

Linguistic Traits of Hebrew Relator Nouns and Their Implications for Translating Genesis 1:1

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Abstract

In the debate over the proper translation of Genesis 1:1, one of the key issues is whether the first word of the verse, בְּרֵאשִׁית, is in the absolute or construct state. If בְּרֵאשִׁית is in the construct state, then it is in construct with the verb בָּרָא and the ensuing clause of Genesis 1:1, and the verse should be rendered with a dependent clause. This rendering is known as the dependent-clause translation of Genesis 1:1 found in such versions as the NRSV, NJV, and NAB. If בְּרֵאשִׁית is in the absolute state, then it is not in construct with בָּרָא and the ensuing clause, and the verse should be rendered with an independent main clause. This rendering is known as the traditional translation of Genesis 1:1 found in such versions as the KJV, NAS, NIV, and ESV. In this article, the author defends the traditional translation of Genesis 1:1 by arguing that בְּרֵאשִׁית, properly understood, is a Hebrew relator noun. According to the author, since בְּרֵאשִׁית is a Hebrew relator noun, it will have a relative meaning at the lexical level, but will still function as a noun in the absolute state at the grammatical level. This trait of being lexically relative yet grammatically absolute, which is possible with Hebrew relator nouns, also explains why בְּרֵאשִׁית is not pointed with a definite article in Hebrew even though it is rendered with one in the traditional translation.

Keywords: absolute, construct, relative meaning, absolute meaning, relator noun, lexically relative, grammatically relative, grammatically absolute, *nomen regens*, *nomen rectum*, definite, definite article, anarthrous

Introduction

For many centuries and almost a couple millennia, a traditional translation and interpretation of Genesis 1:1 have led Christian and Jewish scholars to conclude that God created the world out of nothing.¹ According to this tradition, Genesis 1:1 introduces God's first creative act with an independent main clause. Genesis 1:2 then describes this first creative act as being in an incomplete state. The rest of the Genesis narrative then describes how God shaped, filled, and added to that initial creation. Since Genesis 1:1 does not describe anything as being in existence before the initial creation other than God, many interpreters have logically concluded that God created the world from nothing. Although it is not explicitly stated, the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* is a logical and theological conclusion of the traditional translation and interpretation of Genesis 1:1 (Matthews 1996, 141; Sarna 1989, 5; Skinner 1951, 13; Waltke 1975, 217).² Again, the translation renders Genesis 1:1 as an independent main clause, and the interpretation makes Genesis 1:1 the first creative act. This traditional translation, however, is not always utilized.

For nearly a thousand years a small group of proponents have argued for a different translation of Genesis 1:1.³ According to this view, Genesis 1:1

should be rendered with a dependent clause and should be subordinate to either Genesis 1:2a or Genesis 1:3.⁴ Furthermore, within this last century, this dependent-clause translation of Genesis 1:1 has gained a larger following, and some translational traditions have even updated older versions to reflect it. Consider the following examples:

Protestant Translational Tradition

¹In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. ²The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters. ³And God said, "Let there be light" (RSV, 1952)

¹In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, ²the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. ³Then God said, "Let there be light" (NRSV, 1989)

Jewish Translational Tradition

¹IN THE beginning God created the heaven and the earth. ²Now the earth was unformed and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the spirit of God hovered over the face of the waters. ³And God said: 'Let there be light.' (JPS, 1917)

¹ All biblical citations from the original languages, including the passages from the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, are provided by *BibleWorks 6.0*. [CD ROM] (2003).

² Many scholars of varying positions refer to this reading of the passage as the traditional translation and interpretation. Westermann, however, contends that this interpretation is not traditional. See Westermann (1990, 95).

³ The Medieval Jewish scholars Rashi (d. 1105) and Ibn Ezra (d. 1164) are the first known proponents of this alternate translation.

⁴ If the dependent clause of Genesis 1:1 is subordinate to Genesis 1:3, then Genesis 1:2 is usually treated parenthetically. Cf. the NJV.

¹When God began to create heaven and earth—²the earth being unformed and void, with darkness over the surface of the deep and a wind from God sweeping over the water—³God said, “Let there be light” (NJV, 1985)

Catholic Translational Tradition

¹In the beginning God created heaven, and earth.
²And the earth was void and empty, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the spirit of God moved over the waters. ³And God said: Be light made. (DRA, 1899)⁵

¹In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, ²the earth was a formless wasteland, and darkness covered the abyss, while a mighty wind swept over the waters. ³Then God said, “Let there be light,” (NAB, 1970)

This change in translation produces a change in interpretation. No longer is Genesis 1:1 the first act of creation. Rather, Genesis 1:1, along with 1:2, describe the context in which the first act of creation takes place: the creation of light in Genesis 1:3.⁶ According to this interpretation then, the elements of Genesis 1:2 were already present before God began creating. Thus, one can logically conclude that since these elements, which God utilized in his later work of creation, were in existence before God’s first act of creation, the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* is not implicit in the text. Orlinsky, a proponent of the dependent-clause translation and a translator of the NJV, states,

The implications of the new, correct rendering [of Genesis 1:1 as a dependent clause] are clear. The Hebrew text tells us nothing about “creation out of nothing” (*creatio ex nihilo*), or about the beginning of time; it has nothing to say about the order of creation, so far as heaven, earth, darkness, deep, wind, or water are concerned. Indeed, the last four elements are not even described as having been created by God; the text merely asserts that these elements were present when God began to create the universe. What, then, constituted the first act of creation, if it wasn’t any of heaven, earth, darkness, etc.? The text, once again gives us the answer directly, in verse 3: “(when God began to create the heaven and the earth...) God said,

‘Let there be light’; and there was light.” In other words, the first thing God did when he created the world was to create light... Naturally, there are those who are upset by this old-new interpretation. “When did time begin?” they ask. “What existed in the beginning? Who created the darkness and the water and the deep? And is there no longer any beginning? And what happens to the theological concept of *creatio ex nihilo*?” And so on. Now every scholar or committee of scholars that assumes the responsibility of producing an authorized translation of the Bible for members of a religious group is aware of the difficulties that may arise as a consequence of the translation achieved for such “delicate” passages as Genesis 1:1–3. But the reply by the biblical scholar to such questions can only be: We know only what the Hebrew text of the Bible tells us. If the ancient Hebrew writer did not think about these things, or if he did, did not care to bother his readers with them, it is not for us to read into his text what he did not put into it; and anyone who does this is simply not being faithful to his biblical Hebraic source. (Orlinsky 1966, xv)

As is clear in the case of Genesis 1:1, translation affects interpretation, and interpretation affects theology; yet, what is the reasoning for this alternate translation?

Thesis

In the debate over the proper translation of Genesis 1:1, the major issue is whether the word *בְּרֵאשִׁית* is in the absolute or construct state. If *בְּרֵאשִׁית* is a construct, then it is in construct with the verb *בָּרָא* and the ensuing clause of Genesis 1:1,⁷ and the verse should be rendered with a dependent clause. Naturally, this is the argument of the dependent-clause translation. If *בְּרֵאשִׁית* is an absolute, then it is not in construct with *בָּרָא* and the ensuing clause, and the verse should be rendered with an independent main clause. This is the argument of the traditional translation.⁸

However, proponents of the dependent-clause translation raise two main linguistic challenges to the possibility of the traditional translation: one at the lexical level, the other at the grammatical level.⁹

⁵ This is the Douay-Rheims American Edition (DRA). Unlike the later NAB, the DRA is translated mostly from the Vg rather than Hebrew and Greek manuscripts. See Bruce (1970, 113).

⁶ For an early modern treatment of this view, see Skinner (1951).

⁷ This would make the ensuing clause of Genesis 1:1 a genitive substantival clause with *בְּרֵאשִׁית* functioning as its *nomen regens*. See Joüon and Muraoka (2008, § 129p.)

⁸ Lane also states, “The question whether verse 1 is a complete sentence or only a dependent clause is centered in the syntactical interpretation of the first word, *bārē(‘)šīt*. If the noun *rē(‘)šīt* is in the absolute state, verse 1 contains a complete thought and is an independent clause or sentence. If, on the other hand, it is in the construct state, verse 1 is not a complete thought and forms a temporal clause which must be completed by either verse 2 or 3.” Lane (1963, 66).

⁹ The term “grammar” can have several meanings that are both narrow and broad. This article uses the term “grammar” in its narrow sense according to following definition given by Miriam Webster’s online dictionary: “The study of classes of words, their inflections, and their functions and relations in the sentence.”

First, at the lexical level, they challenge that the word *רֵאשִׁית* always has a relative meaning, the beginning of. Since its meaning is always relative, its rendering in Genesis 1:1 cannot be in the absolute state, but must be in the construct state.¹⁰ Second, at the grammatical level, they challenge that if *בְּרֵאשִׁית* in Genesis 1:1 were in the absolute state and also definite, in the beginning, the word be pointed with an articular *qamets*, *בְּרֵאשִׁית*, rather than with a vocal *sheva*.¹¹ Since, however, *רֵאשִׁית* is pointed with a vocal *sheva*, it is further evidence that the word is in the construct state.¹² Both of these linguistics challenges do raise serious objections to the traditional translation. This article, however, contends that the traditional translation of Genesis 1:1 is linguistically possible because *רֵאשִׁית* in Genesis 1:1 is functioning as a lexically relative yet grammatically absolute Hebrew relator noun.

The Lexical Level

The Relative Meaning of *רֵאשִׁית*

Before exploring the linguistic traits of Hebrew relator nouns, one must first understand the lexical dilemma that proponents of the dependent-clause translation charge against the traditional translation. When they argue that *רֵאשִׁית* has a relative meaning, they are describing its tendency to be semantically related to another word or concept. Skinner states, “The [independent-clause] construction seems to me, however, opposed to the essentially relative idea of [*רֵאשִׁית*],—its express reference to *that of which* it is the beginning” (Skinner 1951, 13, n.1). Simpson also states, “But the Hebrew *bʿrēshîth* seems to mean ‘in the beginning of’ rather than in the beginning, and this requires that vs. 1 should be taken with vs. 3—on vs. 2 see below—and rendered, ‘In the beginning of God’s creating the heavens and the earth, God said, etc.’” (Simpson and Bowie, 1952, 466). Finally, Orlinsky adds, “The very first word, *bʿreshith*, as every student of biblical Hebrew knows, means ‘In

the beginning of,’ with the word or phrase that follows indicating the object (as in ‘In the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah’—Jeremiah 26:1, KJV)” (Orlinsky 1983). Thus, according to these scholars, if *בְּרֵאשִׁית* has a relative meaning then it should be rendered as “In the beginning of,” which would make the word a grammatical construct.

