

# Main Division in the Verse in the 21 Prose Books: Syntactic Study

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The accentuation of the Hebrew Bible is based on the principle of continuous dichotomy, according to which each verse is divided into two parts by the appropriate disjunctive; each half is then further subdivided into two and so on, until the minimal size is reached, namely two words that require no further subdivision. The disjunctive accent is determined according to the segment it divides and its location in that segment. The principle of continuous dichotomy highlights the hierarchical structure of disjunctives and helps us understand their distribution in the verse.<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, if the accentuation of the Bible were determined solely by the principle of continuous dichotomy, given the internal division of the verse we could know the expected order of the disjunctives. This would then reveal the structure of the complete accent system, as the conjunctives are determined by the disjunctives next to which they are located. However, despite the methodic hierarchical structure, we find identical divisional patterns in which different accents serve the same function.

Examination of identical divisional patterns shows that different variables such as the length of the verse, the existence of additional divisions within them, length of the words, location in the biblical text and syntactic features – all affect the selection of the disjunctive accent.<sup>2</sup> In this paper I will relate

\* The English translation of the verses follows the new RSV (Revised Standard Version).

<sup>1</sup> See W. Wickes, טעמי כ"א ספרים: *A Treatise on the Accentuation of the Twenty-One So-Called Prose Books of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1887; repr. New-York: Ktav, 1970), 29; M. Breuer, *Ta'ámé Hamiqra in the '21 Books' and in 'Emet Books'* (Jerusalem: Mikhlalah, 1982), 8 (Heb.); S. Kogut, *Correlation between Biblical Accentuation and Traditional Jewish Exegesis* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1994), 18-29 (Heb.).

<sup>2</sup> See R. Mashiah, "Parallel Realizations of Dichotomy Patterns in Biblical Accentuation," *Lěšonenu* 60 (1997), 11-19, esp. 14-15 (Heb.).

to syntactic issues and focus on the accentuation at the main division point in the verse.<sup>3</sup>

The main division of verses in the twenty-one prose books is almost always indicated through *Atnah*, however there are verses in which the main division is marked with a disjunctive other than *Atnah*. Verses that do not contain *Atnah* constitute approximately 7.5% of all the verses in the twenty-one prose books. For the most part, verses with no *Atnah* have eight words or less,<sup>4</sup> where to the left of the division point are no more than four words – in such verses the main division is marked by *Tipha* or *Zaqef*. This distinction is important in defining the limitations of the use of *Zaqef* and *Tipha*, but it does not explain ambivalent accentuation, since *Atnah* can be found in verses of the same length, divided in the same place. For example (1, 2):

1. וְשָׁמַעְתָּ הַשָּׁמַיִם אֶת-תְּפִלָּתָם וְאֶת-תְּחִנָּתָם / וְנִשְׁמַעְתָּ מִשְׁפָּטָם (מל"א ח 45)

*Then hear in heaven their prayer and their plea, and maintain their cause* (1 Kgs 8:45)

2. וַיָּשָׁב יְהוֹשֻׁעַ וְכָל-יִשְׂרָאֵל עִמּוֹ / אֶל-הַמַּחֲנֶה הַגִּלְגָּל (יהושע י 43)

*Then Joshua returned, and all Israel with him, to the camp at Gilgal* (Josh 10:43)

<sup>3</sup> Several papers concerning the biblical accentuation system focus on syntax – most are dedicated to the rules of parsing, which determine the divisions in the verse; e.g. M. Aronoff, "Orthography and Linguistic Theory: The Syntactic Basis of Masoretic Hebrew Punctuation," *Language* 61 (1985), 28-72; S. Avinun, "Syntactic, Logical and Semantic Aspects of Masoretic Accentuation Signs," *Lěšonénu* 53 (1989), 157-192 (Heb.); S. Kogut, "On the Meaning and Syntactical Status of הַגָּה in Biblical Hebrew," *Language Studies* 2-3 (1987), 245-258 (Heb.); idem., "The Excluding Biblical הַגָּה – Its Syntactical Usages as Reflected in Its Accentuation," *Lěšonénu* 59 (1996), 203-206 (Heb.); R. Mashiah, "Syntactic Patterns of Utterances following הַגָּה According to Principles of Biblical Accentuation," *Lěšonénu* 65 (2002), 21-33 (Heb.); R. Hitin-Mashiah, "Syntactic Patterns of Utterances Following Particles According to Principles of Biblical Accentuation," *Lěšonénu* 69 (2007), 221-226 (Heb.). This paper deals with accentuation rules that dictate the order of the accents in the verse.

