

Speaking to One's Heart: דבר and its Semantic Extension

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INTRODUCTION

The noun דָּבַר has as its principal meaning “word” whether spoken or written as at 2 Kgs 22:13. In reality, just as the English term “word,” it is a sign that designates a class of basic linguistic items but in doing so designates no item in particular. As J.L. Austin pointed out, to ask after the meaning of a word, any word (i.e., “no particular word at all”), is an absurd question; it is like asking: What is anything? The question should be phrased: What-is-the-meaning-of (the word) “word”?; and the answer should explain its syntactics and demonstrate its semantics.¹ In doing this the ancient Hebrew lexica attest the presence of polysemy and list other meanings as well.² Thus apart from the meaning “word,” HALOT lists “matter/affair” and “thing > something/anything.” The latter meaning is of interest in so far as it coincides with Austin’s criticism of the question: What is the meaning of a word? As the Hebrew term דָּבַר designates no word in particular, it appears to be able to designate anything. We will return to a discussion of this phenomenon later. To continue, BDB offers various glosses under the heading “matter/affair,” for example, “business/occupation, acts, events, cause/case, way/manner,” but includes “thing/something/anything” also under the same heading.³ Interestingly, in introducing the meaning “matter/affair” BDB notes that the term can be used of the “thing about which one speaks.” Marcus Jastrow, in addition to the principal meaning “word/utterance/command,” also lists “thing/affair/object/

¹ J.L. Austin, “The Meaning of a Word,” in J.O. Urmson and G.J. Warnock (eds.), *Philosophical Papers* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1961), 60.

² We omit here the listing under “word of Yhwh” as a special context for the sense “word.”

³ F. Brown, S.R. Driver, and C.A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977), 182–84.

occurrence.”⁴ TDOT lists three meanings: “word” (“speech”), “thing” (“matter,” “event”), and “something.”⁵ Under the discussion of “word,” it lists instances that are glossed as “thought,” “promise,” “threat,” “commission/command,” “rule/regulation,” “order,” “precept,” “suggestion/counsel,” “request/wish,” “news/information,” and “attitude/refusal.” It also notes that the term is used in the construct to produce expressions such as “empty talk,” “lying speech,” and “windy words.” How then does one explain these multiple senses that the word **דבר** has?

The present paper argues that: a) metonymy and metonymic chaining account for most lexical senses listed for **דבר**; and b) where metonymy itself cannot explain its lexical sense, the process of grammaticalization (a two staged process of first metonymy and then metaphor/analogy) can. It will proceed under numbered sections. By way of illustration section 1) discusses the term’s use in a formulaic expression to highlight its ambiguous meaning (“acts” that are written) that can best be explained by metonymic extension; section 2) turns to a discussion of metonymy more generally and how it operates; section 3) looks at metonymic chaining and focuses on instances where the singular **דבר** designates a speech act or utterance; it concludes that by allowing “word” to stand for “words” (a PART FOR WHOLE metonym) **דבר** is vacated of its specific semantic content and makes its sense dependent on context. This phenomenon gives rise to such glosses as “claim,” “report,” “command,” and “request” that describe the nature of the words uttered; section 4) extends the previous discussion to consider further instances where **דבר** expresses such intellectual correlates of words as “thoughts,” “plans,” “ideas,” “intentions”; section 5) considers the glossing of **דבר** by “thing” and notes that while metonymic chaining explains some occurrences, there are others where the term seems to function grammatically to individuate or generalize. In such occurrences, there appears to be another factor in operation in addition to metonymy; section 6) introduces the process of grammaticalization as a means to account for the individuating function of **דבר** that was previously observed; section 7) addresses the synchronic nature of polysemy created by metonymic extension by discussing instances where at least two meanings are juxtaposed in the same sentence or other close proximity.

1. **דבר** AS “THING” OR “EVENT”

By way of example to illustrate both the use of **דבר** to mean “thing/event,” etc. and the residual ambiguity with respect to its more prevalent use to mean “word,” we have chosen the

⁴ M. Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* (London: Luzac & Co., 1903), 278–79.

⁵ W.H. Schmidt, “**דבר**,” in G.J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren (eds.), *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament, Vol. 3* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 94–125 (103–6).

expression “Now the rest of the acts (דברי) of NN . . . are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of (למלכי) . . .”⁶ The expression forms part of the regnal formula that provides the framework of the Deuteronomic histories of 1 and 2 Kings, a formula that has played an important part in the discussion of the compositional history of the texts.⁷ Be that as it may, in the expression, דברים is variously translated as either “acts” or “deeds.” The literature is in agreement that the formula ends the narrative of one king’s reign and introduces the reign of the next king. In other words, it segments the narrative and thus provides it with a structure. Within the formula the expression “the rest of the acts of NN” behaves as a “referral notice” that directs the reader/listener to another source in which the “acts” of the king are written.⁸

Taking one text as an example, 1 Kgs 14:29 (NRSV) reads: “Now the rest of the acts (דברי) of Rehoboam, and all that he did, are they not written (כתובים) in the Book of the Annals (ספר דברי הימים) of the Kings of Judah?” Its parallel in 2 Chr 12:15 (NRSV) reads: “Now the acts (דברי) of Rehoboam, from

⁶ See 1 Kgs 14:29; 15:7, 23, 31; 16:5, 14, 20, 27; 22:39, 46; 2 Kgs 1:18; 8:23; 10:34; 12:20; 13:8, 12; 14:15, 18, 28; 15:6, 21, 36; 16:19; 20:20; 21:17, 25; 23:28 and 24:5. A slight variations occur at 1 Kgs 11:41 which replaces (על ספר דברי הימים) with (על ספר דברי). The chronicler parallels the formula in most instances but drops הימים from the expression ספר דברי הימים and largely ascribes the source of information about the various kings to prophetic figures. See A.F. Rainey, “The Chronicler and his Sources—Historical and Geographical,” in M.P. Graham, K.G. Hoglund, and S.L. McKenzie (eds.), *The Chronicler as Historian* (Sheffield: Sheffield University Press, 1997), 30–72, esp. the table on 32–37. Rainey sees these chronicles of the kings as constructed from “historical essays by the prophets” that are roughly contemporaneous with each king’s reign that were later put together. A similar usage also occurs in the expression ‘After these things/events’—(ויהי) אחר הדברים האלה. See Gen 15:1; 22:1; 20; 40:1; Josh 24:29; 1 Kgs 17:17; 21:1; Esth 2:1; 3:1; Ezra 7:1; 2 Chr 32:1.

