Reconsidering the so-called *vav* consecutive

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The term *vav* consecutive and its alternatives (e.g., *vav* conversive, *vav* reversive, *vav* inversive, *vav* relative, and *vav* inductive) are long-established traditional labels for Biblical Hebrew verb forms, and they remain prevalent in the literature of the field despite growing recognition that they are inaccurate descriptions of the verb forms to which they refer. I contend that these terms share some common descriptive errors about the Hebrew verbal system that make their continued use not only confusing and misleading but counterproductive to the study of Hebrew grammar. In this paper I point out the problems engendered by the use of these terms and propose more satisfactory descriptions of the phenomena to which they refer as well as alternative labels for these forms.

Although it is difficult to move beyond well-entrenched grammatical terms, it is desirable to do so when the continued use of such terms wittingly or unwittingly misconstrues the grammatical phenomena to which they refer. It is my contention that this is the case for the *vav*-consecutive terms. The continued use of the *vav*-consecutive or any of its varieties—*vav* conversive, *vav* reversive, *vav* inversive, *vav* inductive, or *vav* relative—perpetuate descriptive errors with regard to the morphology, syntax, and semantics of the verb forms to which they refer.

1. Terminology and what it conveys

A survey of the development of these terms will enable us to appreciate the errors they hold in common.[1] The oldest term, the **vav conversive**, is a translation of the Hebrew term וו ההפוך, which appears in Medieval Jewish grammar discussions. These grammarians understood the Hebrew verbal system in terms of tense oppositions: the Perfect conjugation is past tense, the Participle expresses present tense, and the Imperfect conjugation is future tense.[2] They posited that Hebrew had two semantically distinct *vav* conjunctions: the first of these, the וו החבור, when prefixed to a verb form, joins the clause to a previous one; the וו ההפוך, however, not only links the clauses but *converts* the tense of the verb to which it is prefixed, so that a past tense verb becomes future tense and a future tense verb becomes past tense. The more recent terms *vav* inversive (Joüon 1993: 387) and *vav* reversive (Kittle, Hoffer, and Wright 1989: 388) are variations on the conversive

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1   For a more complete discussion, see Cook 2008.
2   For a defense of an aspectual interpretation of the Bibical Hebrew verbal system, see Cook 2001, 2002, 2006.

translation of the Hebrew term וו ההפוך; they share a common analysis of the conjunction: the *vav* effects a conversion, reversion, or inversion of tense values of the verbal conjugations.[3]

   The term **vav consecutive** emerged in the early nineteenth century and gained popularity from its endorsement in Ewald's grammar and in S. R. Driver's treatise on the verbal system. The consecutive label chiefly denotes the *vav* as conveying a sense of temporal succession: not simply *and* but *and then.* However, there are three distinct interpretations of the *vav* consecutive. According to Ewald, the consecutive *vav* makes the verbal idea "dependent" on what comes before it in the sense of temporal succession or consequentiality; but it also converts the tense in accordance with the *vav*-conversive theory (Ewald 1879: 18–23). Ewald (1879: 19) compared the *a*-vowel of the conjunction on the *vav*-consecutive Imperfect (וַיִּשְׁמֹר versus וְיִשְׁמֹר) "to the augment in other languages." He treated the *vav*-consecutive Perfect as the analogical counterpart to the *vav*-consecutive Imperfect (1879: 23): the augment is dropped, and the tone is shifted *milra* "to compensate for this": in other words, וְשָׁמַרְתָּ versus שָׁמַרְתָּ.

   By contrast, S. R. Driver's classic dissemination of the consecutive theory in the English-speaking world eschewed the conversive idea and integrated the *vav*-consecutive idea with his aspectual theory of the Imperfect and Perfect conjugations. Working from his argument that the Imperfect denotes "nascent" action, S. R. Driver ([1892] 1998: 72) famously glossed וַיֹּאמֶר as 'and he proceeded-to-say'. The *vav*-consecutive Perfect remained, in S. R. Driver's thinking as in Ewald's, analogically related to the *vav*-consecutive Imperfect. Thus S. R. Driver ([1892] 1998: 117) explained that the *vav*-consecutive Perfect denotes action "advancing to completion," in like manner to the *vav* consecutive Imperfect denoting "a fresh development [nascent] in the next act taken up by the narrative."

