GRAMMATICAL REMARKS
IN THE COMMENTARY OF ABRAHAM IBN EZRA
ON QOHELET *

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As is well-known, Abraham Ibn Ezra's Biblical commentaries
train his knowledge of astronomy, astrology, philosophy, grammar,
and other subjects on the interpretation of the Biblical text. Of all
these disciplines, he regards Hebrew grammar as the most important
vehicle for the establishment of the meaning of a word or a verse.
Therefore, his commentaries are full of grammatical theories, which
were further developed in his subsequent grammatical works.

In his commentary on Qohelet, Ibn Ezra makes numerous gram-
matical remarks. Some are directly connected with the meaning of
the text of Qohelet, but others are longer excursuses about grammar
unconnected to the meaning of Qohelet.

This article will analyze Ibn Ezra's grammatical theories in his
commentary on Qohelet against the backdrop of other works and
the theories of earlier grammarians 1.

PRONUNCIATION OF THE HEBREW CONSONANTS

In his commentary on Qoh 5:1, Ibn Ezra introduces a long
discussion on the language of religious poems, especially those by

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1 For the text of Ibn Ezra's Commentary on Qohelet, cf. M. GÓMEZ ARANDA
(ed.), El comentario de Abraham Ibn Ezra al libro del Eclesiastés. (Introducción,
traducción y edición crítica), Madrid 1994. In the cases of Biblical quotations, I have
translated them according to Ibn Ezra's explanations, but sometimes I have used the
NRSV).
Eliezer ha-Qallir. Ibn Ezra criticizes the use of the rhyme in Eliezer ha-Qallir’s poems, mentioning some of the rhymes which he does not agree with, and thus making some remarks about the pronunciation of the Hebrew consonants.

Ibn Ezra rejects the rhyme וָט and הָטָט which appears in one of Eliezer ha-Qallir’s poems. He says that if the reason for this rhyme is that ו and ט belong to the guttural letters, then «the ו and the ט could have rhymed with them». Ibn Ezra also remarks on the rhyme א and א in a poem by Qallir between וב and ובו, claiming that if the rhyme א and א is possible, a rhyme with וב and ט would also be possible, because they belong to the same group of consonants. And, he adds,

therefore, the [number of possible] rhymes would be five, according to the classification of consonants with regard to their pronunciation.

This classification appeared for the first time in the Sefer Yeşarām.

In addition to that, Ibn Ezra criticizes the rhyme ו and ט from a different point of view. He says that,

if the justification for rhyming ו and ט is that they look alike, then one may also rhyme ו and ט; and in addition to that, we can find in the Bible [the cases] וֹתִּי (Num 2:14) and וֹתִּי (Num 1:14), וֹתִּי (1 Chr 1:7) and וֹתִּי (Gen 10:4).

In his Sefer Sahot, he also criticizes this usage of rhyme,

some say that וֹתִּי is like וֹתִּי because they are similar in shape, like וֹתִּי (Num 2:14) and וֹתִּי (Num 1:14), but this is absolutely incorrect.

In this remarks we observe how Ibn Ezra uses irony to ridicule the use of rhyme.

Ibn Ezra also rejects the rhyme between וֹתִּי and וֹתִּי in one of Qallir’s poems, although he says that ו and ט have the same place of articulation. In fact, Ibn Ezra cites some biblical words in which ו is used instead of ט, such as יַעֲשֶׂה (Gen 44:16), הֲדָעֵל from וֹתִּי, or יַעֲשֶׂה (Josh 9:12), הֲדָעֵל from וֹתִּי, and יַעֲשֶׂה (Josh 9:4), הֲדָעֵל from וֹתִּי.

The rhyme וֹתִּי and וֹתִּי in a poem by Qallir is also criticized by Ibn Ezra. He thinks that this is an inappropriate grammarians before Ibn Ezra who used the concept of the place of articulation as a criterion to classify the Hebrew consonants, cf. Sahot, pp. 50-65.

According to his explanation, these are two different names for the same person; cf. Sahot, pp. 50-65.

According to the classification of the consonants in the Sefer Yeşarām 4.3, ו and ט belong to the group formed by the consonants ג, כ, ꜱ and ז, which are pronounced «with the middle of the tongue and with voice». In his Sefer Sahot (ed. cit., pp. 160-161), Ibn Ezra names this group ובו as letters of the tongue. The emphatic ו is used instead of ט, because in these three cases, the roots begin with the silent ט; cf. W. Gesenius, Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar. As Edited and Enlarged by the Late E. Kauftec, Oxford 1916, p. 149. In his Sefer Sahot (ed. cit., pp. 223-223), Ibn Ezra says that ו is used instead of the ט of the הֲדָעֵל, so that the 2 could be clearly pronounced.

It must be noticed that final ו was pronounced like final נ in Palestinian Hebrew in Eliezer ha-Qallir’s time. For a discussion of this matter, cf. H. Yalom, “Zur palästinsichen Aussprache des Schluss -n wie n”, MGWI 77 (1933) 429-430.
rhyme, although he admits that there are some cases in the Bible where ש is used instead of כ, such as מוש (Job 24:22) and מוש (Ezek 4:9). In addition, he remarks that the rhyme is inappropriate, because the radical כ of מוש is not equivalent to the non-radical ש of מוש and מוש, which come from מ and מ. Ibn Ezra then proceeds to define the purpose of rhyme as follows,

the point of rhyme is to be pleasant to our ears, and to make us aware of the identity of the terminal sounds.

As is frequent in Ibn Ezra’s style, he employs irony to ridicule Qallir’s method of rhyming.

perhaps he has a sixth sense so that he can feel that כ sounds like ש, although they do not have the same place of articulation.

