TRANSLATING BIBLICAL WORDS:  
A CASE STUDY OF THE HEBREW WORD,  

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Abstract

Two recent studies (Foster 2008; Van Steenbergen 2006) have acknowledged that the translation of biblical key terms such as  

is an area that needs urgent attention. Many lexicons determine the meaning of a word by describing its etymology, hardly paying attention to the socio-cultural context within which it functions. Because lexicons are often of limited value for Bible interpretation and translation, this article will demonstrate the limitations of existing biblical Hebrew dictionaries with reference to the meaning of  

In addition, this article will propose a possible solution or approach for translating the word  

Key Words: Cognitive Frames, Word Meaning, Exegesis, Bible Translation

Introduction

It has been acknowledged in two recent studies (cf. Foster 2008 and Van Steenbergen 2006) that the translation of key biblical terms such as  
is an area that needs urgent attention. Many lexicons determine the meaning of a word by describing its etymology, hardly paying attention to the linguistic and socio-cultural context. According to Van Steenbergen (2006:2), lexicons are often of limited value for Bible interpretation and translation.2

In cross-cultural semantics, however, it is emphasized that the meaning of a word can only be determined by taking into consideration the linguistic and socio-cultural contexts within which it functions. In this article, therefore, I shall firstly indicate problems with the dictionary view of word meaning (referring particularly to  

). Thereafter, I suggest a possible solution or approach for translating the word  

Problems with the Dictionary View of Word Meaning:

A Case Study of the Hebrew Word,  

I have selected or identified the five commonly used Hebrew-English lexicons, namely  

(referred to as KB);  

(referred to as KB);  

(referred to as KB);  

(referred to as KB).

Footnotes:
1  

has been used in biblical Hebrew throughout the development of the Old Testament. It appears in most books of the Old Testament (cf. Clark 1993:15).
2  

As Van Steenbergen (2006:2) observes, the on-going project of the United Bible Societies (UBS) to create a biblical Hebrew lexicon based on semantic domains, is a commendable attempt at drawing more attention to relevant issues in lexicography.
and Briggs (referred to as BDB); the *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* by Clines (referred to as DCH); the *Dictionary of Biblical Language with Semantic Domains: Hebrew (Old Testament)* (referred to as Swanson) and the *Semantic Dictionary of Biblical Hebrew* (referred to as SDBH).

דָּשַׁר in BDB and KB

When we consider the entries made under דָּשַׁר in BDB (1907) and KB (1999), it becomes clear that these two lexicons approached the entry in a very similar way. A comparative study of the two shows only minor differences. The first meaning of the noun דָּשַׁר described in BDB is *goodness, kindness*, and in KB, it is *loyalty*. In BDB, this main meaning is subdivided into the kindness of man, the kindness of God, and faithfulness (between individuals – only in KB). Subsequently, to express the relational context of ‘God to people’, the noun is translated as *faithfulness, goodness and, graciousness*. The verb for דָּשַׁר is entered in both BDB and KB, and is generally translated as *to seek or take refuge*.

In his critical review of BDB (1907) and KB (1999), Van der Merwe (2004:121) discusses the lack of use of semantic models\(^3\) in these lexicons. One of the major reasons for this state of affairs is the fact that semantics had not yet developed as an independent discipline when BDB and KB\(^4\) were compiled. This observation agrees with Lübbe (1990:1), who claims that on the basis of surveys of the development of Hebrew lexicography, from the first known Hebrew dictionary of Saadia Gaon to the most recent revisions of Koehler-Baumgartner, “little has changed regarding the methods of … determining and reflecting meaning … original meanings are assigned on the strength of etymological evidence. From the original meanings additional meanings are extrapolated.” This can be seen in BDB and KB’s treatment of דָּשַׁר where the primary meanings are given first, and the secondary meanings are then derived from this meaning.