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3   Joüon-Muraoka prefer the term inversive because they treat the stress shift as part of the conversive phenomenon. Kittle, Hoffer, and Wright, but contrast, employ reversive as an "analogical" counterpart of conversive out of a pedagogical concern to distinguish the two conversive conjugations.

The **vav-relative** theory is a slightly older contemporary of the *vav*-consecutive theory. However, the *vav*-relative theory has shifted over the course of the past two centuries. The earliest view was set consciously over and against the *vav*-conversive theory. Schroeder (1824: 239–40; 1st ed. 1766) argued that the *vav* "relativized" the temporal meaning of the verb to the preceding verbal idea. He labeled the *vav*-relative with the Imperfect conjugation the "Relative Future," which relates events in narrative as future *relative* to a leading Perfect form that anchors the narrative in the Past. The logic of this approach is limited to the *vav*-consecutive Imperfect, and thus Schroeder (1824: 236) adopted the standard *vav*-conversive explanation for the *vav*-consecutive Perfect.

However, the more recent use of the *vav*-relative label represents variation on the *vav*-consecutive idea, whereby the *vav* "relates" an event as temporally successive or consequential to an earlier event (see Waltke and O'Connor 1990: 519–20, 547; Futato 2003: 162). This conception of the *vav*-relative owes more on the theories of Ewald and S. R. Driver than Schroeder's earlier *vav*-relative theory. Ewald (1879: 18–19, 22) characterized the consecutive forms as "relative tenses and moods," and employed the descriptive labels "relatively-progressive imperfect" and "relatively-progressive perfect." S. R. Driver ([1892] 1998: 119), perhaps following Ewald's lead, allowed that the *vav*-consecutive Imperfect was so universally employed, that it was often used to express not simply temporal succession but logically "contingent" events. Driver ([1892] 1998: 114) used this same term, "contingent" ("contingently realized"), to describe the basic meaning of the *vav*-consecutive Perfect.

This discussion might remain largely of antiquarian interest were it not for the fact that all of these centuries-old theories are represented in the latest literature—and not simply as respectful nods to these trailblazing grammarians, but spread throughout the introductory and intermediate

grammars. For example, Kittle, Hoffer, and Wright (1989) in their textbook embrace the medieval *vav*-conversive theory, along with their analogical "*vav*-reversive" label; Bornmann (1998) endorses the standard *vav*-consecutive theory in his introductory grammar; and Futato in his *Beginning Biblical Hebrew* (2003) follows Waltke and O'Connor's (1990) version of the *vav*-relative theory. Aside from the aforementioned example of Waltke and O'Connor, among more advanced discussions of Hebrew grammar we find Muraoka's (1999) adoption of Joüon's *vav*-inversive terminology in his work, and an excellent example of Ewald's classic theory combining both a conversive and consecutive sense in Arnold and Choi (2003: 83).

2. The underlying errors

Whether intended or not, the employment of these terms perpetuate two basic errors. First, they presume that the *vav* attached to the Imperfect and the Perfect is a single phenomenon, or at least analogical related ones. Second, they attribute to the *vav* morphophonological, semantic, and syntactic sway over the verb form so far beyond what we reasonably expect of a coordinating conjunction that the theories are incredible on first sight. This is evident from the look of incredulity on the faces of many first-year Hebrew students upon their introduction to these explanations. In response I want to outline an alternative analysis of these conjugations as a basis for encouraging the abandonment of these misleading terms. I should mention that this view is not entirely novel nor entirely my creation; it incorporates a gestalt of insights developed separately to one degree or another my myself and other scholars, most notably Holmstedt, Revell's students DeCaen and Shulman, and Joosten. However, before my analysis, one final aspect of the traditional theories requires attention—namely, morphophonemic contours that have been thought to be indicators of the *vav*-consecutive conjugations.