Ibn Ezra’s irony continues in his criticism of Qallir’s rhyme by citing the rhyme רע and רע, that is, the rhyme of the sibilants ר and ר. He affirms that this is inappropriate, unless the worshipper is an Ephraimitic.

These remarks about Qallir’s rhymes indicate that Ibn Ezra was accustomed to the standards of the Spanish rhyme, which were different from those followed by Qallir. They also show that the pronunciation of Hebrew in Spain in Ibn Ezra’s time was different from that of Palestine in Eliezer ha-Qallir’s time, especially the pronunciation of the gutural letters and final ש. On the other hand, they show that Ibn Ezra followed the classification of consonants as appeared in Sefer Yezira.

In his comments on Qoh 7:27, Ibn Ezra classifies the Hebrew consonants from a different point of view. There he explains that the consonants are classified into two groups: radical consonants and servile consonants. He maintains that the servile consonants can be added to a word, but the radical ones can only be added in the reduplicated words, such as מושך (Song 1:6), from מושך; in this word the radical consonants כ and ש are duplicated. In his Sefer Yezira, Ibn Ezra develops his theories on the reduplication structures of the Hebrew words, and he mentions this word as an example of the reduplication of the second and the third letters of a root. The classification of consonants into radical and servile was common to all medieval grammarians from Saadia Gaon onward, and it reflects the importance to distinguish between the letters which constitute the root of a word and those which have a function in the word.

In connection with the servile character of the Hebrew consonants, in his comments on Qoh 4:12, Ibn Ezra affirms that when ש is added to a noun, it has a paragogic function, such as כַּפֶּסֶךְ (‘a spring of water’) (Ps 114:8) or כַּמֶּש (Num 24:15), that means

In his own words, ‘the servile consonants are מ and ש (like the shoot of the father of a multitude). As it was common in medieval grammarians’ works, in this mnemonic formula the author’s name appears; ‘the father of a multitude’ is Abraham, according to Gen 17:5, ‘no longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations’. This formula also appears in his Sefer Sh additives (ed. cit., pp. 172-173), and he remarks that it is like his own name. For a study of Ibn Ezra’s mnemonic formulae, see W. Bacher, Abraham Ibn Ezra als Grammatiker, Budapest 1881 (henceforth Grammatiker), pp. 57-58; ‘Les signes mnémoniques des lettres radicales et serviles’, BRJ 16 (1886) 286-288 and SH vol. I, p. 59”, vol. II, pp. 235-239.

He mentions in his Sefer Sh additives that half of the consonants are always radical, and half of them are either radical or servile, cf. Sh additives, pp. 170-173. The radical consonants are כַּפֶּסֶךְ and שַׁמֶּשׁ. W. Bacher remarks that the first word of this mnemonic formula refers to the epithet given to the poet, מושך, and the last one is the name of his homeland, Spain; cf. Grammatiker, p. 57. About this question, see also SH vol. II, pp. 68 and 238, and Sefer Moznaim, cf. W. H. Benjamin (ed.) Moznaim (volume 3). On the other hand, it is the letter ש that is used in the Hebrew text of Lev 13:49 and Song 1:6, cf. H. J. Matthews (ed.), Abraham Ibn Ezra’s Commentary on the Canticles, London 1874, p. 4 (of the translation).
that the word has the same meaning without it; but when ו is added to a verb, it is usually considered a pronominal suffix, like in יָשָׁרוּ והוֹדֵעֵם (Deut 3:12). In his comments on Qoh 7:14, he insists on the paragogic function of the ו in words such as משוערנ (Ps 110:4), יָשָׁרֵים (Lam 1:1) and so on.

With regard to some peculiarities of the Hebrew consonants, it is worth noting Ibn Ezra's remarks on the assimilation of some of them, because they reflect his tendency to compare Biblical Hebrew words to their equivalents in Aramaic and Rabbinical Hebrew. In his commentary on Qoh 10:1, he refers to the assimilation of the י in the word יִשְׂרָאֵל and יִשְׂרָאֵל, both from the root יָשָׁר. This assimilation is indicated by the dagesh in the י. About this matter, Ibn Ezra includes a long commentary on Qoh 9:11 on the assimilation of the י at the beginning, in the middle or at the end of a word. He gives emphasis to the assimilation of the י in the imperfect of יָשָׁר verbs, as is evident by the dagesh in the second radical in the following forms: יָשָׁר, יָשָׁרֵים, יָשָׁרִים, and יָשָׁרִים; but he also remarks that the י appears in the participle of these verbs: יָשָׁר, יָשָׁרֵים, יָשָׁרִים, and יָשָׁרִים. After that, Ibn Ezra mentions the word יִשְׂרָאֵל as an example of the assimilation of the י in the middle of a word; according to him, the dagesh in the י reflects the assimilation of the י from the word יִשְׂרָאֵל, from the root יָשָׁר. Ibn Ezra also observes that the י is missing in יִשְׂרָאֵל and in יִשְׁרָאֵל, because they are from יָשָׁר and יָשָׁר.

Ibn Ezra bases his opinion about the lack of י in the word יָשָׁר on Rabbinical Hebrew and Aramaic, because in Rabbinical Hebrew there is יָשָׁר, and in Biblical Aramaic יָשָׁר (Ezra 4:10,11; 7:12). He also refers to Aramaic to prove that the י of the word יָשָׁר is missing in the word יָשָׁר, because in Aramaic it is יָשָׁר. The same explanation is made by Ibn Ezra with regard to the word יִשְׂרָאֵל, which is יִשְׂרָאֵל in Aramaic. In his Safa Beruda, he refers to Arabic to prove that the י is assimilated in the word יִשְׂרָאֵל. In this case, the question of the assimilation of the י is used by Ibn Ezra to demonstrate that there are grammatical similarities among Hebrew, Aramaic and Arabic, and to justify the comparison of the Hebrew language with the other two in order to establish grammatical rules.

