

## TRANSLATING BIBLICAL WORDS: A CASE STUDY OF THE HEBREW WORD, **חָסֵד**\*

Justino Alfredo  
Old and New Testament  
Stellenbosch University

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### Abstract

*Two recent studies (Foster 2008; Van Steenberg 2006) have acknowledged that the translation of biblical key words is an area that needs urgent attention. Many lexicons determine the real 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 חָסֵד. In addition, this article will propose a possible solution or approach for translating the word חָסֵד.*

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

### Introduction

It has been acknowledged in two recent studies (cf. Foster 2008 and Van Steenberg 2006) that the translation of key biblical terms such as חָסֵד<sup>1</sup> 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 Steenberg (2006:2), lexicons are often of limited value for Bible interpretation and translation.<sup>2</sup>

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

### Problems with the Dictionary View of Word Meaning: A Case Study of the Hebrew Word, חָסֵד

I have selected or identified the five commonly used Hebrew-English lexicons, namely *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* by Koehler and Baumgartner, *et al.* (referred to as KB); *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* by Brown, Driver

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<sup>1</sup> חָסֵד 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).

<sup>2</sup> As Van Steenberg (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).

#### חסד in BDB and KB

When we consider the entries made under חסד 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 חסד 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 חסד 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<sup>3</sup> 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<sup>4</sup> were compiled. This observation agrees with Lübke (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 חסד 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 חסד, KB only once refers to its combination with the particle /ב/, while BDB makes two references to prepositions or the comparative particle, namely the combination of חסד with /ב/ and /כ/. Although both of the lexicons make reference to these prepositions, they do not explain their relevance for the translation of חסד. This does not help to clarify the different meanings of חסד. 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 חסד.

#### חסד 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:

<sup>3</sup> 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”.

<sup>4</sup> Although the KB was revised in 1999, the original compilation was done in the early part of the last century.

... 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.<sup>5</sup> 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 חסד 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 חסד 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 חסד in particular contexts.

### חסד in Swanson

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).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>) in his attempt to describe the semantic value of חסד. Apart from this reference, Swanson also refers to the Hebrew word אמת based on his presupposition that the meaning of words should be determined in their contexts of usage. Although this is an important

<sup>5</sup> 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".

<sup>6</sup> 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.

<sup>7</sup> 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 (חסד and אמת),<sup>8</sup> as illustrated below:

חֶסֶד	אֱמֶת
<p><b>2876</b> חֶסֶד (<i>chesed</i>): n.masc.; ≡ Str 2617; TWOT 698a – <b>1. LN 25.33-25.58 loyal love</b>, unfailing kindness, devotion, i.e. a love or affection that is steadfast based on a prior relationship (Ex 34:6,7); <b>2. LN 79.9-79.17 glory</b>, i.e. lovely appearance (Isa 40:6); <b>3. LN 88.66-88.74 favour</b>, i.e. the giving benefits (Est 2:9), note: for another interp in Ps 52:3 (EB 1), see 2875.</p>	<p><b>622</b> אֱמֶת (<i>emet</i>): n.fem.; ≡ Str 571; TWOT 116k – <b>1. LN 31.82.31.101 faithfulness</b>, reliability, trustworthiness, i.e. a state or condition of being dependable and loyal to a person or standard (Gen 24:27); <b>2. LN 72.1-72.11 true</b>, 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; <b>3. LN 88.39-88.45 honesty</b>, integrity, i.e. be in a state or condition of telling the truth, and living according to a moral standard (Ne 7:2); <b>4. LN 33.35-33.68 unit: (אֱמֶת) (אֱמֶת בְּרִיתוֹ)</b> 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+); <b>5. LN 67.78-67.117 lasting</b>, enduring, i.e. a duration of time, without reference to other points of time (Jer 14:13).</p>

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 חסד has been assigned to “Attitudes” and “Emotions” (see LN 25), whereas אמת 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, חסד: **loyal love**, *unfailing kindness, devotion*, and the word אמת: **faithfulness**, *reliability, trustworthiness*. Since Swanson’s dictionary does not indicate the relationship between חסד and אמת, a comprehensive semantic framework is needed to establish the inner semantic relation between these terms.

