THE SYNTACTIC-PRAGMATIC FUNCTION OF GENESIS 1:1-2 IN THE CREATION NARRATIVE

Daniel K. Bediako, PhD
Valley View University, Ghana

The relationship between Gen 1:1-2 and the rest of the first chapter of the Hebrew Bible has occasioned a long scholarly debate, which has produced in its wake a considerable amount of literature. The divergence and polarity of views on these verses seem to result from the atomistic nature of traditional approaches in biblical studies. Approaching the text from the perspective of grammatical textlinguistics and pragmatics, this article has yielded results that both confirm and reshape scholarly thinking on Gen 1:1-2. This fresh look at the text brings with it a re-interpretation of "in the beginning." Gen 1:1-2 presents as antecedent information that succinctly relates a previous act of creation. Thus understood, the pragmatic function of Genesis 1:1-2 is to distinguish this previous creation (vv. 1-2) from the six-day creation in (vv. 3-31), particularly to indicate that הָדוֹן (v. 1) were not created on בְּיָמָיו (i.e., the first day of the six-day creation). The article, therefore, demonstrates that the textlinguistic/pragmatic approach promises a fresh avenue for understanding and interpreting the biblical text, especially such difficult passages as Gen 1:1-2.

1. Introduction

theory.” In view of the difficulty with which the text presents interpreters, S. D. Giere despairingly concludes, “The ambiguity of the relationship of MT Gen 1:1-2 to the subsequent verses likely will never be completely resolved as the ambiguity is inherent in the text itself.” More work, nevertheless, needs be done on the subject.

Generally, scholarly opinions on the function of vv. 1-2 have been informed by their understanding of the phrase “in the beginning.” On the one hand, some scholars consider as a *construct* noun and argue that v. 1 be read as a temporal subordinate clause, even if this means re-vocalizing אַלֹהִים “create” as an infinitive construct (cf. Hos 1:2). Among these scholars, some take v. 1 as a protasis (i.e., preposed dependent temporal clause) and v. 2 as apodosis. Others treat v. 1 as protasis, v. 2 as parenthetical statement, and v. 3 as apodosis. It is even argued that Gen 1:1 is a “bare restrictive relative clause,” a kind of clause with a head (construct)+Ø+verb structure. Thus read, v. 1 is a temporal dependent clause—reducible to a

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prepositional phrase—modifying v. 3a (main clause), with clauses 2a-2c being parenthetical or circumstantial. In any case, scholars advocating this view are largely inspired by Ancient Near Eastern cosmogonic parallels to Gen 1:1-2 as well as 2:4-6. On the other hand, several scholars consider as an absolute noun and thereby render v. 1 as an independent clause. This traditional understanding also has several ramifications as regards the relation of v. 1 to v. 2 and the subsequent narrative. The major positions could be summarized as follows: (1) v. 1 serves as the title or summary of the whole chapter while v. 2 describes the situation prior to creation, that is, a preexistent chaos; (2) v. 1 refers to an original creation which became contaminated with evil and v. 2 sets the stage for reconstruction; (3) v. 1 refers to an original creation of the heavens and earth, with v. 2 describing the state of the earth as it was originally created; v. 3 begins creation of life on earth; (4) v. 1 functions both as summary/superscription and original

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8 Hence, the translation, “In the particular beginning that God created the heavens and the earth—now the earth was formless and void and darkness was upon the surface of the deep and the wind of God was hovering over the surface of the waters—God said, “Let there be light!” Then there was light” (Holmstedt, “The Relative Clause in Biblical Hebrew,” 124; idem, “The Restrictive Syntax of Genesis 1:1,” VT 58 (2008): 56-67, where he rejects the idea of an absolute beginning: “there were potentially multiple periods or stages to God’s creative work” [ibid., 56]).


10 Pfandl, “Does Genesis Teach,” 110-111, categorizes these positions as follows: (a) Genesis 1:1 as a title, (b) the ruin-reconstruction theory, (c) the passive gap theory, (d) creation of the universe on day one, and (e) the traditional creation theory.


12 This is what is usually known as the reconstruction theory. Some advocates of this view translate in v. 2 as “became” (e.g., G. L. Archer Jr., A Survey of Old Testament Introduction [Chicago: Moody, 1974], 190). See also Waltke, “The Creation Account in Genesis 1:1-3,” 216-228.

act of creation; and (5) v. 1 is part of the creative work on the first day of the creation week.

It is observable from the brief overview that studies on the function of Gen 1:1-2 and its relationship to the rest of the creation account are in the state of flux, benefiting scholarship only with “the impossibility in coming to any decisive conclusion.” If anything, the resulting divergence of views on vv. 1-2 is a signal that the traditional, atomistic approaches in biblical studies have outlived their utility, at least, as far as this text is concerned. Accordingly, it is posited here that the textlinguistic/pragmatic approach promises a fresh avenue for understanding the function of Gen 1:1-2. After a few remarks on structure, the Hebrew text of 1:1-2 will be examined from a textlinguistic perspective, highlighting the pragmatic notions of word order, clause typology, and ‘grounding’, and their bearing on the delineation of the function of these verses.

