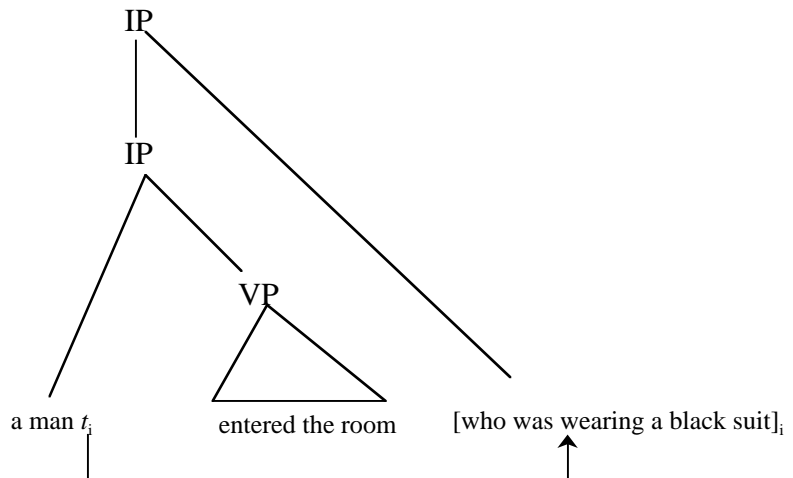
(27) We met a man t_i on the street [who was wearing a yellow suit]$_i$

IP

NP   VP

VP

V'

V   NP   PP   CP

we   met   a man t_i on the street   [who was wearing a yellow suit]$_i$

With two seminal works in the early nineties in Chomskyan generative linguistics, Richard Kayne's *Antisymmetry of Syntax* (1994) and Noam Chomsky's *The Minimalist Program* (1995), the study of extraposition shifted to a leftward movement analysis since both works prohibit rightward movement altogether.[19] Since these two approaches, in some form or another, have dominated generative linguistic discourse in the last several years, the analysis of extraposition has accordingly been revised. Thus, a possible leftward account for extraposition may look something like (28).

(28) we met [a man] [on the street] [$t_{a\ man}$ who was wearing a yellow suit] $t_{on\ the\ street}$

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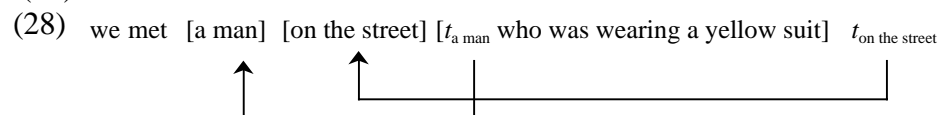
19 Kayne's *Linear Correspondence Axiom* prohibits rightward movement outright and Chomsky's *Checking Theory* only provides syntactic motivation for movement up the clause structure, i.e. leftward movement.

5.2.1. Biblical Hebrew Extraposition

When we return to the Biblical Hebrew אשר clause, we see that the data, represented by (29)-(31), exhibit the same type of movement as the English examples given in (24)-(28) (I have positioned the traces in each example in accordance with a leftward movement analysis).[20]

(29) וּרְאוּ כִּי־[רָעַתְכֶם] רַבָּה [אֲשֶׁר עֲשִׂיתֶם] בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה

ûrəʾû kî [rāʿatkem]ᵢ rabbâ [*t*ᵢ **ʾăšer** ʿᵃśîtem] bəʿênê yhwh

'And see that your evilᵢ (is) great [*t*ᵢ **which you did**] *in the eyes of Yhwh'* (1 Sam 12:17)

(30) וְהִנֵּה [רִבְקָה] יֹצֵאת [אֲשֶׁר יֻלְּדָה לִבְתוּאֵל]

wəhinnê [ribqâ]ᵢ yōṣēʾt [*t*ᵢ **ʾăšer** yulləd̄â lib̄tûʾēl]

'And behold, Rebekahᵢ was coming out [*t*ᵢ **who was born to Bethuel**]*'* (Gen 24.15)

(31) וּלְיוֹסֵף יֻלַּד [שְׁנֵי בָנִים] בְּטֶרֶם תָּבוֹא שְׁנַת הָרָעָב [אֲשֶׁר יָלְדָה־לּוֹ אָסְנַת]

ûləyôsēp̄ yullad [šənê b̄ānîm]ᵢ bəṭerem tāb̄ôʾ šənat hārāʿāb̄ [*t*ᵢ **ʾăšer** yāləd̄â lô ʾāsənat]

'And to Joseph, two sonsᵢ were born before the two famine years came, [*t*ᵢ **who Asenath bore for him**]*'* (Gen 41.50)

(29) represents a case of אשר relative clause extraposition with an intervening verbless clause; (30) is an example of אשר relative clause extraposition with an intervening participial modifier; and (31) illustrates אשר relative clause extraposition with an intervening finite temporal clause.