#### חסד 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

<sup>8</sup> The words חסד and אמת 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; Pss. 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 חסד is paired with אמת in a “hendiadys indicating its element of faithfulness or loyalty”.

dictionary differs from BDB, KB, DCH, and Swanson (including other existing BH dictionaries) in that it is a “semantic domain”<sup>9</sup> dictionary.

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

## חסד

(1) Noun, m | חסד

- (a) **Faithful (State/Process)** // בְּרִית, אֶמֶת  
 = 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; 1SA.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** // אֶהְבֶּה – *devotion (of people towards God, as a wife towards her husband)* (JER.2:2)

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

**God** אֲנֹשֵׁי חֶסֶד אֲנֹשֵׁי // צְדִיקִים – *men of loyalty > devout, pious people* (ISA.57:1)

**God** // אֶהְבֶּה, אֶמֶת, אֶמֶת, אֶמֶת, אֶמֶת :: תְּשׁוּעָה, צְדָקָה, אֶמֶת – *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** // אֶמֶת, מִשְׁפָּט, צְדָקָה – *loyalty, kindness (between people in authority and their subjects)* (1KI.20:31; PSA.101:1; 1SA.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)

<sup>9</sup> 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** מִשְׁכָּח, נִטָּה, נִסְתָּר, עָשָׂה, עָשָׂה // טוֹבָה, אֲמִתּוּת :: שָׁקֵר  
 = 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)* (1SA.20:8,14; 2SA.9:1,7; PSA.109:16)

**Affection; God** אֱלֹהֵי הַיָּמִים עָשָׂה – *to show God's faithfulness (to one's friend's descendants)* (2SA.9:3) (HOS.2:21)

**God** עָשָׂה // הַיָּמִים, מְשַׁפֵּט, מְדַבֵּר – *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; 1KI.3:6; 2CH.1:8; JOB.10:12; PSA.18:51; JER.9:23; 32:18)

**God** נִטָּה :: עֹזֵב – *to show (one's) faithfulness (said of God)* (GEN.39:21; EZR.7:28; 9:9)

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

**God** נִטָּה // אֲמִתּוּת – *to show (one's) faithfulness (said of God)* (MIC.7:20)

**God** מִן הַיָּמִים עָשָׂה – *to withdraw (one's) faithfulness from (someone; said of God)* (2SA.7:15; 1CH.17:13; PSA.66:20)

**God** עָשָׂה – *to withdraw (one's) faithfulness (said of God)* (GEN.24:27)

**God** הִפְלִיא (PSA.31:22)

**God** פָּרַח (PSA.89:34)

**God** עָשָׂה | הִרְאָה <SDBH:הִרְאָה> – *to show (one's) faithfulness (said of God)* (PSA.85:8)

**God** שָׁמַר (DEU.7:9,12; 1KI.3:6; 8:23; 2CH.6:14; NEH.1:5; 9:32; PSA.89:29; DAN.9:4)

**God** שָׁלַח // אֲמִתּוּת (PSA.57:4)

**King** // טוֹבָה, יְשׁוּעָה – *to show one's loyalty (to a king or leader or his descendants)* (JDG.8:35; 2SA.2:5; 3:8; 22:51; 1KI.3:6; 2CH.1:8; PSA.18:51)

**Kinship** // אֲמִתּוּת – *to show one's loyalty (between relatives)* (GEN.24:49; 47:29)

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

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

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

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

- (c) חסד נשה (EST.2:9,17)
- (d) **Faithful (Action) noun, m, pl** // אֱמוּנָה, אֶמְתָּ, בְּרִית, טוֹב, פְּלֵא, רַחֲמִים, תְּהִלָּה, תְּשׁוּבָה  
 = 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; 106:7,45; 107:43; 119:41; ISA.55:3; 63:7,7; LAM.3:32 ...)