2. Structure in Gen 1:1-2

1. Overall Structure: Two major structures are observable in Gen 1. The first is a linear structure, following the sequence of creation: introduction...
(1:1-2), day one (1:3-5), day two (1:6-8), day three (1:9-13), day four (1:14-19),
day five (1:20-23), day six (1:24-31), and day seven (2:1-3). The second is a
thematic structure, depicting a bi-triadic order of creation as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Day</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Light (1:3-5)</td>
<td>4 Lights (1:14-19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Firmament (1:6-8)</td>
<td>5 Inhabitants (1:20-23)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sky</td>
<td>birds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>seas</td>
<td>fish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Dry land (1:9-10)</td>
<td>6 Land Animals (1:24-25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vegetation (1:11-13)</td>
<td>Human beings (1:26-31)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is worth noting that this thematic structure places both Gen 1:1-2 (intro-
duction) and 2:1-3 (day seven) on its periphery—these units lie outside the
boundaries of the symmetry (1:3-31). Such an observation is important, as it
bears on the understanding of the function of Gen 1:1-2.

2. Clause Structure: Gen 1 contains about ninety-six clauses, representing
fourteen clause types. Forty-nine (51%) of these clauses are *wayyiqtol* (i.e.,
*waw*+imperfect) clauses, none of which is found in Gen 1:1-2. In 1:3-2:3,
most of the other clause types are embedded in *wayyiqtol* clauses (i.e., these
other clauses continue the information initiated by *wayyiqtol* clauses), im-
plying that the bulk of the material in Gen 1 stands on the primary story-
line. In other words, *wayyiqtol* clauses present the narrative thread of Gen 1
in the form of sequential happenings. Instructively, the divine activity on
each of the six days of creation begins with the *wayyiqtol* clause
“and God said.” The abridged clausal outline of Gen 1:1-2:3 below shows
this phenomenon.

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18 See e.g., Waltke, *Genesis*, 57; J. T. Walsh, *Style and Structure in Biblical Narrative*
(Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2001), 37; D. A. Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the Old
As can be seen from this outline, does not appear in the first and last paragraphs: Gen 1:1-2 (introduction) and 2:1-3 (day seven). This may imply that in these paragraphs the six-day creation, perhaps in the immediate interest of the author of Genesis, has either not yet begun (1:1-2) or is already completed (2:1-3).

3. Communicative Structure: Apart from 1:1-2 and 2:1-3, each paragraph exhibits three communicative domains. These levels of narrative perspective include the author’s (1) report of divine speeches/commands, (2) report of divine activities following the speech, and (3) further closing remarks (usually structural expressions). Gen 1:1-2 and 2:1-3 do not neatly belong to any of these domains, probably because these paragraphs lie outside of the six-day creation.

3. Clausal Analysis

Gen 1:1-2 contains four clauses: (1) (v. 1; clause type: x-qatal); (2) (v. 2a; clause type: we-x-qatal); (3) (v. 2b; clause type: nominal); and (4) (v. 2c; clause type: participial).

Clause 1 has a marked word order, indicated by the fronting of an adjunct, particularly a prepositional phrase of time reference (i.e.,).
which adverbially modifies the entire clause. The placement of היה בראויה in the preverbal field of the clause suggests, first, that it is a focused constituent, the purpose of which, probably, is to place the creation of זכרו and אשה at some earlier time. Second, the fronting of היה בְּרָאוּ היה disallows clause 1 from standing on the narrative foreground, but highlights the information contained in the clause as background information, since in narrative texts אֲשֶׁר clauses mostly convey background, as opposed to foreground, information. Third, the fronting of היה בְּרָאוּ היה leads the reader to anticipate the unfolding of a main story that goes beyond the scope of היה בְּרָאוּ היה; by so doing signals that clause 1 is an initial phase of the divine creative activity. The constituent structure of clause 1 (i.e., אֲשֶׁר+time ref.+qatal+subj+obj) suggests that it is a simple, declarative sentence, and for that matter, an independent clause/sentence. Thus read, and as argued


See also A. Moshavi, “The Discourse Functions of Object/Adverbial-Fronting in Biblical Hebrew,” in Biblical Hebrew in Its Northwest Semitic Setting: Typological and Historical Perspectives, ed. S. E. Fassberg and A. Hurvitz (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2006), 231, who argues that “verbal clauses with a preposed object or adverbial have one of just two discourse functions: focusing and topicalizing” [emphasis his]. Bandstra, “Word Order,” 117, observes that the marked word order MVSO also indicates the setting of a new stage.


below, v. 1 refers to a semantically self-contained previous creation—appropriately conveyed through a declarative, independent sentence.\textsuperscript{24} That v. 1 conveys a previous creation activity seems to provide the basis for the selection of its second grammatical object, \( \text{‘\textit{va’yiqqel}} \), as the primary topic in clause 2a.\textsuperscript{25} The constituent structure of clause 2a informs this observation. First, the \( +x+\text{qatal} \) structure of clause 2a suggests that it is a discontinuous clause.\textsuperscript{26} This means that clause 2a does not contain an action sequential to the action in clause 1; rather, clause 2a describes the state of \( \text{‘\textit{va’yiqqel}} \) as it was created.\textsuperscript{27} Second, the structure of 2a, especially the presence of the discontinuous clause, indicates that the grammatical objects \( \text{‘\textit{va’yiqqel}} \) and \( \text{‘\textit{va’yiqqel}} \) are effected, rather than affected, direct-object accusatives. Heidel, \textit{The Babylonian Genesis}, 93, rightly observes, “The first verse of Genesis briefly records the creation of the universe in its essential form, and the second verse singles out a part of this universe, viz., the earth, and describes its condition in some detail.”