⁷ See S.R. Bin-Nun, “Formulas from Royal Records of Israel and of Judah,” *VT* 18 (1968), 414–32, here 418–19; and I.W. Provan, *Hezekiah and the Books of Kings: A Contribution to the Debate about the Composition of the Deuteronomic History* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1988), 33–34, for the regnal formulae. Most discussion has focused on the evaluation of the kings within the formulae as it is seen as key for an understanding of the compositional history of the text. See H. Weippert, “Die ‘deuteronomistischen’ Beurteilungen der Könige von Israel und Juda und das Problem der Redaktion der Königsbücher,” *Biblica* 53 (1972), 301–39; W.B. Barrick, “On the ‘Removal of the “High-Places”’ in 1–2 Kings,” *Biblica* 55 (1974), 257–59; A.F. Campbell, *Of Prophets and Kings (1 Samuel 1–2 Kings 10)* (CBQMS, 17; Washington: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1986), 139–202; A.L. Joseph, “Who is like David? Was David like David? Good Kings in the Book of Kings,” *CBQ* 77 (2015), 20–41.

⁸ R.F. Person, Jr., *The Deuteronomic School: History, Social Setting, and Literature* (Atlanta: SBL, 2002), 25; A.F. Rainey, “The Chronicler and his Sources,” 31–32. S. Japhet argues that its purpose is “to support and substantiate the historical work by reference to its sources” (S. Japhet, *I & II Chronicles: A Commentary* [London: SCM, 1993], 20).

first to last, are they not written (כתובים) in the records (דברי) of the prophet Shemaiah and of the seer Iddo, recorded by genealogy (להתיחש)?” Though in both instances דברים is translated “acts,” there is evidently a residual ambiguity in its meaning, for the acts are said in both texts to be “written,” a problem compounded in 1 Kings since the acts are said to be written in “the Book of the Annals.” Words and not acts are written in books/scrolls. Turning to 2 Chronicles, the same verbal aspect may be seen in the term’s collocation with the verbs כתב and התיחש, as well as the repetition of דברים in reference to the records of Shemaiah and Iddo. On further reflection one might be led to construe the usage as an abridgement for “reports of the acts”; however, to do so begs the question as to the meaning of the resulting redundancy in the addition of “and all that he did.” Why add this clause if the term is construed “reports of the acts”? The usage here is better explained as metonymic where words stand for the meanings they convey, and in this instance for the events that they describe. However, one must be aware that it is context that prompts the gloss “acts”—the *waw* in “and all that he did” is best understood to be explanatory, i.e., “to wit all that he did” (Gesenius §154a n.b)—and not anything in the term itself. The motivation for the added explanation is to be found in the abstract sense of the term that has begun to lose its specific semantic content. Such loss is one of the assumed steps of grammaticalization, and metonymy a significant facilitator of the process.⁹

2. METONYMY AND SEMANTIC EXTENSION

For the purposes of the present paper we take the approach of cognitive theory of metaphor and accept the definition of metonymy offered by Günter Radden and Zoltán Kövecses:¹⁰

Metonymy is a cognitive process in which one conceptual entity, the vehicle, provides mental access to another conceptual entity, the target, within the same idealized cognitive model.

Or in the words of Jeanette Littlemore:¹¹

Metonymy is a figure of language and thought in which one entity is used to refer to, or in cognitive linguistic terms “provide access to,” another entity to which it is somehow related.

The idea of contiguity (i.e., that the vehicle and target both belong to the same domain matrix, frame, mental space, knowledge network or idealized cognitive model [hereafter

⁹ P.J. Hopper and E.C. Traugott, *Grammaticalization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

¹⁰ G. Radden and Z. Kövecses, “Towards a Theory of Metonymy,” in K. Panther and G. Radden (eds.), *Metonymy in Language and Thought* (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1999), 17-59 (21).

¹¹ J. Littlemore, *Metonymy: Hidden Shortcuts in Language, Thought and Communication* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 4.

ICM]¹² is seen as fundamental to metonymy, for example, “Washington” to refer to “the government of the USA” (a case of PLACE FOR INSTITUTION), “America” to refer to “the USA” (a case of WHOLE FOR PART), or “four wheels” to refer to a “car” (a case of PART FOR WHOLE). At first, metonymy was seen as purely referential and as such the result of simply substituting one term for another. But as the last example in particular shows, a salient feature of the metonymic vehicle may be highlighted or profiled and may then be preserved in the link to its target. Accordingly, a different element of the “car” ICM might be chosen to profile a different concept. Thus when we say that someone was behind *the wheel*, we imply that that person was in control of the car. That metonymy may not only be a case of substitution is also demonstrated by instances in which metonymy is additive. For example, the sentence “The bathtub is running over” where in fact it is “the water in the bathtub” that is referred to, an instance of CONTAINER FOR CONTENTS.¹³ Metonymy can also be used for rhetorical effect, evaluatively (e.g., “The best part of working at night is that *the suits* have gone home” where businessmen are portrayed as characterless¹⁴), euphemistically (e.g., to go to *the bathroom*), ironically or humorously.

