The Style of the Dialogue in Biblical Prose Narrative

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This study seeks to describe the way that characters in biblical narrative speak, in comparison with the style of the exposition, the action sequence, and the narrator’s remarks of evaluation. This subject is of major importance for our understanding of narrative in the Hebrew Bible, since many tales are actually dominated by character discourse. Moreover, the way in which characters speak is indicative of their inner life, their point of view, their personality, and their status.

1. The Character’s Voice

This study deals with those utterances that are pronounced in a character’s voice, by way of quoted discourse (“direct speech”), in interaction with the utter-

1. Various estimates concerning the incidence of quoted discourse in biblical narrative are more or less convergent. Analysis of five narrative sections (including Genesis 29–31 and Esther 6–8) leads G. Rendsburg to mention a mean percentage of 42.5: Diglossia in Ancient Hebrew (New Haven, 1990), 160–61. According to A. J. C. Verheij, the books of 1–2 Samuel consist of 43.33% of quoted discourse: Verbs and Numbers: A Study of the Frequencies of the Hebrew Verbal Tense Forms in the Books of Samuel, Kings and Chronicles (Assen, 1990), 32–36. In Genesis Y. T. Radday and H. Shore find 42.71% spoken discourse (41 samples out of 96, each containing approximately 200 words); Genesis, An Authorship Study (Rome, 1985), 24–25. In 1–2 Kings and 1–2 Chronicles the mean is lower (34% and 21% respectively, according to Verheij, op. cit., 32–36). Actually, from section to section different data present themselves.


3. Few scholars have contributed so much toward the recognition of the many-faceted function of dialogue in literature (and in social life) as M. M. Bakhtin, “Discourse in the Novel,” in M. Holquist, ed., The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin (Austin, Texas, 1981), 256–422. In his view total domination of all language by the aesthetic function is only found in poetry, whereas prose narrative (and in particular the novel) is characterized by the variety of different language strata used (296–99).

4. This term has been coined by D. Cohn, Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction (Princeton, 1978), 58, 99.
ances of other characters, with the action sequence as such—as a reaction to what has happened, is happening, or could happen—or as a starting point for action. In contrast, extensive discourses, such as Solomon’s prayer (1 Kgs. 8:15–61) or Moses’ speech in the Plains of Moab (Deut. 1:6–28:68) are preferably viewed as texts in their own right,5 with their own structure and dynamics. Our treatment of these matters will be based on the methods developed in a previous study concerning the style of written language and residues of the style of oral narrative in general.6

The existence of differences between the language of character discourse and that of the narrative sequence is indicated by Radday’s statistical study of the Genesis narrative and Verheij’s analysis of the language of the Book of Chronicles, in comparison with the Books of Samuel and Kings.7 According to Ch. Rabin, “the brevity of most of the turns of human speech causes sentences to be short, with few subordinate clauses, and therefore also comparatively few conjunctions. The rhythm of human speech is staccato while that of biblical narrative is flowing.”8 Investigations by MacDonald and Levine point to a number of idioms, especially deictic particles, that occur only in quoted speech, e.g., הוהי הגלות הגלות אל הגלות, “Here comes that dreamer,” Gen. 37:19,9 והז as an indication of place (לא永远不会), “don’t move from here,” Judg. 6:18,10 and כי instead of come as an adverb with the meaning “first” (яхלום באה ברכה ל), “First sell your birthright to me”; Gen. 25:31.11 Rendsburg indicates a number of non-standard phenomena in the biblical text, such as gender neutralization and lack of congruence, which can be explained as traces of colloquial language.12

Mali’s linguistic analysis of quoted discourse in the books of Joshua–Kings indicates some general stylistic differences. One of his findings is that in quoted

5. This distinction is also urged by R. E. Longacre, The Grammar of Discourse, 2nd ed. (New York, 1996), 3.
8. Ch. Rabin, “Linguistic Aspects,” apud Radday and Shore, Genesis (n. 1 above), 218–24, esp. 220. As will be shown in the present discussion, Rabin’s generalization is only valid for (a) casual discourse, or (b) late pre-exilic and (post-)exilic narrative.
11. See MacDonald, 173; and note Gen. 25:33; 1 Sam. 2:16; 9:27; 1 Kgs. 22:5 (as against the usual indication of time, והז, e.g., Gen. 50:20). However, this clause also has legal overtones (see below, p. 91).
speech clauses are mostly shorter than in the narrative sequence. In this respect quoted discourse seems to reflect some features of the vernacular. Secondly, in quoted discourse Mali finds more clauses opened by a direct or indirect object, or another complement (fronting), e.g., °l jymxt rdrdw ≈wqw (“Thorns and thistles shall it sprout for you,” Gen. 3:18). The speaking person’s psychological involvement in the subject matter is illustrated by the word-order of Amnon’s answer to Jonadab: Ḥm mlv ḫm rmd ḫm ḫh (“It is Tamar, the sister of Absalom, my brother, I love”; 2 Sam. 13:4). 

However, these studies are all based on a global analysis in which the sum total of the data for quoted discourse in the corpus (e.g., the Book of Genesis, or the books Joshua–2 Kings) is compared to those of the entire domain of the narrator in the given corpus. Hence, the data for tales in which character discourse is paramount, such as the Saul tales, or the David-Absalom narratives, are lumped together with those for tales of a quite different character. Even within the context of a single book such as Genesis, this method can only yield contaminated results. Thus, any comparison between the style of quoted speech and the language of the narrator’s discourse must be based on detailed analysis within a specific context.

A second problem is the literary status of the speaker’s utterance. In narrative all discourse as such belongs to the narrator, who depicts the situation, describes the action sequence and represents the discourse of the characters. Quoted discourse in a tale belongs to narrative, is embedded between the other elements of the story, and does not eo ipso differ from them. Hence Bar-Efrat can assert that the language of biblical narrative in general does not differ from that of spoken discourse, even though he is attentive to the representation of polite address and courtly style. In his view, careless, informal speech, such as is put in the mouth of Ahimaaz (2 Sam. 18:29), serves to suggest a character’s state of mind in a given episode, but does not imply any interest in the imitation of colloquial language. In a discussion of the place of character speech in modern English fiction Page finds that “a
persuasive effect of colloquialism” often is dependent “upon only a very limited and selective observance of the features of actual speech.”

Within these limitations, however, the imitative suggestion of features of colloquial language must be recognized as a prominent stylistic device of narrative. In medieval literature, Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*, which are narrated by a number of common people, stand out by virtue of a great number of colloquial features.

The data uncovered by the large-scale studies of Mali, Radday, and Verheij indicate that some of the conventions of this kind have also been used in biblical narrative. In fact, Licht argues that the girls’ dialogue with Saul (1 Sam. 9:11–13) illustrates a certain pleasure in the imitation of their way of speaking. Uffenheimer points to the use of soldiers’ language in the tale of Jehu’s coup against Joram, which implies the imitation of a special stratum of language, rather than the characterization of a given individual. However, evaluation of these and similar passages is possible only against the background of a general understanding of the nature of character discourse in biblical narrative.

Hence the present study will focus on the linguistic characterization of quoted discourse in terms of formality, colloquial character, and register. Such a characterization should provide the groundwork for the study of the inner life of the character in the light of his or her way of speaking. For this study we will distinguish between the field of character discourse (quoted speech) and the domain of the story teller, which will include all utterances that are made by the voice of the narrator himself, that is, the action sequence, expository sections, and evaluative or generalizing comments. For each clause we will establish the number of constituents that are directly dependent on the predicate (that is to say, the arguments, e.g., subject, direct...

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22. B. Uffenheimer, *Early Prophecy in Israel* (Jerusalem, 1999), 439–42. Uffenheimer indicates the low level of the halting style of the common man and the coarse language of the soldier, the high level of religious discourse, and the intermediate level of matter of fact information in the narrator’s voice (440–41).
24. Sternberg (*Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 16) warns the linguist not to “mistake the liberties taken by art for the encoded norms,” but acknowledges the need for studying the linguistic code (pp. 11–12).
25. For this distinction see, e.g., H. C. White, *Narrative and Discourse in Genesis* (Cambridge, 1991), 42; Mali (*Language of Conversation*, 27 and introduction) speaks of “speaking frame” as against “action description,” a term that hardly covers exposition and narrator’s comment.
or indirect object, temporal and local modifier), and the number of expanded noun phrases. A distinction will be made between independent and subordinate clauses.

2. Discourse Spoken and Written: A Linguistic Characterization

a. The language of written discourse

Linguistic research points to a number of characteristic differences between the language of spoken discourse and of written texts. Written discourse is formal and planned. Hence the writer typically uses more complicated syntactic constructions: in written language the sentence contains more constituents, subordinated clauses, and long noun phrases, and thus more nominal elements. In biblical narrative, the characteristics of written language are demonstrated by many a sentence on writing, as, e.g.,

Josh. 8:32

And he inscribed there on the stones a copy of the teaching / that Moses had written for the Israelites.

27. For technical details of the analysis see Polak, “The Oral and the Written,” 76–78.


32. According to Halliday (Spoken and Written Language, 61–75, 92–93) the predominance of nouns vis à vis verbs is connected with the higher lexical density of written language, and in general with the character of written texts as static product. Halliday also highlights the predominance of hypotaxis.

33. The importance of these passages for the understanding of scribal culture has been underlined by S. Niditch, Oral World and Written Word: Ancient Israelite Literature (Louisville, 1996), 79–80, 86–88.
Exod. 31:18
Thus he gave Moses when he finished speaking with him on Mount Sinai the two tablets of the Covenant, stone tablets inscribed with the finger of God.

Deut. 27:3
And inscribe upon them all the words of this Teaching when you cross over in order that you may enter the land that the Lord your God is giving you a land flowing with milk and honey as the Lord, the God of your fathers, promised you.