\textsuperscript{24} The understanding of v. 1 as independent clause receives the support of the major textual witnesses (e.g., LXX and SP). This has been recognized even by scholars who take v. 1 as dependent clause (e.g., Brown, \textit{Structure, Role, and Ideology}, 35, 65; Giere, \textit{A New Glimpse of Day One}, 285, “LXX Gen 1:1 and 1:3 are both independent clauses that leave little room but to say that there are two creations in LXX Gen 1:1-5”). The Masoretic accentuation also seems to support reading v. 1 is independent clause (e.g., it is argued that the placement of the discontinuous accent \( \text{‘\textit{tipḥah}} \) on \( \text{‘\textit{va’yiqqel}} \) suggests that the Masorets took it as absolute noun phrase [Hasel, “Recent Translations of Genesis 1:1,” 158-159, following E. J. Young, “Relation of the First Verse of Genesis 1 to Verses Two and Three,” \textit{WTJ} 21 [1959]: 133-146]. The structure of clause 2a, namely, the fronting of \( \text{‘\textit{va’yiqqel}} \), the discontinuous function \( \text{‘}\), and the lexicalization of \( \text{‘\textit{va’yiqqel}} \) strengthen the argument.

If v. 1 were to be taken as a superscription or even a dependent, temporal clause, the constituents of v. 2a would perhaps have been structured differently, for example, \( \text{‘\textit{wayyiqtol+vx}} \) (so also e.g., Keil and Delitzsch, \textit{The Pentateuch}, 1:46; Sattinam, \textit{Genesis Unbound}, 103; E. Kautzsch and A. E. Cowley, \textit{Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar} (Oxford: Clarendon, 1909), 453. U. Cassuto, \textit{A Commentary on the Book of Genesis}, vol. 1, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1961; reprint, Jerusalem, Magnes, 1978), 19, rightly observes that V-X structure (rather than X-V) is required for 1:2 to be a dependent clause).

\textsuperscript{25} Note that the grammatical objects \( \text{‘\textit{va’yiqqel}} \) and \( \text{‘\textit{va’yiqqel}} \) are effected, rather than affected, direct-object accusatives. Heidel, \textit{The Babylonian Genesis}, 93, rightly observes, “The first verse of Genesis briefly records the creation of the universe in its essential form, and the second verse singles out a part of this universe, viz., the earth, and describes its condition in some detail.”

\textsuperscript{26} See also B. K. Waltke and M. P. O’Connor, \textit{An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax} (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 129, who further note that “interclausal \textit{旭v} before a non-verb constituent has a discontinuous role. There are two common types of disjunction. One type involves a continuity of scene and participants, but a change of action, while the other is used where the scene or participants shift” (ibid., 650). See also B. Jongeling, “Some Remarks on the Beginning of Genesis 1:2,” \textit{Folia Orientalia} 21 (1980): 27-32.

\textsuperscript{27} The fronting of \( \text{‘\textit{va’yiqqel}} \) before hayah seems to signal simultaneity, rather than sequential
tive \( \), indicates that it is a main clause rather than a dependent, parenthetical clause.\(^{28}\) Similarly, the lexicalization of \( \) in clause 2a seems to require that clause 2a be read as a main clause.\(^{29}\) In other words, if clause 2a were a dependent clause, its constituents would probably be structured differently,\(^{30}\) and it would not require the lexicalization of \( .\)\(^{31}\) Third, because v. 2 selects and describes its primary topic, \( \) from v. 1, it follows that v. 2 cannot fully be understood without v. 1, a fact which seems suggested by

\(^{28}\) For example, the presence of the -conjunction in 2a may argue against its being taken as a parenthetical construction (cf. Winther-Nielsen, “‘In the Beginning,’” 71, 73). See also Brown, *Structure, Role, and Ideology*, 65, 71; Hasel, “Recent Translations of Genesis 1:1,” 158-159, 165-166; Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 13; Young, “Relation of the First Verse,” 133-146.

\(^{29}\) J. W. Dyk and E. Talstra, “Paradigmatic and Syntagmatic Features in Identifying Subject and Predicate in Nominal Clauses,” in *The Verbless Clause in Biblical Hebrew: Linguistic Approaches*, ed. C. L. Miller (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1999), 159, are right that \( \) “has its own specific lexical frame, while allowing for the formal similarities between structures in Hebrew in which ‘to be’ appears and those in which it is not present (nominal clauses).” The lexicalization of \( \) may serve (1) to “support various clausal morpheme markers” including tense, aspect and modality (C. Sinclair, “Are Nominal Clauses a Distinct Clausal Type?” in *The Verbless Clause in Biblical Hebrew: Linguistic Approaches*, ed. C. L. Miller [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1999], 75), (2) to inject “a modicum of dynamism” in its clause (Longacre, *Joseph—A Story of Divine Providence*, 82), or (3) may operate as a normal verb because its lexicalization is obligatory in main sentences (A. Niccacci, “Simple Nominal Clause [SNC] or Verbless Clause in Biblical Hebrew,” ZAH 6 [1993]: 216-224). This suggests that clauses with lexicalized \( \) are not exactly the same as strictly verbless clauses; the former has some discourse pragmatic functions that the latter does not. See also P. Jouon and T. Muuraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (Roma: Instituto Biblico, 1991), 576-577; Kautzsch and Cowley, *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, 454.


