

The Qatal//Yiqtol (Yiqtol//Qatal) Verbal Sequence in Couplets  
in the Hebrew Psalter with Special Reference to Ugaritic Poetry:  
A Case Study in Systemic Functional Grammar

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ABSTRACT

The object of this study is represented by the qatal//yiqtol (yiqtol//qatal) verbal sequence, previously known as 'tense shifting', as found in couplets of the Hebrew Psalter. One hundred and two couplets of this sort were found. This study attempts to offer an innovatory explanation for such an irregular use of verbal forms in the Hebrew Psalter by means of the M.A.K. Halliday's Systemic Theory.

The data displays evidence both of similarity and of dissimilarity between the two verse-lines of the couplets. Arguably, similarity is achieved at multiple levels. Both verse-lines seem to prefer a similar structure in terms of thematic markedness, mood, Process type, and clause type.

It is argued that dissimilarity occurs at various levels. At the thematic level, a qatal line with a regular Theme is more likely to trigger a Marked Theme in the yiqtol parallel line than vice versa, regardless of which line it occurs in the couplet.

At the interpersonal level, an explicit Subject in the yiqtol line is most likely to be marked. A Marked Theme with a yiqtol in line A is more likely to trigger an explicit Subject functioning as Marked Theme in line B than vice versa.

At the experiential level, the functional structure of these couplets occasionally displays verse-lines with a middle clause as pairs for lines realized by operative clauses, yiqtol verbs being more likely to accompany the former.

In the couplets investigated from Ugaritic poetry, yiqtol verbal forms promote stability and familiarity, whereas qatal verbal forms are closely related to marked Themes, Subject change, Process type variation, and irregular clause complex structure.