A number of studies are of importance to the present discussion of דָּבָר. First, René Dirven in attempting to explain why metonyms can be placed variously along a figurative/non-figurative continuum distinguishes three classes of metonymy, which he terms linear (as in “*Different parts of the country* don’t necessarily mean the same thing when they use the same word”), conjunctive (as in “*Tea* was a large meal”) and inclusive (as in “He has *a good head* on his shoulders”).¹⁵ It is the second type that is of interest for this study in that it gives rise to meaning extension. The principal example given is that of the

¹² According to Kövecses, “idealized cognitive models are structured conceptual representations of domains in terms of elements of these domains” and “a conceptual domain is our conceptual representation, or knowledge, of any coherent segment of experience. We often call such representations ‘concepts,’ such as the concepts of building or motion. This knowledge involves both the knowledge of basic elements that constitute a domain and knowledge that is rich in detail.” (Z. Kövecses, *Metaphor: A Practical Introduction* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010], 324 and 326).

¹³ Radden and Kövecses, “Towards a Theory of Metonymy,” 17–59. An ancient Hebrew example of this would be the gloss “report of the acts” for דְּבָרִים in 1 Kgs 14:29 and its parallel in 2 Chr 12:15. The interpretation also offers a felicitous explanation for the coordination of the plural דְּבָרִים with the singular הִיא in 2 Chr 12:12b, so that it should be understood to mean “and also in Judah there was a good report.” Interestingly, this is an example of the rarer metonym CONTENTS (words) FOR CONTAINER (report).

¹⁴ Cited from Littlemore, *Metonymy: Hidden Shortcuts*, 5.

¹⁵ R. Dirven, “Metonymy and Metaphor: Different Mental Strategies of Conceptualisation,” in R. Dirven and R. Pörings (eds.), *Metaphor and Metonymy in Comparison and Contrast* (Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 2003), 75–111.

term “tea” which can mean the dried leaves of *Camellia sinensis*, the drink made from them, any similarly derived beverage, a light meal in the afternoon (i.e., afternoon tea), and the evening meal or dinner, as in the instance cited above. Under this category Dirven also speaks of the sociocultural syntagma or associated contexts that contribute to semantic extension.¹⁶ It is the conjoining of tea-drinking with ever widening social and cultural contexts (i.e., “inviting guests, the eating of biscuits and scones, and finally all the elements of a whole evening meal”¹⁷) that accounts for the metonymically generated changes in meaning. In addition, Dirven uses the notion of metonymic chaining which he identifies as a feature of the inclusive class of metonymy. Such metonymic chains as *head—brains—thinking—mind—intelligence* arise from the existence of sub-domains within a higher order domain—later described in terms of more concrete classes comprising the other, less concrete or abstract ones—and importantly it is argued that items in the chain may require their own different, verbal contexts.¹⁸ Littlemore extends the use of metonymic chaining beyond the limits set by the postulated condition of sub-domains to explain examples of metonymy drawn from advertising, sign language and language more generally.¹⁹ In effect, chaining involves the target domain of a source domain (vehicle) being used as the source domain (vehicle) for another target domain and so on. To illustrate, Littlemore gives as an example: “Now dry your eyes and *we’ll put the kettle on.*”²⁰ Here we have the two metonymies “put the kettle on” for “make a cup of tea” and “drink tea together” for “drink tea together while sharing one’s problems” linked together by a sociocultural syntagma.

Second, Littlemore shows the importance of using real-life examples of metonymy and not just those derived from the textbook or created by the researcher. She also underlines the complexity of metonymy and its definition, as well as the fact that the perception of it may very well be subjective in nature. As she observes:²¹

¹⁶ One might also note the role that construal plays in inclusive metonymy as sub-domains within the domain matrix are composed. As such contiguity, which is the basis of metonymy, is not natural but cognitive (see Dirven, “Metonymy and Metaphor,” 90–91). In other words, these metonyms are not necessarily universal.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 81–82.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 98; G. Lakoff, *Women, Fire and Dangerous Things. What Categories Reveal about the Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), esp. 91–114, speaks of category chaining where the central sense of the category as indicated by its prototypical members is cognitively extended so that the category includes other more peripheral members. This is achieved through propositional, image-schematic, metaphoric and metonymic models.

¹⁹ Littlemore, *Metonymy: Hidden Shortcuts*, 34, 117–18, 125–26 and 131.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 46. See also 133.

Metonymy relies heavily on both context and co-text, and is often in the eye of the beholder, and this needs to be taken into account in any theory of metonymy.

ICMs, as cognitive constructs which provide the basis of contiguity (i.e., the metonymic vehicle and target are required to be elements in the same ICM), are not a priori givens. Rather they are subjective and influenced by an individual's experience of the world and interpretation of it as well as the influence of culture more generally.

Idealised cognitive models encompass the cultural knowledge that people have and are not restricted to the "real world." That is to say, they also encompass people's subjective views of a particular concept and can be highly idiosyncratic as they are an abstraction from people's encounters with that particular concept. They are highly schematic and flexible, and can be static or dynamic, or both. They are "idealised" in the sense that they are not necessarily "real."²²

Third, Radden and Kövecses seek to investigate what sorts of relationships produce metonymy and the principles that govern the selection or choice of one entity (the vehicle) via which one accesses another entity (the target).²³ In introducing their analysis, they identify eight types of metonymy, the sign and reference metonymies that cut across the "ontological realms" of form (i.e., sounded or spelled word), concept and thing/event (referent), and conceptual metonymies.²⁴ Of these types the sign metonymy (i.e., where words stand for the concept they express) and referential metonymies (i.e., where the form-concept, concept or form stand for the thing/event to which it refers²⁵) are of particular interest to the present paper. As noted by Radden and Kövecses,²⁶ such metonymies underlie language as a whole and it is this fact that often makes metonymy difficult to determine. The reason for our interest is that at first sight sign metonymy seems to explain why דָּבָר has acquired the meanings "thought," "promise," "threat," "commis-

²² Ibid., 10. See also 12–13 where ICMs are described as "a series of embodied, encyclopaedic, abstract, loosely connected and somewhat idiosyncratic knowledge networks that we have in our minds. . . a 'car' ICM will also be shaped by other people's views of cars and is therefore, to a large extent, socially constructed and culturally specific."