<sup>4</sup> Words are counted according to the Bible in Hebrew.

Each of these verses contains six words, and in both the main division is two words before *Silluq*, yet they are accentuated differently: in Kings the division is marked by *Atnah*, while in Joshua *Zaqef* is used.

A comparison of verses of the same length and same division point, in which the main division is indicated either through *Atnah* or through *Tipha* or *Zaqef*, shows a correlation between the disjunctive accent and the syntactic features of the verse.

I am not the first to propose syntax as a tool to distinguish between verses in which the main division is indicated by *Atnah* and verses that do not contain *Atnah*. Hanau states:

ידוע כי כל פסוק (=פסוק) בעל מאמר א' לא יהי בו אתנחתא כמו

*Know that each verse of one "saying" does not contain Atnah such as:*

3. וַתֵּרָא שָׂרָה אֶת-בְּנוֹ-הַגֵּר הַמִּצְרַיִת אֲשֶׁר-יָלְדָה לְאַבְרָהָם (Tipha) / מִצְחָק (בר' כא 9)

*But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, playing with her son Isaac (Gen 21:9)*

4. לֹא תִלְבַּשׁ שְׂעִטָּנוֹ (Zaqef) / צִמָּר וּפְשָׁתִים יַחְדָּו (דב' כב 11)

*You shall not wear clothes made of wool and linen woven together (Deut 22:11)*

[...] איברא מצאנו פסוקים בעלי מאמר אחד שיש בהם אתנחתא להפלגת הענין כמו

[...] *Indeed, we found verses with a single "saying" that contain Atnah to emphasize the point, such as*

5. בְּרֵאשִׁית בְּרָא אֱלֹהִים (Atnah) / אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ (בר' א 1)

*In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth (Gen 1:1)*

נקוד אלהים באתנחתא להפלגת רוממותו ויכולתו".

*The word Elohim is accentuated with Atnah to stress his greatness and ability.<sup>5</sup>*

It would seem that Hanau is attempting to propose a comprehensive definition for the issue of the main disjunctive in short verses, however the terminology he uses, "מאמר אחד" and "הפלגה", is not sufficiently clear.

Breuer also provides the syntactic criterion, and reserves it for verses in which the main division is next to *Silluq*. According to him, *Atnah* next to *Silluq* is found in verses in which the word with *Silluq* is an independent

<sup>5</sup> S. Z. Hanau, *Sha'are Zimra* (Bialystok: Horovits, 1806), chapter 6, 28b (Heb.; my translation).

sentence.<sup>6</sup> This statement is correct, yet the term “independent sentence” requires explanation and additional discussion.

To illustrate the role of syntax in determining the main disjunctive, I chose to focus on verses in which the main division is next to *Silluq*. Other relevant divisional patterns will be briefly mentioned at the end of this paper.

In total, over 400 verses were found with the main division next to *Silluq* – of these, only 55 are accentuated with *Atnah*. These verses are very interesting, because, in them we find a preference for a disjunctive other than *Atnah*, and because syntax plays a major role.

Wickes demonstrated that *Tipha* is preferred to indicate the main division next to *Silluq* both in short and long verses.<sup>7</sup> Although this statement is correct in and of itself, we cannot ignore the fact that the use of *Atnah* increases with the length of the verse, and the use of *Tipha* decreases. As a matter of fact, we can clearly distinguish three groups, as seen in the table below:

Verse length <sup>8</sup>	Group 1 2-4 words		Group 2 5-8 words		Group 3 9+ words		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<i>Atnah</i>	–	–	15	29%	36	71%	51 <sup>9</sup>	100%
<i>Tipha</i>	193	54%	121	34%	43	12%	357	100%
Total	193	47%	136	33%	79	20%	408	100%

We see that the use of *Tipha* is negatively correlated with the length of the verse: over half of the instances are in Group 1, about one third in Group 2, and the rest in Group 3. With respect to *Atnah*, most of the instances are in

<sup>6</sup> See Breuer, *Ta'amé Hamiqra*, 32.

<sup>7</sup> See Wickes, *Treatise*, 61.

<sup>8</sup> Group 1: Verses with no more than 4 words; Group 2: Verses with 5 to 8 words; Group 3: Verses with 9 or more words.

<sup>9</sup> Four of the cases with *Atnah* where there is a *Ma'ayla* in the *Silluq* word were removed, as the *Ma'ayla*, which is a type of *Tipha*, comes between *Atnah* and *Silluq*. In terms of the sequence of the accents, these verses are similar to verse in which *Atnah* comes two words before *Silluq*. Thus, there are only 51 verses in the *Atnah* group.