3. Morphophonemics and the usual suspects

Already the Medieval grammarians identified the vocalization of the conjunction on the *vav*-conversive Imperfect, and its tendency to *mill'el* stress as diagnostic indicators of the conjugation. Similarly, the opposite tendency to *milra* stress with the *vav*-conversive Perfect was treated as a distinguishing feature of the form. Ewald and S. R. Driver both probed the extent to which these features were morphologically and morphophonemically significant—i.e., whether they were more than just diagnostically helpful correlations, but integral characteristics of the conjugations. I've already mentioned Ewald's treatment of the conjunction's *a*-syllable on the *vav*-consecutive Imperfect conjunction and the *milra* stress of the *vav*-consecutive Perfect as equivalent to tense augments (above). S. R. Driver discussed at some length whether the *vav*-consecutive Imperfect was constructed of the Jussive form, given their shared *mill'el*-stress pattern with certain verbs. Each of these three features may be independently addressed in turn.

The morphological shape of the *vav*-consecutive Imperfect is a reliable diagnostic—regardless of one's analysis of the form. However, its shape—particularly the lengthened preformative consonant following the conjunction—has resisted a satisfactory explanation. Suggestions are of three types (see McFall 1982: 217–19; Testen 1998: 193–94): first, some propose two morphologically and semantically distinct conjunctions—the simple conjugation, vocalized with a *shwa,* and the *vav*-consecutive Imperfect conjunction, vocalized with a full *a*-vowel followed by a lengthened consonant (G. R. Driver 1936: 92, who sees in the alteration an analogy with the Akkadian -*ma* suffix on verbs); second, there are theories that attribute the lengthened consonant to the phonological need to preserve the full, original *a*-vowel of the *vav*-conjunction (S. R. Driver [1892] 1998: 72; Müller 1991); third are theories that posit some word or morpheme that has been assimilated between the *vav* conjunction and the verbal preformative, such as Ewald's (1879: 19)

suggestion of a pronominal element *ad*/אז;

The first of these options fails to explain why there is not just two but three distinct conjunctions: the *vav*-conjunction (וו החבור), the *vav*-consecutive (וו ההפוך) with the Imperfect and the *vav*-consecutive with the Perfect. The second type assumes that the Masoretes sought to distinguish the consecutive Imperfect from the non-consecutive Imperfect by arbitrarily imposing a closed-syllable structure on the conjunction, thereby preserving the *a*-vowel. However, this raises the questions of why this means of disambiguating the forms and why they could not have done the same for the *vav*-consecutive Perfect? The third approach is widely held but without any clear consensus on what the morpheme or assimilated word might be (see Testen 1998). From the perspective of historical grammar the issue has reached a standstill, but I will return to it from a different angle in a few moments.

The *mill'el* stress on the *vav*-consecutive Imperfect is less troublesome and more illuminating. This *mill'el* stress occurs only with middle- or final-glide roots (including the "third-*he*" roots, which are technically end in a glide), and only in those inflected forms ending in a consonant (i.e., singular forms except second-person feminine and only the first-person of the plural forms). This pattern of *mill'el* stress matches that of the Jussive conjugation, and has led to the view that a "short" prefix-pattern verb, reconstructed as **yaqtul*, is the common origin of both the Jussive and the *vav*-consecutive Imperfect conjugations (e.g., Rainey 1986; Huehnergard 1988). This "short" prefix form contrasts with a "long" **yaqtulu* form, which is the origin of the Imperfect verb. Despite the loss of the short final vowels prior to Biblical Hebrew, the stress pattern of these conjugations is sensitive to whether these forms etymologically terminated in a consonant or short vowel (see Holmstedt 2000). The recognition of a different patterns underlying the Jussive and *vav*-consecutive Imperfect, on the one hand, and the Imperfect, on the other, is an important

component in the theory of the so-called *vav*-consecutive Imperfect that I will elaborate on in a moment.