²³ Radden and Kövecses, "Towards a Theory of Metonymy," 17–59.

²⁴ See Figure 1, Radden and Kövecses, "Towards a Theory of Metonymy," 23. Note that concept metonymies consist of four types.

²⁵ It may be helpful to note that sign metonymy roughly correlates to intension and reference metonymy to extension in "classical linguistics."

²⁶ See also G. Lakoff and M. Turner, *More than Cool Reason. A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 108; and Radden and Kövecses, "Towards a Theory of Metonymy," 42–43.

sion/command,” “rule/regulation,” “order,” “precept,” “suggestion/counsel,” etc., whilst reference metonymy the meanings “thing,” “something,” “anything,” etc. Examples are only properly given for sign metonymy, the principal one being: “that is a self-contradictory utterance.”²⁷ The point is made that an utterance is strictly speaking a series of sounds and thus might be said to be either audible or inaudible. The modifying expression “self-contradictory” indicates that we have understood “utterance” as a reference to the meaning or “conceptual content” of what was said and not to the series of sounds.

Although we are much indebted to the insights of Radden and Kövecses, a simpler approach will be adopted here.²⁸ Taking the example of *order* in the sentence “The seller must ship your *order* within 30 days of receiving it,” we argue that its use in a particular verbal and pragmatic context invokes an appropriate ICM (itself based on shared experience) and that this context also makes salient certain features in that ICM. Given the context of online shopping, for example, the ICM involves a buyer and seller who are not physically present, objects for sale, credit-card payment, etc. In the sentence “The seller must ship your order within 30 days of receiving it,” the verb “ship” (itself a metonym) makes salient the objects for sale in the shopping ICM, and it is this salience that facilitates the result-

²⁷ Other examples are “those are foolish words” and “four-letter word” to refer to swear words.

²⁸ Looking more closely at their argument, Radden and Kövecses, “Towards a Theory of Metonymy,” 24 and 42, distinguish the general FORM FOR CONCEPT metonymy from “particular instances of the relationship between the form and content parts of a sign,” though the sign metonymy is still said to apply to them. If we understand their distinction correctly, whereas in the general FORM FOR CONCEPT metonymy the form “utterance” stands for our conception of utterance (i.e., what we think the act of making an utterance is), in the particular instance of “that is a self-contradictory utterance” the situation is different, for now “utterance” stands for “the conceptual content expressed by the utterance” (also expressed as “the contents part of the sign”). See Radden and Kövecses, “Towards a Theory of Metonymy,” 23–24 and 42–43. There is, however, reason to question the analysis of ontological realms and metonyms that cut across them. Consider, for example, that by using the CONTAINER FOR CONTENTS METONYM, i.e., “the conceptual content expressed by the utterance,” the analysis appears to simplify a complex series of steps that are not just instances of sign metonymy. In other words, “utterance” stands for a sequence of sounds (a reference metonym) which is in their turn a sequence of forms. It is then the construal of those forms through both sign and reference metonymies in the “particular instance,” not to mention the role played by syntagmatic relationships, that produces, for example, a statement which can then be said to be self-contradictory or not; or again that all examples of “particular instances” of sign metonymy use a term that stands for some act of speaking, i.e., “utterance,” “words.” They involve language talking about language, and thus do not operate at the same level of discourse as “dollar” for *money*, the example used by Radden and Kövecses to illustrate the simple sign metonym.

ing metonym ORDER FOR WHAT IS ORDERED. The example is further important for its use of the pronoun *it* to refer back to *order*, but now its sense is no longer metonymic; for it is the act of ordering itself that is now meant. We will return to this proximate use of the same term but with different meanings in a later section of our article.

In the analyses that follow, we assume the existence of shared ICMs in the minds of ancient Hebrew speakers and the role of context in creating salience. The latter assumption is particularly important as דבר bears various meanings associated with speaking that require in modern translations different glosses to approximate its sense. The following features appear to play an important role in determining דבר's meaning: the choice of the singular over the plural form;²⁹ the presence of anaphora or cataphora as indicated by the article and the deictic זה; the adjective that modifies it; and the verb that governs it. But there are others as well.

3. PART FOR WHOLE (WORD FOR WORDS) METONYMY AND METONYMIC CHAINING

In the following examples דבר stands for an actual or assumed utterance (words) and is variously glossed given the nature and/or context of that utterance. The objection may be raised that this is an issue only in the secondary translation; however, it is clear that a semantic shift has occurred because of its context and collocated terms.

- Qoh 1:8 reads: “All things (= claims/propositions—דברים) are wearisome. No one can speak (them); no eye is sated to see (them); no ear is full of hearing (them).” The sense is clearly verbal in view of its collocation with terms for speaking and hearing. The odd term is “see,” but in view of the context, this appears best viewed as a reference to “reading,” a visual process. The idea also agrees with the sentiment expressed at 12:12bc: “There is no end to making many books; and much study wearies flesh.” Qoh 1:10a is a little more difficult: “Is there a thing (= claim/proposition—דבר) of which it is said, ‘See, this is new?’” The claim/proposition is then negated in 1:10b (“It has already been, in the ages before us”), with 1:11 making it clear that what is contemplated is subject to forgetfulness. The NRSV reads: “Is there a thing of which it is said, ‘See, this is new?’”. The translation makes דבר agree with זה and renders the relative pronoun by “of which.” But this is unnecessary.