The lack of some consonants for reasons of pronunciation is analyzed by Ibn Ezra in several places in this commentary. The lack of the letters נ or נ in some words is mentioned by Ibn Ezra in his comments on Qoh 7:27. There, he explains that when the נ of the pronominal for the second person masculine singular is added to the נ of the root, the latter is missing, as in יִשְׂרָאֵל «you may cut» (Deut 20:20) from יִשְׂרָאֵל. It is worth noting that in his commentary on Hos 2:13, Ibn Ezra states that this is due to the difficulty in pronouncing the two of the same consonants in one word, and for this reason, one of them is dropped. Ibn Ezra also explains that the נ of the root יִשְׂרָאֵל is missing in the word יִשְׂרָאֵל (1 Kgs 1:15), because the נ of the feminine is added, and the נ has a pa'tah to indicate that it is feminine and make it different from the masculine form יִשְׂרָאֵל (Num 11:28, Josh 1:1). This theory was later developed in his grammatical works.

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27 M. Jastrow, A Dictionary of the Targum, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature, New York 1967, s. v. יָשָׁר; cf also Ch. J. Kasowski, יָשָׁר, יָשָׁר אָרְבָּא, Jerusalem 1964, s. v. יָשָׁר.
28 Ibn Janah had already considered יָשָׁר from the root יָשָׁר, and based his assumption on the equivalent word in Aramaic; cf. סֵרָאִים, s. v. סֵרָאִים.
30 The same explanation about this word appears in his Sefer Sfatii (ed. cit., pp. 182-183). Jonah Ibn Janah had stated that יָשָׁר is a feminine form from יָשָׁר, but he had remarked that the correct feminine form should be יָשָׁר, because in his view, the sign of feminine is lacking in יָשָׁר, and besides, the vowel of the third radical has been displaced to the second radical; cf. סֵרָאִים, s. v. יָשָׁר and רְקִיעַד, p. 385.
31 "Spain vol. 1, pp. 204, 314, vol. II, pp. 73, 110-111. See also סֵרָאִים, pp. 182-183 and מִזְרַע יָשָׁר, s. v. יָשָׁר."
With regard to the word תָּהָנ, Ibn Ezra says that the ת of תָּהָנ is dropped because the feminne of the feminine is added. According to Ibn Ezra, the reason is that the places of articulation of נ and ת are very close to each other. This explanation is also mentioned in his "Safég Bérâd, Sefer Shâhîj and Sefer Mo'znâyim."

A concept that was widely extended in medieval commentaries and grammatical works was the concept of interchangeability of consonants. This means that one can establish the meaning of a word by changing a consonant for another one. The medieval exegetes used this method to varying degrees. For example, Menahem ben Saruq and Jehudah Hayyuj applied this method to the consonants ג, נ, י, ו, and צ, ו, י. Other grammarians such as Saadia Gaon and Dunash ben Labrat used this method more extensively.

Ibn Ezra is very cautious in using this method. In his comments of Qohelet 9:11 and 12:5, he affirms that the only letters to be interchanged are ג, נ, י, ו, and צ. In this commentary, he observes that he does not admit the interchangeability of ה and ש because he does not agree with those who interpret הָנָה ‘fool’ as הָנָה ‘intelligent’ (Qoh 10:6), and הָנָה ‘intelligence’ as הָנָה ‘foolishness’ (Qoh 1:17). However, in his later works Ibn Ezra is not very consistent with this theory, and admits the interchangeability of ה and ש in his Sefer Mo'znâyim, he even admits the interchangeability of נ, י, ו, and צ."

MORPHOLOGY

In several commentaries Ibn Ezra refers to the difference between transitive (or causative) and intransitive verbs. According to him there are verbs intransitive in the qal-conjugation which become transitive or causative in the derivative ones. In his Sefer Shâhîj, it is said that נ and ת belong to the group of consonants pronounced "with the middle of the tongue and with voice." In his Sefer Shâhîj (cf. cit., pp. 182-183), Ibn Ezra also mentions the opinion of those who affirm that נ is not from רות ‘one’ but from רות ‘brother’, but he rejects this opinion.

The first group is constituted by the intransitive verbs (רפ ירה), and this means that the action of the subject does not affect another [part of the sentence], but it remains in itself, like ו, ר, and י. The second group is constituted by the transitive verb (רפ ירה), that is, the action of the subject comes out (ר) to another and does not remain in itself.

He also adds that some verbs intransitive in qal become transitive in the derivative conjugations, like ו, ר, and י. This remark stresses the importance of distinguishing the meanings of roots in their different conjugations, and proves that Ibn Ezra is very precise and consistent in practicing this theory. He says that רתי is intransitive in Qoh 2:9, because it is in qal, and therefore, it means "I became great," but in Qoh 2:4 רתי has a transitive meaning, because it is in hif'il, and so it means "I made great works.""}

In his commentary on Qoh 1:8, we observe how Ibn Ezra applies this concept to the interpretation of this verse. Ibn Ezra disagrees with those who interpret the word רתי with a transitive meaning, that is, "to cause weariness", because according to him, the verb רתי is intransitive in qal, and it is in מ'ל where it acts as a transitive verb, as in "do not make the people toil (לַעֲמֹר) up there" (Josh 7:3). Ibn Ezra explains that in Qoh 1:8 רתי means that the things are useless by themselves, because they lack the Divine Will and the necessary strength, therefore "nobody can tell anything about them."

Ibn Ezra also insists on the difference between transitive and intransitive verbs.