In order to defend the absolute rendering of *בְּרֵאשִׁית* as “In the beginning,” many proponents of the traditional translation argue that in Genesis 1:1 the word has an absolute meaning (Childs 1960; Eichrodt 1962, 1–10; Hasel 1971, 158; Ridderbos 1958, 218; Westermann 1990, 98).¹³ They often cite Isaiah 46:10a as evidence of this claim.¹⁴ It states the following:

מְגִיד מֵרֵאשִׁית אַחֲרֵית וּמִקֶּדֶם אֲשֶׁר לֹא-נַעֲשֶׂה

declaring from the beginning, the end, and from before, that which has not been done,

In this verse, the word *מֵרֵאשִׁית* is in the absolute state and seems to be both lexically and grammatically comparable to the use of *בְּרֵאשִׁית* in Genesis 1:1. In addition, many modern bible translations render the word *מֵרֵאשִׁית* in Isaiah 46:10a as “from the beginning,” not “from the beginning of.”¹⁵ Thus, Isaiah 46:10a seems to demonstrate that the word can have an absolute meaning.¹⁶

However, scholars of the dependent-clause translation argue that even though the occurrences of *רֵאשִׁית* in Isaiah 46:10a and Genesis 1:1 may appear to be grammatically parallel, *מֵרֵאשִׁית* in Isaiah 46:10a has a lexically relative meaning. Therefore, it cannot function as a lexical parallel to the alleged absolute meaning of *בְּרֵאשִׁית* in Genesis 1:1. Humbert states,

On constate donc qu’au sens proprement temporel le substantif *rēšîl* ne figure qu’une seule fois à l’état absolu: Es. 46:10. La possibilité théorique de

¹⁰ Thus, it is in construct with *בְּרֵאשִׁית* and the ensuing clause of Genesis 1:1, which again creates a dependent clause.

¹¹ Since there is no morphological difference between the construct and absolute forms of *רֵאשִׁית*, one must use the pointing of the preposition *בְּ* to determine whether *בְּרֵאשִׁית* may be absolute or construct. (Cf. Neh 12:44 where the absolute form of *רֵאשִׁית* is pointed with an articular *qamets*. Unfortunately this example can only be a morphological parallel to *רֵאשִׁית* and not a lexical or grammatical parallel since it is not a temporal use of the word.)

¹² The *rectum* of the alleged construct chain, *בְּרֵאשִׁית* and the ensuing clause of Genesis 1:1, would, through context, already make the *regens*, *בְּרֵאשִׁית*, definite, so no article would be needed to indicate definiteness. Thus, if *בְּרֵאשִׁית* is in the construct state, the lack of the articular *qamets* is expected.

¹³ This article, which defends the traditional translation, rejects the notion that *בְּרֵאשִׁית* has an absolute meaning. As will be seen further on, it is not necessary for *בְּרֵאשִׁית* to be absolute in meaning in order to be grammatically absolute.

¹⁴ König states, “Denn auch andere Adverbia stehen im absoluten Sinne, wie ich durch eine eingehendere Untersuchung festgestellt habe. Man vergleiche nur *mêrêschîth* (Jes. 46 10) im absoluten Sinne = „von Uranfang an.“ (For other adverbs, without the article, are in the absolute sense as I have found through a more thorough investigation. One need only compare *mêrêschîth* [Isa 46:10] in the absolute sense = “From the very beginning.”) (König 1919, 130). Wenham also states, “Nor can it be shown that *רֵאשִׁית* may not have an absolute sense. It may well have an absolute sense in Isaiah 46:10, and the analogous expression *מֵרֵאשִׁית* in Prov 8:23 certainly refers to the beginning of all creation. The context of *מֵרֵאשִׁית* standing at the start of the account of world history makes an absolute sense highly appropriate here” (Wenham 1987, 12). See also Matthews (1996, 137 n. 99, 138 n. 103).

¹⁵ Cf. NASB, NIV, NJPS, NAV, NRSV.

¹⁶ This is the only other passage in the Bible in which the temporal use of *רֵאשִׁית* is grammatically absolute.

construire absolument un *rēšīt* temporel existe donc, mais ce passage mérite d'être considéré de plus près. D'abord, guidés par un sûr instinct, les LXX y traduisent *mērēšīt* par ἀναγγέλλων πρότερον τὰ ἔσχατα, c'est à dire qu'ils entendaient *mērēšīt* adverbiallement («d'avance») et, au fond, relativement (=d'avance par rapport à autre chose), et non point au sens vraiment absolu de «au commencement». Ensuite, dans le TM lui-même, il y a un rapport de corrélation évidente entre *mērēšīt* et *aḥarīt* qui undiquent terminus a quo et terminus ad quem d'un certain laps de temps (cp. aussi le couple *rēšīt*... *aḥarīt* dans Job 8,7; 42,12; Eccl. 7,8), temps conçu de façon passablement concrète d'ailleurs vu le parallélisme de *aḥarīt* avec *ašer lō' na'asū*. Or qui dit corrélation dit relation, implicite à tout le moins : par conséquent le *sens* même de *rēšīt* dans Es. 46,10 est au fond relatif, même si la *construction* ne l'est pas et si *rēšīt* est à l'état absolu. Le passage Es. 46:10 ne peut donc pas être légitimement invoqué en faveur d'un sens temporel absolu de *berēšīt* dans Gen 1,1 qui reste donc, finalement, sans exemple. (Humbert 1955, 86–87)¹⁷

According to Humbert the word מְרֵשִׁית in Isaiah 46:10a still refers to the beginning of something; which makes it relative in meaning.¹⁸

The strength of Humbert's argument is that because מְרֵשִׁית in Isaiah 46:10a has a relative meaning, there is no parallel evidence that בְּרֵאשִׁית in Genesis 1:1 has an absolute meaning. Thus, based upon the weight of the evidence, the word should have a relative meaning in Genesis 1:1 as well. If בְּרֵאשִׁית is lexically relative, then according to proponents of the dependent-clause translation, it should be rendered as “In the beginning of,” and should be in construct with the verb בָּרָא and the ensuing clause of Genesis 1:1. If the word is in construct with the verb בָּרָא and the ensuing clause, then Genesis 1:1 should be rendered as a dependent clause. If this line of reasoning is sound, then the evidence as a whole seems to support the dependent-clause translation.

However, there seems to be some faulty reasoning from proponents of both translational positions. Proponents of the traditional translation who argue

that רֵאשִׁית in Genesis 1:1 has an absolute meaning, hoping to sustain their argument that the word is grammatically absolute, have done themselves a disservice. How can a word like רֵאשִׁית, if it is rendered as “beginning,” have an absolute meaning? How can it refer to a beginning that is unrelated to anything? The very nature of the word requires that it refer to the beginning of something. If it refers to the beginning of something, then its meaning is relative to that something. A beginning that is unrelated to anything is the beginning of nothing, and it is thus not a beginning. On the other hand, proponents of the dependent-clause translation, who argue that the relative meaning of רֵאשִׁית requires the word to be in grammatical construct, have also done themselves a disservice because the evidence only demonstrates that רֵאשִׁית has a relative meaning. It does not demonstrate that a relative meaning requires the word to be rendered as “the beginning of.” In fact, the Isaiah 46:10a passage is still a strong parallel to Genesis 1:1 since the verse demonstrates that the word רֵאשִׁית can be relative in meaning yet grammatically absolute. As stated previously in the thesis of this article, the word רֵאשִׁית is actually one of several types of Hebrew relator nouns, and when its usage is compared to that of other relator nouns, the evidence demonstrates that it is common for a relator noun like רֵאשִׁית to be both lexically relative and grammatically absolute.

Defining and Identifying Relator Nouns

Before demonstrating that relator nouns can be lexically relative and grammatically absolute, one must first define what a relator noun is and identify examples of them. In an article dealing with adpositions, DeLancey describes relator nouns in the following manner:

Relator noun categories are frequently the topic of discussion, and sometimes extended controversy, as to whether they are nouns or adpositions. For all the confusions that they seem to engender, relator nouns are not an unfamiliar phenomenon to anyone, being easily recognized in such unexotic languages as French and English. Since each of these languages

¹⁷ The translation is, “We note therefore that in the strictly temporal sense, the substantive *rēšīt* only appears one time in the absolute state: Isaiah. 46:10. The theoretic possibility of constructing a temporal *rēšīt* in an absolute manner exists therefore, but this passage merits closer consideration. First of all, guided by instinct, the LXX translate *mērēšīt* by ἀναγγέλλων πρότερον τὰ ἔσχατα, that is to say that they understood *mērēšīt* adverbially [‘from before’] and, at the end, relatively [= from before in relation to another thing], and not at all in the absolute sense of “in the beginning.” Then, in the MT itself, there is a correlation connection evident between *mērēšīt* and *aḥarīt* that indicates a terminus a quo and a terminus ad quem of a certain lapse of time [cf. also the pair *rēšīt*... *aḥarīt* in Job 8:7; 42:12; Eccl. 7:8], time conceived in a fairly concrete fashion as seen elsewhere in parallelism to *aḥarīt* with *ašer lō' na'asū*. Now what says correlation says relation, all the less implicit: consequently, the sense even of *rēšīt* in Isaiah 46:10 is relative in the end, even if the construction is not relative and even if *rēšīt* is in the absolute state. The passage Isaiah 46:10 cannot be therefore legitimately called upon in favor of the absolute temporal sense of *berēšīt* in Genesis 1:1, which remains, therefore, without example.” Lane goes so far as to argue that the translation “declaring the end from the beginning” in Isa 46:10a is inaccurate. See Lane 1963, 67.