Both BDB and KB treat syntactic information in a less rigorous way by today’s standards. For example, in their entries of דָּשַׁר, KB only once refers to its combination with the particle כּ, while BDB makes two references to prepositions or the comparative particle, namely the combination of דָּשַׁר with בּ and כּ. Although both of the lexicons make reference to these prepositions, they do not explain their relevance for the translation of דָּשַׁר. This does not help to clarify the different meanings of דָּשַׁר. As Van der Merwe (2004:123) correctly notes, BDB and KB often do not make clear “whether the syntactic information provided has any semantic significance or not. This reflects the absence of any clear distinction between syntax and semantics that is typical of most so-called traditional approaches to language description.” Very little attention (if any at all) is given to the influence of syntactic combinations and sociological dimensions regarding the meaning of דָּשַׁר.

דָּשַׁר in DCH

The DCH (1993) by Clines claims to focus mainly on the syntagmatic relationships between words. In the introduction, Clines (1993:14) explains this endeavour as follows:

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\(^3\) Van der Merwe (2004:121) defines a semantic model as “an explicit theoretically well-justified model for analysing and understanding the meaning of linguistic expression”.

\(^4\) Although the KB was revised in 1999, the original compilation was done in the early part of the last century.
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... The Dictionary ... has a theoretical base in modern linguistics. This theoretical base comes to expression primarily in the overriding concern in this dictionary for the use of words in the language. The focus here, then, is not so much on meanings, or the translation of equivalents, of individual words as on the patterns and combinations in which words are used.

Although Clines’ description of his approach seems very promising, the DCH provides a mere listing of the usages of words without utilising any real semantic model. Imbayarwo (2008) also observes that, although Clines claims to be ‘sure’ of the user’s needs, he does not help the user with the most important data, i.e. the meaning of a particular word. Thus, Imbayarwo (2008:195) concludes that Clines “has fallen into exactly this trap by merely recording data”.

Considering the entry made on Ḥesed in DCH (1993), it is clear that the same pattern as BDB and KB is followed. The translation equivalents are given as loyalty, faithfulness, kindness, love, mercy, and (deeds of) kindness. However, the main difference in these entries is that DCH exhaustively lists the entire corpus of contexts (subjects, objects, and the nominal sentences) in which Ḥesed appears. The question, though, is whether this exhaustive listing really affords us much insight into the meaning and translation of the word. What is needed is a distinction between the semantic features, which are shared and those that are distinct in determining the meaning of Ḥesed in particular contexts.

Swanson’s (1997) dictionary has been associated with the semantic domain approach of Louw and Nida. In the preface, Swanson (1997) explains the purpose of this connection as follows:

... the connections of the Louw and Nida domains are not completely dissimilar ... there is at least an analogical connection between the domains of meaning in the Greek New Testament and Hebrew/Aramaic culture. Many of these domains could relate to nearly any culture of the world, which is why Louw & Nida were designated by its editors as a lexicon for translators (Swanson 1997:n.p. Emphasis as in the original).

Swanson’s observation is important, particularly with regard to the semantic study of words with a shift in meaning. However, it is unfortunate that the semantic framework applied in this dictionary imposes a ‘foreign’ set of domains on the Hebrew language. This is the result of Swanson’s reference to other dictionaries (such as Strong’s lexicon and Louw & Nida) in his attempt to describe the semantic value of Ḥesed. Apart from this reference, Swanson also refers to the Hebrew word Ḥemed based on his presupposition that the meaning of words should be determined in their contexts of usage. Although this is an important

5 Cf. Van der Merwe (2004:121, 124-125). In his book review of DCH, Eng (2000:725) comments that, “Some reviewers have remarked that using DCH is like using a mere listing of syntagmatic data with little analysis and interpretation ... This is not strictly true ... Still, what has frustrated reviewers is the lack of semantic elaboration or discussion within each lexical entry as to how the lexicographers themselves arrived at their determinations ... In addition, DCH still relies, for the most part, on providing ‘glosses’ (word-for-word translation equivalents) rather than real definitions in their lexical entries allowing for even greater semantic vagueness and ambiguity ... It is a bit of a disappointment therefore that after all the work has been done no further lexical semantic description and delineation is provided”.

6 It should be pointed out that Louw and Nida deal with the Greek New Testament, not the Hebrew Bible – it is Swanson who applies Louw and Nida to Hebrew lexicography.