The tendency toward a *milra* stress in the *vav*-consecutive Perfect is most resistant to a satisfactory explanation. The difficulty with the traditional view that the *milra* stress is morphophonemically significant to the *vav*-consecutive Perfect conjugation is not that it only applies to some of the inflected forms—namely, those forms that otherwise would have a *mill'el* stress (i.e., 2nd-person singular and 1st-person singular and plural)—but that the stress pattern is inconsistently applied, displaying variation over even brief stretches of text (e.g., Amos 1). Revell's (1984, 1985) articles examining this phenomenon cast doubt on its morphophonemic status; it may be the case that the stress variation is a purely phonetic phenomenon only coincidentally correlative with some *vav*-consecutive Perfect forms.

4. Historical linguistics as explanation (versus description)

My approach to the so-called *vav*–consecutive forms draws on historical-comparative data. On this approach I offer an apologetic in light of objections to a diachronic approach in recent decades. The objection was concisely stated by Zevit (1988: 27): "Etymological explanations that purport to describe the origins of the Hebrew verbal system are inadequate as descriptions of how this system works in fact." On the one hand, I am sympathetic to Zevit's point in its context: even if one can demonstrate an etymology for the *vav*-consecutive Imperfect in an earlier prefixed preterite or past tense conjugation, this does not mean one has adequately explained the conjugation's role in the Biblical Hebrew verbal *system.* On the other hand, such statements have led to a false dichotomy: *either* we explain how we arrived at the verbal forms we now have based on historical and comparative argumentation, *or* we consciously ignore the diachronic data and treat the system as a static entity. Michel (1960: 14) in his study of the Hebrew verbal system in the

book of Psalms rejected the historical-comparative data altogether, arguing that it is unsound to offer historical-comparative explanations of a system for which we lack an adequate synchronic description. However, his findings have not vindicated his method.

This false dichotomy appears not only in works by hebraists, but in the linguistic literature generally. Recently, linguists have put forward a corrective to this line of thinking. In contrast to Michel's aforementioned argument, Haspelmath (2004) argues that not all types of language explanation require a full (synchronic) description of the language. While synchronic descriptions are valid and important, Haspelmath explains that given two competing descriptions of a language phenomenon we have no other choice than to turn to factors that are "external" to the language system itself, such as language change, in order to arbitrate between the two descriptions. As he states it, "What I am saying here is that external evidence is the only type of evidence that can give us some hints about how to choose between two different observationally adequate descriptions" (2004: 574). In another study, Moravscik (2007) addresses the false dichotomy of synchronic description versus diachronic explanations, by showing how diachronics explain synchronic language structure. She concludes, "there is no need to choose between synchronic and diachronic accounts: synchrony is what diachrony explains" (2007: 39). Thus, I find it both prudent and permissible to turn to historical and comparative evidence to explain the phenomena of the so-called *vav*-consecutive conjugations in Hebrew.

5. From the *vav*-consecutive Imperfect to the Past Narrative

The discrediting of the *vav*-consecutive theory began already in 1910 with Hans Bauer's monograph on the Semitic verb. Historically it is significant for its shift from Arabic as the basis for reconstructing Semitic grammar to Akkadian as the new examplar of pristine, early Semitic grammar. This shift is significant for Hebrew studies in that Arabic offered little in the way of

explanation for the *vav*-consecutive conjugations. By contrast, Akkadian exhibits several prefixed verb conjugations including one that expresses simple past tense. Based on the Akkadian evidence, Bauer (1910) argued that each of the consecutive–non-consecutive pairs of conjugations in Biblical Hebrew preserve two historically distinct verb conjugations: the *vav*-consecutive Imperfect preserves the "old style" Semitic past tense and the Imperfect represented a "new style" non-past prefixed verb form. Similarly, the *vav*-consecutive Perfect derives from an "old style" that corresponds to the Akkadian Verbal Adjective, while the Perfect represents a "new style" of past verbal conjugation developed in West Semitic from the older stative style. Despite shortcomings in Bauer's theory (see Cook 2002: 96–98) it was revolutionary in several regards. First, it opened up an entire new type of explanation for the morphologically similar consecutive and non-consecutive pairs of verbs. Instead of trying to explain the semantic differences in terms of the *vav* conjunction, he argued that partial homonymy of each pair had blurred their distinction as separate forms with different etymologies. Secondly, he discovered cognates of the Hebrew consecutive forms within the earliest Semitic grammar of Akkadian.