These clauses contain a *high number of clauses in hypotaxis*, as attribute clause with relative particle (אֶלְּכַּיָּה יְהֹוָהּ, ארֳכַשׁ רֹבֶה אֲבָטְךָ לֹכֶבְךָ; as adverbial modifier (אֶלְּכַּיָּה יְהֹוָהּ; as indication of goal (came to write these words upon the altar). Some clauses are dependent on subordinated clauses (complicated hypotaxis: מִיֵּת אֲרָבָא לָא הָאָדָם). Some clauses are dependent on subordinated clauses (complicated hypotaxis: מִיֵּת אֲרָבָא לָא הָאָדָם). *The number of constituents* is high. The verse on Joshua’s writing on the altar contains (1) an adverbial modifier (שָׁם), (2) a description of place (עַל הַבָּאָמִים), and (3) a direct object (הָאֹהֶל). In Moses’ exhortation we note, apart from the predicate: (1) the adverbial modifier (עַל הָאֶדֶן), (2) the direct object (הָאָדָם), (3) a time indication (הִרְמֶּנָת אָזְנוֹ), (4) an indication of the goal (וְהַבֵּסֶת בְּאָזְנוֹ). The second verse contains: (1) an indirect object (אֲרֵבָא לָא הָאָדָם), (2) a time indication (בָּאֲרִיָּה), (3) a direct object (כְּלַדְרֵי הָהוֹרֵה הָאָדָם). Some arguments consist of *long noun strings* (כְּלַדְרֵי הָהוֹרֵה הָאָדָם). Deictic particles do occur (לָא לְאַחַר מַשָּׂא, המֵאָרִי); Deut. 27:3;םש, Josh. 8:32), but are mainly found in dependent clauses (לָא לְאַחַר מַשָּׂא, המֵאָרִי; Deut. 27:3).

b. **Written discourse and the complex-nominal style**

The texts just presented form a perfect illustration of the thesis that written language adheres to the complex-nominal style, also found, for example, in the Aramaic contracts from Elephantine. This style is highly developed in literature from the Persian era and the end of the exilic period (the Book of Ezra; the Esther novella, Daniel 1; 1–2 Chronicles), and slightly less so in texts attributable to the exilic...
c. The style of spoken discourse

Spoken discourse is less formal than written language, and is often casual, in particular when used in the intimacy of the household and in a circle of friends and acquaintances (the conversational mood). In spoken discourse one meets more paratactic constructions, most sentences contain fewer constituents, long noun phrases are rare, while reference by means of deictic particles and pronouns is frequent. These parameters are characteristic of quoted discourse in biblical narrative as well, e.g., Jacob’s proposal to his sons or Isaac’s accusation of Abimelech, the king of Gerar.

38. See Miller and Weinert, Spontaneous Spoken Language, 79–87, 89–104, 132; Crystal and Davy, English Style, 109–11. In Biblical Hebrew the distinction between simple, coordinated and compound sentences is less fruitful, since in verbal clauses the subject can be expressed implicitly by the verbal inflection itself (prefix/affix). Hence a sentence in which the first clause contains an explicit subject, while the second contains only a verbal predicate with implicit subject is to be viewed as consisting of two main clauses rather than as a case of subject deletion in a compound sentence.
39. Halliday (Spoken and Written Language, 76–87) describes the lexical sparsity of spoken language and the preference for paraxis, and underlines the high number of verbs, which he relates to his view of spoken language as process oriented, and hence based on verbal clauses with less dependencies than written language (67–75). He opposes the structured “clause complex” of spoken discourse to the “sentence” of written language.
40. Miller and Weinert (Spontaneous Spoken Language, 134–43, 182–89) establish this feature on the basis of English, German, and Russian, as well as, occasionally, non-Indo-European languages such as Turkish or Tamil; they also offer an analysis of noun phrases in English “spontaneous spoken” narrative and conversation (145–53). See also Crystal and Davy, English Style, 106, 112–13.
42. So also the plea of David (1 Sam. 26:9–10), quoted below (p. 64), and the argument of the conjurer of spirits with Saul (1 Sam. 28:21).
In these statements all clauses are paratactic, apart from one subordinated clause (יִתְנְךָ אִלֵּי מָצָא). Isaac’s questions contain three clauses that consist of predicate and pronominal complement only (וּלְשַׁלְחֵנִים מָאתֵכִם). Only one clause contains nouns (וּלְשַׁלְחֵנִים מָאתֵכִם). In view of the serious mood of these statements, and the importance of the causes represented, their lack of formal cultivation is all the more remarkable.

The context of family life is represented by the discussion between Saul and his daughter Michal (1 Sam. 19:17):

"Why did you deceive me this way / and let my enemy get away / and escape"

Now that the context is clarified, let us look at the style of the conversation between Saul and Michal. One could argue that this style reflects the excitement of the quarrel rather than casual language in general. But such an explanation cannot hold true for Saul’s answer to his father’s servant (1 Sam 9:7): 44

The same style dominates Saul’s conversation with his uncle, who asks him (10:14):  

"Where have you gone?"

Saul answers:


44. The preceding conversation (vv. 5–6) is couched in the same language, as seven clauses out of eleven contain at most one argument (63.64%). Four verbal clauses contain one argument only; one clause consists of a verbal predicate only (והנה). In addition we note one clause with two arguments, two relative clauses, and one subordinate clause containing two noun arguments (כִּי חָלָם אֲרֵב).
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"To look for the she-donkeys / but we saw that they were not there / and turned to Samuel."

The narrative continues with his uncle’s question (10:15):

"Tell me / what did Samuel say to you?"

And Saul answers (v. 16)

"He told us / that the donkeys had been found."

Even though this dialogue contains some subordinate clauses, most clauses are extremely simple. Three clauses contain no more than one noun, pronominal reference is frequent, and the uncle’s question is answered by an independent infinitive clause that forms a logical continuation to the implied answer “we went to,”

By the same token one notes Jonathan’s reproach:

"Why should he be killed? What has he done?"

And the question of Elisha’s servant:

"How can I set this before a hundred men?"

These dialogues exemplify the casual language of family life and informal communication with friends and acquaintances (the conversational mood). In such a context the use of pronominals and deictics is self-evident, as the participants in the conversation can see one another, and know what their partner is referring to.

An additional characteristic is “fragmented syntax,” that is the juxtaposition of syntactic elements without explicit syntactic expression of their connection. We encounter an obvious example in Abram’s request from Sarai:

"Please say, you are my sister." / In quoted discourse she would refer to herself as speaker. On

The clauselet suggests indirect discourse, since Sarai is referred to as addressee. In quoted discourse she would refer to herself as speaker.
the other hand, this clauselet lacks the introductory particle characteristic of indirect discourse, e.g., רכ. In terms of discourse analysis this is a case of “that-deletion,” a feature that is considered typical for spontaneous spoken language.50

One also notes, for instance, Jonadab’s address of Amnon:

In this question one notes the high number of pronominal and adverbial forms (אלהים, מדל), the exceptional use of הוֹדו before the nominal predicate,51 and the second question אֲלֵהוֹ, without subordinate object clause. In biblical quoted discourse fragmented syntax is rarely met,52 but one often encounters the other characteristics of casual spoken language.

However, the characteristic style of spoken discourse can also be used to construct intricate arguments, e.g., David’s rebuttal of Abishai’s proposal to kill Saul (1 Sam. 26:9–10):

In spite of the seemingly plain style, this reproach contains a rhetorical question and the parallelism of לוֹדוֹ and הוֹדוֹ. By the same token one notes Abraham’s proposal to Lot to separate their flocks (Gen. 13:8–9):

d. Spoken discourse and the rhythmic-verbal style

A style that seems similar to the language of quoted discourse is found in a large number of narratives. Many tales, and even entire narrative cycles, are characterized by the high number of clauses consisting of a predicate only, or of predicate with one single argument,54 the low number of clauses in hypotaxis, and the low


51. This syntactic connection is implied by the cantillation signs, as הוֹדו carries a מִּנָּח. This is the only passage in which הוֹדו is used to modify a nominal predicate. In all other passages it is linked to the verbal predicate.

52. In this respect Bar-Efrat’s position (see n. 17 above) is partly justified.

53. On the use of parallelism in Abraham’s argument see pp. 82–83 below.

54. Mali (*Language of Conversation*, 204) shows that in Joshua–Kings clauses containing at most one argument are more frequent in quoted discourse than in the narrator’s domain.
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number of expanded noun chains. In the tale of Abraham at the terebinths of Mamre (Gen. 18:1–15), this characterization is as correct for the narrator’s domain as it is for quoted speech. In character discourse we encounter sequences such as

 washer your feet and recline under the tree

 (v. 4, “wash your feet and recline under the tree”),

And let me fetch a morsel of bread that you may refresh yourselves; then go on

 (v. 5, “And let me fetch a morsel of bread that you may refresh yourselves; then go on”),

Quick, three seahs of choice flour! Knead and make cakes”.

 However, similar sequences are found in the event sequence, e.g.,

 (vv. 2b–3a, he saw them, . . . bowed to the ground and said),

Clauses with several arguments (e.g., v. 6, Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah) are far less numerous (six clauses out of 22, 27.27%) than the clauses that include at most one argument (thirteen cases, 59.09%). Expanded noun chains and clauses in hypotaxis are not often found. The scene of the meal contains a series of cases of pronominal reference and ellipsis (and he hastened to prepare it, v. 7), (and he set these before them; and he was waiting on them under the tree, and they ate, v. 8; also vv. 1–2).

A narrative style of this kind, then, is quite different from the complex-nominal style. It is best characterized as rhythmic-verbal, and seems close to character discourse; in consequence it may be assumed to reflect the norms of oral narrative. This style is characteristic of such narrative cycles as, e.g., the tales of the Patriarchs, of Samuel, Saul and David, of Elijah and Elisha. In other words, even though in their present form these cycles belong to written literature, they are based on a substrate of oral literature. The authors who wrote them down, had a thorough knowledge of the literary norms of oral narrative, and adhered to them.

For this characterization see the references in nn. 38–41 above.

The symbiosis of oral and written literature has been discussed by A. B. Lord, Epic Singers and Oral Tradition (Ithaca, 1991), 25–27, 170–95; J. M. Foley, Traditional Oral Epic: The Odyssey, Beowulf and the Serbo-Croatian Return Song (Berkeley, 1990), 1–51; R. Thomas, Literacy and Orality in Ancient Greece (Cambridge, 1992), 35–51; S. Niditch, Oral World and Written Word (n. 37 above); J. Van Seters,
However, even in the tale of the terebinths at Mamre, the domain of the narrator includes a number of verses in which the language is more intricate than is usual in the rhythmic-verbal style:

**Gen. 18:1**

The Lord appeared to him by the terebinths of Mamre; and he was sitting at the entrance of the tent as the day grew hot.

v. 11

Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in years; Sarah had stopped having the periods of women.

In the tale of Hagar’s flight one notes a similar opening:

**Gen. 16:1**

Sarai, Abram’s wife, had borne him no children. She had an Egyptian maidservant and her name was Hagar.

Some of these clauses contain three arguments, long noun chains, or dependent clauses. Accordingly, these clauses seem similar to the complex-nominal style. But their stylistic character suits their expositional function: since the narrator has to present the necessary data concerning the situation, he needs more arguments and longer noun chains to state the facts.61

The second place in which the style is more intricate than usual is the closure of the tale of Hagar:

**Gen. 16:14**

Therefore the well was called Beer-lahai-roi. See, it is between Kadesh and Bered.

The aetiological element in this tale involves the narrator’s authority vis-à-vis the audience, and is thus close to the evaluative function, embodied by such remarks as the conclusion of the first part of the Bath-sheba tale:

**2 Sam. 11:27b**

But the thing that David had done was bad in the eyes of the Lord.