²⁹ The singular and not the plural form of דבר is often used, and this despite the fact that whatever was said was no doubt articulated in a sentence consisting of more than one word. We have therefore at a very basic level a PART FOR WHOLE metonym which in these instances appears to give a clue to the presence of a metonym. In other words, דבר (singular) is often used to indicate that a metonymic chain is used.

In 1:8 the plural is glossed “words,” i.e., in the sense of the plural of *word for words* (*claim*) = *claims*, and the same sense is entailed here, though now in the singular. In other words, every description of or claim about the world is wearisome both because it falls short and fails to satisfy (1:8) and because its subject matter is always the same (1:9). 1:10 thus picks up a contrary word (דבר) which says: “See this. It is new” only to dismiss it also. The use of the singular דבר in v. 10, itself marked as such by the particle וְ and repetition entailed in the relative clause, thus creates a contrastive parallel to the plural דברים (marked by the preceding use of כל) in 1:8. In other words, דבר refers forward (note that דבר is viewed as speaking) to the claim “See this. It is new,” and so we have a metonym *word for words*.³⁰

- Deut 13:12 (MT, v. 11 in NRSV) offers an interesting point of comparison with Deut 17:5 (see below) that highlights the effect that the use of the inseparable preposition כ has on the understanding of דבר. The verse reads: “Then all Israel shall hear and be afraid, and never again do any such wickedness (כדבר הרע הזה).” The use of the prefixed comparative כ and the deictic together with the modifying adjective make it clear that it is the proposition to go and serve other gods (vv. 7, 14 MT) that is at issue. דבר refers to the words נלכה ונעבדה אלהים אחרים and it is this proposal, or better the intention behind it, that is evil. Note also that “Then all Israel will hear” (13:12) contrasts with בסתר, “in secret” (cf. the intimacy of the relationships assumed in 13:7), and, as such, foregrounds the utterance and draws attention to its nature (i.e., “hidden/secret”) as opposed to the later public nature of its consequences. Be that as it may, we have a chaining involving a PART FOR WHOLE metonym (*word for words*) and a MEDIUM FOR MESSAGE metonym (*words for the idea or intention they express*).
- Josh 2:14: “Our life for yours! If you do not tell this business of ours (דברנו זה), then we will deal kindly and faithfully with you when the LORD gives us the land.” The verbal aspect of דבר is highlighted by its governing verb (תגידו). As rendered by the NRSV the narrative makes it difficult to understand what is being referred to here as the king of Jericho already has been told of the spies’ undertaking and it is for this reason that Rahab hid them. The pronoun “our” is best understood to include Rahab, her family (note the plural תגידו), and the spies and it is this word that should not be disclosed. In

³⁰ The argument offered here is confirmed by the Greek translation of vv. 8a and 10a, though the contrastive parallelism is lost to some degree: πάντες οἱ λόγοι ἔγκοποι . . . ὅς λαλήσει καὶ ἐρεῖ Ἰδὲ τοῦτο καινὸν ἐστίν.

other words, it is the arrangement that she is told not to tell. The dependence of דבר on the verb הגיד makes clear its verbal aspect here so that we have a similar metonymic chaining, i.e., *word for words* and *words for the idea or intention they express*.

- Amos 3:7: “For the Lord God makes (עשה) no plan (דבר) unless he has revealed (גלה) his counsel (סוד) to his servants the prophets.” The concessional clause introduced by כי אם (unless) evokes the ICM of advising so that דבר here takes on the meaning of deliberation through the same metonymic chaining, i.e., *word for words* and *words for the idea or intention they express*. We can associate this usage and other similar expressions (e.g., Gen 20:10; 1 Sam 20:2 and 21) with the Hebrew idiom to speak to one’s heart (אמר/דבר בלב) vel sim.), which refers to the internal cognitive act of deliberating or thinking. To us the expression appears to be a metaphor but for the ancient Hebrew who thought of the heart as the seat of thought it should be viewed as a metonym. See also Ezek 38:10—“Thus says the Lord GOD: On that day thoughts (דברים) will come into your mind (לבבך), and you will devise an evil scheme.”

It is interesting to note in passing that there is an epistemological dimension to each of the examples just cited, insofar as each relates to a type of knowledge. Moreover, with the possible exception of Qoh 1:8 and 10, each relates to some kind of secret or hidden knowledge. When compared to the idiom of speaking to one’s heart discussed under Amos 3:7, this might imply a worldview in which thoughts were conceived as “words” (cf. the phenomenon of “internal monologue”), and this may go some way toward explaining the conceptual basis of the semantic extension with which we are concerned. In other words, the characteristic versatility of the noun דבר may be associated in part with the inherently nebulous quality of one’s inner thoughts. The focus on inner thoughts highlights the more subjective nature of the new meaning, a point to be considered further under grammaticalization.

When the *word for words* metonym refers to a command (or a plea, appeal, etc.) and is the object of a verb of performance, the act or event so commanded is made salient.

- Jer 22:3–4 reads (cf. also 42:3): “Thus says the Lord: Act with justice and righteousness, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor anyone who has been robbed. And do no wrong or violence to the alien, the orphan, and the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place. For if you will indeed obey this word (lit. ‘do this word’), then through the gates of this house shall enter kings who sit on the throne.” The preceding word spoken by God is a command as indicated by the imperative and jussive forms of the verb that has as its objective certain actions/events, i.e., acting justly and rightly, etc. It is this word that the hearer should do/obey.

Clearly the use of the verb “do” makes salient the actions/events indicated in the command. The importance of the deictic should also be noted in this and other similar expressions as it refers the reader to what has previously been said or is about to be said.³¹ The result is a metonymic chain *word for words (command)* and *command for the act/event that is commanded*.