\(^{31}\) This what B. S. Childs, *Myth and Reality in the Old Testament* [Naperville, IL: Allenson, 1960], 33, seems to miss when he states that \( \) in v. 2 is superfluous since it is assumed in a nominal clause.
the constituent structure of v. 2. Indirectly, therefore, the structure of clause 2a supports the observation that v. 1 is an independent clause.

With its grammatical subject, הָאָרֶץ, in the preverbal field, clause 2a introduces and focuses attention on הָאָרֶץ as the sphere of divine activity described in a series of sequential actions beginning with v. 3. In other words, while clause 1 indicates that God created הָאָרֶץ and וֹאָרֶץ at some previous time, clause 2a selects הָאָרֶץ and its inhabitants as the focus of the six-day creation. This explains why the state of הָאָרֶץ, not וֹאָרֶץ, receives detailed description in v. 2, which is, as it were, a part of narrative stage setting. It is generally understood that הָאָרֶץ and וֹאָרֶץ in v. 1 express totality, that is, a merism. However, among other reasons, the individuative functions of

32 D. T. Tsumura, The Earth and the Waters in Genesis 1 and 2: A Linguistic Investigation (Sheffield: JSOT, 1989), 78, n. 41, similarly observes that it would be “strange that a Hebrew creation narrative should begin with the present word order of v. 2, i.e., waw+NP[noun phrase]+VP[verb phrase], without any temporal description.” If, as stated above, v. 2 may not fully understood without v. 1, it follows that v. 1 is more than a title or summary of the narrative that ensues. If v. 1 is taken as a mere summary, then v. 2 becomes somewhat anomalous and unexplainable. Against the summary view of v. 1, Wenham, Genesis 1-15, 13, taunts, “How can God be said to create the earth (v. 1), if the earth pre-existed his creative activity (v. 2) as this view implies?” Similarly, v. 1 does not seem to have the structure of a title (e.g., Sailhamer, Genesis Unbound, 102-103; Leupold, Exposition of Genesis, 42; Lim, “Explication of an Exegetical Enigma in Genesis 1:1-3.” 307; Hasel, “Recent Translations of Genesis 1:1,” 154-66). Titles are more likely to be couched in cleft sentence (Gen 2:4; 6:9; 11:10; 36:10; 37:2). Furthermore, unlike v. 1, a title sentence may not be connected to the following text by the conjunction, nor would it begin with a prepositional phrase as in Gen 1:1 (Brown, Structure, Role, and Ideology, 71; Hasel, “Recent Translations of Genesis 1:1,” 165).

33 In the OT הָאָרֶץ may both begin a clause or may appear in the second position after the subject (for the former, cf. Gen 2:7; 10; 4:3; 14; 5:23,31-32; 6:21; 9:11,14; 12:12; 24:14; Num 20:2; Josh 8:35; 10:14; 1 Kgs 8:29; Isa 7:23). This may indicate that when lexicalized, הָאָרֶץ behaves as a full verb, whether the predication is complete or not. This means that when the subject of a הָאָרֶץ-clause is placed in the first position, the order is marked as in a verbal clause. Thus, הָאָרֶץ in 2a may be considered both as a fronted primary topic. The comments of Floor, “Information Structure,” 280, are important: the we-x-qatal structure is a marker for the fronting of nouns for primary topic shift or a "topic theme announcing and topic contrasting." Further, “the fronted, marked word-order focus structure in a we-X-qatal clause contains thematic information, but thematic in the sense of framing or staging the subsequent theme development. It provides the setting” (ibid., 313).


the direct object marker (ָ֣וְּ) and the definite article (ם), and the singling out of אֱרֹ יִרְגָּאֵ for further description in clauses 2a-c argue against a simply merismatic understanding of the word-pair.

The nominal clause 2b—where היהֹו הָאֵרְגָּאֵ seems to do double duty—and the participial clause 2c are coordinated clauses, both of which further describe the state of אֱרֹ יִרְגָּאֵ in general. Thus, rather than dependent circumstantial clauses, clauses 2a-c may be seen as coordinated clauses that bring אֱרֹ יִרְגָּאֵ to the center-stage. In clause 2a וַיֶּחֱמַּקֶּהָ המֶּהָלְּהָ is described as being above, upon him, and in 2c מַחְסַכִּים מָרַע o hovers over it. It appears that הָוָאָה (2b) and הָוָאָה (2c) further define the רָאִי רָאִי (2a) which function together as a single predicate.

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na Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 33, suggests that מַעְרֵגָּאֵ constitutes an antonymous word pair with מַעְרֵגָּאֵ in Gen 1:1, where מַעְרֵגָּאֵ refers to everything under מַעְרֵגָּאֵ. Note that because מַעְרֵגָּאֵ and מַעְרֵגָּאֵ in v. 1 is singled out in v. 2 as a specific entity, it follows that מַעְרֵגָּאֵ and מַעְרֵגָּאֵ in v. 1 are treated as separate entities. Cf. Brown, Structure, Role, and Ideology, 102, n. 12; Tsunura, The Earth and the Waters, 78, 82-83, 163; J. Bergman and M. Ottonson, “אָּה,” TDOT, 1:393-394; Frendo, “Genesis 1:1: An Archaeological Approach,” 166.