Group 3 (in verses with nine or more words), and it is not found at all in verses included in Group 1 (with no more than 4 words). Despite this fact, we cannot describe the breakdown of the verses by length, as the preference for *Tipha* is found in both short and long verses.

To characterize each of the groups, the verses will be described in two stages: First, I will compare the verses of five or more words, looking at the syntactic features of each group. Then I will examine whether the rules found with respect to the accentuation of *Tipha* also apply to verses of no more than four words (where *Atnah* is not used at all).

An examination of the verses with five or more words shows that despite the very limited instances of use of *Atnah*, there are cases in which it is preferred – this is what was found in over 75% of the verses that contain an additional clause (nominal or verbal clause as well as infinitive clause) to the left of the division point, as seen in the table below:

		<i>Atnah</i>		<i>Tipha</i>		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
Additional clause	+	44	77%	13	23%	57	100%
	-	7	4%	151	96%	158	100%

For example (6):

6. וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ מֶלֶךְ הָ' לָמָּה זֶה תִּשְׁאַל לְשִׁמִּי (Atnah) / וְהוּא-פָּלְאִי (שׁוֹפֵ' יג 18)

*But the angel of the Lord said to him, 'Why do you ask my name? It is too wonderful.'* (Judg 13:18)

In this example, a nominal clause – והוא-פלאי – is added to the left of the division point, while in the next example (7) appears a verbal clause:

7. וַיִּזְעַק עִם-שָׂרָיו וְגַבְרָיו לְסִתּוֹם אֶת-מִיַּמֵּי הַעֵינֹת אֲשֶׁר מְחוּץ לְעִיר (Atnah) / וַיַּעְזְרוּהוּ (דה"ב לב 3)

*He planned with his officers and his warriors to stop the flow of the springs that were outside the city; and they helped him* (2 Chr 32:3)

וַיַּעְזְרוּהוּ – a verbal clause.

As mentioned above, the definition of “additional clause” also includes an infinitive clause, namely, a clause consisting of an infinitive and its complement, such as (8):

8. וְאַל-אִשֶּׁת עַמִּיתְךָ לֹא-תִתֶנּוּ שְׂכַבְתָּךְ לְזָרַע (Atnah) / לְטַמְאָה-בָּהּ (ויקרא יח 20)

*You shall not have sexual relations with your kinsman's wife, and defile yourself with her (Lev 18:20)*

Although these types of verses are generally accentuated with *Atnah*, their accentuation with *Tipha* is not impossible, as seen in the two following examples (9, 10):

9. וַיֵּצֵל אֱלֹהִים אֶת-מִקְנֵה אֲבִיכֶם (Tipha) / וַיִּתֶּן-לִי (בר' לא 9)

*Thus God has taken away the livestock of your father, and given them to me (Gen 31:9)*

וַיִּתֶּן-לִי – a verbal clause to the left of *Tipha*.

10. וַיִּשְׂמוּ שְׁקֻצֵיהֶם בְּבַיִת אֲשֶׁר-נִקְרָא-שְׁמִי עָלָיו (Tipha) / לְטַמְאָהּ (יר' לב 34)

*They set up their abominations in the house that bears my name, and defiled it. (Jer 32:38)*

לְטַמְאָהּ – an infinitive clause.

The appearance of *Tipha* in about one fourth of the verses that contain an additional clause to the left of the division point is not incomprehensible. The trend to noting the main division next to *Silluq* with *Tipha*, is what leads to the deviation in some of these verses. It may be also, that the need to put *Tipha* before *Silluq* (as is standard in the verses of the twenty-one prose books) is an additional reason for the unusual accentuation.

The remaining verses (aside from few exceptions) are accentuated with *Tipha*. For example (11–13):

11. וַיָּבֹאוּ עֲבָדֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ חִזְקִיָּהוּ (Tipha) / אֶל-יִשְׁעִיָּהוּ (יש' לו 5)

*When the servants of King Hezekiah came to Isaiah (Isa 37:5)*

12. אָסַף אָסַף כָּל / מֵעַל פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה (Tipha) / נְאֻם-ה' (צפ' א 2)

*I will utterly sweep away everything from the face of the earth, says the LORD (Zeph 1:2)*

Note that the words נְאֻם-השם are a parenthetical phrase and not a clause.