7 In his recent review, De Blois (2006a:4) justifiably stresses that Louw and Nida’s semantic framework lacks inner coherence, i.e. it does not reflect the cognitive reality of the biblical Hebrew language.
point to be considered in describing the meaning of a word in an effective way. Swanson’s suggestion makes it difficult to understand the semantic relationships between these two words ( Chesed and Emeth), as illustrated below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>שֶׁשֶּׁד</th>
<th>אֱמֶת</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>2876</strong></td>
<td><strong>622</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>נְשָׁנוֹת</td>
<td>נְשָׁנוֹת</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(chesed); n.masc.; ≡ Str 2617; TWOT 698a</td>
<td>(emet); n.fem.; ≡ Str 571; TWOT 116k</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. LN 25.33-25.58 <em>loyal love</em>, unfailing kindness, devotion, i.e. a love or affection that is steadfast based on a prior relationship (Ex 34:6,7); 2. LN 79.9-79.17 <em>glory</em>, i.e. lovely appearance (Isa 40:6); 3. LN 88.66-88.74 <em>favour</em>, i.e. the giving benefits (Est 2:9), note: for another interp in Ps 52:3 (EB 1), see 2875.</td>
<td>1. LN 31.82.31.101 <em>faithfulness</em>, reliability, trustworthiness, i.e. a state or condition of being dependable and loyal to a person or standard (Gen 24:27); 2. LN 72.1-72.11 <em>true</em>, certain, sure, i.e. that which conforms to reality, and is so certain not to be false (Dt 13:15), see also domain LN 70; 3. LN 88.39-88.45 <em>honesty</em>, integrity, i.e. be in a state or condition of telling the truth, and living according to a moral standard (Ne 7:2); 4. LN 33.35-33.68 <em>unit</em>; אֱמֶת (morality) a reliable book, formally, Book of Truth, i.e. a writing in a heavenly scroll giving details of future things, with a focus on both certainty and reliability (Da 10:21+); 5. LN 67.78-67.117 <em>lasting</em>, enduring, i.e. a duration of time, without reference to other points of time (Jer 14:13).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**EXCERPTS 1 AND 2 (Swanson 1997:n.p)**

These two words are very closely related in their respective semantic fields. In Swanson’s entries above, however, nothing of this similarity is visible because שֶׁשֶּׁד has been assigned to “Attitudes” and “Emotions” (see LN 25), whereas אֱמֶת is found under “Hold a View”, “Believe”, and “Trust” (see LN 31).

The translation equivalents (indicated in bold below) are in some instances followed by another entry that suggests a different translation equivalent, for example, אֱמֶת: *loyal love, unfailing kindness, devotion*, and the word שֶׁשֶּׁד: *faithfulness, reliability, trustworthiness*. Since Swanson’s dictionary does not indicate the relationship between שֶׁשֶּׁד and אֱמֶת, a comprehensive semantic framework is needed to establish the inner semantic relation between these terms.

**שֶׁשֶּׁד in SDBH**

The SDBH is currently being developed under the direction of Dr Reinier de Blois. This dictionary, which deviates from traditional BH dictionaries, presents the user (primarily intended for Bible translators) with an improved lexicon with reference to the semantic model being used, as well as to the structural layout or presentation of the data. The structural layout, which is organized according to semantic domains, allows the user rapid access to data and easy retrieval of information (Imbayarwo 2008:196). Thus, De Blois’s

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8 The words שֶׁשֶּׁד and אֱמֶת occur in close proximity in narrative, poetic and prophetic texts (cf. e.g. Gen 24:27; 47:29; Exod. 34:6; Josh. 2:14; 2 Sam. 2:6; Mic. 7:20; Psa. 26:3; 40:11; 57:4,11; 61:8; 85:11; 86:15; 89:15; 108:4; 117:2; 138:2; Prov. 14:22; 16:6; 20:28). According to Glueck (1967:55), God’s שֶׁשֶּׁד is paired with אֱמֶת in a “hendiadys indicating its element of faithfulness or loyalty”.

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The dictionary differs from BDB, KB, DCH, and Swanson (including other existing BH dictionaries) in that it is a “semantic domain” dictionary.

