

A Text Linguistic Study of the Jacob Narrative

Jonathan Terino

[p.45]

The aim of the present study is to present a coherent analysis of the Jacob narrative from a linguistic and rhetorical perspective. The two are fundamentally synchronic, rather than diachronic. The text linguistic study in fact purports to understand the biblical material as it presently stands in its canonical form, and is not primarily concerned with the history behind the final written stage.

The synchronic approach, as we understand it in the present study, deals with the actual state of the narrative, viewed as an unfolding sequence in which the internal units are held together according to the overall plan of the narrator, whatever the traditions and the redaction that may have preceded the narrator's final composition. The unity of the text, rather than its heterogeneity, is assumed as the point of departure, while one single creative mind is held responsible for the narrative, rather than a plurality of often contradictory redactional layers.

The diachronic approach, on the other hand, seeks to penetrate beneath the text itself in order to discover the oral prehistory and the literary history of the narratives up to their canonical form. The prehistory is concerned with the origin and early oral transmission of the shorter units of the narrative, whether they be saga, tales or myths, while the history deals with the gradual crystallization of the single written units or cycles of tradition into wider complexes until their final fixation by a redactor, or cycle of redactors, in writing.

There are three reasons that favour a synchronic linguistic study of the Jacob narrative in particular, above the concerns of diachronic literary studies. First, while scholars¹ subjectively propose source documents and create literary and preliterary developmental models, the Masoretic Text is objectively determinable. The existence of documents or of circles of tradition is often proposed on the basis of divisions within the text; it is therefore a priority to consider the overt form and function of the temporal and logical surface markers as they relate the parts to the whole, before attempting to construct a literary critical model on other grounds, historical or theological, on the diachronic scale.

It is essential to understand the Jacob narrative as a macro-structure² and as a literary unit, rather than as a conglomeration of fragmented sections and paragraphs conflated into the whole narrative. Before postulating the existence of independent sagas, records and stories,³

¹ As an example of various source divisions, cf the following: H Gunkel, *Genesis* (Göttingen, 1964); G Von Rad, *Genesis: a Commentary* (Göttingen, 1972); M Noth, *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions* (Stuttgart, 1972); E Speiser, *Genesis* (New York, 1964). Cf also a valid criticism of Gunkel in U Cassuto, *Documentary Hypothesis* (Jerusalem, 1961) 85-86.

² Van Dijk, *Text and Context. Explorations in Semantics and Pragmatics of Discourse* (New York, 1977) 95. He refers to the macrostructure as a 'more global level of semantic description' than the particular embedded paragraphs of the narrative. Macrostructures 'determine the global or overall coherence of a discourse and are themselves determined by the linear coherence of sequences'.

³ Cf Cassuto's criticism of Gunkel in U Cassuto, *Documentary Hypothesis*, 60 and 85-86. Cf also White's allusions to Gunkel's method in H C White, 'French Structuralism and Old Testament Narrative Analysis: Roland Barthes' *Semeia* (March 1975) 105.

[p.46]

intertwined in a somewhat clumsy fashion by a later redactor, it is only fair to allow the text to speak in favour of its own coherence.

The second reason for undertaking a synchronic linguistic study of this kind is that the approach is inductive and based exclusively on the givenness of the written text. The inductive approach establishes the internal rhetorical features of cohesion (lexical, semantic and grammatical) as the primary criterion of divisions and discontinuity within the text. It does not impose an external model, such as western patterns of thinking, on the narrative nor does it project theological and historical reconstructions onto it, but shows a natural reverence for the roughness of stylistic variations, the alternation of themes and episodes within the single corpus, the apparent contradictions and duplications: all these being features typical of the narrator's ancient semitic personality.

The deductive approach, on the other hand, has characterized critical literary studies by a starting point which is external to the text: at times the point of departure is the assumption that there are discrepancies in the narrative,⁴ which are readily assigned to sources. The literary and source distinctions within the text are isolated on the basis of theological or historical criteria or on the cumulative evidence of less convincing individual instances.

Rather than assuming a priori the existence of divergent sources or a diachronic overlay of redactional activities, it is essential from the point of view of discourse analysis to establish the natural boundaries of the text as the point of departure. The subdivisions and rhetorical markers of transition such as particles, verb tense/aspect, thematic shift, will be given priority over and against the multitude of proposed reconstructions of boundaries and alleged interpolations of sources. Each passage of the Jacob narrative must be studied in its *Sitz-im-Text* (the toledoth of Isaac, as we shall see), before it can be set against its often more vague and subjective *Sitz-im-Leben*.⁵

The third reason in favour of the synchronic study of this narrative is that in the past decade various attempts have been made from completely different perspectives to understand the narratives of Genesis according to their sequential and thematic unity. In particular, three approaches to the text have concentrated on the synchronic analysis: in the field of literary criticism, George Coats⁶ has analysed the Genesis narratives according to their structure, genre, setting and intention, with particular reference to their structural development and literary forms, such as saga, tale, legend and so forth. In the field of psychoanalysis and structuralism, Roland Barthes⁷ has dedicated a study to the Jabbock incident of the Jacob narrative, which relies on a synchronic reading of the text. Finally, in the field of linguistics, Robert Longacre⁸ has dedicated a detailed text linguistic analysis to the Joseph story and to the Flood narrative, employing the tools of discourse

[p.47]

⁴ Cf Cassuto and White, as above.