Fast-forward a century since Bauer's work, and his etymological explanation of the *vav*-consecutive Imperfect is wide-spread. It has been bolstered particularly by Rainey's (esp. 1986, 1996) studies of the grammar of Amarna Canaanite, so that the *"yaqtul"* explanation appears frequently not only in scholarly works but in introductory textbooks, such as Seow's. Seow (1995: 225–26) explains that the *vav*-consecutive Imperfect derives from a Semitic prefixed past tense **yaqtul*, which was distinct from the etymological **yaqtulu* form of the Imperfect, by its lack of a final short vowel. The *mill'el* stress pattern of *vav*-consecutive Imperfect and Jussive, mentioned earlier, provides corroborative evidence for the **yaqtul*-**yaqtulu* etymological distinction (see Holmstedt 2000).

This **yaqtul* explanation is a corrective to only one aspect of the *vav*-consecutive and related theories, namely, their treatment of the verbal semantics. Thus, Seow (1995: 225–26) and other authorities continue to embrace the idea of a consecutive *vav* that adds a successive or consequential sense to the past-tense meaning of the verb. However, this element of the *vav*-consecutive theory represents an *over-interpretation* of sorts. Inasmuch as linguists recognize temporal succession to be a defining property of narrative, we must be suspect of any grammatical description that identifies a narrative form as specifically marked for temporal succession. [4] Narrative defaults for *ordo naturalis* (Brown and Yule 1983: 125), that is, it reports events in the order in which they occur in the narrative world. Therefore, languages typically require special marking not for narrative sequences but for *departures* from that *ordo naturalis*. For example, the English Simple Past form is used by default in narrative sequences, while departures from the default ordering are expressed by other forms, including stative expressions, perfect verbs, or gerundive constructions. Despite the single-to-many contrast of forms here, it would be erroneous for us to attribute temporal succession to the English Simple Past form over and against the several other constructions. Likewise, it is mistaken to attribute temporal-succession to so-called the *vav*-consecutive Imperfect (Cook 2004).

It is therefore more accurate and helpful to relabel the so-called *vav*-consecutive Imperfect the *Past Narrative* conjugation: it is marked for "past" tense,[5] and it is generally restricted to "narrative" discourse; that is, it expresses the foreground or most salient events in a narrative. It is only a consequence of the character of narrative that these salient events are by and large temporally successive, and not due to some feature of the Past Narrative conjugation (Cook 2004).

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4   I have yet to see convincing evidence that any language has a narrative verb form expressly marked for temporal succession, as the consecutive theory claims is the case with the so-called *vav*-consecutive Imperfect.

5   The case for distinguishing the past-tense Past Narrative versus the perfective-aspect Perfect verb is based on their distinct interaction with stative verbs (see Cook 2002, 2006, etc.).

Note, however, that this theory leaves as yet unexplained the peculiar shape of the *vav* conjunction on the Past Narrative form. I am intentionally delaying this question until after I've analyzed the *vav*-consecutive Perfect, the analysis of which will dovetail with this question.

6. From the *vav*-consecutive Perfect to the Irreal Perfect

The phenomenon of the *vav*-consecutive Perfect is distinct from and more complicated than that of the Past Narrative. However, Bauer's study again represents a significant launch point. His etymological connection of the West Semitic Perfect with the East Semitic verbal adjective has become widely accepted (e.g., Huehnergard 1992: 156). However, his attempt to relate the Perfect and *vav*-consecutive Perfect diachronically were less successful. Despite a recent effort by Andersen (2000) to resuscitate the theory, there is no convincing evidence for distinct etymologies for the Perfect and *vav*-consecutive Perfect.