In elements of this type the narrator often prefers clauses of a more complicated structure, such as clauses with three arguments, and subordinated clauses.62 Thus

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61. This tendency is evident in, e.g., Gen. 19:1; 2 Sam. 16:1, 5; 20:2; 1 Kgs. 1:1, 4–10; 11:26 (see also Crystal and Davy, *English Style*, 109). The expositional descriptions of the Esther tale occupy extensive sections of the narrative: Esth. 1:1–9; 2:5–8; 3:1–2.

62. So also, e.g., Gen 25:30b. In 2 Sam. 5:9a the aetiological note is presented by a clause that is embedded in the narrative sequence and contains two arguments.
within the narrator’s domain the style of expositional and evaluative clauses (narrator’s comment) is more intricate than that of the action sequence proper.\(^{63}\)

In the following discussion we will deal, first of all, with the place of character discourse in the style of complex-nominal language. Afterwards we will turn to the problems raised by its use in narratives that represent the rhythmic-verbal style.

3. The Complex-Nominal Style and Quoted Discourse

Prose narrative in the complex-nominal style tends to maintain a certain distinction between character discourse and the domain of the narrator, who adheres to the norms of written language.

a. The Ezra Memoirs

In the Ezra Memoirs this distinction is illustrated by the following example, in which we indicate, for every clause, (a) the number of arguments (as defined above), (b) status (subordination is indicated as “sub,”\(^ {64} \) complex subordination as “chyp,” attributive clauses as “attr,” conditional clauses as “cond”),\(^ {65} \) verbal groups that are not to be split into a main and a subordinate clause are marked as “vg”), and (c) the number of expanded noun strings (“expand”). In the following excerpts not all verses analyzed will be quoted in full.\(^ {66} \)

Ezra 10:7–14

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<td>4 arg</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v. 8</td>
<td>2 arg</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v. 9</td>
<td>4 arg</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3+</td>
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63. A similar distinction has been established by Labov’s analysis of oral narrative in the black vernacular of New York: *Language in the Inner City* (n. 26 above), 360–70, 393–96.

64. Motive and adversative clauses introduced by רְבָּעִי are analyzed as independent clauses, since in these cases the syntactic connection can be extremely loose, as shown by S. R. Driver (*BDB*, 473–74, esp. 474b). In this connection Muraoka (*Emphatic Words*, 159–60, 164) points to the deictic force of רְבָּעִי.

65. In the analysis of narrative style, a conditional clause counts as hypotactic, but is not considered as an argument in the apodosis, if it is separated from the protasis by the waw marking parataxis. However, if the apodosis does not open with a paratactic marker, the protasis is viewed as an argument of the apodosis as main clause.

66. Vocatives and adverbial clauses are counted as arguments. So are object and subject clauses. In contrast, relative clauses are not regarded as arguments since they serve as attributes, and thus merely form an expansion of the noun phrase. But at the present stage of research we have not counted them as such.
b. Character Discourse

<table>
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<td>לְמַעֲלָה בָּרֶם</td>
<td>1 arg</td>
<td>sub</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v. 14</td>
<td>וַיִּשְׁמְדוּ אֶל שַׁמְרֵי לָלֶשֶׁת (דְּרֵי לֶשֶׁת)</td>
<td>3 arg</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>וְלָכַל אַשְׁר בְּעֶרֶב (הַזָּקֵן)</td>
<td>2 arg</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>וַיִּשְׁמַעְתָּו בְּעֶרֶב</td>
<td>1 arg</td>
<td>attr</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>וְהַעֲמֹדָה בְּעֶרֶב</td>
<td>1 arg</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>וּלְמַעֲלָה בָּרֶם</td>
<td>3 arg</td>
<td>sub</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The statistical survey presents the summation and percentage for (a) character discourse (Char), the domain of the story-teller (Narr), and (c) the whole unit. For each of these fields we will establish (a) the number of arguments in the independent short clauses only (0–1 arguments, including cases with two pronouns or deictic adverbs), for long independent clauses (2–5 arguments) and the percentage relative to the total number of clauses; (b) the number and percentage of hypotactic clauses, and (c) the number and percentage of expanded noun strings. The last four lines of the summation give the figures for subordination (hypot), long clauses (2–5 arguments), short clauses (0–1 arguments), and expanded noun chains (expand).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ezra 10:7–14</th>
<th>Char</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Narr</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Unit</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>clauses</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>64.00</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>36.00</td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0–1 arg</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>46.67</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11.11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>33.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2–5 arg</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>26.67</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>55.56</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>37.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hypot</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>26.67</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>33.33</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>29.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>expand</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>73.33</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>166.67</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>108.33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thus we see that the clauses in the narrator’s domain are formulated in a highly complex-nominal style, whereas the language used by the speaking characters is far less formal and complex. The inference is warranted that this pericope tries to imitate the peculiarities of spoken language, although basic patterns of the complex-nominal style are also found in quoted discourse. Here, then, the complex style is mitigated and rendered more vivid by the imitation of the conversational mood, without thereby turning into rhythmic-verbal. In the pericope of the Torah reading (Ezra 8:1–18) one meets a similar style.

67. The percentage of expanded noun chains (relative to the number of clauses) indicates how many expanded chains are, on the average, found in each clause. Thus the indication 166.67%, given for the narrator’s domain in Ezra 10, means that each clause in this domain contains 1.67 chains (or each ten clauses 16 expanded noun chains).
This constellation is far from unique. For instance, the Chronicler’s account of Hezekiah’s preparations for the Assyrian onslaught (2 Chron. 32:1–9) is dominated by the complex-nominal style. However, the style of quoted speech is far less formal. The decision to stop up all the springs is motivated by two simple clauses, containing two arguments and one argument, respectively. Each clause includes one expanded noun chain:

2 Chron. 32:4

למה נבוא מלך אשור / ומיע ימי רביב

“Why should the kings of Assyria come / and find much water?”

Hezekiah’s exhortatory address in the sequel opens with three short clauses that consist only of a predicate, followed by a long clause with an expanded noun chain as argument:

v. 7a

ויהיה / ואמר / ולא תיראו / או תקריבו מפלך / ואשר מפלך כהמום אשמך

“He be strong and courageous / do not be afraid / and do not fear the king of Assyria nor for all the multitude that is with him.”

This sequence is rounded off by a short nominal clause that is continued by two nominal clauses and two subordinate infinitive clauses:

v. 7b

v. 8

“For there is someone greater with us than with him / With him is an arm of flesh / but with us is the Lord our God / to help us / and to fight our battles.”

These nine clauses, then, include three clauses consisting of a single predicate (33.33%), two clauses containing one argument (22.22%), and the same number of clauses with two arguments. We note only two subordinate clauses (infinitive clauses; 22.22%), two noun phrases, and one extremely long noun chain.

b. The Esther Scroll

The differences between the style of the action sequence and quoted discourse are also noted in the Esther novella, as demonstrated by the following pericope, where we analyze 16 clauses in character discourse and in the narrator’s domain. The first pericope contains a long sequence of narrated (indirect) speech.

Esther 4:6–8, 11b–13

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit</th>
<th>Esth. 4:4, 6–8, 12–13a (partial excerpt)</th>
<th>Argument</th>
<th>Sub</th>
<th>Expand</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>v. 4</td>
<td>ההואתי ינשד אסתר לפרסות</td>
<td>1 arg</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v. 4</td>
<td>ויהה הל</td>
<td>1 pron</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v. 5</td>
<td>והאתי את התרועה המא</td>
<td>2 arg</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v. 6</td>
<td>ותשפיחו ברוים (הלליש)</td>
<td>2 arg</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v. 6</td>
<td>והללי את מרדי</td>
<td>1 arg</td>
<td>sub</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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68. See Polak, “The Oral and the Written,” 98.
One Line Short

Argument  Sub  Expand

v. 6  3 arg  -  3

b. Character Discourse

Unit  Esth. 4:11, 13b–14, 16  Argument  Sub  Expand

v. 11  2 arg  -  3

v. 13b  2 arg  -  -

v. 14  2 arg  -  2

v. 16  1 arg  -  1

In this pericope the stylistic differences between spoken discourse and action sequence are obvious: in character discourse the number of clauses with no more than two arguments (0, 1, 2 arg) is higher than in the action sequence, whereas the number of subordinated clauses and clauses with 3 arguments is lower. We note only that the incidence of expanded noun strings is on the high side in character discourse, and on the low side in the action sequence.

c. Jeremiah and 1–2 Kings

Character discourse is rare in large narrative sections that are attributed to the Late Pre-exilic/Exilic period. For instance, the account of Joash’s enthronement by the priest Jehoiada contains only a few examples, mainly the long sequence of the priest’s orders (2 Kgs. 11:5–8), two short exclamations, עלי ויהי (v. 12), and two additional priestly orders (v. 15). A number of long royal instructions is found in the narrative on Josiah’s Temple restoration (2 Kgs. 22:4–7, 13), followed by a long prophetic diatribe (vv. 15–20). Short stretches of quoted speech relate to the scroll which was found in the debris:

2 Kgs. 22:8

ירומות הלוחות המכתנ המתנה על שם המפר / שמ מפרמר מצאותי ביבת imprisoned in the House of the Lord.

v. 10

ונר שם המפר מלך לצמרו / سم נמריל הלוחות המכתנ

The scribe Shaphan also told the king, “Hilkiah, the priest, has given me a scroll”

The account on Gedaliah’s murder by Ishmael (Jer. 41:1–18) contains only two short stretches of quoted speech:

69. In contrast, the consultation of Jeremiah by Johanan ben Kareah centers on Jeremiah’s prophecy (Jer. 42:9–22) and the preceding questions by the officers (vv. 2–6) rather than on narrative developments. In the tale of Johanan’s flight to Egypt, the action sequence carries more weight, but the accusations of the prophet (43:2–3) and the prophecy itself (vv. 8–13) are still the main issue.

70. In this verse the LXX does not represent the patronymic. Thus in certain sections of the book of Jeremiah the LXX may reflect a text that contains fewer long noun chains. The difference, however, does not affect the typology of narrative discourse in this book.
On the other hand, character discourse plays an important role in the story of Gedaliah’s efforts to establish his authority (Jeremiah 40; in the following excerpts character discourse is not separated from the narrator’s voice, but is indicated as “char,” whereas the narrator’s domain is marked as “narr”).