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20 The following is a representative (not quite comprehensive) list of BH relative clause extraposition: Gen 1.11; 22.14; 30.2; 33.18; 34.13; 35.14; 48.9, 22; Exod 1.8; 4.17; 5.21; 13.5; 20.2; 29.42; 32.4; Lev 1.5; Deut 4.19; 8.16; 11.10(2x); 19.9; 23.16; Josh 1.15; 6.26; Judg 9.17; 10.4; 18.16; 21.19; 1 Sam 3.11; 10.16; 14.21, 45; 15.2; 24.20; 2 Sam 2.5, 6; 3.8; 7.12, 23; 1 Kgs 5.21; 6.12; 8.24, 33; 10.3, 9, 10; 12.31; 13.14; 15.13; 2 Kgs 9.36, 37; 10.10; 12.3; 17.4; 21.12; Isa 28.4; 29.22; 30.24; 31.4; 54.9; 56.5; 63.7; 65.7; Jer 5.22; 13.25; 19.3; 24.3; 29.19; 37.1; 42.14; 43.1; Ezek 5.16; 6.9; 11.12; 12.2; 14.5; 15.6; 16.17, 45; 17.16; 20.11, 13, 21, 32; 47.14, 22; Mal 3.19; Ps 1.3; 26.9-10; 55.20; 58.5-6; 71.19; 78.5; 84.4; 119.49, 158; 132.2; 139.20; 140.3, 5; Ruth 4.1; Job 6.4; 12.10; 22.15; 30.1; 34.19; 36.28; 38.23; 39.6; Ruth 4.15; Qoh 2.3; 4.9; 7.20, 22, 29; 8.13; 10.15; Lam 1.10; 4.20; Esth 1.19; 2.6; 4.5, 6; Dan 9.1, 8; Ezra 2.2; 9.11; Neh 2.8; 6.11; 9.26; 1 Chr 16.16; 21.17; 2 Chr 1.6; 9.2, 8; 15.16; 22.9; 36.13.

5.2.2. Reanalyzing the Causal, Purpose, Result, and Conditional אשר
Clauses

Recognizing that the concept of extraposition allows us to extend the relative analysis of many אשר clauses, let us look at two in particular: (32), which I introduced above as a causal אשר clause in (15), and (33) which I presented in the introduction and is typically treated as a result אשר clause. Such conclusions may seem warranted upon first glance; neither אשר clause is adjacent to an available antecedent. However, it would be more economical to analyze each clause as extraposition—it resorts to a type of movement which is well-attested in Biblical Hebrew (as illustrated in (29)-(31)) and cross-linguistically[21] and it preserves the basic two-fold function of אשר as well.

(32) וַיָּמָת [בֶּ]־הָאִשָּׁה הַזֹּאת לָיְלָה [אֲשֶׁר שָׁכְבָה עָלָיו]

wayyāmot [ben]ᵢ hāʾiššâ hazzōʾt lāylâ [*t*ᵢ ᵃʾšer šākᵊbâ ʿālāyw]

*'Then [the son]ᵢ of this woman died at night, [*t*ᵢ **who** she laid upon him]'* (1 Kgs 3.19)

(33) כִּדְבָרֶיךָ הִנֵּה נָתַתִּי [לְךָ] לֵב חָכָם וְנָבוֹן [אֲשֶׁר כָּמוֹךָ לֹא־הָיָה לְפָנֶיךָ הִנֵּה עָשִׂיתִי

וְאַחֲרֶיךָ לֹא־יָקוּם כָּמוֹךָ]

hinnê nātattî [lᵊkā]ⱼ lēb ḥākām wᵊnābôn [*t*ᵢ ᵃʾšer kāmôkā lōʾ hāyâ lᵊpānêkā wᵊʾaʰʳêkā lōʾ yāqûm kāmôkā]

*'Look, I give [to you]ⱼ a wise and discerning mind, [*t*ᵢ **who** there has been none like you before you and after you none will rise like you]'* (1 Kgs 3.12)