- At 1 Sam 15:13 when Saul mistakenly says to Samuel: “May you be blessed by the LORD; I have carried out the command (דבר) of the LORD,” it is clear that יהוה דבר (definite and anaphoric in view of the *nomen rectum*) refers to the command of God relayed to him at 1 Sam 15:3 (and reiterated in v. 18). The NRSV glosses דבר as “command,” a term that has an act or event as its objective, and clearly this is the case at 1 Sam 15:13. The verb הקים/“carry out” (itself a metaphorical usage both in English and Hebrew) makes salient the act/event in the ICM of commanding. Thus we have here a metonymic chain: *word for words (command)* and *command for the act/event that is commanded*.
- In the Sodom and Gomorrah story we have an “angel” say to Lot after his plea in the preceding verse to let him flee (cohortative) to a small city: “Very well, I grant you this favor (הזהר הזה) too, and will not overthrow the city of which you have spoken” (Gen 19:21 NRSV). We might equally render the words: “Behold, I also grant you this plea (דבר) by my not overthrowing the city (of) which you have spoken.” The metaphor to lift another’s face up to (i.e., to grant) makes salient the act/event that is entailed by Lot’s plea (19:20—“Let me escape there”) as indicated by the following infinitival phrase “by my not destroying the city.” The metonymic chain is *word for words (plea/request)* and *plea/request for what is requested*.
- In its protasis Deut 17:2–5 adumbrates a sequence of events: the committing of the sin of idolatry; the reporting of it (דבר assumed); the investigation of the דבר and its proof.³² In the apodosis the punishment is then passed—the person who has done הזה הרע הדבר is to be brought outside the city and stoned. The expression by its repetition of דבר and use of the deictic refers back to the earlier reporting and investigation of it. But clearly the offender did not make the report, nor should the report itself be considered evil. It appears that where the referenced דבר is expressed explicitly or implicitly in

³¹ See Gen 20:10; 22:16; 30:31; 34:14, 19; Exod 9:5–6; 18:23; 33:17; Lev 8:36; Num 32:20; Deut 1:18; 4:13; 10:4 (as the ten commandments are the ten דברים); 24:18, 22; Judg 11:37; 20:9; 21:11; 1 Sam 24:6, 7; 2 Sam 11:11; 12:12; 14:21; 1 Kgs 20:24; 2 Kgs 8:13; 11:5; 1 Chr 21:8.

³² Cf. also Gen 21:26; Exod 1:15–18; Judg 6:29; 8:1; 1 Sam 28:18; 2 Sam 2:6; 12:6; 2 Kgs 17:12.

the indicative mood, the expression stands for the reported act or event. In other words, we have a metonymic chain in operation: *word for words (report)* and *report for that which is reported*, i.e., the act of idolatry, and it is this act and not the report of it that is evil.

- 1 Sam 22:15 is a similar example of metonymic chaining, where דבר stands for *that which is reported*. In 1 Sam 22:15 דבר occurs twice and is usually glossed as “anything” and “nothing,” respectively (NRSV, NASB, ESV). In the first instance, the reference is to an imputation of treachery, or disingenuousness, and can be glossed “any charge.” In the second instance, however, דבר relates specifically to knowledge (ידע) of the enmity between David and Saul. By extension, then, דבר may be understood according to the metonymic chain *word for words (report)* and *report for that which is reported* (cf. 1 Sam 20:2).

With this last example (i.e., word stands for that which is reported) we return to the point where the discussion started, namely, the meaning of דברים in the Deuteronomic formula “Now the rest of the acts.” However, a new insight has been afforded. Whereas most examples above envisaged a discrete דבר, the reporting of a king’s reign is not so constrained in its media and thus multiple דברים are envisaged. More significantly, we see that the first step in the chain, in allowing word to stand for words (PART FOR WHOLE), vacates דבר of its specific semantic content and makes its sense dependent on context as is indicated by the various glosses that now appear, e.g., “report,” “command,” “plea,” etc. Meaning has been extended by means of metonymy.

4. MEDIUM FOR MESSAGE METONYMS

We noted above instances of chaining involving a PART FOR WHOLE metonym (*word for words*) and a MEDIUM FOR MESSAGE metonym (*words for the idea or intention they express*), i.e., דבר can be used to express the intellectual correlates of words (e.g., “thoughts,” “plans,” “ideas,” “intentions”), rather than to designate the literal words themselves, be they spoken or written. We turn in this section to consider such instances in more detail.

The verbs with which דבר is collocated in some of these instances are verbs of speaking (הגיד, דבר, אמר), demonstrating that the meaning “word” is very much present in these usages; however, the semantic extension goes well beyond the meaning “word” and into the conceptual realm. Consequently, these cases offer additional examples which underline the intentional and subjective aspects of semantic extension and the importance of context for its interpretation. For example, in Deut 17:8–9, 11 and 2 Sam 14:13 דבר refers to a “decision.” The former passage details the manner by which legal disputes must be settled and explains that the parties involved must approach the priests and the judge, who will pronounce (והגידו) the “decision” (דבר המשפת). Throughout this passage דבר is

often coupled with **משפט**, rendering the literal translation of the phrase as “word of judgment” (17:9) or “word for judgment” (17:8). However, in 17:11 **דבר** is not accompanied by **משפט**, it is instead clarified by the relative clause “which they declare (**יגידו**) to you.” Despite this, it still carries the same sense of “decision.” Similarly, in 2 Sam 14:13 **דבר** is also collocated with a verb of speaking (**אמר/מדבר**). Its coupling with the deictic **זה** indicates that it refers back to the king’s “decision” to protect Absalom but forbid him from returning home, which was spoken in 14:11.