37 Some scholars see v. 2 as a subordinate circumstantial clause (e.g., Westermann, Genesis 1-11, 102; Kidner, Genesis, 44; Stigers, A Commentary on Genesis, 49; R. J. Williams, Hebrew Syntax: An Outline, 2d ed. [Toronto: University of Toronto Pres, 1976], 83; Holmstedt, “The Relative Clause in Biblical Hebrew,” 124; idem, “The Restrictive Syntax of Genesis 1:1,” 56-67). Some would even think that v. 2 is out of place (Childs, Myth and Reality, 30-42; Gunkel, Genesis, 104). Wenham, Genesis 1-15, 15, argues that v. 2 is disjunctive but it is circumstantial to v. 3 rather than to v. 1 (so F. I. Andersen, The Sentence in Biblical Hebrew [The Hague: Mouton, 1974], 85). However, Hamilton, The Book of Genesis Chapters 1-17, 117, notes that “contemporaneous circumstance is adequately handled by a verbless clause,” hence suggests that v. 2 is “distinct from and prior to v. 3” (so Waltke, “The Creation Account in Genesis 1:1-3,” 225-228). While v. 2 contains descriptive clauses, these clauses are not subordinate. V. 1 is a simple declarative, independent sentence. V. 2 does not describe the circumstance in which the action in v. 1 took place, but rather describes the condition of the earth when the creative act in v. 1 was complete. Therefore, the clauses in v. 2 should not be read as circumstantial clauses. A. Niccacci, “Basic Facts and Theory of the Biblical Hebrew Verb System in Prose,” in Narrative Syntax and the Hebrew Bible: Papers of the Tilburg Conference 1996, ed. E. van Wolde (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 173, notes that circumstantial constructions are indicated by the movement from וְּחֵלָּה to וְּאָּה clauses.

38 See Kidner, Genesis, 44, who considers v. 2 as “an expansion of the statement just made, and its own two halves are concurrent. It sets the scene, making the earth our vantage point” (so also Sailhamer, Genesis Unbound, 109).
complement describing... The terms...

To summarize, Gen 1:1-2 contains four main clauses: x-qatal, we-x-qatal, nominal, and participial. The transitive declarative x-qatal clause (v. 1) possibly constitutes an initial creative activity; the we-x-qatal clause (v. 2a) both coordinates v. 1 and v. 2 disjunctively and topicals, within whose parameters the ensuing divine activity (1:3-2:3) is situated. Clauses 2b and 2c are each conjunctively coordinated to 2a, as made clear by the use of coordinating conjunction as well as their parallel descriptions of the state of והארץ. Finally, as indicated by their modes of predication as well as the low level of transitivity, the clauses in v. 2 are stative-descriptive clauses; these clauses describe the state of והארץ as it was originally created.

4. Gen 1:1-2 as Antecedent Information

It has been argued elsewhere that Gen 1:1-2:3 is best understood as a historical narrative text in its own right. Like other historical narrative...

39 Were... not to be understood as part, or contents, of והארץ, clauses 2b and 2c would hardly make sense here. See also Tsumura, The Earth and the Waters, 67-74; Cassuto, Commentary, 25; Sarna, Genesis, 7; Wenham, Genesis 1-15, 17.

40 So also Tsumura, The Earth and the Waters, 67-74; idem, "A 'Hyponymous' Word Pair, 'rs and tm(t), in Hebrew and Ugaritic," Biblica 69 (1988): 258-260. It appears that והארץ describes והארץ while specifies והארץ. In any case, והארץ and והארץ as well as והארץ and והארץ, all define והארץ. The expression, therefore, does not convey sinister/chaotic connotation. The expression is described והארץ because it is not yet ready for habitation (cf. vv. 3-31). Following an extensive philological and comparative study on the meaning of והארץ, Tsumura similarly concludes, "The biblical context and extra-biblical parallels suggest that the phrase... in Gen 1:2 has nothing to do with 'chaos' and simply means 'emptiness' and refers to the earth which is an empty place, i.e. 'an unproductive and uninhabited place'" (Tsumura, The Earth and the Waters, 156; cf. Waltke, Genesis, 59; Rooker, "Genesis 1:1-3: Creation or Re-creation? Part 1," 316-323).

41 See e.g., Matthews, Genesis 1-11:26, 130; Walton, Genesis, 73; Cassuto, Commentary, 19-20; Wenham, Genesis 1-15, 3, 15; Hamilton, The Book of Genesis Chapters 1-17, 108; Arnold and Choi, A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax, 148. Some have considered the expression as a farrago (e.g., J. M. Sasson, "Time... to Begin," in Sha'arei Talmon: Studies in the Bible, Qumran, and the Ancient Near East Presented to Shemaryahu Talmon, ed. M. Fishbane and E. Tov (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1992), 188; Brown, Structure, Role, and Ideology, 75, who renders it as "mingled mass").

42 It is interesting to note that whether one takes v. 1 as an independent clause or a sub-ordinate clause, the argument that vv. 1-2 present antecedent information stands supported (Cf. Holmstedt, "The Relative Clause in Biblical Hebrew," 124-125).

43 Daniel Bediako, "Genesis 1:1-2:3 as Historical Narrative Text Type," Valley View Uni
texts, the major ‘genre-determining’ factor in Gen 1 is the dominance of \textit{wayyiqtol} clause types.\textsuperscript{44} For example, beginning with Gen 1:3, every verse in 1:3-2:3 commences with a \textit{wayyiqtol} verb form—the only exceptions are vv. 18 and 30, but even these verses are embedded in initial, matrix \textit{wayyiqtol} clauses. In narrative texts, as in Gen 1, \textit{wayyiqtol} clauses present the narrative foreground information (i.e., main storyline) in the form of sequential happenings, while other clause types (e.g., \textit{x-qatal} and descriptive clauses) present background information.