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30 In Sefer Yeïrâd 4:3, it is said that נ and ת belong to the group of consonants pronounced «with the middle of the tongue and with voice». In his Sefer Shâhîj (ed. cit., pp. 182-183), Ibn Ezra also mentions the opinion of those who affirm that נ is not from רות ‘one’ but from רות ‘brother’, but he rejects this opinion.


intransitive verbs in his commentary on Qoh 6:2. According to his explanation, the root פָּאַל has an intransitive meaning in qal, 'be lacking of something' or 'be in want or something', and he specifies that it requires a construct state to inform what kind of things someone is lacking of, as in 'am I lacking of (ם) monadmen?' (1 Sam 21:16), and 'they are not lacking of (ם) all that they desire' (Qoh 6:2). In his explanation of these verses, Ibn Ezra adds the preposition מ to the verb פָּאַל, and we deduce that this verb is considered by Ibn Ezra as one of those verbs which need a preposition to introduce a complement. This theory was later developed in his סֵפֶר בָּדָרָדְו. In his comments on Qoh 6:2, Ibn Ezra also affirms that this root has a causative meaning in p'el, 'to cause to be lacking' or 'to deprive', as in 'you have made them a little less (ם) than the divine beings' (Ps 8:6). As Ibn Ezra explains, this verse means that God made human beings a little less perfect than divine beings; in addition to that, he rejects the opinion of those who interpret פָּאַל as a verb with two objects (direct object and indirect object), because, according to this interpretation, the verse would mean 'you deprived him of the divine beings'.

Ibn Ezra also refers to the difference between פָּאַל and פָּאַל in his commentary on Qoh 10:10. פָּאַל is an hif'il form from פָּאַל, and so it has a transitive meaning, 'to give success to someone', and this is the meaning in Qoh 10:10: wisdom is more advantageous than all the sufferings, because 'it gives success to the human beings', and guides them rightly, preventing his power to weaken. On the other hand, in qal, פָּאַל has an intransitive meaning, 'to be useful', as in 'the thing is useful (ם)'.

In connection with the concept of transitivity of the verbs, it is important to notice that Ibn Ezra considers that every transitive verb has always a direct object, although it is omitted in the sentence. In his explanations, Ibn Ezra provides a direct object when a transitive verb occurs without it. In his commentary on Qoh 2:3, he says that the verb פָּאַל in 'my mind guides (ם) with wisdom' has a transitive meaning and that the indirect object direct object is 'its affairs', and thus the verse means 'my mind guides its affairs with wisdom'.

The same explanation is made up with regard to פָּאַל (Qoh 12:3); it has a transitive meaning and its implicit direct object is פָּאַל 'the grinding'. The verse thus means that the women who grind decrease (ם) their grinding (ם) until they stop working. One of the most important exegetical methods in Ibn Ezra's commentaries is the ellipsis, as a means of explaining difficult biblical passages by supplying the words that are missing from the text.

The possibility of a verb of having two objects (direct and indirect objects) is pointed out by Ibn Ezra in his commentary on Qoh 2:21. He says that the word פָּאַל is a transitive verb with two objects in this verse, and it means, 'she will give his part (direct object) to him (indirect object)', as in 'since you have given the land of the Negeb (direct object) to me (indirect object)' (Josh 15:19, Judg 1:13). In his commentary on Qoh 11:6, he clearly remarks that the verb פָּאַל does not have two objects in all the Bible, and therefore, פָּאַל פָּאַל means 'your hand must not leave the sowing', being פָּאַל the predicate of פָּאַל, and it is in feminine because פָּאַל is feminine, following the rules of grammatical agreement. פָּאַל can be considered as the second person masculine singular with the meaning 'do not let', but in this case in Ibn Ezra's view, two objects would occur, 'hand' and 'sowing', and the verse would mean 'do not let your hands stop the sowing', and according to Ibn Ezra, this is not possible.

The peculiarities of the different verbal conjugations are also discussed by Ibn Ezra in this commentary. He distinguishes between the qal-conjugation and the rest of them, which are called פָּאַל «heavy» conjugations. He refers to the p'el as 'the heavy conjugation with dageš' or «the verbal conjugation with dageš» to the hif'il as 'the heavy added conjugation'.

37 Ibn Ezra's explanation is different from the traditional interpretation of this verse, «the women who grind cease working because they are few», cf. נֵבֶט, p. 690. For more on transitive verbs without direct object in Ibn Ezra's works, cf. Grammarik, p. 125.
39 Modern translations of this verse interpret פָּאַל as the second person masculine singular from פָּאַל with the meaning 'do not let your hands be idle' or 'do not hold back your hand'.
In his commentary on Qoh 2:20, Ibn Ezra refers to the punctuation of the «heavy» conjunctions; he states that the p'el-form יָרָא should have a dapag in its second radical, because the נ is not one of the guttural letters, and these are the only letters which omit the dagesh in the p'el conjugation 45. He also marks the omission of the dagesh in the second radical of the form יִרְאֶה (Qoh 7:28), p'el from יָרָא. In some other commentaries, the morphological structures of the verbal conjugations are discussed. In his commentary on Qoh 2:10, Ibn Ezra compares two defective hif'il forms: רָאָל (Num 11:25), hif'il from יָרָא, is like יִרְכָּה (Isa 27:5), hif'il from יָרָה, because in these two forms the characteristic ה of the hif'il conjugation is omitted 46.

In his commentary on Qoh 12:5, he says that when a verbal root begins with ו or ו, a metathesis between ו or ו and the characteristic נ of the hupael occurs in this conjugation, as in יָרָבֶךְ (Qoh 12:5), hupael from יָרְבֶךְ (Exod 9:17), hupael from יִרְבֶךְ, and יָרְבֶךְ (Isa 59:15), hupael from יָרְבֶךְ 47.