¹⁸ Even Ridderbos, a proponent of the traditional translation, grants Humbert this claim; however, he still argues that רֵאשִׁית has an absolute meaning in Genesis 1:1. See Ridderbos 1958, 218.

has a robust and thriving adposition category, relator nouns constitute a relatively marginal category, but a number of them are quite frequent in occurrence and encode fairly basic concepts: à *côté de*, on *top of*, in *front/back of*, etc. Such constructions can be a source of new prepositions, e.g. English *atop* < *on top of*, *beside* < *by side of*. In languages which invest less in a lexical category of adpositions, relator nouns may constitute a substantial and important category. (DeLancey 2005, 190)

In general, relator nouns are nouns that are semantically dependent upon other words to complete their meanings. They can also be grammatically dependent upon those words—usually by means of the preposition “of” in English or the construct state in Hebrew. This dependency explains why relator nouns, by nature, have a relative meaning.

Once relator nouns are defined, they are easy to identify. English words, such as front, back, middle, side, end, and beginning are all relator nouns because their meanings are relative to other words or concepts in a sentence. For instance, if the word “book” is lexically and grammatically related to these English relator nouns, then their meanings become relative to and dependent upon that word: the front of the book, the back of the book, the middle of the book, the side of the book, the end of the book, the beginning of the book. Without the word “book” these relator nouns would be empty of meaning: The front of what? The back of what? The middle of what? The side of what? The end of what? The beginning of what?

Relator nouns are easily identifiable in Hebrew as well. They include such words as *פְּנֵה*, *אָחוּר*, *חֹץ*, *בֵּית*, *רֵאשִׁית*, *אֲחֵרִית*, *רֵאשׁ*, *יָמִין*, *שְׂמָאל*, *בֵּית*. They exhibit the common traits of relator nouns in that they are also lexically relative to other words or concepts to complete their meanings.¹⁹ Again, because of their relative nature, these nouns are most commonly found in grammatical construct with other words.²⁰ The following analysis demonstrates these traits in the Hebrew relator nouns.²¹

The relator nouns *פְּנֵה* and *אָחוּר*.

The relator nouns *פְּנֵה* and *אָחוּר* describe spatial relationships between themselves and the things to which they are semantically related, referring to the front, *פְּנֵה*, or the back, *אָחוּר*, of the related word or concept. In the following examples they are lexically

and grammatically relative to such words as *מִשְׁכַּן*, *אֹהֶל*, *בֵּית*, *קֹדֶשׁ*, *פְּרָכֶת*, and *אֹהֶל*.

Exodus 26:12

וְכַדֵּף הַעֲדָף בִּירֵעַת הָאֹהֶל חֲצֵי הַרְיֵעָה הַעֲדָפֹת הַסֵּכָה עַל אַחֲרֵי הַמִּשְׁכָּן:
And the leftover excess in the curtains of the tent, the half of the curtain that is left over, will run over the **back of** the tabernacle.

Exodus 26:9b

וּכְפַלְתָּ אֶת-הַרְיֵיעָה הַשְּׁשִׁית אֶל-מִוֶּל פְּנֵי הָאֹהֶל:
And you shall double over the sixth curtain to the opposite of the **front of** the tent.

Leviticus 4:6

וְטָבַל הַכֹּהֵן אֶת-אֶצְבְּעוֹ בְּדָם וְהִזָּה מִן-הַדָּמִים שֶׁבַע פְּעֻמִּים לְפָנֵי יְהוָה אֶת-פְּנֵי פְרֹכֶת הַקֹּדֶשׁ:
And the priest shall dip his finger into the blood, and seven times he shall sprinkle the **front of** the veil of the sanctuary before the LORD.

Ezekiel 41:21

הַהֵיכָל מְזוּחָת רִבְעָה וּפְנֵי הַקֹּדֶשׁ הַמְרֹאָה כְּמְרֹאָה:
The door frames of the temple and the **front of** the sanctuary were square, the appearance of *one being* like the appearance of *the other*.

Ezekiel 47:1a

וַיִּשְׁבַּעֵנִי אֶל-פֶּתַח הַבַּיִת וְהַנְהַרְמִים יָצְאוּ מִתַּחַת מַסְתֵּן הַבַּיִת קְדִימָה כִּי-פָנֵי הַבַּיִת קְדִימִים
And he returned me to the opening of the temple, and behold, waters were coming out from under the threshold of the temple toward the east because the **front of** the temple was *facing* eastward.

In his description of relator nouns, DeLancey states that there is sometimes controversy over whether relator nouns should be categorized as prepositions. With respect to *אָחוּר* and *פְּנֵה*, one may ask whether these words should also be categorized as prepositions. The question, however, would fail for two reasons. First, there are already lexically similar prepositions, *אֲחֵרִי* and *לְפָנֵי*, that probably developed from these relator nouns. Second, although the relator nouns *אָחוּר* and *פְּנֵה* and the prepositions *אֲחֵרִי* and *לְפָנֵי* have very similar, almost interchangeable, meanings, the relator nouns can also be used in instances in which they do not need to be *grammatically* related to another word.²² The prepositions do not function in this manner.

¹⁹ This trait explains why proponents of the dependent-clause translation argue that *רֵאשִׁית* has a relative meaning and should be translated with the preposition “of,” making it relative to the word *בְּרֵא* and the ensuing clause of Genesis 1:1.

²⁰ Although Hebrew relator nouns are usually in construct with the words to which they are semantically related, some are grammatically linked to their related words by the preposition *לְ*. Cf. 2 Kings 23:13; Ezekiel 10:3; Joshua 15:21; Nahum 2:10; 3:3.

²¹ The following examples of relator nouns have been translated as literally as possible to bring out their relative meanings.

²² Cf. 2 Chronicles 13:13–14.

The relator nouns חוץ and בית.

The relator nouns חוץ and בית also describe spatial relationships between themselves and the things to which they are semantically related, referring to the outside, חוץ, or the inside, בית, of the related word or concept. In the following examples they are lexically and grammatically relative to such things as מחנה, עיר, פרכת, and כתר.

Exodus 33:7b²³

וְהָיָה כָּל־מִבְקֵשׁ יְהוָה יֵצֵא אֶל־אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד אֲשֶׁר מִחוּץ לַמַּחֲנֶה:
And it will be that everyone who seeks the LORD shall come out to the tent of meeting, which is **outside of** the camp.

2 Chronicles 32:3²⁴

וַיִּשְׁרֹי וַיְגַבְרִיו לְסָתוּם אֶת־מִימֵי הָעֵינֹת אֲשֶׁר מִחוּץ לָעִיר וַיַּעֲרֹוּהָ:
וַיִּזְעַן עִם
And he consulted with his princes and mighty men to shut up the waters of the springs which were **outside of** the city, and they helped him.

Exodus 26:35a²⁵

וְשַׂמְתָּ אֶת־הַשְּׁלֶחַן מִחוּץ לַפְּרֹכֶת
And you shall place the table **outside of** the veil.

Exodus 26:33a²⁶

וְנִתְּתָה אֶת־הַפְּרֹכֶת תַּחַת הַקְּרָסִים וְהִבֵּאתָ שָׁמָּה מִבֵּית לַפְּרֹכֶת אֶת אֲרוֹן הָעֵדוּת
וְנִתְּתָה אֶת־הַפְּרֹכֶת
And you shall place the curtain under the hooks, and you shall bring into there the ark of the testimony **inside of** the veil.

1 Kings 7:31a

וּפְתוּחָהּ מִבֵּית לְכַתְּרָתָהּ וּמֵעֵלָה בְּאַמָּה
And its opening **inside of** the capital and above was a cubit.

As a relator noun, בית is not used as much as its counterpart חוץ. The preposition ב is more frequently used in its place because the relator noun and the preposition share a similar meaning.²⁷ However, the relator nouns חוץ and בית can also be used in instances in which they are not grammatically related to another word in the sentence. The preposition ב cannot function in this manner, which again demonstrates one main difference between relator nouns and prepositions.²⁸

The relator nouns שמאל and ימין.

The relator nouns שמאל and ימין also describe spatial relationships between themselves and the things to which they are semantically related, referring to the left side, שמאל, or the right side, ימין, of the related word or concept. In the following examples they are lexically and grammatically relative to such things or people as עזרא, איש, גלה, עזרא, איש, עשהאל, הימן, or עשהאל.²⁹

2 Kings 23:8b

הַשְּׁעָרִים אֲשֶׁר־פָּתַח שַׁעַר יְהוֹשֻׁעַ שַׁר־הָעִיר אֲשֶׁר־עַל־שְׂמֹאלוֹ אִישׁ
וַיִּתֵּן אֶת־בָּמוֹת
בְּשַׁעַר הָעִיר:
And he pulled down the heights of the gates which were at the entrance of the gate of Joshua, the leader of the city, which is upon the **left side of** a man in the gate of the city.

Nehemiah 8:4b³⁰

עָמַד אֵצֶלָּו מִתְּחִילָה וְשִׁמְעֵי וְעֵנְיָהּ וְאוּרִיָּהּ וְחַלְקִיָּהּ וּמַעֲשִׂיָּהּ עַל־יְמִינוֹ
וּמַשְׂמָאלָּו פְּדַיָּהּ וּמִישָׂאֵל וּמַלְכִּיָּהּ וְחָשׁוּם וְחַשְׁבַּדָּנָה וְזַכְרְיָהּ מִזְּשָׁלָּם:
And at his side stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, and Maaseiah on the **right side of** him and on the **left side of** him Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam.

²³ For more examples of חוץ related to מחנה, see Exodus 29:14; 33:7 (2x); Leviticus 4:12, 21; 6:4; 8:17; 9:11; 10:4, 5; 13:46; 14:3; 16:27; 17:3; 24:14, 23; Numbers 5:3, 4; 12:14, 15; 15:35, 36; 19:3, 9; 31:13, 19; Deuteronomy 23:11, 13.

²⁴ For more examples of חוץ related to עיר, see Genesis 19:16; 24:11; Leviticus 14:40, 41, 45, 53; Numbers 35:5; 1 Kings 21:13; 2 Chronicles 33:15.

²⁵ For more examples of חוץ related to פרכת, see Exodus 27:21; 40:22.

²⁶ For more examples of בית related to פרכת, see Leviticus 16:2, 12, 15; Numbers 18:7.