71. In v. 12 the LXX does not reflect the entire first clause (יוֹרָשַׁב).
In this pericope the distinction between character speech and narrator’s discourse is indicated by (a) the high number of independent clauses with 0–1 arguments (54% as against 5.56% in the narrator’s domain); (b) the low number of clauses containing 2–5 arguments (16.67%; in the narrator’s domain: 55.56%); (c) the percentage of subordinated clauses (29.16% as against 38.89% in the narrator’s domain); (d) the low percentage of expanded noun chains (41.67% as against 211% in the narrator’s domain). In the account of Jehoiakim’s persecution of Jeremiah and Baruch the situation is similar, even though the differences between the domains are less clear cut.72

The tale of the Queen of Sheba contains a long appreciation of Solomon’s court and wisdom, which could almost be regarded as a formal speech in itself. However, since it forms a reaction to the narrative events, it still belongs to character discourse. The language proves less formal than the style of the narrator’s domain.

---

In this pericope, the Queen of Sheba delivers a sophisticated encomium of Solomon’s wisdom in a highly formal style. The most obvious indication of this formality is the double praise of Solomon’s courtiers, in two parallel clauses, (v. 8). In general one notes the high incidence of subordinate clauses (10 out of 18 clauses, 55%). As a matter of fact, in this cultivated discourse the percentage of subordinate clauses is far higher than in the narrator’s domain (8 clauses out of 22, 36%). Nevertheless, in other respects the style of this encomium is less formal than the language of the action sequence, in which the percentage of clauses with two arguments or more is higher than in character speech. Of particular interest are the long noun chains used to describe the caravan of the queen and the gifts which she presented to Solomon. That is to say, even in cultivated, “elevated” quoted discourse the narrator may prefer a style that is less formal than the style of the pericopes in the narrator’s domain.

Thus, narrative prose in the complex-nominal style (Persian era and the Late Pre-exilic/Exilic period) tends to maintain a distinction between the complex, intricate style of the narrator’s discourse and the less formal language of character speech. Since the complex-nominal style reflects the habits of the scribal desk, the authors using it seem to be aware of the special status of spoken discourse vis-à-vis written language.

73. Of course, this is no more than a tendency. In Jeremiah 38 the style of discourse is more intricate and cultivated than that of the narrative sequence.
4. Character Speech in the Rhythmic-Verbal Style

In the narrative cycles in the rhythmic-verbal style, subordinate clauses and expanded noun chains are rare, while most clauses contain less than two arguments. In this respect, the rhythmic style is closely related to the style of character discourse, in so far as it imitates the spoken language. What, then, is the place of quoted speech within a tale in the rhythmic-verbal style? Rabin has already pointed out that quoted discourse contains more than one register, and more than one stylistic level. In certain situations the narrator allows the characters to speak in the cultivated, intricate style, while in other episodes plain diction is preferred, as is found in the conversational mood. The following paragraphs will bear out the distinction between these levels. The functions of the intricate style in tales that are dominated by the rhythmic-verbal style will be analyzed in the ensuing sections.

a. Stylistic similarity between quoted speech and the narrator’s domain

In the first part of the tale of Abraham at the terebinths of Mamre (Gen. 18:1–8), the style of quoted speech is highly informal, and thus, as we have already shown, closely resembles the rhythmic style of the narrative sequence, as indicated by the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Char</th>
<th>Narr</th>
<th>Unit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>clauses</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0–1 arg</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2–5 arg</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hypot</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>expand</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In character discourse the only long sentence (הנה נא המאה נון בברכה, v. 3) consists of a fixed formula of respectful language, and thus represents the polite address of worthy guests. On the other hand, Abraham’s discourse to Sarah is couched in characteristically casual language, including two clauses without argument and two with one argument ( Público, נלעטleep נשים חמה על. בנחל, ד’un. v. 6: “Quick, three seahs of choice flour! Knead and make cakes!”). It is hardly possible to explain this style as a matter of excitement only, since Abraham’s visitors also address him in casual language (v. 5: נושל כלרשא רברנה, “Do so, as you have said”).

A similar constellation is found in the tale of Hagar’s flight (Gen. 16:1–12).

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75. In view of the thesis that in the rhythmic-verbal style the language of the action sequence tends to be less complicated than that of the dialogue, it is to be noted that even in the present tale the percentage of clauses with no explicit argument is slightly lower in dialogue than it is in the action sequence. The difference, however, is not significant.

76. For the present analysis Gen. 16:13 has not been taken into account because of the well-known textual difficulties. As indicated above, the style of vv. 14–15 is quite different from that of the preceding episodes.
In this tale one notes a number of clauses in plain language, such as Sarai’s proposal (v. 2: “Consort with my maid; perhaps I shall have a son through her”), the angel’s counsel (v. 9: “Go back to your mistress, and let yourself be maltreated by her hands”). The casual style stands out all the more, as the tale also contains some instances of quoted discourse in the intricate style, such as Sarai’s argument (v. 5: “It is me who put my maid in your bosom”).

b. Varieties of character discourse

By contrast, in many tales the language of character discourse is more complex than the style of the action sequence. This situation prevails even in stories that
seem to epitomize the art of oral narrative, such as the Samson tale.77 (In the following excerpts “cond” indicates conditional clauses,78 “vg” a verbal group that is not to be separated into finite verb and infinitive.)

Judg. 14:11–20 (vv. 12–16)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit</th>
<th>Judges 14</th>
<th>Argument</th>
<th>Sub</th>
<th>Expand</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>v. 12</td>
<td>ראפרל תלדה שומשם</td>
<td>2 arg</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>char</td>
<td>זוחרש וא{lms w</td>
<td>2 arg</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ומצל תוגדארו</td>
<td>3 arg</td>
<td>cond</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>התחי תכל השלים מעניי_rooms הכול朋友们</td>
<td>2 arg</td>
<td>cond</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v. 13</td>
<td>והם אל תלדה ר</td>
<td>1 arg</td>
<td>cond/vg</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>התחי תכל השלים מעניי_rooms הכול朋友们对</td>
<td>3 arg</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>narr</td>
<td>האמר</td>
<td>1 pron</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>char</td>
<td>ודוד</td>
<td>1 arg</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ושם</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v. 14</td>
<td>الإعلام תלדה</td>
<td>1 pron</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>char</td>
<td>המאתא (짜 말צל)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>sub</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>המאתא וכapellido</td>
<td>2 arg</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ומצל אנ♫</td>
<td>2 arg</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>narr</td>
<td>לכן כל כל המגד גדל השלים מעניי_rooms</td>
<td>2 arg</td>
<td>vg</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v. 15</td>
<td>יהוי ימים השביעי</td>
<td>1 arg</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>יאמרו לאשה השמוע</td>
<td>1 arg</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>char</td>
<td>מנה משך (מנ</td>
<td>2 arg</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>רודֵל אולדה</td>
<td>2 arg</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ורשא</td>
<td>1 arg</td>
<td>sub</td>
<td>1+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>השילוש</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>sub</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(ודליש]נ) קראתי כל אל</td>
<td>3 arg</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v. 16</td>
<td>תוכר יצא שמשון עליה</td>
<td>2 arg</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>התכון</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>char</td>
<td>קיشاه</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>אל האבות</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>והדותו חתת גבעים</td>
<td>2 arg</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>narr</td>
<td>יאמרו הלה</td>
<td>1 pron</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>מעניי_rooms לא למדמי</td>
<td>1 arg</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>מכל</td>
<td>1 pron</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


78. As noted above (n. 65), in conditionals that are introduced by a particle (e.g., "אא" or "ו") the apodosis is analyzed as a subordinate clause that counts as an argument in the apodosis. The only exception to this rule is the case in which the apodosis is separated from the protasis by ה, and thus in parataxis. In such a case the protasis is still viewed as hypotactic, but it does not count as an argument in the apodosis. If the condition is expressed by two asyndetic clauses in parataxis, these clauses are considered independent, since the logical connection is not expressed by morphological means.
This tale, popular though it be, contains a variety of levels of discourse. The casual style characteristic of informal situations presents itself in such utterances as Samson’s quarrel with his wife (Judg. 14:16), or his demand to give him the Timnite woman (אוהת הק ל, with two pronominal arguments; 14:3). However, in other contexts one notes a slightly more formal style. The reaction of Samson’s parents to his demand to marry the woman from Timnah is couched in complex, formal language (Judg. 14:3):

אוהת הק לוכס אדוניכיupy לואשת / לוכס אדוניכיupy לואשת מפלשתים ועילד

"Is there not a woman among the daughters of your own kinsmen and among all my people, that you must go and take a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?"

The cultivated style of this question, which includes a number of long noun chains and two subordinate clauses, seems to reflect quite a different attitude from Samson’s plain demand. Since Samson’s parents endeavor to persuade Samson not to take a wife from foreign Timnah, it seems that the intricate style of this utterance reflects the dignity of parental authority.79

The voice of parental persuasion also makes itself heard in Naomi’s desperate counsel to her daughters-in-law: 80

רעה 1:8 / להנה / שהכנת אשה לזר את אמה / רענה: זעמא חאד / הנשלו עсужден עם הקרועים קעודם

v. 9a

"Turn back, each of you, to her mother’s house. May the Lord deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me! May the Lord grant that each of you find security in the house of her husband!"

The elaborate style of Naomi’s plea contrasts sharply with the plain language which Orpah and Ruth use for rejection:

v. 10

"But we will return with you to your people"

A second source of stylistic variation is the use of cultivated, rhetorical language, e.g., in Samson’s challenge to and accusation of his Philistine guests. These speeches are characterized by parallelism and intricate conditionals:

Judg. 14:18

"If you had not plowed with my heifer, you would not have found out my riddle”

79. The use of prestige language to boost parental authority is most evident in bilingual communities. R. Fasold mentions that in a farmers village with one language as household language (Hungarian or Mexican Spanish) and a second language as prestige language (German or English), parental orders may be given in the prestige language when a child does not obey: The Sociolinguistics of Society (Oxford, 1987), 203–6.


81. According to Rendsburg (Diglossia [n. 1 above], 41–43) the final mem in the suffix ב- and the verbal affix סנ- reflects the neutralization of the gender distinction (epicene suffix) which he views as characteristic of colloquial language.
This tale, then, simple and popular as it may seem, contains various levels of quoted speech, from casual to rhetorical and cultivated. The latter style, elevated as it is, is far more intricate than casual language, and thus in some respects is similar to the formal style.