In his commentary on Qoh 12:5, Ibn Ezra mentions Judah Hayyuj's theory that every verb has a tri-consonantal root, and verbs like יָרָא or וָרָא have a second radical consonant which is נ 48. This second consonant appears in [[the command of Queen Esther]] fixed (יָרָה) these practices of Purim (Esth 9:32); the word יָרָה and the verbal form יָרָה prove that the second radical consonant of נ is נ. Ibn Ezra remarks the similarities between the verbs יָרָא and יָרָה: יָרָה is like whether sit or rise (יָרָה) (Lam 3:63), because in both cases יָרָה appears; you have discerned (יָרָה) my thoughts (Ps 139:2) is like you have risen (יָרָה) (2 Sam 12:21). It must be noticed that Ibn Ezra does not reject Hayyuj's explanation in this commentary, but in his Sefer Sha'ot, he claims that these verbs are bi-consonantal 49. This question is widely studied in his Safa Bera'ah. In this work, he presents the theories of Judah Hayyuj, Ibn Chiquiella, and Shemuel ha-Nagid who consider that these roots are tri-consonantal. Ibn Ezra rejects all of their arguments and defends that they are bi-consonantal 50.

In his commentary on Qoh 10:4-5, Ibn Ezra points out the similarities between יָרָה and יָרָה verbs; he asserts that the word יָרָה (Qoh 10:4) is an active participle of the «heavy» conjugation of יָרָה, being נ instead of נ 51, and it is also «that who abandons (יָרָה) leaves great sins» and it is referred to the one who leaves power. With regard to the word יָרָה (Qoh 10:5), he says that, although its third radical letter is נ, it follows the analogy with יָרָה verbs; he also remarks that «a heifer that tramples (יָרָה) [on the grass]» (Jer 50:11) is a similar case 52. In his Safa Bera'ah, he also studies the similarities between יָרָה and יָרָה verbs 53. The question here involved is that, according to Ibn Ezra's opinion, the נ and the נ belong to the group of consonants (נ, נ, נ and נ) which can be interchanged.

In his commentary on Qoh 3:18, Ibn Ezra explains that the second radical of duplicated verbs is not dropped in the p'el, and therefore, the verbal form יָרָה is not from יָרָה, because the p'el infinitive of this root with this pronominal suffix should have been יָרָה; but Ibn Ezra considers that יָרָה is the infinitive form from יָרָה with the pronominal suffix for the third person masculine plural, and its meaning is «from among those He chose». He explains that God chose some people from among all the generations on earth 54. The repetition of the first radical in the word יָרָה (Qoh 10:10) proves that this form is from יָרָה, as Jonah Ibn Janah and Judah Hayyuj had already pointed out 55.

45 For a discussion on the punctuation of the p'el in verbs with guttural letters, cf. Sha'ot, pp. 414-415 and Sefer vol. I, pp. 39*-40*, vol. II, pp. 143-147. This remark was observed by Hayyuj in his comments on the root וָרָא, cf. Treatises, p. 23.

46 Judah Hayyuj had already observed that יָרָה is in the «heavy» conjugation; cf. Treatises, p. 19 (23 of the translation).

47 This was already remarked by Ibn Janah; cf. Rigpa, p. 191.

48 Judah Hayyuj was the first grammarian who demonstrated that the Hebrew root system was actually tri-consonantal, and that there are verbs with a נ or נ as the second root consonant, which sometimes is missing. For more information on this matter, cf. A. Sáenz-Badillos and J. Targarona Borràs, Gramàtics Hebrews de Al-Andalus (siglos X-XIII). Filologia y Bibliá, Córdoba 1988, pp. 95-108 and D. Sivan, Biblical Hebrew Roots and Qesemets According to Judah Hayyuj's Grammatical Works, HOCa 60 (1989) 113-127.

49 Sha'ot, pp. 332-346; cf. also Grammatiker, pp. 76-79, 87-95.


51 This had already been noticed by Jonah Ibn Janah; cf. Sora'atim, s.v. יָרָה.

52 The similarities between יָרָה and יָרָה verbs had already been studied by Judah Hayyuj, and before him; by Saadia Gaon and Menahem ben Suraq; cf. D. Sivan, Or. cit., p. 119.


54 Ibn Janah considered this word from the root יָרָה with the meaning 'to choose'; cf. Sora'atim, s.v. יָרָה.

55 Sora'atim, s.v. יָרָה and Treatises, p. 116 (135 of the translation).
On explaining Qoh 7:16, Ibn Ezra mentions the different interpretations of the verbal form מָלַך. According to him, it is a לְגֵן form from מָלַך, and the dagesh in the פ indicates the assimilation of the פ of the לְגֵן conjugation. In addition to this explanation, he rejects the opinion of those who consider this word as an הֵכְדֶּש form and the dagesh in the פ indicating the assimilation of the פ of the הֵכְדֶּש. In Ibn Ezra’s view, the הֵכְדֶּש form from מָלַך should be מָלַךְ.

Ibn Ezra also makes in this commentary some explanations on the structure of the Hebrew words, making connections between those having the same structure. In his commentary on Qoh 1:3, he explains that מָלַך has the same structure as מָלַךְ. He sometimes remarks that when two words have the same structure, they are derived from the same type of verbs; this is the case of מָלַךְ and מָלַך (Qoh 1:14), which have the same structure as מָלַך and מָלַךְ, because they are derived from מָלַך verbs.

In his explanation on Qoh 7:26, he affirms that the structure of מָלַךְ is the same as that of מָלַך, because both are derived from מָלַך or מָלַך verbs. He also states that מָלַך (Qoh 3:19) has the same structure as מָלַךְ, because both are derived from מָלַך verbs using פ instead of פ.