Concerning the entries on dsj, SDBH provides the lexical meaning and distinguishes this from its contextual meanings. In other words, the different usages of dsj in different contexts are given (as presented below):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Noun, m</th>
<th>dsj</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(a) **Faithful (State/Process)** // &#39;רִית, אֱמֶת

= attitude of commitment towards fulfilling one’s obligations; these may be obligations defined within the context of a covenant or agreement, or moral obligations to show kindness to someone who acted in a similar fashion towards you before; an attitude that is meaningless if not translated in actions — loyalty, kindness, love, devotion (EXO.15:13; 34:6; NUM.14:18,19; RUT.2:20; 3:10; ISA.20:15; 2SA.15:20; 16:17; 1KI.20:31; 1CH.16:34,41; 2CH.5:13; 7:3,6; 20:21; ISA.40:6 ...)

Faithfulness

— loyalty, kindness (between individuals) (PSA.85:11; PRO.3:3; 11:17; 14:22; 16:6; 19:22; 20:6,28,28, 21:21; 31:26; DAN.1:9; HOS.4:1; 12:7; MiC.6:8; ZEC.7:9 ...)

Affection; Marriage; Individual > God // אַהֲבָה — devotion (of people towards God, as a wife towards her husband) (JER.2:2)

God // אֱמֶת — loyalty, love, devotion (towards humans and God) (PSA.85:11; PRO.3:3; ISA.40:6; HOS.6:4; 10:12)

God אַנְשֵׁי חֶסֶד // צְדִיק — men of loyalty > devout, pious people (ISA.57:1)

God // צֶדֶק — love, devotion (of God towards his people) (EXO.15:13; 34:6; NUM.14:18,19; RUT.2:20; 2SA.15:20; 1CH.16:34,41; 2CH.5:13; 7:3,6; 20:21; EZR.3:11; NEH.9:17,17; 13:22 ...)

God ; Idolatry — (those who worship idols forfeit God’s) loyalty (JON.2:9)

King // כֹּל הָאֱלֹהִים, אֱמוּנָה — loyalty, kindness (between people in authority and their subjects) (1KI.20:31; PSA.101:1; ISA.16:5)

Kinship — loyalty, kindness (between relatives) (RUT.3:10)

Politics — loyalty, kindness (between nations) (1KI.20:31)

Punishment — (a rebuke can be seen as) an act of kindness (PSA.141:5)

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9 The term semantic domain has always been closely linked to componential analysis. However, the semantic model of SDBH departs from the theoretical foundation underlying componential analysis, and is rather based on insights from cognitive semantics, a more recent theoretical model for the semantic analysis of Biblical Hebrew.
(b) **Faithful (Action) verb, qal** מָשֵׁךְ, נְטָה, עָשָׂה, נַעֲרָה, כְּדָהָ נַעֲרָה, כְּדָהָ מַעְלָה // שְׁקֵר = to act in accordance with the attitude described under [a] – to act with
loyalty, faithfulness, kindness, devotion, love (GEN.19:19; 20:13; 21:23;
24:12,14,27,49; 39:21; 40:14; 47:29; EXO.20:6; 34:7; DEU.5:10; 7:9,12;
JOS.2:12 ...)

**Faithfulness**

**Affection** // בְּרִית – to show one’s loyalty (of friends to one another
or to one’s friend’s descendants) (ISA.20:8,14; 2SA.9:1,7;
PSA.109:16)

Affection; God מָשֵׁךְ, נְטָה, עָשָׂה – to show God’s faithfulness (to
one’s friend’s descendants) (2SA.9:3) (HOS.2:21)

God מָשֵׁךְ, נְטָה, עָשָׂה – to show one’s loyalty (said of
God) (GEN.19:19; 24:12,14; EXO.20:6; DEU.5:10; RUT.1:8;
2SA.2:6; 22:51; 1KL.3:6; 2CH.1:8; JOB.10:12; PSA.18:51;
1ER.9:23; 32:18)

God מָשֵׁךְ – to show (one’s) faithfulness (said of God)
(GEN.39:21; EZR.7:28; 9:9)

God מָשֵׁךְ – to remain faithful (said of God) (EXO.34:7)

God מָשֵׁךְ – to show (one’s) faithfulness (said of
God) (MIC.7:20)

God מָשֵׁךְ – to withdraw (one’s) faithfulness from (someone;
said of God) (2SA.7:15; 1CH.17:13; PSA.66:20)