²⁷ The relator noun חוץ does not share a similar lexical meaning with any preposition; hence, it is more frequently used than בית. Cf. Lev 17:3, where the preposition ב is used to refer to the inside of the מחנה; whereas, the relator noun חוץ is used to refer to the outside of the מחנה.

²⁸ Cf. Ezekiel 7:15 where both the relator noun בית and the preposition ב refer to the inside of the עיר, with the exception being that בית, as a relator noun, is not grammatically linked to עיר, but ב, as a preposition, is.

²⁹ For more examples of שמאל and ימין referring to the leftside or rightside of a thing or person, see Genesis 48:17; Exodus 14:22, 29; Judges 3:15, 16, 21; 7:20; 20:16; 2 Samuel 16:6; 20:9; 1 Kings 2:19; 7:39; 22:19; 2 Chronicles 18:18; Psalm 109:6, 31; Ecclesiastes 10:2; Jeremiah 22:24; Ezekiel 10:3; 39:3; Zechariah 3:1; 4:11; 11:17.

³⁰ Although שמאל and ימין are grammatically constructed to a pronoun, the antecedent of the pronoun is עזרא (cf. also 1 Chronicles 6:24; 2 Samuel 2:21).

Zechariah 4:3³¹

וְהָיוּ שְׁנֵי זֵיתִים עָלֶיהָ אֶחָד מִיְמֵן הַגִּלָּה וְאֶחָד עַל שְׂמאלָהּ:

And there were two olive trees beside it, one on the **right side of** the bowl and the other on the **left side of** it.

1 Chronicles 6:24

וְאָחִיו אֶסָּף הַעֲמִיד עַל־יְמִינוֹ אֶסָּף בֶּן־בְּרִכְיָהוּ בֶן־שִׁמְעָא:

And his brother, Asaph, was standing by the **right side of** him, Asaph the son of Berechiah son of Shimea.

2 Samuel 2:21a

וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ אֲבִנֵר שָׁהָ לְךָ עַל־יְמִינְךָ אוֹ עַל־שְׂמאלְךָ וְאָחִיו לְךָ אֶחָד בְּדֹנְעֵימִים:

And Abner said to him, “Turn yourself to the **right side of** you or to the **left side of** you and I take one of the young men for you.”

The words **שְׂמאל** and **יְמִין** do not always act as relator nouns. They can also refer to the actual left hand or the right hand of a person,³² in which instances they are regular nouns. The previous verses, however, demonstrate that the nouns also act relationally, referring to the right side or left side of a thing or person.³³ Unlike prepositions, these relator nouns can also be used in sentences in which they are not grammatically related to another word.

אַחֲרִית and ראש relator nouns

The relator nouns **אַחֲרִית** and **ראש** describe temporal relationships between themselves and the things to which they are semantically related, usually referring to the beginning, **ראש**, or the end **אַחֲרִית** of the related word or concept. In the following examples, they are lexically and grammatically relative to such things as **הַתִּיכּוּנָה**, **הָאֲשֵׁמֶרֶת הַתִּיכּוּנָה**, **שָׁנָה**, **דְּבָר**, and **הָ**.³⁴

Judges 7:19a

וַיָּבֹא גִדְעוֹן וּמֵאה אִישׁ אִשְׂרָאֵל בְּקֶנֶה הַמְּדִינָה רֹאשׁ הָאֲשֵׁמֶרֶת הַתִּיכּוּנָה:

And Gideon, and the one hundred men with him, came into the outskirts of the camp at the **beginning of** the middle watch.

Ezekiel 40:1a

בְּעֶשְׂרִים וָחֲמֵשׁ שָׁנָה לְגָלוּתֵנוּ בְּיֶאֱשׁ הַשְּׁנָה בְּעֶשְׂרִי לַחֹדֶשׁ

In the twenty-fifth year of our exile, in the **beginning of** the year on the tenth day of the month,

Deuteronomy 11:12³⁵

אֲרֵץ אֲשֶׁר־יְדַוְּךָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ דָּנָשׁ אֹתָהּ וְיִזְכֹּר עֵינֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּהַנְשִׂיחַ הַשְּׁנָה וְעַד אַחֲרִית שָׁנָה:

a land for which the LORD your God cares, the eyes of the LORD your God are continually upon it; from the beginning of the year until the **end of** the year.

Ecclesiastes 7:8³⁶

טוֹב אַחֲרִית דְּבַר מְרֵאשִׁיתוֹ טוֹב אֶרְךָ־רוּחַ מִגִּבְהַ־רוּחַ:

The **end of** a matter is better than the beginning of it, and patience of spirit is better than pride of spirit.

Amos 8:10

וְהִפְכִּיתִי חַגֹּתֵיכֶם לְאֵבֶל וְכָל־שִׂירֵיכֶם לְקִנָּה וְהִעַלְתִּי עַל־כָּל־מִזְבְּחֵיכֶם שֶׁמֶן וְעַל־כָּל־רֹאשׁ קָרְחָה וְעַמְתָּהּ כָּאֵבֶל יוֹדֵד וְאַחֲרִיתָהּ כְּיוֹם מָוֶה:

And I will turn your festivals into mourning and all your songs to dirges, and I will put sack cloth upon all loins and baldness upon all heads, and I will make it as the mourning of an only *child*, and the **end of** it will be as a day of bitterness.

These verses demonstrate that temporal relator nouns are less restrictive in their lexical relationships than spatial relator nouns. For instance, in Ecclesiastes 7:8, the word to which **אַחֲרִית** is semantically and grammatically related, **דְּבַר**,³⁷ does not have a specific meaning. Thus, the meaning to which **אַחֲרִית** is actually related is communicated in the context of the passage instead of by the word to which it is grammatically linked.³⁸ Also in Amos 8:10, the pronominal suffix **הָ**—of the relator noun **אַחֲרִית** seems to be an inclusive reference to the end of all the events described in Amos 8:8–10. Thus, even though **אַחֲרִית** is grammatically related to the suffix, it is semantically related to the series of events expressed in the context.³⁹ Since **אַחֲרִית** can be semantically related to a series of events, it seems plausible that

³¹ This verse and the previous seem to show that the prepositions **מִן** and **עַל** are interchangeable in meaning when used with **שְׂמאל** and **יְמִין**.

³² Cf. Genesis 48:14; Judges 5:26; Psalms 21:9; 26:10; 74:11; 89:14, 26; 138:7; 139:10; 144:11; Song of Solomon 2:6; 8:3; Isaiah 48:13; Daniel 12:7, but also cf. Genesis 48:17; Judges 3:15, 21; 7:20; 20:16; 2 Samuel 20:9; Psalm 73:23; 121:5; Jeremiah 22:24 Ezekiel 39:3 where the nouns **שְׂמאל** and **יְמִין** are actually in construct with the word **יָד**.

³³ N.b. especially how the two relator nouns further define the less-specific relator noun **אֶצֶל** in Nehemiah 8:4. Cf. also 1 Kings 7:39 where the relator nouns further define the less-specific relator noun **כְּתֵף**.

³⁴ For more examples of **ראש** referring to the beginning of something, see Exodus 12:2; Numbers 10:10; 28:11; Lamentations 2:19. For more examples of **אַחֲרִית** referring to the end of something see Genesis 49:1; Numbers 23:10; 24:14; Deuteronomy 4:30; 32:20; Psalms 37:38; 73:17; Proverbs 14:12; 16:25; Isaiah 2:2; 47:7; Jeremiah 5:31; 23:20; Lamentations 1:9; Ezekiel 23:25; 38:16; Daniel 8:19; 11:4; Hosea 3:5; Amos 4:2; 9:1; Micah 4:1. N.b. especially Numbers 24:20; Job 8:7; 42:12, where **אַחֲרִית** and **רֵאשִׁית** occur together as an antonymic, relator noun pair.

³⁵ N.b. the use of **רֵאשִׁית** in this sentence.

³⁶ N.b. the use of **רֵאשִׁית** in this sentence as well.

³⁷ The relator nouns **אַחֲרִית**, **אֲשֵׁרִית**, and **ראש** may be semantically and implicitly related to this word when no other concept is specified in the context of their passages (cf. Genesis 1:1; Isaiah 41:4, 26; 46:10; 48:16).

³⁸ N.b. that the same applies to the relator noun **רֵאשִׁית**.

³⁹ Cf. also Isaiah 47:7; Jeremiah 5:31.

ראשית may function in a similar manner in Genesis 1:1.⁴⁰

The relator noun ראשית.

The relator noun ראשית also describes temporal relationships between itself and the things to which it is semantically related, usually referring to the beginning of the related word or concept. It can be lexically and grammatically relative to such things or people as שנה (Deuteronomy 11:12), איוב (Job 8:7; 42:12), חכמה (Psalm 111:10; Proverbs 4:7), דעת (Proverbs 1:17), דרך (Proverbs 8:22), מדון (Proverbs 17:14), דבר (Ecclesiastes 7:8), ממלכות (Jeremiah 26:1; 27:1; 28:1; 49:34), and חטאת (Micah 1:13).⁴¹ Thus, ראשית is a relator noun, and it most likely has a relative meaning, even in Genesis 1:1.

The semantic dependence of the words פנה, אחור, חוץ, בית, שמאל, ימין, ראש, אחרית, and ראשית is what makes them relator nouns, and all of the cited examples demonstrate this trait. In most contexts these relator nouns would be empty of meaning if they were not semantically related to another word or concept. For example, if the relator noun ראש, “beginning,” is not semantically related to the phrase האשמרת התיכונה, “the middle watch,” in Judges 7:19a, then no reader would be able to determine what ראש is the beginning of. However, the main question to be asked now is since relator nouns are lexically relative, do they always have to be in grammatical construct? In other words, do relator nouns always have to be translated with the preposition “of”?