In his commentary on Qoh 9:12, Ibn Ezra lays a great stress on words having a פְּלַכֹּל-participle structure without preformative פ (except in the case of מָלַךְ), but they are actually פְּלַכֹּל-passive participles; i.e., they have a פְּלַכֹּל structure, but they are פְּלַכֹּל. Ibn Ezra mentions the different opinions about this matter of the grammarians who preceded him, and his comments can be considered a compendium of earlier opinions on this matter. Judah Hayyuj said that the words are the following four: «and the bush was not consumed (יִשָּׂרַע)» (Exod 3:2), «if you see me as I am being taken (יִשָּׂרַע) from you» (2 Kgs 2:10), «lame (יִשָּׂרַע) foot» (Prov 25:19), and «snared (יִשָּׂרַע) at a time of calamity» (Qoh 9:12). Hayyuj considered that מָלַך and מָלַך should actually be מָלַך and מָלַך, according to their meaning; with regard to מָלַך, Hayyuj said that it should be מָלַך, as in Jer 5:26. Jonah Ibn Janah added a new case, «the boy who will be born (יִשָּׂרַע)» (Judg 13:8), which should actually be מָלַך, as in 1 Kgs 3:26. Shemuel ha-Nagid rejected these interpretations, because according to him, מָלַך is in place of the relative pronoun מְלֹא, as in יִשָּׂרַע «that was renowned» (Ezek 26:17). According to Moshe ha-Kohen Ibn Chiquitilla, as quoted by Ibn Ezra, these cases are only four. Ibn Chiquitilla includes מָלַך (Judg 13:8) in his list, but מָלַך (Prov 25:19) is not included; the reason for this exclusion is that מָלַך belongs to the group of intransitive verbs, whereas מָלַך, מָלַך, מָלַך, and מָלַך belong to the group of the transitive ones. Regarding to מָלַך, Moshe ha-Kohen Ibn Chiquitilla claimed that the מְלֹא was instead of מְלֹא, and therefore it should have been מָלַך. Ibn Ezra simply cites these opinions, but he does not give his own; he only says that מָלַך is an adjectival. This theory is also mentioned in his ספּל בֵּיתָד, ספּל רְאָל, and מְלַמְלָא.

The structure of the segolate nouns is discussed by Ibn Ezra in this commentary. On commenting Qoh 1:2, he explained the changes of vocalization in the segolate nouns when used in the construct state. He says that the word מְלֹא does not belong to the same group as מְלֹא, because מְלֹא changes its vocalization in the construct state, מְלֹא, but מְלֹא does not change. He also adds some examples of nouns belonging to the group of מְלֹא but changing their vocalization in the construct state: «the chamber of (יִשָּׂרַע) your bed» (Exod 7:28.

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54 Judah Hayyuj claimed that מָלַך was an הֵכְדֶּש form from מָלַך, and it should be מָלַך. Cf. Treatises, pp. 118-119 (138 of the translation). For a discussion of the duplicated verbs by Hayyuj, see pp. 102-105 (119-121 of the translation). About Ibn Ezra’s theories on the duplicated verbs and their morphological structures, see ספּל vol. 1, pp. 58ח-66ח, vol. 2, pp. 231-262.

55 מְלֹא and מְלֹא are derived from מְלֹא, and מְלֹא and מְלֹא are derived from מָלַך.

56 מְלֹא is from מָלַך and מְלָא is from מְלָא.

57 מְלָא is from מְלָא and מְלָא is from מְלָא. Cf. Treatises, pp. 21-32.
2 Kgs 6:12), «shut your doors (הָעֵין)» (Isa 26:20), and «pouring out your wrath (הָעֵין)» (Hab 2:15), these are the construct states from רָעַךְ, רַעְךָו and רַעַךְ.

In his commentary on Qoh 2:17, Ibn Ezra writes about the words with a plural structure and a singular meaning, such as רַעְךָו, רָעַךְ and רַעַךְ. He remarks the importance of considering רָעַךְ as a singular noun and not as a plural adjective in Qoh 2:17. According to this assumption, the verse means «I hated life», but not «I hated living beings». On commenting Qoh 6:8 and Qoh 10:19, he also insists on the possibility of considering רָעַךְ either as a plural adjective or as a singular noun.

In his explanation of Qoh 10:1, Ibn Ezra states that it is possible to distinguish if a word is an adjective or a noun according to its vocalization; he explains that רָעַךְ ‘precious’ is an adjective in Qoh 10:1, but רָעַךְ ‘preciousness’ is a noun either in absolute or construct state, and both are different from רָעַךְ that is the adjective in the construct state. Ibn Ezra cites some verses as example: «and their eyes see every preciousness (רָעַךְ)» (Job 28:10), a noun in absolute state, «and the splendor of (רָעַךְ) his pompous majesty» (Esth 1:4), a noun in construct state, and «one who is cool in spirit (רָעַךְ רָעַךְ) has understanding» (Prov 17:27), an adjective in construct state.

The lack of grammatical agreement between the different parts of the speech is indicated by Ibn Ezra in several commentaries. In his long digression of Eliezer ha-Qallir’s piyyuṭin on Qoh 5:1, he says that in one of Qallir’s poems, רָעַךְ is used in masculine with an adjective in feminine, רָעַךְ. He criticizes this use and says that רָעַךְ should have been used instead. In his commentary on Qoh 11:2, he insists on the lack of agreement between the subject רָעַךְ in feminine and the predicate רָעַךְ in masculine; he does not say what form should have been used instead, but he simply mentions a similar case, «if a young woman (רָעַךְ רָעַךְ) is (רָעַךְ) engaged».