In (32), the head that the extraposed relative modifies is the noun phrase *son*. The extraposed relative appears to be non-restrictively modifying the head in that it provided additional information which is unnecessary for identifying the referent of *son* (the head noun phrase *son* is already identified by virtue of the construct relationship with *this woman*). The relative clause is in fact providing the cause of death; the point is, however, that syntactically it is more economical to analyze the אשר clause as a relative even if we render it as a causal clause in translation. The second example, (33), is not so ambiguous. Though it is often categorized as a result clause, the אשר clause should be understood as an extraposed relative non-restrictively modifying the 2ms object of the preposition in the phrase *to you*.[22]

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21 For example, see Bayer (1997) who presents extraposition data from Bengali, Marathi, Hindi, Italian, and German.

22 The extraposition from a prepositonal phrase in which the preposition and the head are both moved up, stranding the remaining material, also occurs in English, e.g. *I was talking to a woman yesterday in the store who had red hair.*

6. EXEGETICAL IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The grammatical implications of re-analyzing problematic אֲשֶׁר relative clauses are clear: we preserve the economy of the function of אֲשֶׁר, and we are left with only a handful of examples which remain truly exceptional. The exegetical implications are also forthcoming. Let us return to the description of Solomon in 1 Kgs 3.12-13, provided in full in (34).

(34) הִנֵּה עָשִׂיתִי כִּדְבָרֶיךָ הִנֵּה נָתַתִּי לְךָ לֵב חָכָם וְנָבוֹן אֲשֶׁר כָּמוֹךָ לֹא־הָיָה ¹²
לְפָנֶיךָ וְאַחֲרֶיךָ לֹא־יָקוּם כָּמוֹךָ ¹³וְגַם אֲשֶׁר לֹא־שָׁאַלְתָּ נָתַתִּי לָךְ גַּם־עֹשֶׁר
גַּם־כָּבוֹד אֲשֶׁר לֹא־הָיָה כָמוֹךָ אִישׁ בַּמְּלָכִים כָּל־יָמֶיךָ

¹²hinnê ʿāśîtî kiḏbārêḵā hinnê nāṯattî ləḵāᵢ lēḇ ḥāḵām wənāḇôn [*t*ᵢ **ᵃšer** kāmôḵā lōʾ hāyâ ləpānêḵā wəʾaḥᵃrêḵā lōʾ yāqûm kāmôḵā] **¹³**wəgam **ᵃšer** lōʾ šāʾaltā nāṯattî lāḵⱼ gam ʿōšer gam kāḇôḏ [*t*ⱼ **ᵃšer** lōʾ hāyâ ḵāmôḵā ʾîš bamməlāḵîm kol yāmêḵā]

*¹²Behold, I am acting according to your words; behold, I am giving to you*ᵢ *a wise and understanding heart, [*tᵢ ***who** there was none like you before you and there will be none like you after you*]. ¹³Even what you have not requested I am giving to you*ⱼ*—even riches and honor— [*tⱼ ***who** there was no man like you among the kings all your days*]. (1 Kgs 3.12-13)*

If the bracketed אֲשֶׁר clauses in verses 12 and 13 are understood as result clauses, the passage indicates that Solomon becomes unique only *after* God endows him with a wise and discerning mind, i.e. *God is about to give Solomon wisdom and riches with the result that he will become unique.*

Semantically, there is nothing inherently wrong with this analysis. However, if the אֲשֶׁר clauses are, as I propose, to be correctly understood as extraposed relative clauses, then we would interpret the verse to mean that God *already* considered Solomon unique among men, i.e. *Solomon alone has shown himself, by his humble request, worthy among kings and God is in the process of blessing him for the character he has demonstrated.* The difference between the two interpretations, based upon differing syntactic analyses, is subtle yet significant.

In this paper I have argued, using the principle of Occam's razor, that the function of אשר is essentially binary: to mark a relative clause, or to mark a complement clause. A relative analysis of the אשר clauses in (15)-(19) can be preserved by using the two following filters: headlessness or extraposition. These two concepts allows us to avoid a more complex analysis of אשר where we add four additional functions to this single functional word: causal, purpose, result, and conditional. Any English rendering other than a relative or complement analysis is better understood as a reflex of translation technique and English grammar, not as the structure of Biblical Hebrew. Thus, using current linguistics, we can confirm Goshen-Gottstein's (1949) acute observation from fifty years ago that אשר clauses like those in (32)-(34) are displaced relative clauses.

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