As noted earlier, the first paragraph of Gen 1:1-2:3, namely vv. 1-2, does not contain a \textit{wayyiqtol} form. Rather, it contains \textit{x-qatal}, \textit{we-x-qatal}, nominal, and participial clauses. If, as established, \textit{wayyiqtol} clauses present narrative storyline, and \textit{qatal}/\textit{x-qatal} and descriptive clauses in narrative texts convey background information, then vv. 1-2 is background information.\textsuperscript{45} It is further suggested, however, that vv. 1-2 constitutes a special kind of background information: because vv. 1-2 begin the creation account, and because the rest of this account cannot be fully understood without these verses, it is probable that vv. 1-2 provide antecedent information along with descriptive, typical narrative-stage-setting elements upon which the six-day creation narrative proper, beginning with v. 3, rests.\textsuperscript{46} This observation is sustainable for several reasons, some of which are given below.


\textsuperscript{46} Winther-Nielsen, “‘In the Beginning’,” 77, has argued from a functional grammatical
First, marked word order (XV) in biblical Hebrew is basically a backgrounding feature. For example, as noted above, *x-qatal* and *we-x-qatal* clauses in narrative mark background/offline information as opposed to foreground/mainline information, at least text-syntactically. In the case of Gen 1:1-2, therefore, clauses 1 (*x-qatal*) and 2a (*we-x-qatal*) are both demoted from foreground to background information by means of fronting. Second, clauses 2a-c are descriptive clauses. In narrative texts descriptive clauses convey background information, and in most instances set the narrative perspective that although יָם הַיָּמִים is a time setting element, the rest of v. 1 “expresses a highly foregrounded state of affairs,” since a “temporal specification does not necessarily alter the foreground/background values.” His conclusion supports the basic thesis of this study, namely that v. 1 is an initial creation report: “At one and the same time it [Gen 1:1] contains a temporal specification and describes a foregrounded self-contained action. The main clause ‘in the beginning’ is temporally staged as befits its discourse-initial position on a content plane, but otherwise describes an action. In a sense it is a whole narrative of just one clause embedded or preposed at the beginning of a full narrative. The following clauses of 1:2 further elaborate details of initial action-setting, and the earth in the beginning of 1:2 rhetorically links back to 1:1, singling out a subtopic of 1:1 for further description. Syntactically, however, it provides the backgrounded information . . . introducing the following narrative in 1:3ff” (ibid.). It should be stated, however, that Winther-Nielsen defines ‘foreground/background’ as semantic notions, not pragmatic notions (78).

The following statement from the viewpoint of general linguistics may be noted: “In narrative research, scholars working in different frameworks agree that the opening of a story typically relates to the state of affairs existing prior to the onset of the plot. Thus, the initial part of a story provides the hearer-reader with a backdrop to the ensuing chain of events and plays an important role in the organizational structure of and communicative function of the narrative, because it orients the addressee toward what is to come by specifying the who, when, where, and why of the events to be recounted” (R. A. Berman and I. Katzenberger, “Form and Function in Introducing Narrative and Expository Texts: A Developmental Perspective,” *Discourse Processes* 38 [2004]: 58).

stage, especially when they appear at the beginning of the narrative as in v. 2. This strongly suggests that the function of v. 2 is to set the stage for, but not necessarily part of, the six-day creation narrative. Third, according to A. Niccacci, nominal clauses (defined as non-verb-first or verbless clauses) may be grammatically main clauses—as are clauses in vv. 1-2—but textually dependent upon an adjacent verbal (verb-initial) clause. In this regard, Gen 1:1-2 may be seen at the text level to be subordinate, or preparatory, to the verb-first clauses beginning in v. 3. More importantly, it is observed that the shift from (we-)x-qatal clauses at the beginning of the pericope (vv. 1-2) to wayyiqtol clauses starting with v. 3 intimates a movement from antecedent to foreground information. Such a shift in narrative texts represents a break in communication and signals the inception of the narrative proper. Fourth, even a cursory reading of Gen 1:3-31 shows that each of the six days of creation opens with וַיְהִי and closes with וַיָּכֹס וָאָלָהוּ. The implication of this formulaic, enveloping phenomenon is that both Gen 1:1-2 (i.e., antecedent information) and 2:1-3 (i.e., day seven) lie outside of the six-day creation. Yet, Gen 1:1-2 and 2:1-3 cannot be placed on the same functional level because while both units lack expressions characteristic to days one through six, 2:1-3 contains wayyiqtol clauses and 1:1-2 does not. Thus, while 1:1-2 provides information antecedent to the six-day creation which is presented through a string of wayyiqtol clauses in vv. 3-31, 2:1-3 conveys divine activity sequel to the six-day creation.