(Deut 22:23) In Qoh 10:12 the lack of agreement between the subject and the predicate is stated by רָעַךְ הַשִּׁבְיָה, «the lips of the fool» in plural and רָעַךְ consumes him» in singular, as in «dead flies (רָעַךְ רָעַךְ), pl. spoils (רָעַךְ, sing.)» (Qoh 10:1), and «the sun [and] the moon (pl.) stands still (רָעַךְ, sing.)» (Hab 3:11). In his commentaries to these two latter verses, Ibn Ezra explains that the plural subjects actually means «each one of them», and therefore, it requires a singular predicate.

According to his commentary on Qoh 11:5, we must assume that Ibn Ezra considered that the agreement between an adjective and a noun must be indicated by number, gender and definite article. He affirms that in רָעַךְ הַשִּׁבְיָה (Qoh 11:5), הַשִּׁבְיָה is a noun, and it means «the full woman», i.e., «the pregnant woman», because if it were an adjective of רָעַךְ «in a womb», the latter should have been יְנֵה יַנְתָּה, i.e., with the definite article indicated by the patah, because יְנֵה has the definite article.

The vocalization of the ה functioning either as the definite article or as the interrogative particle is remarked by Ibn Ezra in his commentary on Qoh 2:19 and on Qoh 3:21 62. According to his explanations, this is a question of great importance for the meaning of the verses. On commenting Qoh 2:19, he says that the interrogative particle ה is always with hava-patah, but if it stands before שֵׁמֶר תַּבָּרֶךְ, it is with patah.

The same rule appears in his Sefer Sabbath 63. He also affirms that the interrogative particle ה takes patah if it stands before כ, כ, כ, כ or ה, but in most cases it takes ḫames; in his commentary on Qoh 3:21, he says that the ה functioning as the definite article takes ḫames before the gutturals letters and the ה, but it sometimes takes

62 In his Sifra Beshorah, Ibn Ezra studies the grammatical structures of the segolate nouns, and he mentions the same examples: cf. Sifra vol. 1, pp. 68a-69a, vol. 11, pp. 266-268. In his Sefer Sabbath (ed. cit., pp. 282-285), he also distinguishes between the group of רָעַךְ and the group of רָעַךְ. See also Moasayin 29a. This question had already been discussed by Ibn Janah; cf. Riqhav, p. 225; cf. also Grammatiker, p. 81.

63 This is also discussed in his Sabbath, pp. 272-273; cf. also Grammatiker, p. 84.

64 Jonah Ibn Janah had already pointed out the difference between רָעַךְ in absolute state and רָעַךְ in construct state; cf. Riqhav, pp. 139-140.

65 Grammatiker, p. 85. In his explanation of Gen 1:14, Ibn Ezra points out that there is a tendency toward uniformity when a word is employed frequently, and so רָעַךְ or abbreviated רָעַךְ is more frequent than רָעַךְ as would be expected; cf. H. N. SIRCKMAN - A. M. SILVER (trans.), Commentary on the Pentateuch. Genesis (Bereshit), New York 1988, p. 38, note 106.

66 Grammatiker, p. 134.

67 Although he does not mention the case of Qoh 3:21, Ibn Ezra deals with this subject in his 88 vol. 1 pp. 85a-86a, vol. 11 pp. 325-330, and Sabbath, pp. 186 ff.
In the case of נֵבֶן, Ibn Ezra says that the ְn with segol could either be the definite article or the interrogative particle, and although it should have taken qamesh, it takes segol, because the word could not have been pronounced properly, since the ְn is followed by two qamesh.

In his commentary on Qoh 3:21, Ibn Ezra lays great stress on explaining that the first ְn of נֵבֶן is the definite article, not the interrogative particle, because it stands before a guttural letter and takes qamesh; the ְn of נֵבֶן is also the definite article, because the following ְl has a dagesh, as is usual in the case of the article. Had it been the interrogative particle, Ibn Ezra says, the ְn should have taken batef-patah and the ְl should not have taken dagesh. According to Ibn Ezra’s explanation, the verse means “who knows that the human spirit is the one who goes upward (נֵבֶן) and the spirit of animals is the one that goes downward (נֵבֶן) to earth?” Ibn Ezra adds that very few people know the difference between these two kinds of spirits. Had the ְn of נֵבֶן and נֵבֶן been the interrogative particle, it would have cast doubt on the statement that the human spirit goes toward God, whereas the spirit of animals goes downward to earth; in this case, the verse would mean, “who knows whether the human spirit goes upward and the spirit of animals goes downward to earth?”. Ibn Ezra’s remark is of great importance, because one of his most remarkable philosophical ideas is here involved; that is, that the spirit of human beings goes up toward God when the bodies die. He finds in this verse a grammatical basis for this theory, and his comments on this prove that his interest of being consistent and precise in his grammatical observations is more than a mere interest in Grammar; it is a way of basing Philosophy on Grammar.

Some remarks concerning the use of the comparative and the superlative are found in his commentary on Qoh 1:2. There, he explains that,

a noun in the construct state followed by the plural of the same noun is used to indicate the superlative [in Hebrew].

But נֵבֶן (literally “vanity of vanities”) means “the most important vanity.” He also adds some examples of this construction: וְנֹבֶן (Ezek 26:7) “king of kings,” i.e., “the most important king,” and נֹבֶן תַּבָּן (Gen 9:25) “servant of servants,” i.e., “the lowest servant.” In his commentary on Qoh 1:2, he also states that נֹבֶן is used to indicate a comparison and is used instead of יָבְן “more,” as in יָבְן (נֹבֶן) who had been before me in Jerusalem (Qoh 2:7), and “I have more understanding than all (נֹבֶן) my teachers” (Ps 119:99). In his commentary on Qoh 3:18, Ibn Ezra refers to the use of נֹבֶן to indicate a comparison and says that sometimes it is omitted in comparisons, as in “they are animals” (Qoh 3:18), which means “human beings are like animals (נֹבֶן) and birds (נָבָן);” This very explanation appears in his commentary on Qoh 5:1 regarding to the verses “for the Lord your God is a devouring fire” (Deut 4:24), which means “He is like a devouring fire,” and “for the Lord God is a sun and a shield” (Ps 84:12), which means “He is like a sun and a shield.” Ibn Ezra insists very much in this point, because he wants to emphasize that one cannot use the epithets “sun,” “shield” or “fire” to refer to God in the liturgical poems; one must use the name “God” or “the Lord” instead.