**Faithfulness**

(2) noun, m | חסד

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

**Shame; Sin**

(3) noun, name  
 See: חסד

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 חסד 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 חסד, 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 חסד, 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.<sup>10</sup>

Therefore, in his critical evaluation of the SDBH, Imbayarwo (2008:159) suggests “frequency of attestation”<sup>11</sup> 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*

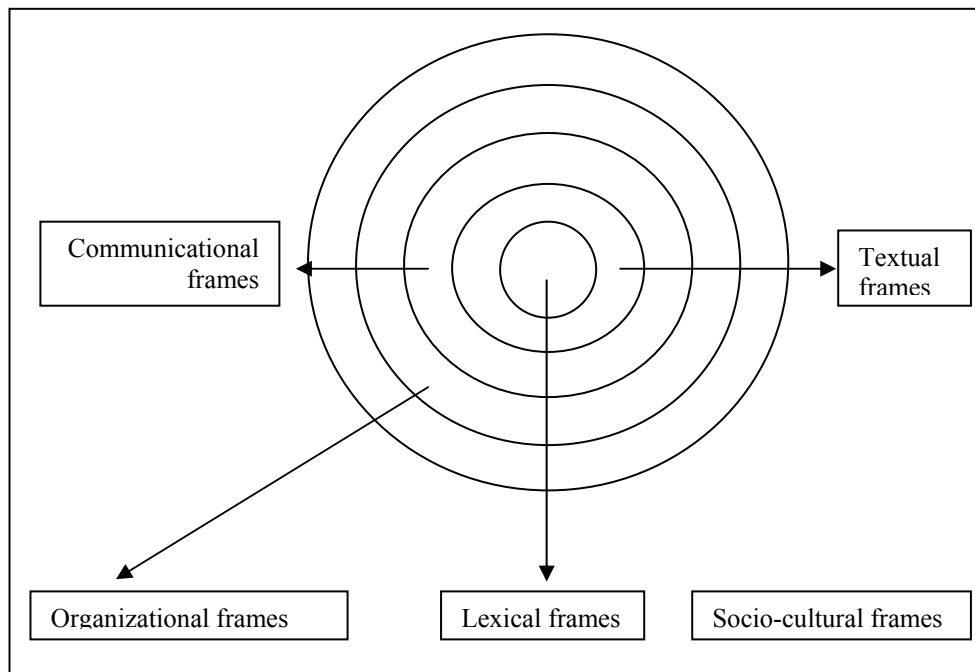
Since the publication of *Bible Translation: Frames of Reference* (Wilt, ed. 2003), analysts were able to focus more directly on the wider and narrower contextual dimension of meaning when studying the biblical text (Wilt 2003:43-58). Wilt’s theoretical presentation of frames of reference provides a 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

<sup>10</sup> 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.

<sup>11</sup> 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:<sup>12</sup>



**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 חסד).

### *Lexical Frames*

Lexical frames incorporate cognitive categories as well as the cognitive frames.<sup>13</sup> To complement De Blois' theoretical model, I propose that more consideration should be given

<sup>12</sup> Based on the analogy of an onion (cf. Wendland 2008:1).

<sup>13</sup> See Wilt and Wendland (2008:255).

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 *חסד*, 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 *חסד* 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).<sup>14</sup> 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.<sup>15</sup> 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’.

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<sup>14</sup> 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 indiscriminating perspective. Rather, it is viewed holistically as composed of a hierarchy of integrated structural levels and units”.

<sup>15</sup> “People live by stories – they use stories to organize and store cultural traditions” (Bohannon 1995:150; cf. Johnson 1987:171-2).

### *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 fulfil 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.<sup>16</sup> 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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<sup>16</sup> These conversations fulfil 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”.