13. וּמִנְחֹתֶם וּנְסֻכֵיהֶם לְפָרִים לְאֵילִם וְלִכְבָּשִׁים בְּמִסְפָּרָם (Tipha) / כְּמִשְׁפָּט (במ' כט 30)

*With the grain-offering and the drink-offerings for the bulls, for the rams, and for the lambs, as prescribed in accordance with their number (Num 29:30)*

According to the accentuation, the word כְּמִשְׁפָּט is the predicate of the complete sentence.

It should be noted that the word at the division point is accentuated with *Tipha* if a verb or infinitive without a complement appear to the left of the division point. For example (14):

14. וַיִּקְחוּ אֶת-כָּל-רְכֻשׁ סֹדֶם וְעִמְרָה וְאֶת-כָּל-אֲבֹלָם / (Tipha) וַיֵּלְכוּ (בר' יד 11)

*So the enemy took all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all their provisions, and went their way (Gen 14:11)*

This is not surprising, as a verb without a complement is considered a parallel constituent in the full sentence with several predicates and not a clause.

It is important to emphasize again that this distinction is based on the relationship between the two parts of the verse and the features of the part to the left of the division point. It does not include all of the verses that are complex or compound sentences, such as the following examples (15–17):

15. וַיִּתֵּן אַבְרָהָם אֶת-כָּל- (אֲשֶׁר-לוֹ) / (Tipha) לְיִצְחָק (בר' כה 5)

*Abraham gave all he had to Isaac (Gen 25:5)*

16. וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵיהֶם {כֹּה-אָמַר ה'} [הַנְּגִי מִמֶּלֶא אֶת-כָּל-יֹשְׁבֵי הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת וְאֶת-הַמְּלָכִים הַיֹּשְׁבִים לְדָוִד עַל-בֶּסֶסָו וְאֶת-הַכֹּהֲנִים וְאֶת-הַנְּבִיאִים וְאֶת כָּל-יֹשְׁבֵי יְרוּשָׁלַם / (Tipha) שְׁכָרוֹז]] (יר' יג 13)

*Then you shall say to them: Thus says the LORD: I am about to fill all the inhabitants of this land – the kings who sit on David's throne, the priests, the prophets, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem – with drunkenness (Jer 32:28)*

17. וְאָתָּה בְּתוֹךְ עֵרְלִים {תִּשְׁבֵּר וְתִשְׁכַּב} / (Tipha) אֶת-הַלְּלִי-חֲרָב} (יח' לב 28)

*So you shall be broken and lie among the uncircumcised, with those who are killed by the sword (Ezek 32:28)*

Let us now look at the verses of group 1, meaning verses of up to four words (that do not contain *Atnah*) and examine the applicability of the syntactic criterion.

Given that verses of up to four words are always accentuated with *Tipha*, I examined the extent to which a correlation exists between the syntactic structure of the verse and its accentuation. It was found that the features of these verses are identical to those of verses containing five or more words that are accentuated with *Tipha*, as seen in the following examples (18, 19):

18. וַיִּשֶׂם אֶת-מִסְדַּ הַפֶּתַח / (Tipha) לְמִשְׁכָּן (ש'מ' מ 28)

*He also put in place the screen for the entrance of the tabernacle (Exod 40:28)*

19. תוֹשֵׁב וְשָׂכִיר (Tiphā) / לֹא-יֹאכַל-בּוֹ (שמ' יב 45)

*No bound or hired servant may eat of it* (Exod 12:45)

The segment לֹא-יֹאכַל-בּוֹ is the predicate of the complete sentence and not a clause.

It would seem possible to argue, that the findings in verses of up to four words do not support the statement regarding the dominance of the syntactic features, as in short verses the chance of an additional clause appearing to the left of the division point is very low. Yet, we cannot ignore that the accentuation in these verses corresponds with the general syntactic trend.

When the main division is two word before *Silluq*, verses that do not contain *Atnah* use *Tiphā* or *Zaqef* as the predominant disjunctive.<sup>10</sup> In these, the impact of the length of the verse increases, yet we can distinguish three groups, as seen in the table below:

Verse length <sup>11</sup>	Group 1		Group 2		Group 3		Total	
	3-4 words		5-6 words		7+ words			
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<i>Atnah</i>	33	9%	272	55%	871	90%	1176	100%
<i>Tiphā/Zaqef</i>	337	91%	227	45%	92	10%	656 <sup>12</sup>	100%
Total	370	100%	499	100%	963	100%	1832	100%

Nevertheless, the strength of the syntactic features is clearly seen: The features noted in the discussion of the main division next to *Silluq* were found to be valid for verses of up to six words as well, where the main

<sup>10</sup> *Zaqef* can appear if at least one of the words to the left of the division point is long – with two or more vowels before the tuned syllable (*Šewa* after a so-called “long vowel” is also counted as a vowel); see Wickes, *Treatise*, 62. For a more accurate definition, see M. Breuer, “On the Emergence of the Accentual System,” *Lěšonénu* 53 (1989) 203–213, esp. 211–212; T. Strauss, “The Effects of Prosodic and Other Factors on the Parsing of the Biblical Text by the Accents of the 21 Books” (Ph.D. diss., Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2009), 13 (Heb.).