Grammatically Absolute Relator Nouns

Although relator nouns in general are both lexically and grammatically relative to another word, or in the case of some temporal relator nouns another concept, they can also be lexically relative to another word or concept while functioning as a grammatical absolute. Even in English, relator nouns do not have to be grammatically linked to another word. The most notable English example is the use of the relator noun “end” at the conclusion of a story. No English speaker argues that because the word “end” is relative in meaning, the phrase “The End” must be relative in form as well and changed to “The End of.” Furthermore, when reading the phrase “The End” at the completion of a book or movie, the English speaker does not ask, “The end of what?” The meaning to which the relator noun “end” is semantically related is implicit in context of the event. Thus, in English, relator nouns can be

both lexically relative and grammatically absolute. Similarly, relator nouns in Hebrew can also be both lexically relative and grammatically absolute. In other words, these Hebrew relator nouns, even though they are relative, can stand alone and are not required to be rendered with the preposition “of.”

The relator nouns פנה and אחור.

The relator nouns פנה and אחור can be relative in meaning and grammatically absolute, while still referring to the front, פנה, or the back, אחור, of a related word or concept. In the following examples they are lexically, but not grammatically, relative to such things or people as יואב, יהודה, and מגלת ספר.

2 Samuel 10:9a

וַיֵּרָא יוֹאָב כִּי־הִתְחַמָּה אֵלָיו פְּנֵי הַמַּלְחָמָה מִפְּנִים וּמֵאֲחֹרַיִם

And Joab saw that the front of the battle was against him from the **front** and from the **back**.

1 Chronicles 19:10a

וַיֵּרָא יוֹאָב כִּי־הִתְחַמָּה פְּנֵי־הַמַּלְחָמָה אֵלָיו מִפְּנִים וּמֵאֲחֹרַיִם

And Joab saw that the front of the battle was against him **front** and **back**.

2 Chronicles 13:14a

וַיִּפְּגְנוּ יְהוּדָה וַתִּגַּח לָהֶם הַמַּלְחָמָה מִפְּנִים וּמֵאֲחֹרַיִם

And Judah turned, and behold the battle was against him **front** and **back**.

Ezekiel 2:10a⁴²

וַיִּפְרֹשׂ אוֹתָהּ לִפְנֵי הוּא וְהָיָא כְּתוּבָה מִפְּנִים וּמֵאֲחֹרַיִם

And he spread it out before him, and it was inscribed on the **front** and the **back**.

In 2 Chronicles 13:14 both nouns are clearly acting in the place of the prepositions אחר and לפני, which are also in relation to יהודה in 13:13. However, even though the two nouns are relative in meaning to יהודה they are grammatically absolute. In other words, they have a relative meaning, but are not rendered with the preposition “of.”

The relator nouns חוץ and בית.

The relator nouns חוץ and בית can be relative in meaning and grammatically absolute, while still referring to the outside, חוץ, or the inside, בית, of a related word or concept. In the following examples they are lexically, but not grammatically, relative to such things as מחנה, עיר, תבה, and ארון.

⁴⁰ That is, of course, without the pronominal suffix ה.

⁴¹ ראשית is also paired with the relator noun אחרית in Job 42:12; Ecclesiastes 7:8; Isaiah 46:10.

⁴² פנה and אחור are semantically relative to מגלת ספר in Ezekiel 2:9.

Deuteronomy 23:13–14a

וְיָרָה תְהִיָּה לָךְ מִחוּץ לַמַּחֲנֶה וְיָצֵאתָ שָׁמָּה חוּץ
 וְיָתֵד תְהִיָּה לָךְ עַל-אֹמֶד וְהָיָה בְשִׁבְתְּךָ חוּץ וְרִפְרַתָּה בָּהּ
 And there shall be a place for you outside of the
 camp, and you will go out to there *on the outside*,
 and there will be a spade for you among your tools,
 and it will be, when you sit down *outside*, that you
 will dig with it,

Genesis 19:16b–17a

וַיֹּצֵאוּהוּ וַיִּצְהָרוּ מִחוּץ לְעִיר:
 וַיְהִי כַּהוֹצֵאֵם אֹתָם הַחוּצָה וַיֹּאמֶר הַמַּלְאָךְ עַל-נַפְשָׁךְ
 And they brought him out and put him outside of the
 city, and it came about, when they brought them to
 the *outside*, that one said, “Flee for your life,

Ezekiel 7:15⁴³

וְהָיָה הַחֶבֶד בְּחוּץ וְהַדָּבָר וְהָרֶעַב מִבֵּית אִשֶׁר בְּשָׂדֵה פְּדָב וַיָּמוּת וַאֲשֶׁר בְּעִיר רָעַב
 וְהָיָה יֹאכְלוּהוּ:
 The sword is on the *outside* and the plague and
 famine are on the *inside* so that in the field, one
 will die by the sword, and in the city another will be
 devoured by famine and plague.

Genesis 6:14b

קָנִים תַּעֲשֶׂה אֶת-הַתֵּבָה וְכִפַּרְתָּ אֹתָהּ מִבֵּית וּמִחוּץ בַּכֹּפֶר:
 You will make the ark with cells, and you will cover it
 from the *inside* and the *outside* with pitch.

Exodus 37:2a⁴⁴

וַיִּצְבְּרוּהוּ חָיִב טָהוֹר מִבֵּית וּמִחוּץ
 And he overlaid it with pure gold from the *inside*
 and the *outside*.

In Deuteronomy 23:13–14a the relator noun *חוּץ* is used three times and has the exact same meaning in all three instances. However, in two of the instances the noun is grammatically absolute, but lexically relative to the word *מִחוּצָה*.⁴⁵ Also, in Ezekiel 7:15 *חוּץ* and *בֵּית* are semantically, not grammatically, related to the word *עִיר*. The preposition *בְּ* is also semantically related to *עִיר*. Again, however, the preposition cannot be grammatically independent. Thus, the grammatically absolute and lexically relative *בֵּית* is used in its place and does not need to be translated with the preposition “of.”

The relator nouns *שְׂמאל* and *יְמין*.

The relator nouns *שְׂמאל* and *יְמין* can be relative in meaning and grammatically absolute, while still referring to the left side, *שְׂמאל*, or the right side, *יְמין*, of a related word or concept. In the following examples

they are lexically, but not grammatically, relative to such things and people as *מִזְבֵּחַ*, *הֵיכָל*, *הַיְמָן*, and *עֲשֵׂה־אֵל*.

2 Kings 12:10a

וַיִּקַּח יְהוֹיָדָע הַכֹּהֵן אֲרוֹן אֱלֹהִים וַיִּקַּח חֹר בְּרִלְתוֹ וַתֵּן אֹתוֹ אֶצְלַת הַמִּזְבֵּחַ
 בַּיְמִין בְּבֹאֵי-אִישׁ בֵּית יְהוָה
 And Jehoida the priest took a chest and bore a hole into
 its door and placed it on the side of the altar, on the
right side, as one is coming into the house of the LORD.

2 Chronicles 3:17a

וַיִּקֶם אֶת-הָעַמֻּדִים עַל-פְּנֵי הַהֵיכָל אֶתֶר מִיְמִין וְאֶתֶר מִשְׂמָאל
 And he placed the pillars in front of the temple, one
 on the *right side* and one on the *left side*.

1 Chronicles 6:29

וּבְנֵי מֵרָרִי אֲחֵיהֶם עַל-הַשְּׂמָאל אִתּוֹן בְּרָקוּשִׁי בְרֵעֲבָדִי בְּרִמְלוּךְ:
 And the sons of Merari, their brothers, were upon the
left side, Ethan son of Kishi, son of Abdi, son of Malluch,

2 Samuel 2:19

וַיִּדְרֹךְ עֲשָׂהֵל אַחֲרֵי אַבְנֵר לְלִצְתָּהּ עַל-הַיְמָן עַל-הַשְּׂמָאל נֹאדֵד אַבְנֵר:
 And Asahel pursued after Abner and he did not
 turn to go to the *right side* or the *left side* from
going after Abner.

In 2 Kings 12:10a the relator nouns *שְׂמאל* and *יְמין* further define the less specific relator noun *אֶצְלַת*, just as they do in Nehemiah 8:4. However, in 2 Kings 12:10a the relator nouns are grammatically absolute; whereas, in Nehemiah 8:4 they are in grammatical construct.⁴⁶ Also in 2 Chronicles 3:17 the phrase in which the relator nouns *שְׂמאל* and *יְמין* are used is nearly identical to the phrase in Zechariah 4:3. However, in 2 Chronicles 3:17 the relator nouns are grammatically absolute; whereas, in Zechariah 4:3 they are in grammatical construct. Finally, in 1 Chronicles 6:29 the grammatically absolute relator noun *שְׂמאל* is semantically related to *הַיְמָן* in 1 Chronicles 6:18, but in 1 Chronicles 6:24 its antonym *יְמין* is in grammatical construct with the pronoun whose antecedent is also *הַיְמָן*. Thus, rendering the relator nouns in 2 Kings 12:10a; 2 Chronicles 3:14; and 1 Chronicles 6:29 with the preposition “of” would be grammatically incorrect.

The relator nouns *ראש* and *אַחֲרִית*.

The relator nouns *ראש* and *אַחֲרִית* can be relative in meaning and grammatically absolute, while still referring to the beginning, *ראש*,⁴⁷ or the end, *אַחֲרִית*, of a related word or concept. However, the things to which they are semantically related are not always explicitly stated in the context of the passage.

⁴³ *עִיר* and *בֵּית* are both semantically related to the word *חוּץ*.

⁴⁴ *חוּץ* and *בֵּית* are semantically related to *אֲרוֹן* in Exodus 37:1.

⁴⁵ Cf. also the two uses of *חוּץ* in Genesis 19:16b–17.

⁴⁶ Cf. also 1 Kings 7:39 where the relator nouns further define the less-specific relator noun *כֶּתֶר* even though they are grammatically absolute.

⁴⁷ In all of the example passages in which a temporal *ראש* is used in the absolute grammatical state, the LXX translates the word with the Greek equivalent ἀρχή.

Proverbs 8:23⁴⁸

מְעוֹלָם נִסְכַּחְתִּי מִרֵאשִׁית מִקְדְּמֵי־אָרֶץ:

From everlasting I have been established, from the **beginning**, from before the earth

Ecclesiastes 3:11b⁴⁹

גַּם אֶת־הָעֹלָם יָתֵן בְּלִבָּם נִפְלִי אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יִנְצֵא הָאִים אֶת־הַמַּעֲשֵׂה אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂה הָאֱלֹהִים מִרֵאשִׁית וְעַד־סוֹף:

Moreover, he has set eternity in their heart so that man will not find out the work which God does from **beginning** to end.