Elements of the cultivated style are also found in some of the stories on Elisha,\textsuperscript{82} e.g., the tale of Gehazi’s curse.
The casual style characteristic of informal situations presents itself in such utterances as Elisha’s question, יָזַג יָמ (v. 25), that seems a typical example of the prophet’s way of speaking to common people (so also, e.g., המָה קָם וְהָלַךְ, 2 Kgs. 4:41). However, in other contexts one notes a slightly more cultivated style. The casual language of Elisha’s question, וְאָמַר, “Where is Gehazi (coming) from?” contrasts sharply with the polite style of his servant’s denial, כָּל לְאָלְפֵּי, “Your servant has gone neither there nor there,” including two arguments and one repetitive expression (אל חנה). The self-reference to “your servant” strengthens the formal character of the answer. Finally, the style of Elisha’s indictment of Gehazi is couched in highly intricate language, with a number of subordinate clauses, a long noun chain, and a clause that includes three arguments:

v. 26
לְאָלָלְפֵּי ולְכָרֹן / לְכָרֹן וְלַכְלָל / פיִקְלֵת אֵלֶם וְהָלָיְמָאֵד תַּמְיִיק וְאָמַר וְעָבָר וְשָׁפְתָה
did not my spirit go along, when a man got down from his chariot to meet you? Is it a time to receive money, and to obtain garments, and olive orchards and vineyards, and sheep and oxen, and men-servants and maid-servants?”

v. 27
“תַּמְיִיק וְאָמַר כְּהַרְדִּיק לְעָלָל הַשַּׁעָת הַזָּה
But the leprosy of Naaman shall cling to you and to your descendants forever.”

Elisha’s answer demonstrates his mastery. He refutes Gehazi’s evasive answers, establishes his guilt, and pronounces the punishment. Thus the rhetorical level of his indictment is a sign of his authority.83

The cultivated style is also found in other sections of the Elisha tales, e.g., his declaration to Joash (2 Kgs. 13:17, 19):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit</th>
<th>2 Kings 13</th>
<th>Argument</th>
<th>Sub</th>
<th>Expand</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>v. 17</td>
<td>דָּרֶימֶר</td>
<td>-</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>narr</td>
<td>מִחְלַת הָלוֹנִים</td>
<td>2 arg</td>
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<tr>
<td>char</td>
<td>יִפְרֵשָּׁה</td>
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<tr>
<td>char</td>
<td>אָרְמִי לָעָל</td>
<td>1 arg</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>narr</td>
<td>יְיִד</td>
<td>2 arg</td>
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<td>narr</td>
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<td>char</td>
<td>אָרְמִי</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>char</td>
<td>תִּסְתַּקְּעַה לְקָח</td>
<td>1 arg</td>
<td>- 1</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>תִּסְתַּקְּעַה בַּשֶּׁר</td>
<td>1 arg</td>
<td>- 1</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>תִּשְׁפָּרְנָה</td>
<td>3 arg</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>רוֹחֵית אֵלֶם בָּאָפָּם (דּוֹלָלֵי)</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>v. 19</td>
<td>יִקְּטַנֶּה עַל עַל אָדָלָה</td>
<td>2 arg</td>
<td>- 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>narr</td>
<td>דָּרֶימֶר</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>v. 19</td>
<td>הַשַּׁעָת הַזָּה וְאָלָלְפֵּי</td>
<td>1 arg</td>
<td>- 2</td>
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</tbody>
</table>


84. In v. 19 the LXX reads אִמְנַרָאָג for יָזַג, and thus seems to reflect יָזַג. The use of הַשַּׁעָת in the apodosis following יָזַג is found in Joab’s speech in 2 Sam. 19:7. If one accepts the reading הַשַּׁעָת of MT, it may be regarded as a feature of casual language.
In these prophetic proclamations the opening clauses manifest the casual style of informal discourse, but the concluding clauses are couched in a far more formal style. Since these statements embody the main content of the prophetic declaration, the formal style might be related to the religious register of discourse. This surmise is confirmed by other pronouncements by the prophet, e.g.,

2 Kgs. 2:21

The formality of religious discourse is also evidenced by Samson’s prayer at En Hakkore (Judg. 15:18):

Thus we see that even in narratives of a pronounced rhythmic-verbal character prayer and prophetic discourse can be far more intricate than other pieces of discourse. On some levels of discourse, then, such as religious discourse and authoritative talk, these narrators know to use formal and cultivated language. That is to say, in narratives dominated by the rhythmic-verbal style the diction of discourse is characterized by its immense variety. In this respect, then, Bakhtin’s characterization of prose in general holds true for biblical narrative:

The novelist working in prose (and almost any prose writer) . . . welcomes the heteroglossia and language diversity of the literary and extraliterary language into his own work not only not weakening them but even intensifying them (for he interacts with their particular self-consciousness).

Thus c. Character discourse and rhetorical figures

In many cases formal, cultivated discourse also manifests obvious rhetorical features, such as, e.g., parallelism. A characteristic example is found in Abram’s address to Sarai (Gen. 12:11b–13):

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85. Bakhtin, “Discourse in the Novel,” 298 (n. 2 above); see also his discussion of the discourse of the speaking person 315–20, 331–66.

For the most part Abram’s address seems casual. Out of eleven clauses of quoted discourse, seven contain either one argument or none. However, a more formal level of language is indicated by the relatively high percentage of clauses in hypotaxis (three out of eleven, 27.27%). This aspect of Abram’s discourse is enhanced by its rhetorical power. The dangers threatening the patriarch are described in two antithetic, chiastic clauses, wyjy˚taw/yta wgrhw. One also notes the balancing of the two final clauses˚llgb yvpn htyjw/˚rwb[b yl bfyy ˆ[ml that close both with a reference to Sarai (˚rwb,˚llgb). Stylistic structure raises these clauses above the level of casual language. By the same token Pharaoh’s rebuke of Abram reveals a fusion of parallelism and anaphora (vv. 18b–19):

“What have you done to me! Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? Why did you say, ‘She is my sister,’ so that I took her as my wife? Now, here is your wife; take her and be gone!”

Pharaoh’s accusation consists of nine clauselets with an extremely simple syntactic structure. The single clause that contains more than two pronominal arguments dominates a clause in hypotaxis (lama ˚llgb yvpn htyjw). On the other hand, this discourse stands out by its rhetorical power, as the general opening question (lama ˚llgb yvpn htyjw) is followed by two accusations (lama ˚llgb yvpn htyjw and ˚llgb yvpn htyjw), that are characterized by the anaphoric repetition of ˚llgb and the semantic-syntactic congruity of the two clauselets ˚llgb and ˚llgb. No less impressive are the rhetorical means used in the episode of the separation from Lot (Genesis 13):

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87. On “that-deletion” in v. 13 as a feature of spoken language, see n. 50 above.
88. According to E. L. Greenstein parallelism is a common stylistic convention of quoted speech in biblical literature (including the books of Psalms, Proverbs, Lamentations, and Deuteronomy as well as the poetic discourses in Job) with roots in Northwest Semitic epic literature: “Direct Discourse and Parallelism,” in S. Vargon et al., eds., Studies in Bible and Exegesis 5, Presented to Uriel Simon (Ramat Gan, 2000), 33–40 (in Heb. with Eng. summary). In his view biblical prose narrative preserved this convention in quoted speech because of its dramatic qualities. Although this is not the place to discuss the problem of the origin of parallelism, two points are worthy of notice. D. Tannen highlights the frequent use of parallelism in contemporary Greek and English spoken discourse: “Relative Focus on Involvement in Oral and Written Discourse,” in Olson et al., eds., Literacy (n. 28 above), 124–47. But since she describes parallelism as one of the features of “the style of involvement,” it seems that the frequent use of parallelism for quoted speech constitutes a further extension of the natural rhetoric of spoken discourse, rather than a dramatic convention or an inheritance of ancient epic. On the other hand, J. Huizinga interprets the “game” of poetry as the ceremonial of earnest play; Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture, trans. R. F. C. Hull (London, 1949), 119–27, 129–35. Huizinga (127–29) shows that ancient Frisian law even contains a poetic description of the hardships of winter.
Polak: *The Style of the Dialogue in Biblical Prose Narrative*  

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v. 8

Let there be no strife between you and me, between my herdsmen and yours / for we are kinsmen. Is not the whole land before you? / Break up from me. / If you go north, I will go south / and if you go south, I will go north.”

This proposal opens with two balanced stretches, and closes with two parallel clauses in chiastic order, and

v. 9

The impressive rhetorical means that stand at the narrator’s disposal, form another aspect of the cultivated style, as they enrich the formal syntactic aspects. These qualities justify the use of the term “elevated style.”

Clearly, then, quoted discourse in narrative is far from uniform. On the contrary, in classical biblical narrative character speech stands out by the large variety of registers. In the following section an attempt will be made to sketch some of these registers.

5. The Cultivated Style in Character Discourse

In public life the distinction between the casual and the cultivated, elevated style is of the utmost importance. In Jotham’s parable, the trees of the wood use the casual style to address the candidates for kingship:

Judg. 9:8

Once the trees went to anoint a king over themselves. They said to the olive tree, “Reign over us.”

v. 10

Then the trees said to the fig tree, “You come, reign over us.”

But the reply of the magnates of the wood uses an elevated, formal style, e.g.,

v. 9

But the olive tree said: “Have I stopped yielding my rich oil, by which gods and men are honored, and should I go and wave above the trees?”

v. 13

But the vine said, “Have I stopped yielding my new wine, which gladdens gods and men, and should I go and wave above the trees?”

The style of these rebuttals is highly cultivated, as evidenced by the fixed pair

89. In Haugen’s terms (n. 37 above), public life is dominated by the language of status rather than by the language of intimacy.

In this parable, then, the elevated style accentuates the status of the important personages, as is often found in traditional societies.

On the other hand, a person enjoying high status may address a lowly person in the casual style, whereas he himself is addressed in the elevated register of respectful language. Thus Esau addresses Jacob in the plain style, e.g., “Who are these to you?” (Gen. 33:5); “What is this entire camp of yours that I have encountered?” (v. 8). Jacob, on the other hand, persuades his brother by the use of cultivated and respectful language, e.g.,

Gen. 33:10

v. 11

“No, I pray you; if you would do me this favor, accept from me this gift; for to see your face is like seeing the face of God, and you have received me favorably. Please accept my present which has been brought to you, for God has favored me and I have plenty.”

a. The register of authority

In biblical narrative, then, status and authority are related to various ways of using language. It all depends on the ranking of the persons speaking and being addressed:

(1) If persons who do not enjoy formal power are to manifest authority, they often use the formal, cultivated style, as in the cases of Manoah and his wife displaying parental authority, or the high-born trees refusing to serve as monarch. By the

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91. The fig’s reply (v. 11) contains the noun chain hbwfh ytbwnt taw yqtm ta.
93. The dialectic of respect and status in the multi-leveled Javanese language has been discussed by C. Geertz, The Religion of Java (London, 1960), 248–60, esp. 255–59. Javanese has a complicated hierarchy of language levels, ranking from the plain language of the household (ngoko inggil) to the most elevated language which is used to address the high ranking members of the ancient aristocracy (krama inggil). Yong-Jin Kim and D. Biber point to the morphosyntax of multiple levels of respectful language in Korean: “A Corpus-Based Analysis of Register Variation in Korean,” in Biber and Finegan, eds., Sociolinguistic Perspectives, 157–81, esp. 158, 176–78.
94. On diverse patterns of respectful language (polite address of persons with high status by persons of lower status) see G. Brin, “Polite Speech in the Bible,” Issues in the Bible and the Dead Sea Scrolls (Tel Aviv, 1994), 78–96 [Hebrew].
95. So also Esau’s discourse in vv. 9, 12, 15.
96. So also Jacob’s discourse in Gen. 33:13–15, but in vv. 5, 8 he uses clauses of less intricate structure.
same token, Naomi uses the cultivated style when addressing her daughters-in-law, in order to convince them to leave (Ruth 1:8–9).\textsuperscript{97}

(2) The dignity of the court requires the formal, and even elevated language. This is the style used by the royal servants, when addressing the king, even in the alarming news of Absalom’s mutiny:\textsuperscript{98}

\begin{verbatim}
2 Sam. 15:13
"The heart of the men of Israel is after Absalom."

v. 15
"Whatever our lord the king decides, see, your servants."
\end{verbatim}

In the Goliath tale, David’s answer to the question whose son he is, is well-formed and dignified: \textsuperscript{99} Thus the young shepherd boy already knows how to speak the language of the court, as already announced by Saul’s courtiers (16:18).