A more fruitful approach is to abandon efforts to find a distinct etymological source for the *vav*-consecutive Perfect and instead look for comparable semantic and syntactic functions among the other Semitic Perfects. Such an examination will quickly discover that the various reflexes of the West Semitic Perfect conjugation tends to exhibit a non-past temporal meaning as the predicate of a conditional protasis or apodosis clause.[6] The protasis-apodosis construction, broadly conceived, presents one event as *contingent* on another—the term that already S. R. Driver used to describe the *vav*-consecutive Perfect. In fact, contingency accounts for a wide range of uses of the *vav*-consecutive Perfect, including not only the protasis-apodosis use but also its final (purpose/result) sense following a Jussive or Imperative form. However, contingency fits less well another frequent uses of the *vav*-consecutive Perfect, as an directive in passages such as God's directions to Moses on how to build the tabernacle in Exodus 25–31. It is possible to see a development, semantically

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6 For example, Classical Arabic (Wright 1962: 2.14–17), Ethiopic (Dillman [1899] 1974: 548), Imperial Aramaic (Folmer 1991) and Syriac (Nöldeke [1904] 2001: 203–05, 265), Ugaritic (Tropper 2000: 715), Phoenician (Krahmalkov 1986), and Amarna Canaanite (Rainey 1996: 355–65)

and diachronically, between the protasis-apodosis use and the directive meaning of the *vav*-consecutive Perfect in conditional law code, where the apodosis regularly includes a directive sense. For example, the structure of the sacrificial legislation in Leviticus 1–6 is typically "If someone does this (often expressed by an Imperfect) . . . then s/he *must* or *should* do this (expressed by a *vav*-consecutive Perfect).

   Given that the idea of contingency and its extension into directive account for the functions of the *vav*-consecutive Perfect, it is clear that its opposition with the Perfect form is one of mood (or modality) and not tense, aspect, or temporal succession: the Perfect expresses Indicative mood whereas the *vav*-consecutive Perfect expresses non-indicative or Irreal mood. Linguists have come to recognize that mood is essentially a binary distinction in language (Palmer 2001), to which one may apply the Indo-European based labels of Indicative and Non-Indicative or Subjunctive. However, we do better to utilize the favored terminology of linguists, Real versus Irreal. These terms are are more transparent than the traditional ones: real mood refers to existing events, whereas irreal mood designates events as in some way "non-existent": instead, they are presented as contingent on the realization another event (contingent modality), judged as more or less likely to be realized (epistemic modality), imposed upon someone to realize them (deontic modality), etc. This broad category or irreal mood easily encompasses the full range of meanings of the so-called *vav*-consecutive Perfect, justified and making it preferable to call it the *Irreal Perfect*.[7] This label highlights both its relatedness and its mood distinction with respect to the Perfect.

   However, this theory leaves unexplained the nature of the distinction between the Perfect and the Irreal Perfect—if it is not the *vav* conjunction itself. At this point the discussion dovetails with the earlier issue I postponed regarding the shape of the *vav* conjunction on the Past Narrative

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7   This is in contradistinction to earlier works in which I referred to the form as *weqatal* (e.g., Cook 2001, 2002, 2004) or Modal Perfect (Cook 2008; Cook and Holmstedt 2007).

inasmuch as we are left with a common question: If the *vav* is not related to the meaning of the verbal conjugation, why does it regularly appear on these forms and with the specific shape it has on the Past narrative? To answer these questions we need to pursue the issue of mood into the area of word order. Studies by Revell (1989) and his students (DeCaen 1995; Shulman 1996) have demonstrated that directive verbs—the Imperative, Jussive, and Cohortative—consistently appear in the initial position in their clause, just as the Irreal Perfect does. Given the binary character of mood, DeCaen (1995), followed by others (Cook 2002; Holmstedt 2002, 2009) have posited a syntactic opposition between Real and Irreal mood: Real mood clauses default for subject-predicate word order, while Irreal clauses default for predicate-subject word order. Stating this distinction in terms of subject and predicate rather than clause position is not consummate with linguistic approaches to word order, but explains why Biblical Hebrew word order is frequently difficult to determine: many clauses lack an overt subject. This ambiguity may, however, be the reason why the *vav* conjunction conventionally appears on both the Irreal Perfect: the *vav* marks the clause boundary, thus disambiguating the form from the Perfect. That the *vav* conjunction is not morphologically or semantically integral to the Irreal Perfect is evident from the appearance of the verb with other grammatical words, like the conditional protasis marker אם.