Isaiah 40:21⁵⁰

הֲלֹא חִדַּעְתֶּם הָאֵל תִּשְׁבוּ הֲלֹא תִּדְבַר מִרֵאשִׁית לָכֵן הֲלֹא יָבִינְתֶם נוֹסוֹת הָאָרֶץ: Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been declared to you from the **beginning**? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?

Isaiah 41:4⁵¹

מִי־פָעַל וְעָשָׂה קִדָּא הַדְּרוֹת מִרֵאשִׁית אֲנִי יְהוָה רֵאשִׁית וְאַחֲרָיִם אֲנִי־הוּא: Who has done and made *this*, calling the generations from the **beginning**? *It is I*, the LORD, the first and the last. I am He.

Isaiah 41:26a⁵²

מִי־הִגִּיד מִרֵאשִׁית וְיִדְעָה וּמִלְפָּנִים וְנֹאמַר צְדִיק

Who has declared it from the **beginning** that we might know and that we might say from former times, “You are righteous.”

Isaiah 48:16a⁵³

קְרַבּוּ אֵלַי שְׁמַעוּ־זֹאת לֹא מִרֵאשִׁית בְּסֵתֶר דִּבְרֹתַי מִעַתָּה הִיחַתָּה שֵׁם אֲנִי Draw near to me, listen to this, *for* from the **beginning** I have not spoken in secret. From the time of its being there, I *am*.

Isaiah 46:10a⁵⁴

מְגִיד מִרֵאשִׁית אֲדִיבִית וּמִקֶּדֶם אֲשֶׁר לֹא־נַעֲשָׂה

declaring from the beginning, the **end**, and from before, that which has not been done,

Ecclesiastes 10:13⁵⁵

תְּהִלַּת דְּבָרֵי־פִיָּהּוּ סִכְלוּת וְאַחֲרֵיהֶּן פִּיהוּ הוֹלָלוֹת רָעָה:

The beginning of the words of his mouth are folly and the **end of the words** of his mouth are evil madness.

These verses demonstrate that even temporal relator nouns can also be grammatically absolute even though they are lexically relative. However, even the meanings to which they are semantically related do not have to be explicitly stated in the verse; rather, the context of the passage as a whole supplies the general concept to which these nouns are semantically related.

רֵאשִׁית רֵאשִׁית

In Isaiah 46:10, the relator nouns רֵאשִׁית and אַחֲרֵיהֶּן are grammatically absolute, but semantically related to a meaning that is implicit in the passage. As Humbert notes, the meanings of the words are semantically related to an unspecified *laps de temps* (lapse of time).⁵⁶ Like the English phrase “The End,” where the meaning of the relator noun is relative to a meaning implicit in the context of the event, the relator nouns רֵאשִׁית and אַחֲרֵיהֶּן are relative to a meaning implicit in the context of Isaiah 46:10a. This implicit relationship in meaning is not lost on Hebrew speakers. Ramban, a Medieval Jewish rabbi, states, “But there is the verse [Isa 46:10] ‘Declaring the end from the beginning’ (mê-rê’shîth), and if he constructs (the word mê-rê’shîth) with dâbhâr (thing) understood, here too [in Gen 1:1] it can be constructed (with a word understood) in the same way” (Newman 1960, 33).⁵⁷ Thus, the passage of Isaiah 46:10a demonstrates that the noun רֵאשִׁית can be grammatically absolute and lexically relative to a meaning that is implicit in the context of the

⁴⁸ רֵאשִׁית may be semantically related to מִפְּעֻלָּיו in Proverbs 8:22. In general רֵאשִׁית may be semantically related to such implicit concepts as עֵת, “time,” or הַכֹּל, “everything,” which is used to refer to all of creation in Jeremiah 10:16. The text is not specific about the meaning to which רֵאשִׁית is semantically related; nevertheless, the meaning communicated by the verse as a whole is clear.

⁴⁹ רֵאשִׁית may be semantically related to the words הַכֹּל or בְּעֵתוֹ in Ecclesiastes 3:11a. In general רֵאשִׁית may be semantically related to such an implicit concept as דְּבָר, “thing or matter” (cf. Ecclesiastes 7:8).

⁵⁰ רֵאשִׁית may be semantically related to the events described in Isaiah 41:2, 3, and/or 25. In general רֵאשִׁית may be semantically related to such an implicit concept as דְּבָר, “thing or matter.”

⁵¹ The text gives no specifics about the thing to which רֵאשִׁית is semantically related; however, in general it may be semantically related to such implicit concepts as עֵת, “time,” הַכֹּל, “everything,” or דְּבָר, “thing or matter.”

⁵² רֵאשִׁית may be semantically related to the events described in Isaiah 41:2, 3, and/or 25. In general רֵאשִׁית may be semantically related to such an implicit concept as דְּבָר, “thing or matter.”

⁵³ רֵאשִׁית may be semantically related to the events described in Isaiah 48:14. In general רֵאשִׁית may be semantically related to such an implicit concept as דְּבָר, “thing or matter.”

⁵⁴ The text is not specific about the concept to which אַחֲרֵיהֶּן is semantically related. In general אַחֲרֵיהֶּן may be semantically related to דְּבָר, “thing or matter.”

⁵⁵ אַחֲרֵיהֶּן seems to be semantically related to the word דְּבָרִי. The parallelism suggests that דְּבָרִי has been elided in the second colon.

⁵⁶ Cf. Ecclesiastes 7:8 where the two relator nouns are in grammatical construct, but are still lexically relative to something that is unspecified.

⁵⁷ Rashi, one of the first proponents of the dependent clause translation, also understands Isaiah 46:10a in the same sense (Rashi 1946, 2). Even the old Karaite scholars ‘Ali ben Suleimān and Ibn Janāh contemplate the relative nature of רֵאשִׁית and the implicit meaning to which it is semantically related in Genesis 1:1 (Skoss 1928, 93 n. 1.2).

passage.⁵⁸ It is a perfect parallel to the traditional translation of **רֵאשִׁית** in Genesis 1:1.

Lexical Conclusion

The preceding evidences demonstrate two things concerning relator nouns as a whole. First, contrary to the views of some scholars, a relative meaning for a relator noun does not require a “relative” construction or translation—i.e. “in the beginning of.” Relator nouns can be lexically relative yet grammatically absolute.⁵⁹ This phenomenon is typical of relator nouns and is neither a lexical nor a grammatical anomaly. Second, with respect to temporal relator nouns, the words or concepts to which they are semantically related do not have to be explicitly stated in the context of the passage. Like the English phrase “The End,” the relator noun’s context can supply the relational meaning implicitly. In the case of Genesis 1:1, the context tells the reader that the concept to which **רֵאשִׁית** is semantically related may be the universe, time, or the event of creation (“In the beginning of all things,” “In the beginning of time,” or “In the beginning of the creation event”).⁶⁰ It may be that the related concept is not specified because Genesis 1:1 describes, all at the same time, the beginning of the universe, time, and the creation event. Readers of the Hebrew and the traditional English translation of Genesis 1:1 can easily understand the “beginning” to be semantically related to such implicit concepts in the text.

The Grammatical Level

The absence of the definite article

Before returning to the linguistic traits of Hebrew relator nouns, one must also understand the grammatical dilemma that proponents of the

dependent-clause translation charge against the traditional translation. As stated earlier, if **רֵאשִׁית** is grammatically absolute and definite in meaning,⁶¹ one would also expect the word to be pointed with an articular *qamets*, **רֵאשִׁית**, rather than with a vocal shewa.⁶² However, if **רֵאשִׁית** is in construct with **רֵא** and the ensuing clause of Genesis 1:1, then one would expect **רֵאשִׁית** to be anarthrous and pointed as it is: with the vocal *shewa*.⁶³

To cite further evidence for this charge, proponents of the dependent clause translation frequently use Hosea 1:2a as a grammatical parallel, where the anarthrous noun **תְּחִלָּה** is in construct with the verb **דִּבֶּר** and the ensuing clause.⁶⁴ The passages states,

תְּחִלָּתָהּ דִּבֶּר יְהוָה בְּהוֹשֵׁעַ וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-הוֹשֵׁעַ לֵךְ קַח-לְךָ אִשָּׁת וְזִנּוּיִם
When the LORD first spoke to Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea, “Go, get yourself a wife of whoredom,” (NJPS)

The strength of this example is that the structure of the passage is very similar to Genesis 1:1, and the *nomen regens* of the construct chain, **תְּחִלָּה**, is nearly identical to **רֵאשִׁית** in meaning.⁶⁵ Furthermore, almost all modern translations render Hosea 1:2a with a dependent temporal clause,⁶⁶ and some are nearly identical in structure to the dependent-clause translation of Genesis 1:1. For example the NIV renders Hosea 1:2a as “When the LORD began to speak through Hosea;”⁶⁷ the NJV renders Genesis 1:1 as “When God began to create heaven and earth.”

In order to show that an anarthrous **רֵאשִׁית** in Genesis 1:1 can still be grammatically absolute and definite in meaning proponents of the traditional translation frequently use König’s argument (König 1919. 130 n. 1),⁶⁸ that **רֵאשִׁית** is a type of temporal noun that is often anarthrous when functioning as an

⁵⁸ Wenham also seems to recognize the word’s relationship to a meaning implicit in the context. He states, “In temporal phrases [רֵאשִׁית] is most often used relatively, i.e., it specifies the beginning of a particular period, e.g., ‘From the beginning of the year’ (Deut 11:12) or ‘At the beginning of the reign of’ (Jer 26:1). More rarely, as [in Genesis 1:1], it is used absolutely, with the period of time left unspecified; only the context shows precisely when is meant, e.g., Isa 46:10. ‘Declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times (מִקְדָּמִים) things not yet done’ (cf. Prov 8:22)” (Wenham 1987, 13–14).

⁵⁹ Skinner states, “But [the traditional translation] is not in accordance with the usage of רֵאשִׁית” (Skinner 1951, 13.) The cited examples of relator nouns demonstrate this statement to be incorrect.