⁵ Cf the *Sitz-im-Leben* postulated for the Patriarchal narratives by H Gunkel, *Genesis*, by M Noth, *A History* and by R Rendtorff, *Das überlieferungsgeschichtliche Problem des Pentateuch* (New York, 1977).

⁶ G Coats *Genesis with an Introduction to Narrative as Literature* (Grand Rapids, 1983) 1.

⁷ R Barthes, *Structural Analysis and Biblical Exegesis* (Pittsburg, 1974).

⁸ R Longacre, 'The Discourse Structure of the Flood Narrative' in G Macrae, *SBL* (Missoula, 1976) 235-262. Cf also R Longacre, 'A Text-Linguistic Analysis of the "Joseph Story"' (tentative draft) SIL.

analysis, which have been developed by himself⁹ and other non-theological linguists.¹⁰ Our study is intended to be a synchronic analysis of the Jacob narrative with particular reference to Longacre's linguistic analysis.¹¹ Where possible, we shall attempt to bring some criticisms to his working model. It is in fact obvious that although the synchronic analysis of discourse must take priority over the diachronic models, no particular synchronic approach can adequately account for the present state of the text.

SYNCHRONIC CONTEXTUAL RELATIONS WITHIN THE BOOK OF GENESIS

The Jacob narrative must be situated within the broader context of the book of Genesis. Its story occurs within the third but last *tōlēdōt* section of Genesis (25:19-35:29), under the caption of *wē'ēlleh tōlēdōt Yīshāq*. Nine previous sections headed by the same formula occur in the book; only the first (1:1-2:3), giving the account of the creation of heaven and earth, is unmarked, while the second section (2:4-4:26), the *tōlēdōt haššāmayīm wēhā'ares*, is less cosmic and more personalized than the first. After these follow the *sēper tōlēdōt'adam* (descendants of Adam) (5:1-6:8), the *tōlēdōt noāh* (Noah's sons and descendants, 10:1-11:17), the *tōlēdōt sēm* (brief and genealogical, 11:10-26) and the *tōlēdōt terāh* (11:27-25:10). The latter, Terah, is dealt with rather briefly, while the rest of the toledoth is dedicated to the son, Abram. The eighth section, *tōlēdōt yišmā'el* (25:12-18), is almost entirely genealogical, followed by the *tōlēdōt yīšhāq ben 'abraham* (25:19-35:29), Abraham's younger son, Isaac. However, Isaac himself only figures prominently in chapter, 26, while the greater part of the toledoth is dedicated to his younger son, Jacob. The section ends with the death of Isaac, who is buried by his two sons, followed then by the tenth *tōlēdōt 'ēsāu* (36:1-43), composed of several distinct lists connected to the head of the clan, Esau. The eleventh *tōlēdōt ya 'āgōv* (37:1-50:26) relates the story of Joseph to the broader themes of the family of Jacob.

On the basis of this natural subdivision of the Genesis narratives, Longacre¹² concludes that the toledoth is in a minimal form a genealogical table; however, the essential genealogical skeleton may be enriched by any amount of anecdote or even larger units of narrative, centering around the history of the characters and of their sons. The established head of the clan (already known through the previous section) gives his name to a section that is mainly the story of his son. Hence, the book of Genesis is primarily an 'annotated genealogical record'.¹³

The length of the individual toledoth seems to be proportional to its theological significance in relation to the narrator's theme of promise and blessing in the form of land and descendants. Thus, Terah gains

[p.47]

⁹ R Longacre, *The Grammar of Discourse* (New York, 1983).

¹⁰ J Grimes, *The Thread of Discourse* (The Hague, 1975). Also, *Papers on Discourse* (Dallas, 1978). M Halliday, *Cohesion in English* (Bath, 1976) and Brown and Yule, *Discourse Analysis* (Cambridge, 1983).

¹¹ R Longacre, 'A Text-Linguistic Analysis of the "Joseph" Story' (A Tentative Draft) SIL.

¹² Longacre, 'A Text-Linguistic', 1, 2.

¹³ *Ibid.*

significance only in relation to his son Abram, who will be the recipient of the promises of descendants and of the land. Although Ishmael and Esau both figure as older sons, their basic genealogical record is not amplified with a cycle regarding their journeys and exploits, because they do not feature in the overall thematic concern of the promise and its fulfilment. Moreover, the toledoth of creation up to the toledoth of Sem appear to have the function of introducing the Patriarchal narratives as the central plot of the book. The first six toledoth are a lengthy preview to the main story, the history of a particular family. The narrator opens the stage at first on to the world (creation, decline, flood, Babel), in order to narrow down the sequence to one particular and insignificant family line. Within this family line, the sequence is again narrowed down to the younger sons, entrusted with the promise. The story of Joseph (*tōlēdōt ya'āgōb*) brings the Patriarchal cycles to a close with the death of Jacob, but it also opens a new chapter, which was the main concern of Genesis: the origin and formation of a nation.

THE PROBLEM OF HISTORICITY IN RELATION TO DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Having considered a few of the structural divisions of Genesis some mention must be made of the problem of historicity in relation to the Patriarchal narratives. What relevance does it have to the literary development and particularly to the linguistic concerns of discourse analysis?