God מָשֵׁךְ – to withdraw (one’s) faithfulness (said of God)
(GEN.24:27)

God מָשֵׁךְ – to show (one’s) faithfulness (said of God)
(PSA.31:22)

God מָשֵׁךְ, נְטָה – to show one’s faithfulness (of a king or leader or
his descendants) (JDG.8:35; 2SA.2:5; 3:8; 22:51; 1KL.3:6; 2CH.1:8;
PSA.18:51)

King מָשֵׁךְ – to show one’s loyalty (to a king or leader or
his descendants) (JDG.8:35; 2SA.2:5; 3:8; 22:51; 1KL.3:6; 2CH.1:8;
PSA.18:51)

Kinship מָשֵׁךְ – to show one’s loyalty (between relatives)
(GEN.24:49; 47:29)

Marriage מָשֵׁךְ – to show one’s loyalty (of a wife towards her husband)
(GEN.20:13)

Politics מָשֵׁךְ – to show one’s loyalty (between nations)
(GEN.21:23; ISA.15:6; 2SA.10:2,2; 1CH.19:2,2)

Punishment מָשֵׁךְ – to show kindness (which will not be done to
someone who refused to show kindness to other people)
(PSA.109:12)

Reward מָשֵׁךְ – to show kindness (in return for another act
of kindness) (GEN.40:14; JOS.2:12,14,14; JDG.1:24; RUT.1:8;
2SA.2:6; 1KL.2:7; 2CH.24:22)

(c) נְשֵׁה (EST.2:9,17)
(d) **Faithful (Action) noun, m, pl** // נַחַלָה, חֶסֶד, חֶסֶד (EST.2:9,17)

= acts that reflect the attitude described under [a] – acts of loyalty, kindness, devotion, love (GEN.32:11; 2CH.6:42; 32:32; 35:26; NEH.13:14; PSA.17:7; 25:6; 89:2,50; 106:7,43; 107:43; 119:41; ISA.55:3; 63:7,2; LAM.3:32 ...)

**Faithfulness**

(2) noun, m | נַחַלָה

(a) **Shame (Action) :: רָעָה**

= event that brings disgrace upon the person performing it – disgrace, shameful act (LEV.20:17; PRO.14:34)

**Shame; Sin**

(3) noun, name

See: בֶּן־חֶסֶד

EXCERPT 1 (SDBH 2006b:n.p)

This excerpt above shows that the SDBH is helpful for translators because it includes both lexical and contextual meanings in the process of semantic analysis, as the following example illustrates:

(a) Faithful (State/Process) //...= attitude of commitment towards fulfilling one’s obligations; these may be obligations defined within the context of a covenant or agreement, or moral obligations to show kindness to someone who showed kindness to you before; an attitude that is meaningless if not translated in actions loyalty, kindness, love, devotion ...

Meaning extensions stemming from the lexical meaning are then provided at the contextual domain level, for example: faithfulness, affection, etc. These contextual domains cover the range of social relationships in which נַחַלָה is used in the Hebrew Bible. These two levels of semantic domain, namely lexical meaning and contextual meaning, represent paradigmatic relations, which involve a semantic substitution frame of lexical correspondents. With regard to the lexical meaning, in the table above, De Blois provides both a paraphrase of meaning and translation equivalents, for example, loyalty, kindness, love, devotion in the above-mentioned section.

However, with reference to the SDBH’s entries on נְשֵׁה, there is a possibility that the user may be left with some uncertainty as far as the meaning of the word is concerned. For example, in the subcategory 1b in the excerpt above, the general entry at the lexical level, i.e. faithful (action), is followed by the specific acts of loyalty, faithfulness, kindness, devotion and love. What these terms simply tell us is that נְשֵׁה, when translated into English, may be rendered by one of these five glosses, depending on the context. This does not adequately convey the meaning of this biblical concept.
Imbayarwo (2008:168), maintains that one of the main functions of a dictionary is to focus on the reception, production and translation of texts, that is, on their communicative dimension – from the native language to the foreign language or from the foreign language to the native language. Based on these distinctions, he explains the lexicographical function of a BH dictionary for translators as follows:

The lexicographic function of a BH dictionary for translators is to primarily help translators and general users to understand the BH language text (text reception) in order to translate these texts from the foreign language (Hebrew) into the selected target language (Imbayarwo 2008:170, emphasis as in the original). According to Imbayarwo, in order to perform this communicative function, it is necessary to provide a broader context that can open new ways of thinking about a certain contextual domain and an improved procedure for the contextual components of exegesis and translation. Although De Blois alludes to contextual semantics as being relevant for understanding the meaning of a word within its wider socio-cultural context, he does not deal with it explicitly in his proposed model.10

Therefore, in his critical evaluation of the SDBH, Imbayarwo (2008:159) suggests “frequency of attestation”11 in BH, the analysis of which belongs to corpus linguistics, as a possible solution to describe the meaning of a word. The basic premise of this frequency of attestation is that it should start from the most literal and proceed to the metaphorical or extended meanings of a word. However, in a footnote, he acknowledges that it is not always easy to draw a “line between what is literal and what is metaphorical” (Imbayarwo 2008:157) because biblical Hebrew is an ancient language that is no longer spoken. Two questions then remain: How can we determine the meaning of a word in a particular context? What are the tools that one can apply to identify the translation equivalent of a biblical word? To answer these questions, one needs a more specific frame of reference that can help to bridge the cognitive gap between the biblical and contemporary receptor audiences. This issue will be discussed in the next section.

Cognitive Frames of Reference:
A Practical Model for Exploring Contextual Domains

A General Discussion of Cognitive Frames

Since the publication of Bible Translation: Frames of Reference (Wilt, ed. 2003), analysts were able to focus more directly on the wider and narrower contextual dimension of meaning when studying the biblical text (Wilt 2003:43-58). Wilt’s theoretical presentation of frames of reference provides a broad, contemporary cognitive linguistic perspective on Bible translation. Taking insight from this book, Cognitive Frames of Reference (hereafter CFR) have been proposed as a conceptual framework that incorporates the following overlapping and interacting sub-frames: socio-cultural, communicational, organizational, textual, and lexical perspectives. This complex cognitive structure is commonly termed a worldview or mental model. According to Wendland (2008:19), worldview is a pervasive outlook on reality that is normally very broad in its range and inclusive in scope, embracing the composite cognitive environment of an entire society or community. He further argues

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10 According to van der Merwe (2004:133), this may be due to the absence of effective tools to conduct research in this regard. It could also be that a computer program is not able to identify the socio-cultural nuances associated with the meaning of a word.

11 These terms were coined by Imbayarwo (2008).
that this context may also be taken in a more specific sense to refer to the psychological orientation of an individual or a distinct group of members within the society as a whole (Wendland 2008:19). The notion of cognitive frames thus refers to all the ‘sub-frames’ of semantic description that are active in a given socio-cultural setting as presented in the diagram below:  

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**Figure 1: Cognitive Frames of Reference**

This diagram indicates some (not necessarily all) of the principal CFR approach that is involved in the processes of reading and understanding a biblical text. It also suggests the close interaction of these different contextual layers during the interpretation of any transmitted text. These different frames of reference are described below. It should be noted here that this model may be applied from outer frame to inner frame (from the general to the more specific, or vice-versa) when describing the relevant conceptual features of a particular cultural setting, for example, when analysing a specific text, or a particular word. In the following sections, I will briefly describe the various frames of reference to be applied in this article from the inner to outer frame (using a case study of the Hebrew word `דַּמָּה`).

**Lexical Frames**

Lexical frames incorporate cognitive categories as well as the cognitive frames. To complement De Blois’ theoretical model, I propose that more consideration should be given...
to the contextual semantics of Biblical Hebrew words. Contextual semantics deals with a given word in its cognitive context, as evoked by the particular linguistic setting in which it is used, including all semantic and pragmatic features that are relevant to that context. It is argued that דָּשַׁן, used in specific texts, is embedded within the larger body of Old Testament literature, and therefore an understanding thereof requires a consideration of one or more wider frames of reference (cf. Cruse 2004:137).