In his explanation of Qoh 9:2, he affirms that this comparative ְn sometimes appears in both parts of the comparison, as inבְּעָנָנָנוּ and it means “as are the good, so are the sinners, and vice versa”; he also mentions some examples in which this construction occurs: “as with the slave, so with his master (וּנֹבֶן בְּעַנָּנוּ)” (Isa 24:2); according to Ibn Ezra’s explanation, it means that the slave is like his master and vice versa, i.e., Scripture emphasizes that there is no difference between them. He adds more examples: “I am as you are (וְנֹבֶן בְּעָנָנָנוּ); my people are like your people (וּנֹבֶן בְּעַנָּנוּ)” (1 Kgs 22:4, 2 Kgs 3:7), and “darkness is as light (וְנֹבֶן בְּעָנָנָנוּ)” (Ps 139:12).
In his commentary on Qoh 4:12, Ibn Ezra writes about the pronominal suffixes; with regard to יִשָּׂעַ (Qoh 4:12), he says that the pronominal suffix י is joined directly to the end of the verb, but in other cases it is joined by י or יא, as in יִשָּׂעַּחַ (Job 14:20).  

SYNTAX

Syntactical remarks are also found in this commentary on Qohelet. In his explanation of Qoh 8:3, Ibn Ezra mentions some Biblical verses in which a remarkable syntactic structure takes place; this is the case of the use of two verbs, one after the other, being the second one of them subordinated to the first one. Ibn Ezra explains that these two verbs must be related in either two ways: by the relative יא or using the second verb in infinitive. In Qoh 8:3 it is written יִשָּׂעַּחַ יִשָּׂעַּה חֲסִינָא לא, and according to Ibn Ezra’s interpretation, it means «do not be hasty so that you go (ישע) from him» or «do not be hasty to go (ישע) from him». יִשָּׂעַּה חֲסִינָא (Hos 6:3) means «let us know that we follow after (ишע)» or «let us know to follow after (ишע)». יִשָּׂעַּה חֲסִינָא (1 Sam 2:3) means «do not exceed in what you talk (ישע)» or «do not exceed to talk (ישע)».

As it has been shown in this article, Ibn Ezra considers that it is very important to follow the rules of the Hebrew grammar in order to interpret the Biblical text, and he tries to be very precise and consistent in his grammatical analyses, and therefore, he always cites parallel verses to prove his statements. This preciseness in the application of grammatical rules is more remarkable when philosophical ideas are involved in a passage, because Ibn Ezra considers Hebrew Grammar as the basis for his Philosophy.

We may also observe that he had a great knowledge of the theories of the grammarians who preceded him, and some of his commentaries can be considered a summary of these ones.

He based his theories about the morphology of the Hebrew words, especially that of the irregular verbs, in those formulated by Judah Hayyuj and Ibn Janah, and his explanations of the roots of the words are very similar to those by Ibn Janah in his Sefer ha-Sorosim.

The commentary on Qohelet was the first important work that Ibn Ezra wrote in his life, and therefore, he had not still written any of his grammatical treatises. The interest that Ibn Ezra lays on grammar in the rest of his commentaries is also great, but it is remarkable the amount of grammatical theories developed in this commentary, even when they do not have a direct relationship to the meaning of Qohelet; in my opinion, it proves that Ibn Ezra was eager to write a grammatical treatise when he wrote this commentary, and so his commentary on Qohelet can be considered a preparation for a grammatical work. Not too much time would pass until he began to write it.

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74 About the pronominal suffixes joined by י or יא, cf. Saady, pp. 214-217.
75 S. R. Driver says that to translate this construction into English, the most common way is to translate the first verb as an adverb; cf. S. R. Driver, Notes on the Hebrew Text and the Topography of the Book of Samuel, Oxford 1913, p. 24.

76 At the end of the commentary he wrote the date in which it was finished: 1140. For a chronological list of Ibn Ezra’s works, cf. Reconstruction, pp. XVIII-XIX.
RESUMEN

Abraham Ibn Ezra considera que el estudio de la gramática hebrea es el método más importante para establecer el significado literal de una palabra o de un versículo bíblico. Podemos encontrar sus teorías gramaticales no sólo en sus obras específicas de gramática, sino también en sus comentarios bíblicos. En su Comentario a Qohelet, Ibn Ezra hace numerosas observaciones sobre la pronunciación y peculiaridades de las consonantes hebreas, la morfología de nombres y verbos, algunas estructuras sintácticas específicas y otras similares. En este artículo, se examinan estas teorías en conexión con las obras gramaticales de este autor y con las opiniones de los gramáticos anteriores, sobre todo Juda Hayyuj y Jona ibn Yanah.

SUMMARY

Abraham Ibn Ezra considers the study of the Hebrew grammar to be the most important tool for establishing the literal meaning of a word or a Biblical verse. We find his grammatical theories not only in his grammatical works, but in his Biblical commentaries as well. In his Commentary on Qohelet, Ibn Ezra makes numerous grammatical remarks dealing with the pronunciation and peculiarities of the Hebrew consonants, the morphology of nouns and verbs, some peculiar syntactical structures, and the like. In this article, these grammatical theories in connection with Ibn Ezra's other works and with the theories of earlier grammarians, including Judah Hayyuj and Jonah ibn Janah, are examined.