The semantic shift from the literal realm (i.e., “word”) to the conceptual realm may also be observed in Deut 13:12, in which the noun **דבר** occurs in the expression **וכל ישראל ישמעו ויראון ולא יוספו לעשות כדבר הרע הזה בקרבך**, “then all Israel will hear and be afraid, and will never again do such a wicked thing in your midst.” Here, **דבר** is the object of the coordinated verb “not do again.” The act is the act of idolatry (13:7–12 [13:6–11 in NRSV]), for which the idolater is to be stoned to death. But it is important to note the presence of the comparative preposition **כ** and the anaphoric pronoun **זה**. In this instance it seems that “this word” refers back to what was said (**לאמר**) by the idolater in v. 7: “let us go and serve other gods”; however, in v. 12, **דבר** is modified by the attributive adjective **רע**, and, as such, it is evidently the idolatrous intention rather than the words themselves which is intended (see Deut 13:12 above). Another instance in which **דבר** expresses an abstract concept is Esth 5:14, in which **דבר** is variously glossed as “idea” (ESV) or “advice”/“counsel” (NASB, RSV). It refers to the suggestion made by Zeresh and Haman’s friends to hang Mordecai on the morning of the banquet: **יעשו-עץ גבה המשים יעשו-עץ גבה המשים**. As in the examples above, **דבר** is collocated with a verb of speaking (**אמר**) and is used definitely, indicating it refers to the specific speech act mentioned earlier in the verse.

While **דבר** may be glossed as “decision,” “idea” or “prediction” in the examples discussed above, we have shown that, because **דבר** is coupled with verbs of speaking, the meaning “word” still underlies its usage in these cases. In the passages below, however, **דבר** does not exhibit so close an affinity to the spoken “word.” It is further removed as it is not collocated with verbs of speaking, and it expresses various concepts that are more complex than straightforward “speech” (i.e., motivation, justification, purpose). In such cases some form of inner speech may be implied (cf. the idiom of speaking to one’s heart discussed above). In Josh 5:4 and 1 Kgs 11:27 **דבר** is glossed as “reason” and is used to explain the motivations behind the actions of Joshua and Jeroboam. In both passages **דבר** appears in the set phrase **זה הדבר אשר**, which functions to introduce the following section of the narrative in which the characters’ motivations are rationalized. BDB lists 1 Kgs 9:15 as another example of **דבר** meaning “reason.”³³ While the phrasing in this

³³ F. Brown, S.R. Driver, and C.A. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 184. The translation is also followed by

verse is similar to Josh 5:4 and 1 Kgs 11:27 (דבר is preceded by זה and preceded by a relative clause), the placement of דבר in construct with המס and the description that follows suggests that דבר should instead be glossed as “account” here.³⁴ Unlike the usage in 1 Kings and Josh 5:4, what follows in vv. 16–28 is not an explanation of why Solomon raised the forced labor, but a description of that labor and its products.

In some cases, דבר may refer to comparatively abstract or nebulous mental states. For example, in 1 Sam 10:2 דבר refers to the matter of Saul’s missing donkeys, and in fact it is left untranslated in most English translations; however, it is important to note that in this case it is not the donkeys themselves, but the concern of Saul’s father for them which is in view, והנה נטש אביך את דברי האתנות ודאג לכם לאמר מה אעשה לבני (“Behold, your father has abandoned his concern(s) for the donkeys, and is anxious about you, saying, ‘what have I done to my son?’”).³⁵ As such, דבר seems to relate to the conceptual or emotional component of the referent, rather than the object it is attached to. In this instance the conceptual aspect is made salient by the use of the plural construct, which renders the gloss “matter/affair,” etc. (singular) unsuitable. In other words, we have evidence of a metonymic chain similar to those discussed above: i.e., *word for words (concern)*, but in the plural (*concerns*); cf. above discussion of Qoh 1:8.³⁶

Adverbial uses of דבר where it is prefixed with a preposition are also used to express the intellectual correlates of words, especially those that relate to reason (“plan”) or purpose (“intention”). The adverbial usage can govern either a proper noun or pronoun in the construct state or a clause in which case אשר is added. For example, in Gen 12:17; 20:11 and Deut 4:21, על דבר (on account of, because of) is used to provide an

KJV, ASV, and ERV.

³⁴ As it is in the NIV, ESV, and NASB.

³⁵ Note the verbalization of the concern to express Kish’s internal anguish.

³⁶ 1 Sam 10:2 raises the issue of the effect of the construct state in such expressions (cf. also דבר המשפת, Deut 17:9). In such cases it appears that the use of the noun in the construct, much like the adjective רע (cf. also דברים טובים, 2 Chr 12:12), makes salient the content of the words. Similar examples, described as paronomastic by Gesenius and glossed “deeds” in BDB, occur in Pss 65:4; 105:27 and 145:5. In Ps 65:4 (v. 3 in the NRSV) דברי עונת refers to iniquity which threatens to overwhelm the protagonist (glossed “deeds of iniquity” in the NRSV), and is paralleled by פשע in the second colon. In Ps 105:27 דברי אתותיו refers to the signs performed by Moses in Egypt and stands in synonymous parallelism with מפתים. While in Ps 145:5 דברי נפלאותיך refers to God’s wonders (as the object of the verb (אשיחה), and is paralleled by הדר כבוד הודך (“glorious splendour of your majesty” in the NRSV) in the preceding colon. In none of these cases is the noun associated with a verb of speaking, but in each case the glosses “deeds,” “signs” and “works” may be explained, as in the preceding section, by the metonymic chaining, i.e., *word for words (report)* and *report for that which is reported*, which with the construct plural form דברי is glossed by “deeds,” etc.