Besides the pragmatic notions of word order, clause typology, and grounding, the thematic structure in Gen 1:1-2 and some lexical items in 1:2 cumulatively buttress the observation that vv. 1-2 provides antecedent information, namely a divine creation activity prior to the six-day creation. According to the thematic structure shown above and which is generally accepted, the six-day creation unfolds through a bi-triadic format, so that,

48 In narrative, (1) foreground is signalled emically by wayyiqtol (preterite) forms, (2) background actions are conveyed by perfect or noun (focus) plus perfect constructions, (3) background activities are presented through participial clauses ( participle, participle, or noun + participle), and (4) setting is indicated by descriptive constructions (preterite of הָיְתָה, perfect of הָיְתָה, verbless clauses, and existential clauses). See Longacre, “Discourse Perspective on the Hebrew Verb,” 180; idem, Joseph—A Story of Divine Providence, 75-76, 81; idem and Hwang, “A Textlinguistic Approach,” 337-338; van der Merwe, “Critical Analysis of Narrative,” 143.


for example, the objects of creation on day one (light, 1:3-5) and day four (luminaries, 1:14-19) correspond. Clearly, this structure excludes Gen 1:1-2 and 2:1-3 because there are no corresponding parallels in the triadic format to the elements in these two units. This implies, once again, that Gen 1:1-2 and 2:1-3 lie outside the six-day creation.

It has been argued here that the function of v. 2 is to set the stage for, and therefore not part of, the six-day creation narrative. This explains why v. 2 picks up and describes אֲדֹם in its ‘not-yet-habitable’ state. Prior to clause 2b, only two entities are discourse-active, namely אֲדֹם and הָאָרֶץ. However, in the description of הָאָרֶץ in v. 2 several new terms are introduced: הָאָרֶץ, הָאָדָם, הָאֵדָם, חָּדָשׁ, הפרוש. It is interesting to note that while v. 2 presents these phenomena in the description of הָאָרֶץ, nowhere in the six-day creation narrative (vv. 3-31) is the creation of these phenomena mentioned. For example, even though חָּדָשׁ (v. 5), רוּחַ (v. 6), חָּדָשׁ (v. 8), חָּדָשׁ (v. 10; cf. vv. 6-7), and חָּדָשׁ (v. 10) are named on days one and three, the objects are not created on these days. The same observation goes for הָאָדָם and הָאָדָם outside of vv. 1-2, the narrative presupposes the prior existence of these objects, so that no reference is made to the creation of these objects during the six days (1:3-31). It follows, then, that the objects mentioned in vv. 1-2 were not created during the six-day creation, but were created at a time prior to the six-day creation. This renders the conclusion that the creation of הָאָדָם (v. 1) belongs to a previous creation—an initial creation antecedent to, and serving as the basis for, the six-day creation—all the more plausible.

5. 

Does אֱansom בָּרָא in Gen 1:1 refer to a specific beginning (i.e., an absolute beginning, a relative beginning, or the beginning of the six-day creation), or to a period of time (i.e., an undefined period of time or the span of the six days

51 Note also the use of the article with קָרֵב, even at its first occurrence.

52 In fact, a careful reading of Gen 1 indicates that vv. 3-31 do not merely elaborate on v. 1, but rather present the six-day creation as a narrative subsequent to vv. 1-2.

of creation)? This question is a reflection of the atomistic nature that most studies on Gen 1 have taken. These studies have focused on the vocalization of באֶֽרֶךְ שֵׁם הָאָדָم, its nominal form (whether it is construct or absolute), and its usage in the rest of the Hebrew Bible. The brief discussion of באֶֽרֶךְ שֵׁם הָאָדָמ. that follows does not seek to trace the atomistic, age-long debate. Rather, it attempts to answer why the author chooses to use באֶֽרֶךְ שֵׁם הָאָדָמ. at the beginning of the narrative.

In the clausal analysis above, it was stated that באֶֽרֶךְ שֵׁם הָאָדָמ. is a clausal ad-verb, that is, it modifies clause 1. Moreover, because the clauses of v. 2 describe the state of באֶֽרֶךְ שֵׁם הָאָדָמ. when it was initially created, by extension modifies v. 2. This macro-adverbial function requires that באֶֽרֶךְ שֵׁם הָאָדָמ. be taken as an absolute noun, after all, it does not stand in a construct relationship with an explicit head noun (cf. Jer 26:1; 27:1; 28:1; 49:34). And because באֶֽרֶךְ שֵׁם הָאָדָמ. is not in construct relationship with a head noun, the question as to

54 See Walton, Genesis, 68; Sailhamer, Genesis Unbound, 38, 105; Wenham, Genesis 1-15, 14; Waltke, Genesis, 58.

55 It is often argued that the pointing of באֶֽרֶךְ שֵׁם הָאָדָמ. (i.e., without the characteristic vowel of the article) indicates that the Masoretes understood it as a construct form. Nonetheless, because there is no explicit genitive, one may not insist that the Masoretic pointing is conclusive evidence for taking באֶֽרֶךְ שֵׁם הָאָדָמ. as a construct (cf. Westermann, Genesis 1-11, 46; J. Barr, “Hebrew Lexicography: Informal Thoughts,” in Linguistics and Biblical Hebrew, ed. W. R. Bodine [Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1992], 147; Heidel, The Babylonian Genesis, 89-95; Waltke, “The Creation Account in Genesis 1:1-3,” 338; Keil and Delitzsch, Pentateuch, 1:46; Sailhamer, “Genesis,” 21; Wenham, Genesis 1-15, 3).