The text linguistic analysis is not concerned with the historicity of the characters and of the sequences of the embedded episodes, because its approach to the narrative is essentially functional; our concern is to show the functional relation of the parts to the whole in the structural hierarchy of written communication.

Our aim is to discover the underlying unity of the text on the grammatical, lexical and semantic level. While seeking for features of cohesion and plot progression within the story, thus rejecting the document/source developmental theory of current Pentateuchal criticism,¹⁴ our text linguistic analysis can say nothing about the factuality of the characters or the historicity of the episodes forming the plot of the narrative.

On the other hand, the unity of narrative, as it is recovered by a linguistic synchronic study, points to the unity of authorship, thus allowing for a more limited time span between the written text and the events described by the one redactor, author and theologian. While the possibility of various cycles of oral tradition cannot be excluded, the development of the latter can be limited to a far shorter period, allowing for an early crystallization of the traditions at the very first stages of the nation's history (wilderness period and conquest). In turn, the unity of authorship and the limitation set on the period of composition favour

[p.49]

the historicity of the narratives, as they discourage later hands of tradition and redactional interpolation, or the often accidental combination and conflation of divergent 'sources'. When showing the substantial unity and coherence of the narrative as a whole, the linguistic tools of discourse analysis are a useful assistance towards the resolution of other questions of theological and historical nature.

¹⁴ Cf the critical works cited above at 1.

Goldingay¹⁵ discusses the relation of history to the biblical stories, pointing out that while we may not understand the narratives as factual in the modern sense of the word, we are nonetheless committed to their historicity, that is, to the trustworthiness of the historical and social milieu that comes through the narratives, as the true picture of the middle bronze age. The acknowledgement of historicity does not entail historicity.

In reply to Goldingay's point, it is relevant to stress that whatever degree of historicity we wish to assign to the narratives, it is clear that the Patriarchal narratives purport to describe family histories of factual character, and not mythical or cyclical eponymous sagas. Since the narrator intends the former to be a factual account of the nation's origins, the point of debate is whether or not we are committed to the narrator's perspective of history, and not just in a more restricted theological sense.

The linguistic analysis of the text will take priority over the other equally important concerns of history and literary criticism.

CONTEXTUAL RELATIONS OF THE JACOB STORY

The Jacob story falls within the ninth *tōlēdōt* section of Genesis, introduced, as we have seen, by the formulaic beginning *wē'elle tōlēdōt yīshāq*. Typically, the end of one *tōlēdōt* section anticipates the next one; often the beginning of a *tōlēdōt* section makes back-reference to the previous one. Hence, the *tōlēdōt yīshāq* establishes the new head of the clan by introducing his name (he is mentioned three times in the opening paragraph), which is linked twice to the previous patriarch in a chiasmic knot: son-father-father-son (25:19). The same lexical ties between toledoth occur in the previous sections of Genesis, a feature pointing to an overall continuity of the book through stitch formulae.

The end of the previous section (25:18) does not present any catch word or semantic feature of cohesion to be linked to the next toledoth, as the unit deals exclusively with Ishmael, and has no bearing on the thematic line of promise and blessing; it is therefore, rather, a genealogical link in the basic Genesis structure. On the other hand, Isaac's toledoth is linked to the end of his father's section in verse 11, where the formulaic ending is also a lexical and semantic link to the ninth toledoth. The line of continuity with Isaac is anticipated, leaving out Ishmael.

[p.50]

The toledoth introduces Isaac as the clan head, but the immediate story deals with his family concerns (the birth oracle). This is not strange in itself, for while a toledoth section may be named for X, it is concerned with the dealings of the son of X.

The placement of the Jacob story within this toledoth will require some treatment. While he is marked as a central participant in many parts of his father's toledoth, there are sections where he is not mentioned at all, or, if he is, he is off stage. For example, chapter 26 (Isaac's journey to Gerar) interrupts the narrative cycle of the two sons, which is resumed at 27; chapter 34 is a self-contained story of family misfortune and fortune concerning Dinah, whose central participants are Jacob's sons, although Jacob is off stage until verse 30. While the Jacob story

¹⁵ J Goldingay, 'The Patriarchs in Scripture and History', in *Essays on the Patriarchal Narratives* (Leicester, 1980) 11-40 [http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/e/pn_1_goldingay.html].

begins early in the toledoth of Isaac (with the birth oracle of 25:21ff), the main character is not prominent until he is sent away from home and confronted with the dream (28:10ff); up to that point, the story dedicates equal space to both brothers, who are of equal rank on stage, although the narrator's vantage point definitely leans towards the younger one. Finally, while the narrative is mainly about Jacob, interspersed within the wider cycle, we have the two lists of Esau's wives (26:34 and 28:9).

The *tōlēdōt yīshāq* has two interwoven strands: the Jacob story proper and the broader concerns of Isaac and his family. An outline can be traced in which some episodes deal with Jacob and broader concerns, while others deal only with Jacob and one other story still dealing only with Jacob's family. Interestingly, a parallel sequence also takes place in the Joseph story, situated within the wider concerns of the *tōlēdōt ya'āgōb*: chapter 38 interrupts the natural flow of the Joseph story and deals exclusively with Judah; later on, in chapter 49, we have Jacob's blessing related to the wider interests of his own family.¹⁶ From a literary point of view, Miscall¹⁷ has made an interesting study concerning the analogies between the stories of Jacob and Joseph, providing an oblique commentary based on a three part plot structure (deception of father and treachery between brothers; twenty years separation with younger brother in a foreign land, without anything being said about the fortunes of the older brother(s); eventual reunion and reconciliation). The one invariant in both stories is that the endings are in accordance with the divine plan and promises, while the main divergence between the two stories is that reconciliation in the Jacob cycle is not followed by reunion and cohabitation.