   This explanation would seem to apply likewise to the conventionalization of the *vav*-conjunction on the Past Narrative, except that it is self-evidently Real mood, despite some efforts to argue otherwise (e.g., DeCaen 1995; Hatav 2004). A further look at word order is necessary to explain the case of the Past Narrative. There are three distinct and ordered levels of grammar that determine word order in Biblical Hebrew. *Semantically*, there is a subject-predicate : predicate-subject distinction between Real and Irreal verbal predications. *Syntactically*, most grammatical words in Biblical Hebrew, such as relative clause markers, subordinating conjunctions, interrogative words,

and negatives, cause triggered inversion of the word order, thus making the clauses predicate-subject, just like Irreal clauses. Finally, *pragmatically*, a word may be highlighted by placing it at the front of a clause, which likewise triggers inverted word order.[8]

Although the Past Narrative form clearly exhibits predicate-subject word order, we need to determine at what grammatical level this word order is determined. Both the semantic and pragmatic explanations are unlikely. Therefore, the syntactic explanation seems to be the best alternative. However, we need to posit some reasonable explanation for consistent triggered inversion in Past Narrative clauses, which this leads us back to the issue of the particular shape of the *vav* conjunction on the Past Narrative verb: following Ewald's lead, we may identify a "phonologically underspecified function word," to use DeCaen's term (1995:128; followed by both Cook 2002 and Holmstedt 2002) as represented by the doubled consonant and *a*-vowel of the *vav*-conjunction on the Past Narrative. Whatever its etymology, now lost to us, this function word triggers inverted word order in Past Narrative clauses and became conventionalized in Biblical Hebrew. Thus, while we would be mistaken to attribute to the complex any semantic contribution to the past form, as the *vav*-consecutive theory did*,* we are justified in thinking of whole complex as constituting the shape of the Biblical Hebrew Past Narrative.[9]

7. Conclusion

To summarize, I have argued that the *vav*-consecutive and related theories of the Hebrew verbal conjugations err in attributing the morphophonemics, morphology, syntax, and most importantly semantics of these verb forms in part to the *vav* conjunction. Whether one intends to embrace one of these theories or not by the use of any of these *vav*-labels, they equally imply erroneous views of

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8   For a discussion of this word order theory at an introductory level, see Cook and Holmstedt 2007, esp. lessons 26–30. For a more detailed discussion, see Holmstedt 2009.

9   This is particularly apt given the proposal of various examples of the prefixed past tense form in non-narrative syntagm in biblical poetry (e.g., Rainey 1986).

these verb forms. In arguing against the use of these labels and the theories that stand behind them, I began with the instincts of Ewald, S. R. Driver, and Bauer and arrived at an alternative explanation and labels for these forms through an analysis of the historical and comparative data and an attention to the relevant linguistic literature. The so-called *vav*-consecutive Imperfect I have relabeled as Past Narrative, a past-tense verbal conjugation that has becoming conventionalized with the particular, and still puzzling, conjunctive *vav* prefix and is the default verb form in Biblical Hebrew narrative. That is, by its use events are denoted as occurring in the past and being salient events in the story line. The so-called *vav*-consecutive Perfect I have suggested renaming Irreal Perfect in order to draw attention to its mood distinction with the Perfect conjugation while maintaining the historical connection between the two conjugations. By comparison with the Irreal directive-modal system of the Imperative and Jussive forms I have posited that the Irreal Perfect is syntactically distinguished from the Perfect by its Irreal predicate-subject word order. Through a broader discussion of word order in Biblical Hebrew, I have suggested a motivation for the predominance of the *vav* conjunction on the Irreal Perfect, described factors that may obscure the semantic mood-based word order distinction, and explained the predicate-subject word order of the Past Narrative form in terms of syntactic triggered inversion.

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