(3) Different rules obtain for the king’s speaking style. On formal occasions the king’s speech is cultivated, and even elevated, such as, for instance, when Saul accuses his servants of lack in loyalty: \textsuperscript{100}

\begin{verbatim}
1 Sam. 22:7–8:
"Listen, men of Benjamin! Will the son of Jesse give fields and vineyards to every one of you / and will he appoint all of you captains of thousands or captains of hundreds, that all of you have conspired against me / and no one informs me when my own son makes a pact with the son of Jesse; / no one is concerned for me and no one informs me when my own son has set my servant in ambush against me, as at this day?"
\end{verbatim}

The formal opening, “Listen, men of Benjamin,”\textsuperscript{101} is continued by two clauses of which the one contains three arguments (ם לכלכלת ית של מתי שלר ורומס) and two expanded noun chains (שם לשלר ורומס), and the second two arguments (לאלפ מות) and one expanded noun chain (שם לאלפ מות), to be followed, in v. 8, by a series of clauses in hypotaxis (ולכלכלת ית של מתי שלר) and coordination (ולכלכלת ית שלר) of the real content of the

\textsuperscript{97} See above, p. 78. So also Ruth 1:11–13; 3:1–4; also when Boaz speaks: 2:8–9; 3:10–13; 4:3–4, 9–10; and when Ruth takes the initiative: 1:16–17; 2:2.

\textsuperscript{98} This style is found in a large variety of passages, e.g., 1 Sam. 22:9, 14–15; 2 Sam. 15:15, and Nathan’s addresses Bathsheba’s and David (vv. 11–14; in vv. 24–27 one notes the double question). One also notes the way in which the Aramean officers address their king (2 Kgs. 6:12).

\textsuperscript{99} The subject יקנא is deleted in the wake of the preceding question, in accordance with the findings of Greenstein, “The Syntax of Saying ‘Yes’” (n. 46 above).

accusation is expressed in intricate clauses that are subordinated to these clauses (נייב מייב, התשובה של חכמים, החכמה של חכמים, וביתו בין בניו) (five arguments).

By the same token, David addresses the priests in cultivated, dignified language (2 Sam. 15:27–28):

“Do you see? You return to the safety of the city with your two sons, your own son Ahimaaz and Abiathar’s son Jonathan. Look, I shall linger in the steppes of the wilderness / until word comes from you / to inform me.”

A number of clauses in these instructions include two arguments or more (שם, ראה, הבנה, ההתחלה, המימונה, הברירה המירה, המערכה המערבת, המשרים, המשרים המ新的一ים,长时间的,长时间的,长时间的), complex hypotaxis (אם, בורה, בורה, בורה, בורה, בורה, בורה), and long noun chains (האם, בורה, בורה, בורה, בורה, בורה, בורה).

On the other hand, the king often addresses his subjects in short, simple, clauses:

2 Sam. 15:14

“Arise, and let us flee; for else none of us shall escape from Absalom / make speed to depart, lest he will haste and overtake us, and bring down evil upon us, and smite the city with the edge of the sword.”

In the present context the sequence of short clauses can be related to the excitation and the urgency of the moment. A similar style, however, is found in a large number of passages, e.g., when Saul asks David for his father’s name:

1 Sam. 17:58a: “Whose son are you, boy?”

Saul is often represented as using extremely simple language. In a number of cases this stylistic choice seems to suit the intimacy of the family circle and other close relationships, e.g., when addressing Abner:

v. 55a: Whose son is that boy, Abner? / רmyModal, אתה, אתה, אתה, אתה

The army-leader and nephew of the king is allowed to answer in the same vein:

v. 55b By your life, the king, if I do know.” / ויימונךémonך, אתה, אתה, אתה, אתה

But this style also has other aspects. Saul is extremely curt when giving orders: Saul’s

102. The formal style is found in David’s address of Hushai (2 Sam. 15:33–35), the priests (19:12–14), and the supporters of Solomon (1 Kgs. 1:29–30, 32–35), and to a lesser extent in 2 Sam. 15:19–20; 16:10–12; 19:30, 34, 39; 1 Kgs. 2:22–24, 26, 31–33, 36–37, 42–44). In the Elijah-Elisha cycles one notes Obadiah’s plea to the prophet (1 Kgs. 18:9–10, 12–13), Ahab’s explanations to Izebel (1 Kgs. 21:6), Naa-man’s address to Elisha (2 Kgs. 5:15, 17–18), and Gehazi’s discourse (ibid., vv. 20, 22). Also note Saul’s accusation of Ahimelech (1 Sam. 22:13).

103. So, e.g., the two short clauses of the cry ייהו והיהו (1 Sam. 28:12); see also 2 Kgs. 11:14 (יטשם, והיהו).

104. So also his threats to Ahimelech and Jonathan (1 Sam. 22:16; 14:44).

manner of speaking is hardly less brusque when he witnesses the reaction of the
people to the Ammonite threat: הממה הממה הממה הממה (1 Sam. 11:5, "What happened to the
people that they weep?"). This scene implicitly endows Saul with lordly authority,
even though he is not represented as king before the outcome of the battle (vv. 12–15).

In some cases one could argue that the king addresses his subjects in a con-
derscending style, such as in David’s question to Ziba: הממה הממה הממה הממה (v. 3: "And where is your master’s
son?"). It is quite possible that he is treating Ahimaaz roughly as the latter does not
know to bring news concerning Absalom: הממה הממה הממה הממה (v. 3: "Move, stand over there," 18:30).

At times the informal manner of speaking indicates that the king does not speak
from a position of authority, such as in the scene before the fateful battle with Ab-
salom, when David addresses his veterans in the informal style:

2 Sam. 18:2

“Gently, please, with my boy, with Absalom”

v. 4

v. 5

The informal tone strengthens the impression that David is uttering a wish rather
than issuing full-blown commands.

The connection between authority and speaking style is amply illustrated in the
tale of the wise woman from Tekoa. As the woman approaches the king, in the
guise of a widow in deep mourning, she establishes contact by her prostration
(2 Sam. 14:4), and initiates the proceedings by demanding the king’s intervention
(ל TECHNOLOGY). As befits the subject’s request from the king, her plea is couched
in formal language (so also 2 Kgs. 6:26). In contrast, the king’s condescending re-
sponse uses the most casual style possible: הממה הממה הממה הממה (v. 5: "What ails you?").

106. So also 2 Sam. 14:24; 1 Kgs. 20:12; 2 Kgs. 6:27–28.

107. The particle י lor functions as a dativus ethicus rather than as a dativus commodi. It hardly is strong
enough to justify the rendering "for my sake" (ASV, NJPS).

108. A similar effect is to be noted in Saul’s plea with the Ziphites (1 Sam. 23:21–23).

109. The high adroitness with which the wise woman from Tekoa succeeds in persuading the king is
described by J. P. Fokkelman, Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel, Volume I: King David
point of view of conversation analysis the performance of the Tekoite is a transaction initiated by the wise
woman, and concluded to her full satisfaction.

110. In this case the prostration serves to open the communication between the subject and her king,
as a “paralinguistic act,” that is an act which does not use language elements, but belongs to the commu-
nication framework, as shown by, e.g., W. Edmondson, Spoken Discourse: A Model for Analysis (London,

111. The importance of initiative, which puts restraints on the expectations for the continuation and to
a large extent establishes dominance, is discussed by M. Coulthard, An Introduction to Discourse Analy-
sis, 2nd ed. (London, 1985), 134–35; Edmondson, Spoken Discourse, 86–91; Longacre, The Grammar of
Discourse (n. 5 above), 127–29, 150.

112. This formula is used in a large number of passages that indicate its colloquial character: Gen.
21:17 (in a friendly way); Josh. 15:18; Judg. 1:14; 18:23, 24; 1 Kgs. 1:16; 2 Kgs. 6:28; Ps. 114:5. In a
number of cases the tone could hardly be described as friendly: Jon. 1:6; Ps. 50:16; Isa. 22:1, 16.
A similar style dominates her description of the agitation around the punishment of the fratricide, even though the use of the participles seems suitable to the legal register (v. 7a: ṣaḥaḥ ḫaḥ, ṣaḥaḥ ḫaḥ). A sharp change in style, however, occurs when he states her evaluation of the case:

14:7b

“Thus they would quench the last ember / remaining to me / leaving my husband without name or remnant upon the earth.”

The metaphor is accompanied by the use of a relative clause and a complicated infinitive clause with three arguments (пуиру ḫaḥ, ḫaḥ, ḫaḥ пуиру). Thus the cultivated style indicates the status of the wise woman.\(^{113}\)

But in spite of the woman’s mastery of language, David continues to treat her as a plain commoner (v. 8):

1 Sam. 25:35

“Go home safely. See, I have heeded your plea and respected your wish.”

However, the woman from Tekoa is not satisfied with this subterfuge. In order to obtain an explicit decision, she assumes full responsibility for the outcome, thus cleaning the royal house in advance from all liability for the clemency concerning the fratricide. However, the very mention of liability, raises the eventuality of divine retribution (2 Sam. 14:9: ṣeḥaḥ ḫaḥ; “My lord the king, may the guilt be on me”). Thus David can only express his readiness to intervene:

2 Sam. 14:10

“Anyone troubling you, have him brought to me, and he will not continue to harass you.”