The toledoth under consideration can be divided, according to the present writer, into eighteen cohesive subsections, of which only a few (1, 5, 8 and 9) will be analysed in the present study. The internal unity of the subsections is determined by features such as cataphoric and anaphoric linkage, internal chiasmic structures, semantic coherence and lexical affinity; on the other hand, the temporal and geographical shifts

[p.51]

in the setting as well as shifts in participant reference will determine the unit boundaries. As Longacre¹⁸ points out, 'the primary task of a text linguistic study is to isolate the peak of the narrative, around which the other discourse parts can be allocated'. Hence, the present study, however selective, intends to be a linguistic analysis at the macroscopical and microscopical levels, focusing on cohesion and peak selection.

SOME SUBSECTIONS OF THE TOLEDOTH OF ISAAC

Subsection 1

The birth of Jacob and Esau (25:19-34). Already in this section we have the concerns of the toledoth of Isaac intermingled with what is called the 'preview' and the 'stage' of the Jacob story. The formulaic aperture (v 19) and the chronological marker (v 20) which forms an inclusio with verse 26, set Isaac as the central participant at least until verse 21. The toledoth's fraction is to present descendants for Isaac, while the narrator's more localized interest is to set the stage and introduce the central characters of the Jacob story.

¹⁶ R Longacre, 'A Text-Linguistic', 1, 4.

¹⁷ P D Miscall, 'Jacob and Joseph Story Analogies' *JSOT*, 6 (1978) 28-40.

¹⁸ R Longacre, 'Narrative versus Other Discourse Genre' (Missouri, 1971) 176.

After the preview unit, neatly contained in the temporary *inclusio* of verse 20 and 26b (age of Isaac) in which we are given the background of the story to follow and introduced to the four major characters of the Jacob/Esau cycle, there follows another episode, marked off from the previous one by the *wayehi* (and-it-was), which sets the new paragraph. The semantic indication of time discontinuity is given by the words 'and-grew-up-the-boys', *wayehi*... The *wayehi* indicates a break and a thematic progression, whereby verses 27 and 28 represent the stage for the following episode and for the story in subsection 3 (ch 27). The story proper begins at verse 29. No overt marker isolates the episode, but the change of setting, from a general description of the characters, with the brothers being equally thematic, to the telling of the story, signals the beginning of the new paragraph.

If the first part of subsection 1 corresponds to stage and preview (exposition), the second part (from 27 to 34) begins the story of the two brothers: Esau sells his birthright to Jacob. This corresponds to the inciting incident of the first 'prepeak' episode on the surface level,¹⁹ while on the deep semantic level it indicates that the plot of the story has been set in motion. Verse 34b concludes the first prepeak episode with the narrator's evaluative judgement, 'and-despised Esau the-birthright', as often didactic overtones will mark the end of a section as a form of synthetic conclusion (called 'wrap-up' by Longacre).²⁰ Verse 34b also reveals the author's vantage point as being sympathetic towards Jacob, far more directly than in the oracle of verse 23.

The inciting episode forms a chiasmic structure (inverted parallelism) pointing to the unity of the section:

[p.52]

A And-came Esau from-the-field

B (Esau) 'Let-me-eat-please of the red pottage'

C (Jacob) 'Sell first your birthright to-me' (Esau) 'Behold (*hinneh*), I (emphatic) going to-die

D and what-this to-me (the) birthright?' (Jacob) 'Swear to-me first' (and-he-swore to-him)

C' And-he-sold his-birthright to-Jacob

B' And-Jacob gave to-Esau bread and-pottage of-lentils (and-he-ate and-he drank)

A' And-he-arose and-he-went

The narrator's evaluative information (34b) refers specifically to the core of the chiasmic structure (medial step 'D'), as often the centre of the chiasm represents the crux²¹ of the unit, which in discourse analysis is termed 'peak'.

¹⁹ R Longacre, 'The Discourse Structure of the Flood Narrative', 100; idem, 'Narrative', 172-173.

²⁰ Longacre, 'Narrative', 174-175.

²¹ K Bailey, *Poet and Peasant and Through Peasant Eyes* (Michigan, 1983), 17. Cf pp 45-46 for a definition of rhetorical criticism and chiasmus.