56 See Holmstedt, “The Relative Clause in Biblical Hebrew,” 123-124. באֶֽרֶךְ שֵׁם הָאָדָמ. has an ad-verbial function in Gen 1:1, and since “time designations in adverbial expressions do not need the article, seldom have the article, and occur in the absolute state,” there is no need to maintain that באֶֽרֶךְ שֵׁם הָאָדָמ. here is a construct (cf. Hamilton, Pentateuch, 32; Heidel, The Babylonian Genesis, 89-95; Hasel, “Recent Translations of Genesis 1:1,” 156-57; Arnold, Encountering the Book of Genesis, 25; idem, , “בראֶֽךְ שֵׁם הָאָדָמ.” NIDOTTE 3:1025-1028; Eichrodt, “In the Beginning,” 66-72; Barr, “Hebrew Lexicography: Informal Thoughts,” 147; Wenham, Genesis 1-15, 12).

57 Apart from Gen 1:1, the phrase באֶֽרֶךְ שֵׁם הָאָדָמ. in its other four occurrences (Jer 26:1; 27:1; 28:1; 49:34) stands in a construct relationship with הבָּשָׁם (cf. Gen 10:10). Likewise, באֶֽרֶךְ שֵׁם הָאָדָמ. is almost always used as in construct relationship with explicit genitives. In rare cases, however, it is used as absolute noun (e.g., Lev 2:12; Deut 33:21; Job 40:29; Ps 105:36). In Deut 33:21, באֶֽרֶךְ שֵׁם הָאָדָמ. fills the direct object function-slot. The phrase באֶֽרֶךְ שֵׁם הָאָדָמ. also occurs four times (Num 15:21; Deut 26:2; 1 Sam 2:29; Isa 46:10), all but Isa 46:10 being in the construct state with explicit nouns. In Isa 46:10, באֶֽרֶךְ שֵׁם הָאָדָמ. is used adverbially with a predicate participle. Such adverbial use of באֶֽרֶךְ שֵׁם הָאָדָמ. parallels באֶֽרֶךְ שֵׁם הָאָדָמ. in Gen 1:1. Contrary to the scholars who seek to repoint באֶֽרֶךְ שֵׁם הָאָדָמ. in Gen 1:1 as an infinitive (cf. Gen 5:1), Isa 46:10 and Gen 1:1 seem to imply that whether with a finite verb or participle, when באֶֽרֶךְ שֵׁם הָאָדָמ. is used adverbially it may be absolute, though anarthrous (cf. Gen 38:26).
whether this term refers to a specific beginning or a period of time is not warranted by the syntagmatic context of vv. 1-2.

As argued in this study, Gen 1:1-2 functions as antecedent information succinctly relating a previous act of creation, and thus provides the base for understanding the subsequent narrative of the six-day creation (vv. 3-31). This function of vv. 1-2 is the appropriate context within which to construe האל וענני השמים וארץ שאת at some previous time, the pragmatic function of the term extends beyond the level of v. 1. Overall, הבואות is used to clearly mark vv. 1-2 as reporting divine act of creation distinct from, and antecedent to, the six-day creation (vv. 3-31).

The creation event and its description in vv. 1-2 can easily be conflated with those of the first day of the six-day creation (vv. 3-5). Probably to preclude the ambiguity, the author uses הבואות as the temporal locus for the creation of "the heavens and the earth" in v. 1—with the state of "the earth" being described in v. 2—but uses הבואות as the temporal locus for the creation of "light" and division of "day"/"night" in vv. 3-5. It is also instructive to note that whether in Gen 1 or elsewhere (Jer 26:1; 27:1; 28:1; 49:34), הבואות cannot refer to a segment of time within the scope of one day; since the time referent conveyed by the time referent conveyed by הבואות far transcends the boundaries of a single day, it follows that Gen 1:1-2—modified by הבואות—is not meant to be considered as part of the creative activity on day one of the six-day creation. Taken together, therefore, the pragmatic function of הבואות is to distinguish the creation of "the heavens and the earth" in vv. 1-2 from the six-day creation in vv. 3-31, particularly to show that "the heavens and the earth" (v. 1) were not created on ‘day one' (i.e., the first day of the six-day creation).

6. Conclusion

The syntax and function of Gen 1:1-2 have long engaged scholarly attention which has yielded considerably large amount of literature. Most of the studies done on the subject are linguistically atomistic, promising within their purview no beam of conceivable scholarly consensus. In view of the semantic cul-de-sac that these studies have reached, this article has indicated that textlinguistics/pragmatics promises fresh avenues for understanding difficult texts such as Gen 1:1-2. Following intra-clausal and inter-clausal analyses from a textlinguistic perspective—focusing especially on

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58 This further shows that the debate as to whether הבואות indicates an absolute beginning or relative beginning is not particularly necessary.

59 Note that the segments of ‘day one' are spelt out as ‘evening’ and ‘morning’. Since הבואות cannot refer to a segment of one day, it is not possible, for example, to equate הבואות with ‘morning'.
word order, forms of predication, clause types, and their functions on both clause and text levels—it is concluded that Gen 1:1-2 is an antecedent information which provides the narrative base for the six-day creation. V. 1 reports a previous act of creation and v. 2 describes the state of the earth as it was originally created, thereby setting the narrative stage for the six-day creation (vv. 3-31). Understood within this pragmatic context, the macro-adverbial phrase, דאשנ, is used to mark vv. 1-2 as a divine act of creation distinct from, and prior to, the six-day creation. Unmistakably, therefore, דאשנ disallows conflating vv. 1-2 with the divine activity on ‘day one’ of the six-day creation (vv. 3-5)—“the heavens and the earth” (v. 1) were created “previously” (וית_added (ב万欧元) rather than on “day one” (וית) of the creation week.