⁶⁰ Even if **רֵאשִׁית** refers to the beginning of the world, or the cosmological first cause of the world, its meaning is still relative to that event. As a relator noun, **רֵאשִׁית** is empty of meaning until it is semantically related to something in the sentence or context, whether that thing is explicitly or implicitly stated.

⁶¹ As a relator noun, **רֵאשִׁית** must be semantically related to another word or concept. This semantic relationship makes relator nouns naturally definite, like the natural definiteness of cardinal numbers (see GKC § 134). Even if, on the rare occasion, the word or concept to which the relator noun is related is itself indefinite, the relator noun would still be definite because of its inherent semantic dependency. Consider Eccl 7:8, where the relator nouns **אֶחָדִים** and **רֵאשִׁית** are in construct with and semantically related to the indefinite word **דִּבֶּר**. Even though **דִּבֶּר** is indefinite, modern translations still render the relator nouns in this passage with definite articles. Thus, if **רֵאשִׁית** is a relator noun, it must be definite in meaning.”

⁶² Fn 11.

⁶³ Fn 12.

⁶⁴ N.b. the construct form of the noun **תְּחִלָּתָהּ** in this passage.

⁶⁵ Both words seem to be virtually interchangeable. Cf. Proverbs 4:7 with 9:10; Jeremiah 26:1 with Ezra 4:6; Isaiah 46:10 with Ecclesiastes 10:13.

⁶⁶ Cf. ESV, JPS, NASB, NIV, NKJV, NRSV, et al., but n.b. NAB, which seems to follow the rendering of the Vg.

⁶⁷ In Genesis 1:1 the NIV follows the traditional translation.

⁶⁸ Scholars who use König’s argument are the following: Heide (1951, 92); Hasel (1971, 158–159); Westermann (1990, 96); Waltke (1975).

adverbial expression of time, like **ראש קדם**, and **עו לם**.⁶⁹ Thus, if **בראשית** is functioning in this manner in Genesis 1:1, then it would not have to be pointed with the articular *qamets*. König's argument, however, should be rejected for two reasons. First, it is fraught with many problems and doesn't necessarily explain why these types of words are frequently anarthrous. Second, there is a better explanation for why **בראשית** is pointed with a vocal *sheva* that is more reflective of the relator noun classification.

The complications of König's argument.

As König argues, the word **בראשית** can certainly be classified as a temporal noun; however, many problems arise when he classifies it with other types of temporal nouns. First, temporal nouns like **ראשית** and **ראש** are not lexically analogous to **קדם** and **עולם**. The former nouns frequently refer to specific moments or periods in time: the beginning of something. The latter refer to indefinite periods of time. For instance, the temporal noun **קדם** almost always refers to an unspecified, immeasurable period of past time, and the temporal noun **עולם** is so unspecific that it can refer to an indefinite period of past *or* future time.⁷⁰ Thus, a possible explanation for why both **קדם** and **עולם** can be both anarthrous and grammatically absolute is that they are lexically indefinite; an article would seem to imply a lexically definite meaning.⁷¹ Thus, these nouns cannot be used as examples to explain why a definite **בראשית** in Genesis 1:1 can be both anarthrous and grammatically absolute.

König and the proponents of his argument might then counter that **ראשית** in Genesis 1:1 also has a lexically indefinite meaning like that of **קדם** and **עולם**,⁷² but in all its temporal uses, whether in construct or absolute (Isaiah 46:10), **ראשית** always has a definite meaning, **קדם** and **עולם** never do. Furthermore, as a relator noun, the meaning of **ראשית** is always semantically related to another word or concept, which makes the word naturally definite even if it is not grammatically related to another word.⁷³ Anyone who might argue that **ראשית** has an indefinite meaning in Genesis 1:1 would have to argue that it has a non-relative

meaning, which seems antithetical to the relator noun concept.

Second, proponents of the dependent-clause translation challenge König's argument. They counter that the examples with which he compares **בראשית** are all taken from poetic texts which do not frequently use the definite article. Brown states,

In addition, all the examples of related words used absolutely but without the article (*mērōš* in Isa 40:21; 41:4, 26; 48:16; *miqqedem* in Isa 46:10; *mēvōlām* in Isa 46:9) are culled from poetic texts, which by nature tend to "omit" the articles for nouns considered definite. Thus, on methodological grounds alone the comparison of poetic texts with Genesis 1 is problematic when used to argue for the absolute function of *bērēšit* in Gen 1:1. **Indeed, the absence of the article still supports the interpretation of *bērēšit* as a construct.** [emphasis mine] (Brown 1993, 64)⁷⁴

Even though opponents raise this objection, proponents of König's argument rarely cite prose examples, even though they do exist and are a counter to this challenge.⁷⁵ However, if **ראש** and **ראשית** are not semantically analogous to **קדם** and **עולם**, then there are no other prose examples with which to compare **ראשית**. Isaiah 46:10 is a great parallel verse in which **ראשית** is grammatically absolute, definite in meaning, and anarthrous, but a proponent of the dependent-clause translation can easily argue that the word would have a definite article if it were not in a poetic passage.

Third, since the temporal nouns **ראשית** and **ראש** almost always refer to the beginning of something, they are much more comparable to the temporal relator noun **תחלה**, which at times is semantically interchangeable with **ראשית**.⁷⁶ The word's semantic proximity to **ראשית** and **ראש** makes it a better methodological candidate for grammatical comparison. However, this is a problem for König and the proponents of his argument because even though **תחלה** is often grammatically absolute, it always functions in this manner with the article, not without.⁷⁷ Thus, according to this bit of evidence, the lexically comparable **ראשית** should also have the article when it is grammatically absolute. The

⁶⁹ Cf. **ראש** (Isaiah 40:21; 41:4, 26; 48:16; Proverbs 8:23, Ecclesiastes 3:11); **קדם** (Micah 5:1; Habakkuk 1:12); **עולם** (Genesis 3:22; 6:3, 4; Psalm 90:2; Proverbs 8:23).

⁷⁰ See Brown, Driver, and Briggs (1907) and Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm (1994–1999), s.v. "עולם."

⁷¹ Even when it has the definite article, the word **עולם** has an indefinite meaning (cf. 1 Chronicles 16:36; Nehemiah 9:5; Psalms 41:14; 106:48).

⁷² Although most modern scholars do not make this argument for the traditional translation, this may have been the view of the targumic translators of Genesis 1:1 and the LXX translators of Isaiah 46:10.

⁷³ See fn 62.

⁷⁴ In order to counter this charge, Heidel suggests that the text of Genesis 1 may itself be more poetic than prosaic (Heidel 1951, 92 n. 41). However, no other proponents of the traditional translation seem to make this argument.

⁷⁵ Cf. **קדם** Nehemiah 12:46; **עולם** Genesis 3:22; 6:4; 13:15; Exodus 3:15; et al.

⁷⁶ Cf. Proverbs 4:7 with 9:10; Jeremiah 26:1 with Ezra 4:6; Isaiah 46:10 with Ecclesiastes 10:13.

⁷⁷ Genesis 13:3; 41:21; 43:18, 20; Judges 1:1; 20:18; 2 Samuel 17:9; Nehemiah 11:17; Isaiah 1:26; Daniel 8:1; 9:21.

evidence as a whole demonstrates the weakness of König's argument, which makes the plausibility of the traditional translation weak as well. However, there is a better explanation for why a lexically definite and grammatically absolute **בְּרֵאשִׁית** is not pointed an articular *gamets*.

Relator Nouns and the Hebrew Definite Article

The previous lexical discussion has already established that **רֵאשִׁית** is a relator noun. As shown earlier, the relator noun classification demonstrates that relator nouns, like **רֵאשִׁית**, can be grammatically absolute even though they are relative in meaning. This classification, however, can also explain why **בְּרֵאשִׁית** is pointed with a vocal *shewa* instead of an articular *gamets*.

Because relator nouns are relative in meaning to another word or concept, they are definite in meaning by nature.⁷⁸ The following verses will demonstrate, however, that when they function as grammatical absolutes they can frequently be found with or without the article in passages of both prose and poetry. Consider the use of the relator nouns **חוּץ** and **בֵּית**:

Ezekiel 7:15

הַדָּבָר פֶּחוּץ וְהַדָּבָר הָרֹעֵב מִפֶּתַח אֲשֶׁר בַּשָּׂדֶה פֶּדַח יָמוֹת וְהָאֵשׁ בְּעִיר רֹעֵב
וְהָדָבָר יֵאָלֵפוּ:

The sword is on the **outside** and the plague and famine are on *the inside* so that in the field, one will die by the sword, and in the city another will be devoured by famine and plague.

Lamentations 1:20b⁷⁹

מֵעַן הִמְדַּבְּרוּ טֶרֶף לְבָבִי בְקִדְבִי כִּי נִדְוִי מִדָּוִי מִחוּץ שִׁכְלַח־הַדָּבָר פֶּתַח פִּמְוִתִּי:
my organs are in turmoil, my heart is turned within me for I have certainly rebelled. On *the outside* the sword makes childless, on the **inside** it is like death.

In these verses **חוּץ** and **בֵּית** are paired together, like they are in other passages,⁸⁰ and both are semantically related to the word **עִיר**. However, in both instances one relator noun is pointed with the article, but the other is not, even though both nouns are grammatically absolute and definite in meaning. Thus, the grammar of the passages demonstrates that a relator noun can be grammatically absolute and definite in meaning, but still be anarthrous.

Deuteronomy 23:13–14a⁸¹

יָדְךָ תִּהְיֶה לְךָ מִחוּץ לַמַּחֲנֶה וְיָצְאתָ שָׁמָּה חוּץ:
וְיָתֵד תִּהְיֶה לְךָ עַל־אֹתָךְ וְהָיָה בְּשִׁבְתְּךָ חוּץ וְהִפְרַתָּה בָּהּ

And there shall be a place for you **outside** of the camp, and you will go out to there *on the outside*, and there will be a spade for you among your tools, and it will be when you sit down *on the outside*, you will dig with it,

In this example the relator noun **חוּץ** in the first clause of verse 13 is semantically and grammatically related to **מִחֲנֶה** and is clearly definite in meaning. However, in the latter half of verses 13 and 14, **חוּץ** is grammatically absolute, but still relative in meaning to **מִחֲנֶה**. However, in its grammatically absolute form, **חוּץ** is anarthrous even though it is definite in meaning. Again, the evidence demonstrates that an anarthrous relator noun can be grammatically absolute and definite in meaning.