Textual Frames

Textual frames integrate intertextual as well as intratextual sub-frames of reference, which need to be incorporated in order to apply a fuller hermeneutical and communicative model when considering דָּשַׁן in its cognitive context. According to Wendland (2008:110), no text exists in isolation; i.e. it must always be studied in relation to other texts. He argues that a “given text is either partially or wholly derived from, based on, related to, or in some way conditioned by other texts with respect to general ideas, presuppositions, structural arrangements, particular concepts, key terms, or memorable phrases” (Wendland 2008:110; cf. also Wilt and Wendland 2008:191). These different aspects of intertextual influence act as a reservoir of clues within the source text, serving as additional instructions to the intended addressees as they construct a conceptual model of the situation being evoked by the speaker or writer. In this respect, one will need to determine the degree of salience or relevance of any instance of intertextuality to the current message being conveyed (Wendland 2003:184). Furthermore, close attention also needs to be paid to how one portion of a text influences the exegetical interpretation of another portion of that same text, usually from the former to the latter as part of its intratextual frame of reference.

Communicational Frames

Communicational frames relate to the different media of interpersonal text transmission: oral-aural, written or print media. Through these media, people can, for example, communicate their diverse cultural traditions, values and norms. In certain socio-cultural settings, people may prefer to utilise certain specific communicational frames such as the audio-visual dimension of traditional story-telling. As a primary mode of human communication, story-telling also features the element of dialogue. According to Alter (1981:66) “narration in the biblical story is ... oriented toward dialogue”. In the book of Ruth for example, the author freely uses dialogue between the different characters to express or to emphasise the importance of family, social, and religious values, which were necessary for the fulfilment of their cultural roles and responsibilities. While reinforcing the familial hierarchy based on role, characters’ words and communication via actions as depicted by narrator also demonstrate the responsibilities of members of the family to nurture and support each other. In particular, the role taken on by characters highlights the significance of the individual’s obligation toward and communication with his/her fellow Israelites as the communal ‘people of God’.

14 According to Wendland (2004:99), “the essential compositional unity of the text under consideration is assumed in a literary approach, but this does not mean that one looks at a particular text from a uniform, monolithic, or undiscriminating perspective. Rather, it is viewed holistically as composed of a hierarchy of integrated structural levels and units”.

Organizational Frames

The organizational is a frame of reference created by the specific social groups to which a person belongs: religious, ecclesiastical, political, educational, and work-related. In an ancient theocratic state and community such as “Israel”, the organizational frame merges with the socio-cultural to such an extent that it is difficult to distinguish them. They will therefore be considered together under the socio-cultural category.

Socio-Cultural Frames

Socio-cultural frames are cognitive frames of reference developed from the observation and experience of one’s socio-cultural environment which are passed down formally or informally as “tradition” from one generation to the next. For instance, the biblical texts normally target a particular receptor group living in a particular socio-cultural context.

The book of Ruth focuses on family issues and family relationships within an agrarian society. Since in ancient Israel the identity of each individual was embedded in the larger society, the family as a whole was responsible for sustaining its individual members. Within the family, in turn, these individuals had to fulfill certain roles, which reinforced them and added to the cohesion of the wider social unit. However, the quality and character of a family could change because of adverse internal and/or external factors, which could affect the successful performance of individual roles within the family. Naomi’s story about the death of her husband and two children illustrate the point. She was a widow with no family support in a foreign land (Moab) because her relatives lived some distance away in Bethlehem of Judah. Because of her vulnerable state as a widow, Naomi decided to return to her relatives in Judah. On the other hand, she advised her two daughters-in-law to return to their father’s house, for there they could remarry and enjoy the care and protection of the kinship group. But Ruth refused in favour of care for Naomi, thus adopting a formerly alien socio-cultural frame of reference in preference to her own. Naomi and Ruth therefore become the central characters in the story (cf. LaCoque 2004:2; van Wolde 1997:1) that engage in some in-depth and complex conversations. The introduction of Boaz is not just in the interest of the narrative plot line, but it also serves in the interest of the characterization of the main characters as illustrated in the diagram below:

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16 These conversations fulfill the two principal functions of biblical narrative dialogues as noted by Bar-Efrat (1989:147-148): “On the one hand, they serve as a vehicle for the development of the plot (story) ... On the other hand, conversations serve to illuminate the human aspect, revealing such psychological features as motives and intentions, points of view and approaches, attitudes and reactions”.