Subsection 5

This episode (28:10-22) resumes the narrative sequence from verse 5, this time returning to Jacob's departure: 'So Isaac sent Jacob away' (5a) is linked here with 'Jacob left'(10). This natural sequence is a sign of textual cohesiveness, which betrays the compositional activity of one hand. However, source critics do not acknowledge this textual unity shown by the linkage, and assign verse 5 to source 'P' and verse 10 to 'J'.²²

This section, describing Jacob's dream and giving the first divine speech addressed to Jacob, a very crucial stepping point in the narrator's theological perspective, is an 'interlude' unit between two localities (Beer-sheba and the 'people of the east', Paddan-Aram). The interlude represents a natural stepping stone between the Jacob/Esau cycle and the embedded Jacob/Laban cycle; it is an 'intercycle' section that the narrator inserts as a theological peak (there will be two other theological peaks in 32:28ff and 35:10ff, the latter being the major climatic one). While the change of venue (v 10 from Beer-sheba towards Haran) sets the opening boundary, the interlude or intercycle narrative closes with the end of Jacob's discourse, that is, the vow. Often chiasms close a unit, especially if they are cast in the form of a major character's speech, and serve to mark the end of an important episode; Jacob's vow (20-22) is in its first part chiasmic:²³

A If God (be with me)
 B In this way I go
 C giving me bread and clothing
 B' so that I come again (to my father's house)
A' Then YHWH (shall be my God)

The structure, reduced to a minimum, is:

[p.53]

A If God
 B go
 C food and clothing
 B' come
A' Then YHWH

The final oath in the vow (22) forms an outer boundary with verse 18b: 'he took the stone (anaphorically linked to v 11b 'one of the stones') and set it up for a pillar' opens the response unit of 18:22, while 'this stone, which I have set up for a pillar' closes it, in a form of *inclusio*.

The smaller response unit is linked to the rest of the interlude through the chronological marker of continuity, indicating progression: in verse 11, after arriving, Jacob 'stayed there that night', while in verse 18, 'Jacob rose early in the morning'. Lexical cohesion is shown in the occurrence of the word 'stone' first introduced in verse 11b, then referred to with the article as 'the-stone', anaphorically tied to its preceding mention.

²² M Noth, *A History*, 264. 28:10 is assigned to J; 28:5 to P; 28:11-12 to E; 28:13-16 to J.

²³ Longacre, 'A Text-Linguistic', 1, 16.

Source criticism²⁴ assigns this section (10-22) to 'J' and 'E' sources alternatively. However, this literary method does not take into account those rhetorical and semantic features of cohesion, such as the inverted parallelism structure of the vow. The semantic and rhetorical coherence of this section point to the unity of the original narrative, and in particular, to the original unity of the story as it is unfolded by the narrator.

As an example of rhetorical cohesion, verse 12 (an 'E' verse) is linked to verse 13 (a 'J' verse) through the repetition of *wehinneh*; likewise, after verse 10, Jacob is referred to only through verbal pronouns until verse 16, since he is the central participant in the unfolding sequence. Nonetheless, source criticism assigns verses 11 to 12 to 'E', while verses 10 and 13 to 16 are assigned to 'J'. Moreover, verses 10 and 11 are linked by the semantic cohesion of venue ('he went' and 'he came'), while verse 12 ('E') and 13 ('J') are linked by grammatical cohesion: the pronoun *'ālāw* in verse 12 is anaphorically related to 'ladder' in verse 13.

Another example of a microscopical and fragmented reading of the text is given in verse 17; the verse, assigned to 'E', is seen as an alternative version to verse 16 ('J'). The former, 'and-he-feared and-he-said' is contrasted with the latter, 'and-he-awoke Jacob (subject) from his sleep'. However, there is a thematic continuity between the two verses, for Jacob is not mentioned by name in verse 17 ('E'), having been introduced in verse 16. Verse 17 is assigned to 'E' not on rhetorical grounds, but on the assumption that wherever the deity is held in awe and at a distance, there must be an 'E' source. Verse 16, on the other hand, would appear to present a more 'primitive', simple and fearless response to the deity.

More essential still to the source hypothesis is the attribution of the name YHWH to the 'J' tradition (v 16 has a YHWH), while Elohim is

[p.54]

assigned to the 'E' tradition. From the point of view of discourse analysis, verse 17 is an expansion and a paraphrase of 16, because it specifies what has just been said in the previous paragraph.

Verse 11 ('E') refers for three times to the 'place', *bammāqōm*, *hammāqōm* and *hammāqōm hahū*; the same expression *bammāqōm* is reechoed in verse 16 ('J'). Likewise, in verse 19a ('J'), *wayyīqra* 'et-šemhammāqōm hahū, 'and-he called the name of the place that-one', 'that place' is anaphorically related to verse 11 ('E'): '*hammāqōm*'. Throughout the whole of the Jacob narrative it is possible to identify the lexical, grammatical and semantic links that have just been mentioned.

The criterion for isolating alleged sources within the narrative is mainly deductive²⁵, as it relies on an a priori theological and historical reconstruction of hypothetical cycles or 'hands' of tradition. Discourse analysis establishes as priority the rhetorical considerations mentioned above, as a criterion for isolating boundaries and transitions in the narratives. This method will resort to sources only if the text itself demands it.

²⁴ Noth, *A History*, 264.

²⁵ Cf U Cassuto's insightful criticism of an earlier but similar methodology in his *The Documentary Hypothesis*, 15-16, 42-43.

On the other hand, source criticism begins the analysis of the text assuming an editorial and redactional activity, rather than the originality of the narrator. Consequently, verses 11 to 12 are assigned to 'E', because of the mention of 'dream' as a mediated theophany and because the setting is said to be that of a popular tale, another feature of 'E'.²⁶ Verses 13 to 16 are instead assigned to the 'Yahwist' (or to 'J') because of their theological function in mentioning the blessing and promise to descendants, besides the fact that the tetragrammaton is used. Likewise, although Jacob's vow contains a chiasm, verses 20 to 21a are assigned to 'E' (they contain Elohim), while verses 21b-22 to 'J' (YHWH is mentioned).