<sup>11</sup> Group 1: Verses with no more than four words; Group 2: Verses with five to six words; Group 3: Verses with seven or more words.

<sup>12</sup> We see that *Tiphā* and *Zaqef* are preferred in 36% of the verses.

division is two words before *Silluq*. *Atnah* is preferred when an additional clause comes to the left of the division point. For example (20, 21):

20. וַיִּקַּח יַעֲקֹב אֶבֶן (Atnah) / וַיִּרְמֶה מַצֵּבָה (בר' לא 45)

*So Jacob took a stone, and set it up as a pillar (Gen 31:45)*

21. ה' אֵישׁ מִלְחָמָה (Atnah) / ה' שְׁמוֹ (שמ' טו 3)

*The LORD is a warrior; the LORD is his name (Exod 15:3)*

In *Genesis* (example 20) *Atnah* appears before a verbal clause, and in *Exodus* (example 21) it appears before a nominal clause.

*Tipha* and *Zaqef* are preferred when there is no additional clause to the left of the division point. For example (22, 23):

22. וַיִּקְרְבוּ בְנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל-בְּנֵי בְנֵימִן (Tipha) / בַּיּוֹם הַשֵּׁנִי (שופ' כ 24)

*So the Israelites advanced against the Benjaminites on the second day (Judg 20:24)*

23. וּלְמִטֵּה בְנֵי שִׁמְעוֹן (Zaqef) / שְׁמוּאֵל בֶּן-עַמִּיהוּד (במ' לד 20)

*Of the tribe of the Simeonites, Shemuel son of Ammihud (Num 34:20)*

However, we have here a certain extension of the definition, due to the lengthening of the part to the left of the division point. In these verses *Atnah* is preferred not only before nominal, verbal or infinitive clauses, but also in verses with three or more parallel constituents, in which two of the constituents appear to the left of the division point. See the following examples:

24. וּבְנֵי יוֹן אֵלִישָׁה וְתַרְשִׁישׁ (Atnah) / כְּתִים וְדֹדָנִים (בר' י 4)

*The descendants of Javan: Elishah, Tarshish, Kittim, and Rodanim (Gen 10:4)*

The predicate in this verse is made of four parallel constituents: אלישה – two of them: וְתַרְשִׁישׁ וְדֹדָנִים – two of them: כְּתִים וְדֹדָנִים are to the left of the division point.

25. לְיְהוּדִים הִיְתָה אוֹרָה וְשִׂמְחָה (Atnah) / וְשֶׁשׁ וְיִקָּר (אס' ח 16)

*For the Jews there was light and gladness, joy and honour (Esth 8:16)*

In this case the subject of the sentence is made of parallel constituents, two of them: שֶׁשׁ וְיִקָּר appear to the left of the division point.

To demonstrate the power of the syntactic features, I compared verses of group II, with five and six words, as seen in the table below:

		<i>Atnah</i>		<i>Tipha &amp; Zaqef</i>		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
Additional clause or parallel constituents <sup>13</sup>	+	184	71%	75	29%	259	100%
	-	88	37%	152	63%	240	100%

To close, with respect to the main division next to *Silluq*, we can summarize by saying that *Atnah* is preferred in verses in which the division is in the range of two clauses, namely, when a clause (as defined above) is added to the left. *Tipha* is primarily used in verses in which the part to the left of the division point is a phrase and not a clause. This syntactic criterion is valid also in verses up to six words with a division two words before *Silluq*. In these, *Atnah* is also preferred with parallel constituents (as defined above).

With respect to verses of up to six words, in which the main division is three or four words before *Silluq*, the syntactic factor plays a much smaller role: The further the point of division is from *Silluq*, the fewer verses there are that use a main disjunctive other than *Atnah*. Despite this, the syntactical criteria found in verses with a main division two words before *Silluq* are, to a certain extent, valid for these verses as well.

<sup>13</sup> In verses of no more than four words, 82% of the occurrences with *Atnah* have an additional clause or parallel constituents to the left of the division point; in verses with seven or more words, 77% of the occurrences with *Tipha* or *Zaqef* do not have an additional clause or parallel constituents to the left of the division point.