The language level of this declaration is higher than that of David’s previous answers, and thus seems to imply a certain recognition of the status of the woman. The wise woman uses the concessions in order to press the king even more:

\(^{113}\) Bar-Efrat (Narrative Art, 66; n. 2 above) discusses the rhetorical skills of the Tekoite woman, and also indicates her polite address of the king, but does not note how she gradually starts to dominate the discourse, as she turns from petitioner to advisor.

\(^{114}\) In this case, as in many like it, even the modern English rendering fails to do justice to the Hebrew.

\(^{115}\) The Abigail tale endows David with royal authority and magnanimity, even though he is not yet king.
v. 11a
“Let the king be mindful of the Lord your God, that the blood avenger destroy not any more, and let my son not be killed.”

In this petition the second infinitive clause, לשלחת, is dependent on the first infinitive clause, מזרחיים [מזרחיים גאל הדמות]. The practical explanation is only given in the independent third clause: לא שמסרו את בנין. The king responds to this richness of style in a metaphor that is designed to convince the other party:

v. 11b
“As the Lord lives, not a hair of your son shall fall to the ground.”

This language level implies a full appraisal of the status of the wise woman. From this moment on she is in full control. She now formally requests consideration of her argument:

v. 12
“Let your servant speak a word to my lord the king”

As this request is granted tersely: דבר (v. 12b, “speak”), she proceeds to admonish the king in a highly elevated style by which her authority is highlighted even more. In the end it is the king who asks for permission to speak:

v. 18a
“In response the wise woman gives the king permission to speak, politely, but decisively:

v. 18b
“Do not withhold from me anything I ask you!”

And when the king asks her whether she was coached by Joab, she immediately confirms the assumption in rich and persuasive language. By highlighting Joab’s way of concealing the real purpose of her intervention, she indicates the authority behind her performance. In addition she acknowledges the infinite wisdom of the king who in the end realized what was at stake.116 These words of praise clinch the case: David is now virtually obliged to accept the implications of his decision. In the end, then, it is the king who has to obey the woman. Calling for Joab is the logical consequence of this dialogue.

b. Discourse and the legal register

The various genres of legal literature, such as law and obligation by contract, reflect specialized activities that are dominated by experts. They are characterized

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by a particular terminology and a traditional repertory of language patterns, such as, in casuistic law, “Now if a man sells his daughter as a servant,” Exod. 21:7 (“but if he designates her for his son,” v. 9), patterns in which biblical law reflects traditional constructions of Old Babylonian law, that are, in their turn, reproduced by Deuteronomistic law (e.g., Deut. 22:23, 25), and Holiness Code (Lev. 25:2, 25, 28). In public ceremonies of a legal character, then, the cultivated style seems obligatory. Thus Abimelech imposes an oath on Abraham (Gen. 21:23):119

This declaration contains two relative clauses ( hb htrg rva , ˚m[ ytyc[ rva dsjk ), and two clauses with two arguments (µyhlab yl h[bvh ht[w). The single clause with one argument contains a long noun chain (ydknlw ynynlw yl µa hnh), not unlike the long list of future parties to the Sefire treaty (Sf I. A, 5–6):120

With all Aram and with Muß and with his sons who will come after [him] and [with the kings of] all Upper-Aram and Lower Aram and with all who enter the royal palace.

Many episodes contain an admixture of casual and formal language. Abimelech’s rebuttal of Abraham’s argument (Gen. 21:26) contains one clauselet with pronominal reference (yl tdgh al hta µgw), whereas the conclusion sounds formal:121

The same style prevails in the negotiations between Abimelech and Isaac after Isaac’s first remand (Gen 26:28–29; on the casual style of Isaac’s first reaction in v. 27 see p. 62 above).122

117. Crystal and Davy, English Style, 193–217. Rendsburg (Diglossia [n. 1 above], 157) finds less colloquialisms in “legalese” than in narrative prose.


119. In Abimelech’s oath one notes the legal overtones of the condition (yl rqvt µa) (v. 23), similar to the Sefire treaties, according to J. A. Fitzmyer, The Aramaic Treaties of Sefire (Rome, 1967), 12–15: (ytlb µ[wyh ytlb yt[mv al ykna (and also I have not of it until today”). Apart from the two arguments, one also notes the use of the negation particle בְּלִתי.122
A mixture of this kind is often found in the Jacob tales. When Jacob starts negotiating the birthright with Esau, he mixes the casual language of the household with some formal features: ("First sell your birthright to me," 25:31). This clause contains three arguments, while the personal pronoun is placed in the end, in a highly emphatic position. The lexeme "birthright" situates this demand firmly in the legal register. The negotiations concerning Jacob's marriages are mostly couched in the casual style, such as his demand, which consists of three short clauses with one argument each:

Gen. 29:21

"Give me my wife, for my time is full, that I may cohabit with her."

Jacob asks for his wife as a household member, rather than demanding her as future son-in-law. The casual style is also used in Jacob's agitated complaint on the replacement of Rachel by Leah:

v. 25

"What have you done to me? Did not I serve with you for Rachel? Why have you deceived me?"

Laban's answer, however, is couched in formal language, and thus accentuates both the legal position and patriarchal authority:

v. 26

"It is not so done in our place, to give the younger before the older. Fulfill the week of this one, and we will give you the other also for the service which you shall serve with me yet seven other years."

The formal character of this statement is most obvious in the long relative clause at the end of the decision (v. 27). One also notes the embedded infinitive clause, the use of three arguments, and the legal register, then, has an important role to fulfill in classical Hebrew narrative.

c. The Language of Religious Discourse

Since discourse of a religious character, e.g., prayer, hymnody, and prophetic vision, is ceremonial by its very nature, its preferred style is the elevated one. In

or administrative contexts, e.g., Joseph's decree (Gen. 43:3, 5), official petitions (Gen. 47:18; Num. 11:6); dream interpretation (Judg. 7:14), and also Exod. 20:20; 22:19; Num. 32:12.

123. The legal aspects of the negotiations between Jacob and Laban (Gen. 31:26–30, 31–32, 36–44) have been highlighted by C. Westermann, _Genesis 12–36: A Commentary_, trans. J. J. Scullion (Minneapolis, 1985), 489–95; C. Mabee, "Jacob and Laban: The Structure of Judicial Proceedings (Genesis xxxi 25–42)," _VT_ 30 (1980), 192–207. These negotiations are opened by statements in the casual style (31:26–27), but in the sequel the style is more intricate (e.g., vv. 29–30), notwithstanding sporadic elements in the verbal style (e.g., v. 40). Rachel addresses her father in respectful language (v. 35).

124. For this exceptional construction one may compare Gen. 34:16; Deut. 12:1; Ps. 18:48; 28:4; Prov. 23:26; Cant. 8:1.

bilingual communities this tendency is extremely clear-cut, as shown by, e.g., the use of Latin in medieval Christianity and the Roman Catholic church, the use of Hebrew in traditional Jewish communities where the vernacular is Yiddish, Arabic, or Ladino, and the use of French in the religious services of the Creolic-speaking Protestant communities of Haiti. That the situation in the ancient Near East was no different, is indicated by the use in Babylonia and Assyria of the hymnal-epic dialect and Sumerian for prayer and royal inscriptions, when Sumerian was no longer in use as a spoken language, as well as by the well-known archaisms of hymnic and prophetic poetry in the Hebrew Bible.

Small wonder, then, that in biblical narrative prayer and prophetic utterances are for the most part couched in cultivated, elevated language, though not necessarily in poetic parallelism. Samuel’s prophetic indictment of Saul opens with a number of clauses in the casual style of prose narrative, e.g.,

1 Sam. 15:16
“Stop! Let me tell you what the Lord said to me this night!”

The confrontation of prophet and king ends with two indictments, of which the second is entirely in the poetic style:

1 Sam. 15:22
“Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices / as much as in obedience to the Lord’s command? Surely, obedience is better than sacrifice / compliance than the fat of rams. For rebellion is like the sin of divination / defiance, like the iniquity of teraphim. Because you rejected the Lord’s command, He has rejected you as king.”

These verses stand out by their intricate syntactic structure (e.g., the use of the infinitive clause as subject in the main clause in v. 22, and the inversion of subject and predicate in v. 23a), as well as by their parallelism (e.g., in v. 23a, as comma and balances as haqatsam hem geyim).129


129. Note also, e.g., 1 Sam. 10:1–2, 7–8; 15:28–29; Num. 23:18–19.
Other narrators also prefer the poetic style for the prophetic utterances in their tales, e.g., Zedekiah’s prophecy before the battle over Ramoth Gilead, which uses two arguments and the infinitive clause:130

1 Kgs. 22:11
כַּעֲלָה תְּכָה אֲנִי דֶּרֶךְ כָּלְהָה
“With these you shall gore the Arameans until their destruction.”

One also notes, e.g., the structure of Elijah’s proclamation of the coming drought:131

1 Kgs. 17:1
וַיְהִי אֲלֹהִים יִשְׂרָאֵל / אֵשׁ סְמָרֶת לְפִנֵי
ם היהshown אֲלֹהִים טַלְתָּה / טַלְתָּה לְפִי
“As true as the Lord lives, the God of Israel whom I serve, there will be no dew nor rain these years, except at my bidding.”

So also his declaration to the widow from Sarepta:

v. 14
דֵּרֶךְ הָכֹסֶה אל כָּלְהָה / עָצָהָה יַשָּׁנָה אל חֵתָר
דֵּרֶךְ הָכֹסֶה לְפִי אֱמֶת
“The jar of flour shall not give out and the jug of oil shall not fail until the day that the Lord sends rain upon the ground.”

The first two clauses balance one another exactly: both of them open with a subject in the construct state, followed by the predicate. The third colon consists of temporal modifier that includes an embedded infinitive clause with three arguments. This proclamation, then, instances the elevated style of prophetic discourse in narrative.132

Elevated diction is not restricted to prophetic utterances, however. The widow acknowledges Elijah’s truthfulness in the same cultivated style:

v. 24
עָתָה הוּדָעְת / כִּי יַהֲדוֹת אָדָם / וּכְבָר הַבָּצֶר אָמְתָּה
“Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the Lord is truly in your mouth.”

The inference is warranted, then, that the use of the cultivated style is not only related to the prophetic style of speech, but to the elevated character of religious discourse.

Indeed, we encounter this style in other types of context as well. Hannah’s prayer consists for the most part of clauses with two arguments (1 Sam. 1:11):

וַיְאָבֵא אֶל אֶרֶם הָעַרַת בֵּן אַמְתָּךְ / וַךְ רָכְרֵי / וַתִּשְּׁחַת אַתָּךְ
וַתָּתֵת אֲלֹהֵךְ וְרֹז עַשֶּׂשׁ / וַתִּשְּׁחַת אֲלֹהֵךְ כִּי מִי זִהְיָה / וַתָּתֵת אֲלֵיהּ עֶרֶב לַעַשָּׂר
“Lord of Hosts, if You will look upon the suffering of Your maidservant and will remember me and not forget Your maidservant, and if You will grant Your maidservant a male child, I will dedicate him to the Lord for all the days of his life; and no razor shall ever touch his head.”