The divine speech of 28:13a-16 contains, in Rendtorff's view, the second stage of *Bearbeitung*²⁷ ('*leka ettenenna ulezar aka*') together with 13:15 (speech to Abraham) and 35:12 (final speech to Jacob, understood as a 'P' stratum).²⁸ Consequently, the divine speech is not assigned in its entirety to the composition of one hand, but would instead betray the overlap of a much later stage of transmission. However, the divine speech can be structurally analysed according to the principles of inverted parallelism, showing both the unity of the discourse and the progression of thought.

The following chiasmic structure of the narrative with the embedded speech is suggested by the present writer:

A. Jacob takes *stone* and lies down.

B. Dream: ladder (ramp) to heaven.

C. The Lord: 'I am the Lord, etc.' (*premise*, qualification)

D. The land on which you lie (*subject* of the speech)

E. to you I will give and to *your descendants* (promise,) and your descendants shall be like

[p.55]

the dust of the earth (amplification, to promise,)

F. and you shall spread abroad (amplification₂ to promise₁)
to the west and to the east) antithetical
to the north and to the south) parallelism

E' and in you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves and in *your descendants* (promise₂)

D' Bring you back to the *land* (*subject* of the speech)

C' Jacob: 'Surely the Lord, etc' (*conclusion*, acknowledgement)

B' 'This is the house of God, this is the gate of Heaven'

A' Jacob rises early and takes *stone*.

²⁶ R Rendtorff understands the process of *Bearbeitung* (arrangement or adaptation) as the operations of tradition-interpretation that were carried out at a point close to the fixation of the Pentateuch.

²⁷ J A Emerton, 'The Origin of the Promises', 25.

²⁸ Longacre, 'The Discourse Structure', 120-121.

The medial point F of the inverted parallelism is crucial, as it relates the theme of descendants (multiplication) to Jacob himself (expansion). If 'descendants' is to be taken as a later addition to the speech in the form of a layer of tradition in step E, then medial point F must also be understood as a later interpolation-layer of tradition. From a structural point of view, the speech contains internal parallels of coherence and can be understood within the narrative progression of Joseph's flight.

The first divine speech to Jacob sets the latter apart as the central participant of the narrative, as he is addressed completely alone, while . situated between the two significant geographical areas. The promise of guidance and blessing as well as of land and descendants points towards the end of the narrative, after the peak denouement episodes, to the final speech, which is the theological peak. Between the divine speeches, the Jabbok confrontation enacts Jacob's life time struggle and operates a dramatic role reversal: from the position of villain/victim, Jacob is established as hero through the branding of the hip and the promise that his name will be changed.

The first speech (28:13a-16) is a guidance oracle that the narrator widens considerably to comprise the theme 'descendants'; it does not, however, express anything concerning the structural role of the central participant, Jacob. He is not established as hero at this point, but is the recipient of the promise.

In a fashion reminiscent of the ancient Greek chorus, the divine speeches of Genesis 26:2-5, 28:13-15 and 35:10-12 form a complex of isolatable units which do not disrupt the natural plot of the story. While the narrator inserts them as an integral part of the sequence, they fulfil a superior theological function of interpreting the otherwise secular story of the Patriarchal wanderings and exploits in the light of the religious themes of promise and descendants.

Subsections 8 and 9

The story has taken a new turn with the birth of Joseph. The new section (30:25-31:16) is introduced with *wayēhī* + temporal marker *ka'ašer* with the verb in the perfect: 'and-it-was when bore Rachel Joseph'. *Wahēhī*

[p.56]

appears, either at peak or at the opening of a narrative section. In the opening sections, the *wahēhī* is often united to a temporal marker with the verb in the perfect, followed then by a chain of preterites. This is the case here, which indicates a new progression in the narrative, that in turn will usher in the peak: 'and-it-was when bore Rachel Joseph, and-said Jacob to-Laban'.

In this section, the plot that begun with Laban's trickery (subsection 6, 29:1-30) is set in motion in a series of crescendo paragraphs ('buildups' for Longacre²⁹) culminating in the major peak of the Laban cycle. This is in fact the inciting episode that is preparing the way for an intensified conflict: Jacob wants to leave. The inciting moment is highlighted by verse 25b 'Send me away!'. Within section 8 we have a series of four escalating build ups, each contributing to the inevitable crisis (30:25-43; 31:1-2, 3-13, 14-16). Jacob is the oppressed central participant, while Laban is the hidden villain. Jacob is central because (1) he does not have to be introduced afresh by name in 31:1, but is referred to through the verbal pronoun,

²⁹ Longacre, 'Narrative', 176.

having been established as prominent; (2) his actions (37-43) are described in detail, while Laban's are not; likewise (3) his speeches are lengthy and even repetitive (overlay), while the other three participants are given only a small place. Finally (4) we are given Jacob's inner feelings, but not those of anyone else.