The relator nouns **שְׂמֹאל** and **יְמִין** can also function in the same manner. Consider the following uses.

2 Samuel 2:21a

וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ אַבְנֵר נָטָה לְךָ עַל־יְמִינֶךָ אוֹ עַל־שְׂמֹאלֶךָ וַיֵּאָדוּ לְךָ אֶחָד מִהַנְּעָרִים

And Abner said to him, “Turn yourself to the **right side** of you or to the **left side** of you and I will take one of the young men for you.”

2 Samuel 2:19

וַיִּדְרֹף עֲשׂוּרָאֵל אַחֲרֵי אַבְנֵר לִלְכֹת עַל־יְמִין וְעַל־שְׂמֹאל מֵאֲחֵרֵי אַבְנֵר:

And Asahel pursued after Abner and he did not turn to go to the **right side** or the **left side** from *going* after Abner

Numbers 20:17b

וְהָרַף הַמִּלְכָּד נֵלֶךְ לֹא נָטָה יְמִין וְשְׂמֹאל עַד אֲשֶׁר־נִשְׁעַר גְּבֻלְךָ:

We will go the way of the king; we will not turn to *the right side* or *the left side* until we cross your territory.

Numbers 22:26

וַיֹּסֵף מִלְּאֲדֵי־יְהוָה עֲבֹד וַעֲבֹד בְּמִקְוֵם צָר אֲשֶׁר אֵין־דֶּרֶךְ לְשׂוֹת יְמִין וְשְׂמֹאל:

And the messenger of the LORD passed on further, and stood in the narrow place in which there is not a way to turn to *the right side* or *the left side*.

In these examples, the relator nouns **שְׂמֹאל** and **יְמִין** are used with the verb **נָטָה** to describe turning from the path either to the right side or the left side

⁷⁸ See fn 62.

⁷⁹ There are a couple of reasons to translate the verse in this manner. First, Lamentations 1:19 suggests that the speaker of this passage is referring to the inside and the outside of a city during a siege, not the inside of a house. Second, the parallel language of Ezekiel 7:15 (cf. also Deuteronomy 32:25) matches the situation described in Lamentations 1:19–20 exactly. There are those who die by the sword outside of the city and those who perish of famine inside. Although Lamentations 2:21 does describe death by the sword in the streets, the more technical form **חִוּצוֹת** is used in the passage rather than simply **חוּץ**.

⁸⁰ Genesis 6:14; Exodus 25:11; 37:2; 1 Kings 7:9.

⁸¹ The words “on the” are added to the translation to bring out the definiteness of the word **חוּץ**.

of oneself (cf. 2 Samuel 2:21). The Numbers passages, however, demonstrate that this word pair, when used in the same way with the same verb, can be grammatically absolute and definite in meaning even though both words are anarthrous.⁸²

1 Kings 7:39a

וַתֵּן אֶת־הַמִּבְנוֹת הַיָּמִישׁ עַל־פְּתָח הַבַּיִת מִיְמִין וְחֲמִשָּׁה עַל־פְּתָח הַבַּיִת מִשְׂמָאלוֹ
And he placed the stands, five on the side of the temple on *the right side* and five upon the side of the temple on its *left side*.

2 Chronicles 3:17a

וַיָּקָם אֶת־הַעֲמֻדִים עַל־פְּנֵי הַחֵיכַל אֶחָד מִיְמִין וְאֶחָד מִשְׂמָאלוֹ
And he placed the pillars in front of the temple, one on *the right side* and one on the *left side*.

Finally, both of these examples demonstrate that even though *שְׂמָאל* and *יְמִין* are used in exactly the same manner, *שְׂמָאל* is grammatically definite and *יְמִין* is not. Both, however, are definite in meaning, which again suggests that relator nouns can be both grammatically absolute and definite in meaning, yet anarthrous in form.

In addition to these passages, there are a number of verses in which a definite and grammatically absolute relator noun can be either articulated or anarthrous. The relator nouns *אָחוֹר* and *פְּנֵה* are always anarthrous when they are grammatically absolute (2 Samuel 10:9; 1 Chronicles 19:10; 2 Chronicles 13:14; Psalm 139:5; and Ezekiel 2:10). The relator nouns *חוּץ* and *בַּיִת* can be pointed with the article when they are grammatically absolute (Genesis 9:22; 19:17; 24:31; 39:11; Exodus 21:19; Leviticus 18:9; Deuteronomy 24:11; 25:5; Judges 12:9; 19:25; 2 Samuel 13:18; 2 Kings 4:3; 2 Kings 10:24; Ezra 10:13; Job 31:32; Psalm 41:7; Proverbs 22:13; 24:27; Song of Solomon 8:1; Ezekiel 41:9, 17, 25; Hosea 7:1), but there are other passages in which they are anarthrous (Genesis 6:14; Exodus 12:46; 25:11; 37:2; Leviticus 14:41; Deuteronomy 23:13, 14; 32:25; 1 Kings 6:6, 15, 16; 7:9; Isaiah 33:7; Lamentations 1:20; Ezekiel 7:15; 40:5, 19; 46:2; 47:2). The relator nouns *שְׂמָאל* and *יְמִין* can also be pointed with an article when they are grammatically absolute (Genesis 13:9; 2 Samuel 2:19; 1 Chronicles 6:29; 2

Chronicles 3:17; Nehemiah 12:31; Ezekiel 1:10), but mostly they are anarthrous (Genesis 24:49; Numbers 20:17; 22:26; Deuteronomy 2:27; 5:32; 17:11, 20; 28:14; Joshua 1:7; 17:7; 19:27; 23:6; 1 Samuel 6:12; 1 Kings 7:39, 49; 2 Kings 12:10; 22:2; 2 Chronicles 3:17; 4:6, 7, 8; 34:2; Job 23:9; 30:12; Psalm 142:5; Proverbs 4:27; Isaiah 54:3). Finally, the temporal relator nouns *אֶחָד* and *אֲחֵרִית* are almost always anarthrous when they are grammatically absolute (Psalm 37:37; Proverbs 8:23; 23:18; 24:14; 24:20; Ecclesiastes 3:11; 10:13; Isaiah 40:21; 41:4, 26; 46:10; 48:16; Jeremiah 29:11).⁸³

Grammatical Conclusion

The preceding evidences demonstrate that relator nouns can be anarthrous when they are grammatically absolute. The reason for this is because they are in a grammatical state of flux. On the one hand, they are in an almost implicit grammatical construction with a related thing or concept,⁸⁴ yet on the other hand, they are grammatically absolute with a definite meaning. Because these nouns are lexically dependent on another word or concept to complete their meaning, like a noun in grammatical construct, one would expect grammatically absolute relator nouns to be anarthrous. However, because they have a definite meaning when they are grammatically absolute, one would also expect them to have the definite article. Thus, it is not surprising that grammatically absolute relator nouns can occur with or without the article. With respect to the relator noun *בְּרֵאשִׁית* in Genesis 1:1, if it is grammatically absolute, it does not have to be pointed with an articular *qamets*, even though it could be. Such is the nature of relator nouns in this grammatical state of flux.

Conclusion

Once *בְּרֵאשִׁית* is correctly identified as a relator noun, a better methodology can be used for collecting and analyzing the lexical and grammatical data. This article has shown that when the word *בְּרֵאשִׁית* is compared with other types of relator nouns, the lexical evidence demonstrates that it can be grammatically absolute even if it is lexically relative. Thus, the challenge put forth by opponents that

⁸² Numbers 20:17 and Deuteronomy 2:27 describe very similar happenings where the Israelites request a nation's permission to travel through their land, and they swear not to deviate to their left or to their right from the path. However, Numbers 20:17 uses the verb *נָטָה* to describe not turning to one's left or right, and Deuteronomy 2:27 uses the verb *סוּר*. These parallel verses suggest that the act of turning, or not turning, to one's left or right can be described by both verbs. The examples from 2 Samuel suggest that the relator nouns *שְׂמָאל* and *יְמִין* when used either with *נָטָה* or *סוּר* are definite in meaning even though they are anarthrous.

⁸³ One could argue that in some cases, in which *אֲחֵרִית* is grammatically absolute, it should be rendered as "future" rather than "end," which would mean that the word is not being used as a relator noun (cf. Psalm 37:37; Proverbs 23:18; 24:14, 20; Jeremiah 29:11). However, *אֲחֵרִית* is often semantically related to a person and is used as a reference to the latter days of that person's life (Numbers 23:10; Job 8:7; 42:12; Proverbs 5:11; 19:20; Jeremiah 17:11). Thus, in the cases where *אֲחֵרִית* is grammatically absolute, but implicitly related to a person, it still functions as a relator noun even though it could be rendered as "future."

⁸⁴ This is Brown, Driver, and Briggs's (1907) description of *אֲחֵרִית* in Isaiah 46:10. It is absolute, but implicitly it is the end of a phase of history. See Brown, Driver, and Briggs's (1907), s.v. "אֲחֵרִית."

because **רֵאשִׁית** is lexically relative, it must be rendered in the construct state in Genesis 1:1, does not stand up to scrutiny.

Furthermore, this article has shown that when **בְּרֵאשִׁית** is again compared with other types of relator nouns, the grammatical evidence demonstrates that it can be anarthrous even though it is grammatically absolute. Thus, the challenge put forth by opponents that because **בְּרֵאשִׁית** is not pointed with an articular *qamets*, the word is in the construct state, also does not stand up to scrutiny.

Both the lexical and grammatical evidences of Hebrew relator nouns demonstrate that **בְּרֵאשִׁית** can be in the absolute state in Genesis 1:1, which would render the verse as an independent clause. This is the traditional translation of the passage, which allows Genesis 1:1 to be interpreted as the first act of creation. However, the grammatical and lexical evidences only demonstrate that the traditional translation is itself linguistically possible. Syntactical evidence presented in a forthcoming article will demonstrate that the traditional translation of Genesis 1:1 is not only linguistically possible, it is the only reasonable translation of the first verse of the Bible.

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