130. A similar expression is found in Elisha’s address of Joash (2 Kgs. 13:19), on which see above, pp. 80–81.

131. The pair כֶּלֶת-לָלָת represents the poetic style, as evidenced by Deut. 32:2; 2 Sam. 1:21; Job 38:28. In addition one notes the play with this pair in Job 29:19 (כֶּלֶח-לָלָת) and 29:23 (כֶּלֶח-לָלָת).

132. See Andersen, “What Biblical Scholars Might Learn” (see n. 86 above), 59; Simon, Reading Prophetic Narrative, 205.
In this prayer four clauses out of six contain two arguments, and four expanded noun chains, giving it a decidedly formal character. The priest’s rebuke in the same pericope (v. 14) is closer to the verbal style:

“How long will you be drunken? Keep the wine far from you.”

However, this rebuke also stands out by its prosodic regularity. It consists of two balanced clauses, that contain the poetic pair שָרְרָה / שֶׁרֶר, and the antithesis of יְלָדָה / יְלָדָה אֲנָפִי. Parallelism also exists in Hannah’s prayer, though in a less conspicuous form. The only two simple clauses (v. 14). Hannah’s answer to the priest contains two balanced junctions (v. 15; מֶרֶב שִׁיאֵה תֵנֵפֶּפ, v. 16). Finally, the priest’s blessing stands out by its elevated style:

v. 17

“Go in peace and may the God of Israel grant you the request that you have requested of Him.”

On the formal level one notes the use of two arguments in the main clause, the relative clause, and the paronomasia of יְלָדָה / יְלָדָה אֲנָפִי and שָלָח / שָלָח. The construction יְלָדָה / יְלָדָה אֲנָפִי is balanced by (a) the repetition of the root יָלַד in the phrase יִלְּדַה / יִלְּדַה אֲנָפִי (noun/verb interchange); and (b) the contrast between the wish for the divine favor conveyed in the main clause (יָלַד / יָלַד אֲנָפִי) and the request from God that is expressed by the relative clause (אֲנָפִי / יְלָדָה שָלָח).

Words spoken by the deity also represent the register of religion, and thus are often couched in the elevated style. This tendency may be illustrated by the proclamations of Abram’s destination:

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133. Hannah’s answer to Eli’s rebuke (vv. 15–16) opens with three simple clauses, but its continuation contains three clauses with two arguments each. Four clauses contain an expanded noun chain.

134. This pair occurs in poetry with the noun יָלַד / יָלַד אֲנָפִי: Isa. 24:9; 28:7; 29:9; 56:12; Misc. 2:11; Prov. 20:1; 31:4; 6; and with the verbal root יָלַד / יָלַד: Jer. 51:7; Cant. 5:1; and in prose: Gen. 9:21. In prose the noun pair is found in Lev. 10:9; Num. 6:3; Deut. 14:26; 29:5; Judg. 13:4, 7, 14. On the parallelism of יָלַד / יָלַד and יָלַד / יָלַד אֲנָפִי in Ugaritic epic poetry see Avishur, Stilistische Studien (n. 90 above), 441, n. 1.

135. These cola also represent an action-result sequence, a construction that has been recognized as parallelism by S. A. Geller, Parallelism in Early Biblical Poetry (Missoula, Montana, 1979), 31–37.


137. This compound epithet is found in a number of verses without preceding tetragrammaton: (a) in poetic context: 2 Sam. 23:3; Isa. 29:23; 45:15; Ezek. 8:4; 9:3; 10:20; 11:22; (b) in prose: Exod. 24:10; 1 Kgs. 8:26; and in the phrase יָלַד / יָלַד אֲנָפִי: 1 Sam. 5:7, 8, 10; 11; 6:3, 5; (c) in (post-)exilic prose: Ezek. 43:2; Ezra 3:2; 9:4; 1 Chr. 4:10; 5:26; 2 Chr. 29:7; (d) in conjunction with אֲנָפִי: Gen. 33:20; Ps. 68:9.

138. This construction is found twice in Gen. 26:18.
This proclamation stands out by the balanced noun chain מָארָ֖זוּ מָמָלְדוּתָּךְ מְבִיכָֽהּ אַלָּא הָאָרְחָא אָרָאָךְ (v. 1), by the two participles that serve as object to the two short cola in the last verse (v. 3), and by the long noun chain in the last clause נְבוֹרֶךְ בְּכִלֶּמֶּשָׁהּ הָאָרְחָא, that also contains two arguments. This colon carries all the more weight, as Abram’s blessing by all the families of the earth balances his departure from his family and his country in the opening clause.

The cultivated style also stands out in the divine announcement to Samuel of Saul’s kingship:

The first of these divine proclamations to the prophet consists of a series complex clauses that contain two or three arguments. Only one clause is less intricate יָמְלַע אֲלֵךְ אוֹלְכַּא אֲלֵךְ נָעַמָּן (v. 17), but here the LXX could reflect a reading with a construct state (e.g., יָמְלַע בְּכִלֶּמֶּשָׁה). The cultivated style is also evidenced by other declarations of designation (e.g., Gen. 13:14–17; 21:12–13; 22:2, 12, 16–19; 25:23–24; 26:2–5; 28:13–15; 32:29;139 46:2–4,140

These data, however, do not permit the generalized thesis that all divine speech is cultivated or formal. The tale of Abraham and the three wayfarers contains, apart from two intricate utterances (the promise concerning Sarah and the comment on her laughter, Gen. 18:9, 13–14) a number of short clauses, that seem entirely casual: “Do as you have spoken,” v. 5); “Where is your wife, Sarah?” v. 9).141 This is not only a matter of ironic concealment of the divine speaker. In the Gideon tale a number of divine instructions represent the formal style (Judg. 7:2–3, 4, 5), but the narrative also includes a military instruction in casual language:

139. The cultivated style in the angelic announcement of the change of Jacob’s name (Gen. 32:28) stands out all the more against the background of the obvious verbal style of the tale itself.
140. In Gen. 17:1 the opening of the divine promise consists of three short clauses (1 arg. each), but the diction of the next verses is more intricate (v. 2), and often even extremely formal (vv. 4–8, 15–16, 19–21). Signs of the elevated style are also found in, e.g., Gen. 3:11, 14–19, 22; 4:7, 11–12, as against the more casual style in Gen. 3:9, 13; 4:9, 10, 15.
141. In 18:17–21, 23–33 the style of spoken discourse is entirely formal.
This way of speaking suits the register of the military rather than that of religion. Of course, in the present context this style is only to be expected, unlike the previous instructions, that are permeated by religious notions. However, less formal speech is also found in other divine instructions, e.g., the orders to Moses, Aaron and Miriam: זאת תשחתם אל האל מעון (Num. 12:4; “Come out, you three, to the Tent of Meeting.”)

Thus, we do not perceive any intrinsic difference in language use between divine and human discourse. In general, however, divine speech belongs to the register of religion, and represents its language use. Divine discourse, that does not belong to this register, does not necessarily use the cultivated style, and may even be as casual as any human quoted speech.

6. The Style of Character Speech and the Narrator’s Art

These data are indicative of the great stylistic variety of character speech in those narratives that are dominated by the rhythmic-verbal style. The reader must be attentive to the different nuances in order to perceive the tone of speaking, the relation to the social context and setting, and thus also the shades of meaning, and the relation to the character’s inner life. It appears that this great variety in style is related to the nature of oral narrative and the special gifts and techniques developed by the story-tellers over the generations. In oral narrative quoted discourse is an essential element. As Richard Dorson has put it:

One point that had escaped me until they were placed on the dissection table is their plentiful use of dialogue. The tale becomes fresher, livelier, and clearer when natural conversation is introduced.

Anthropologists who study these phenomena in their proper setting often highlight the theatrical talents of the oral narrator, who turns a character’s discourse into an actor’s performance, and the narrative, at least partly, into a play on stage.

More than that, in Bakhtin’s view, the presence of various different speaking voices warrants “speech diversity and language stratification,” and thereby con-

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142. And similarly Num. 12:14. But the declaration concerning Moses’ prophetic position instances the elevated style (12:6–8), including parallelism (6ḥb). 143. In this respect, our data do not support Radday’s perception of a general difference between divine discourse, on the one hand, and character speech and the narrator’s voice, on the other; see Radday-Shore, Genesis (n. 1 above), 212–14; Rabin, “Linguistic Aspects” (n. 8 above), 221. 144. Frank Andersen was kind enough to inform me that in an unpublished paper he notes that “God talks to humans more casually, humans to God more formally.” In his view the point is that the deity addresses human beings in human language, as asserted by the Talmudic maxim רברא הוהי llevא רבי ארי (TB Makkoth 12a; Qiddushin 17b). 145. R. M. Dorson, “Oral Styles of American Folk Narrators” (n. 19 above), 43, 46–51. For additional references see n. 19 above. 146. Finnegan, Oral Literature in Africa (n. 19 above), 373–77; İlhan Başgöz, “The Tale-Singer and his Audience,” in D. Ben-Amos & K. R. Goldstein, eds., Folklore: Performance and Communication (The Hague-Paris, 1975), 142–203. 147. Bakhtin, “Discourse in the Novel,” 315.
tributes to the embedding of the narrative in a broad social framework that supports “a dialogue of languages.”\textsuperscript{148} Thus the diversity of speech ultimately serves to emulate the variety of social life and thought.

\textsuperscript{148} Ibid., 314.
Is it prose fiction? He boldly asserts that Bible does not characterize its narrative as history and that treating it as such will rule out the ability to use the tools of literary analysis. He basically argues that since the OT shows literary artistry and since the writers would not have had any documentation for the stories they recorded, then it must not be history. In chapter four, Alter discusses the relationship between biblical narrative and dialogue. He shows that dialogue is the most important segment for communication because narrative is generally only a bridge between blocks of dialogue (though narrative sometimes gives helpful omniscient information). Character traits, thought, plot, etc. are all almost always rendered as direct speech, which is something unique to Hebrew narrative in its time. Biblical Narrative Analysis from the New Criticism to the New Narratology, Biblical Narrative and the Birth of Prose Literature. New Testament Narrative and Greco-Roman Literature. Biblical Historiography as Traditional History. This chapter discusses the significance of literary milieu for the analysis and interpretation of the narratives of the Hebrew Bible, in particular, the pre-exilic narratives found in Genesis-Kings (less Ruth). Appealing to literary milieu entails a type of literary-comparative method. There are, however, not one but two forms of literary comparison: historicist comparison, based on chronological and geographical contiguity, and formalist comparison, based on formal similarity.