The build up⁴ small unit of subsection 8 leads directly to the high point of the Jacob/Laban cycle. We have, in fact, reached what is called 'peak' at the surface level of the discourse, and 'climax' at the deep structure (the plot). The climax of the narrative is the point of impasse, when all the movements of the plot are knotted up and will allow for no point of return: it is the highest point of tension, followed by the denouement or loosening. The solution is not brought about in the climax, but in the loosening of the climax. Longacre³⁰ points out that the climax of the deep structure (plot) may encode on the surface level as peak, followed by denouement on the deep structure and peak on the surface encoding. Or else, climax may encode as peak and denouement as post peak episode.

It is relevant at this point to stress the psychological nature of discourse, as a universal trait of language. While it is important to discover linguistic features underlying the discourse in order to establish sequence, plot, peak, etc, any given discourse will be determined by the psychological mood of the writer, as much as by embedded semantic and linguistic functional rules such as word order, tense and aspect of the verb, participant reference. Even discourse analysis must rely on a calculus of probability. Moreover, we will have to distinguish between the concerns of the writer and those of the readers, both of whom may come to the story from different angles, thus understanding the plot and the climax according to their particular interests, as Poythress has indicated.³¹

[p.57]

While we have isolated a peak of the Jacob narrative at subsection 9 (31:17-42) and may present adequate linguistic features in support of this choice, it may have been possible to isolate another area for peak and to have produced equally convincing results. If, in fact, a peak is determined by discourse features such as crowded stage, rhetorical underlining, shifts in tense, person, vantage point, orientation, length of units, from narrative to rhetorical question, apostrophe, dialogue or drama, then several narrative sections of the Jacob story are potential candidates for peak. It is therefore the psychological insight of the reader, united to the feeling of the narrator, that can give scope to the linguistic model. However, whenever such linguistic features as described above do appear in the text, we may have a case for embedded, internal peaks, relative to each subsection.

The peak of subsection 9 corresponds to Longacre's second option, where climax encodes as peak, followed by denouement (subsection 10 31:43-54). The unit deals with the outcome of the pre-peak episodes: Jacob flees, and is overtaken by the villain of the story. The selection of this section as peak with its climax at verses 36-42 is justified on the grounds that we have (1) a crowded stage, (2) a great deal of rhetorical underlining in both Laban and Jacob's speech, in the form of unresolved questions; (3) the quotation formulae are extended to include emotional and psychological details of the central participant Jacob (v 36): 'and-was-anger to-Jacob and-he-upbraided Laban, and-he-said'. Jacob's speech is structured in its first

³⁰ V Poythress, 'Analysing a Biblical Text: What are we after?', *SJT*, 32, 319-331.

³¹ W Brueggemann, *Interpretation Genesis* (Atlanta, 1982) 204-206. He presents an interesting structural study of the Jacob cycle.

part around a crescendo of rhetorical questions, 'what-my-offence?' 'what-my-sin?' 'what-have-you-found?' Thus this speech crowns the Jacob/Laban cycle as the highest point, exposing from the narrator's vantage point the rights of the oppressed Jacob. Jacob is thematic and brings the peak to a stalemate. On the other hand, the villain receives some sympathy as he is shown not only as deceived, but also as being deprived of the sociolinguistic formula of senior respect: no honorifics nor status acknowledgements are inserted in the speech, while in a later encounter with Esau they will be of primary importance. Humour and suspense have led to Jacob's anger (the narrative climax), but we are still left in the dark as to the outcome of the inevitable confrontation. The loosening, corresponding in our narrative section to a post-peak episode, takes place in verses 43:54, leading to a peaceful conclusion ('wrap up') of the Laban cycle.

Peak and denouement form together a loose structure of inverted parallelism, that points to the unity on a semantic level of at least the boundaries of subsection 9 and 10. The structure is not strictly a chiasm because of the amount of unparalleled paragraphs, however it does form an inclusio unit and contains at least a general sequential parallelism. The central point of the structure is also the climax of the peak and its denouement:

[p.58]

A 17-21 Jacob (flee)

B 22-35 Laban (overtake) (+Laban's complaint and search)

C 36-42 Jacob (angry) Climax

43-54 Laban (treaty) Denouement

(Jacob takes a stone, naming of the place, Jacob swears, offering of sacrifice)

B' 31:55 Laban (depart)

A' 32:1a Jacob (go his way)

CONCLUSION

The overall structure of the Jacob narrative moves from estrangement to reconciliation³²; while the overall framework poses the question of blessing in connection with the divine promises, the narrative sequence takes the reader through a plot of conflicts, before the resolution can finally take place: (1) conflict with Esau, (2) conflict with Laban, (3) conflict with the mysterious man.

The whole narrative, as we have noted only selectively throughout this textlinguistic study, is structured around two concentric circles; the outer circle contains the Esau materials, while the inner circle, set between the two theophanic narratives of Bethel and Peniel, contains the Laban materials. At the very centre of the internal circle, as Brueggemann noted,³³ we have the birth narrative of the two younger sons of Jacob: with the birth of Joseph, Jacob looks

³² Ibid.

³³ Cf in particular R K Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Leicester, 1970), 495ff; J Bright, *A History of Israel* (London, 1982), 45-96; K A Kitchen, *The Bible in its World* (Exeter, 1977) [http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/book_bibleinitsworld.html]; E Yamauchi, *Stones and Scriptures* (London, 1973).

back towards the land. However, there can be no return to the land without the major confrontations with Laban and Esau. Both confrontation episodes represent the high point in the story, either as peak (the former) or as peak-denouement (the latter).

The horizontal stories of conflict with Esau are matched with the vertical narratives of the meetings with God, which are sign posts of blessing and confirmation of previous promises.

The following macrostructure is suggested by the present writer for the Jacob narrative:

A. CONFLICT (Jacob/Esau)

B. FLIGHT (Jacob/Esau)

a. _____ Bethel _____ Jacob alone: promise { land / descendants

A' CONFLICT (Jacob/Laban)

===== birth of children ===== midpoint

B' FLIGHT (Jacob/Laban)

C' TREATY (Jacob/Laban)

b. _____ Peniel _____ Jacob alone: { branding as hero (hip) / new name (promise)

C. RECONCILIATION (Jacob/Esau)

c. _____ Bethel _____ Jacob alone? { confirmation of promise / new name (performative)

[p.59]

The present study is an attempt to show through some selected passages how the Jacob story can be read as an unfolding narrative with its own internal coherence, and with reference to the theological angle of the narrator. The text has been studied making use of the tools and dynamics of discourse analysis. While the overall synchronic method has been applied to the narrative with favourable results, some criticisms have been directed towards the pragmatic limitations of the linguistic model in relation to the isolation of particular functions of discourse, marked as peak.

It is essential to stress the value of a possible interaction between the diachronic and synchronic studies of the ancient Hebrew text. Both linguistic and literary approaches are influenced by a particular bias towards their subject matter. Generally, the diachronic approach favours the fragmented nature of the text, rather than its unity, due to its understanding of the history and prehistory of transmission. On the other hand, the synchronic approaches often disregard the problems of history and of literary developments as they concentrate on the present state of the text, with particular reference to the linguistic function of the parts to the whole. However, the diachronic studies in the field of Pentateuchal criticism conducted in recent years by several scholars would confirm the results obtained on the synchronic scale by discourse analysis linguists.

RHETORICAL STRUCTURES IN THE JACOB NARRATIVE

Inverted parallelism (chiasm) with execution-paragraph (32:26b-29)

A 'Bless me' (condition) Jacob

B Name (question) the 'man'

(+ answer)

C CHANGE OF NAME (the 'man')

B' Name (question) Jacob

(+ answer)

A' 'And-he-blessed' (the 'man') (execution)

The chiasm does not coexist perfectly with speaker's alternation.

Step parallelism showing unity of the section (35:1-7)

A 'Arise' (Elohim)

B 'Go to Bethel'

C 'Make an altar'

D ('When you fled from Esau')

E 'Put away foreign gods' (Jacob) THEN

[p.60]

a 'Let us arise'

b 'go to Bethel'

c 'make an altar'

d in the day of my distress

e' so they gave Jacob foreign gods

A' As they journeyed

B' Jacob came to Luz (Bethel)

C' There he built an altar

D' when he fled from his brother

OUTLINE OF THE SUBSECTIONS

| References | Sub-sections | Point of Narrative | 'Sources' |
|--------------|--------------|--|-------------|
| 25: 19-26 | 1 | Preview (stage) | P J E J P |
| 27-28 | 1 | Exposition (stage) | J |
| 29-34 | 1 | Inciting moment (prepeak episode ₁) | E |
| 26: 1-33 | 2 | Parenthesis | J |
| 34-35 | 2 | Toledoth records | P |
| 27: 140 | 3 | Inciting episode (prepeak ₂) Build Up ₁) (BU ₁) | J |
| 41-45 | 3 | Prepeak ₂ (BU ₂) | J |
| 27: 46-28:5 | 3 | Prepeak ₂ (BU ₃) | P |
| 28: 6-9 | 4 | Toledoth records | P |
| 10-22 | 5 | Intercycle between Jac/Esau and Jac/Laban cycles | J E J E J E |
| 29: 1-14 | 6 | Stage (exposition) | J |
| 15-30 | 6 | Inciting episode ₁ | E J E J E |
| 29: 31-30:24 | 7 | Episodic section | JJEJEJ |
| 30: 25-43 | 8 | Inciting episode ₂ (prepeak) BU ₁ BU ₂ | EJEJEJEJE |
| 31: 1-16 | 8 | Developing conflict (pre-peak) BU ₃ BU ₄ | JEJEJE |
| 31: 17-42 | 9 | PEAK (CLIMAX) BU ₁ - BU ₄ | JPJEJEJE |
| 43-54 | 10 | Denouement: post peak loosening | JEJEJEJE |
| 31: 55 | 10 | Closure and wrap up | E J |
| 32: 1-5 | 11 | Prepeak ₃ BU ₃ (Jac/Esau cycle) | EJ |
| 6-21 | 12 | Peak (BU ₁ - BU ₃) | J E |
| 22-32 | 13 | Interpeak Plateau | JEJEJEJEJ |
| 33: 1-16 | 14 | Peak' (denouement) | J |
| 17-21 | 15 | Post peak ₁ | J E |

| | | | |
|-----------|----|---|---------|
| 34 | 16 | Independent unit (wider family concerns) | J |
| 35: 1-15 | 17 | Post peak ₂ (theological peak) | EJPEPPP |
| 35: 16-29 | 18 | Wrap up (synthetic conclusion) | E J P |

© 1988 *London School of Theology* (<http://www.lst.ac.uk/>). Reproduced by permission.

Prepared for the Web in March 2009 by Robert I. Bradshaw.

<http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/>