explanation for the agent's actions. A parallel Aramaic usage of **על-דבר** is attested in Dan 2:30, in which the adverbial phrase **על-דבר די** introduces the reason God has revealed the meaning of the king's dream to Daniel. Similarly, at Exod 18:11; Deut 22:24; 1 Kgs 15:5 the expression **בדבר** provides the reason for or nominates the person on whose account an action occurs. Alternatively, the prepositional phrase **לדבר** can express intentionality or purpose as at Neh 8:4.³⁷

5. WORD AS "THING"

The above discussion has not treated instances where **דבר** is taken to mean "thing." We have looked at instances of **דבר** with the verb "to do" and seen how important its definiteness is (especially in conjunction with the deictic **זה**). It is therefore interesting to notice the difference that the absence of such definiteness has on the sense of **דבר**, a fact reflected in its translation. For example, Esth 6:3 reads: "Then the king said, 'What honor or distinction has been bestowed on Mordecai for this?' The king's servants who attended him said, 'Nothing has been done for him.' (**לא־נעשה עמו דבר**)."³⁷ Similar examples can be found at Gen 19:8, 22 and Deut 22:26. All uses appear to exclude reference to spoken or written words (i.e., no evidence of word standing for words) and thus are translated indefinitely as "anything." One exception when **דבר** is negative, though definite, is Judg 19:24, where it occurs in the construct state. Judg 19:23–24 reads:

And the man, the master of the house, went out to them and said to them, "No, my brothers, do not act so wickedly. Since this man is my guest, **אל תעשו את הנבלה הזאת** (do not do this vile thing). Here are my virgin daughter and his concubine; let me bring them out now. Ravish them and do whatever you want to them; but against this man **לא תעשו דבר הנבלה הזאת** (do not do such a vile thing)."

The expressions at the end of 19:23 and 24 are almost identical with the exceptions of mood (negative imperfect replacing negative jussive, though both having the illocutionary force of the imperative) and the use of **דבר** in the construct where the definite direct object marker **את** had previously stood. The repetition of the imperative in a strengthened form suggests that the use of **דבר** serves a similar purpose as borne out by the translation "such a vile thing" where "thing" envisages an action. As **דבר** is definite, its translated sense is also definite as it is quite clear what "the vile thing/action" is.

The above examples all use **דבר** in a negative clause; however, not all uses are negative. Thus at 1 Sam 3:11 one reads: "Then the Lord said to Samuel, 'See, I am about to do something (**דבר**) in Israel that will make both ears of anyone who hears of it tingle.'" The undefined sense, in this instantiation "something," is again foremost, though one notes the subse-

³⁷ Although not always, see for example 2 Chr 23:19 and 24:5.

quent reference to one's hearing of it. At 2 Kgs 17:11 one reads: "There they made offerings on all the high places, as the nations did whom the Lord carried away before them. They did wicked things (ויעשו דברים רעים), provoking the Lord to anger." Here the plural form with its modifying adjective implies multiple, though undefined, actions that characterize idolatry.

The translations of דבר by "nothing," "something," and "thing(s)" above all disguise the fact that each דבר is an action and, as we've seen above, דבר can mean act/event through metonymic chaining, i.e., *word for words (command)* and *command for the act/event that is commanded*. In other words, the sense of דבר in these instances can be taken back to metonymic processes that had in time become lexicalized so that the immediate context of ordering or commanding, for example, had receded into the background. But does this explanation account for more problematic uses of דבר where the verb "to do" is absent? We now turn to look at these and there appears to be some prospect that they may also be explained by metonymy in part. But we need to recall that when the action requires the provision of goods, for example, there will be an added step in the metonymic chain, i.e., *word for words (request)* and *request for the act that was requested* where the goods now stand for the act that was requested. In other words, we have the chain: *word for words (request)* and *request for the goods that were requested*.

Take for instance the idiom דבר יום ביומים. At Exod 5:13 we read: "The taskmasters were urgent, saying, 'Complete your work, the same daily assignment (דבר יום ביומים) as when you were given straw.'" In this and most other instances the idiom stands in apposition with a quantifiable noun, e.g., work allotment (Exod 5:13), manna (Exod 16:4 understood), various offerings (Lev 23:37), food/living allowance (2 Kgs 25:30 // Jer 52:34; Neh 11:23; 12:47).³⁸ It is also used in apposition with the abstract noun משפט (= what is one's rightful due, 1 Kgs 8:59; Ezra 3:4).³⁹ Like the role of the governing verb, the presence of apposition makes salient the object that is ordered or required. דבר may thus be seen to indicate that which is demanded or ordered and as such is an instance of the metonymic chain *word for words (request)* and *request for the goods that were requested*. However, to some extent the expression had become lexicalized and as such did not always need to be used in apposition to specify the item(s). The sense of דבר suggested here is borne out in the *targumim* to Exod 5:13 and 1 Kgs 10:25, i.e., סכום or "fixed sum/quota" (Exod 5:13—יום ביומיה סכום in Neofiti only) and גזירת "decree" (1 Kgs 10:25—שנא בשנא גזירת), and the LXX τὰ ἔργα τὰ καθήκοντα καθ' ἡμέραν (Exod 5:13) and τὰ κατ' ἐνιαυτὸν ἐνιαυτὸν (1 Kgs 10:25). The Hebrew

³⁸ Cf. the expression for annual gifts/dues at 1 Kgs 10:25 // 2 Chr 9:24.

³⁹ But note late use with no apparent apposition at Dan 1:5 and with prefixed with ל or ב 1 Chr 16:37; 2 Chr 8:13, 14; 31:16.

idiom and its verbal sense is maintained in the Aramaic but lost, other than in context, in the Greek.

As a second example, we consider another idiom, namely, the phrase, **אין דבר** (e.g., 1 Sam 20:21) and related expressions. Exod 5:11 and 9:4 read: “Go and get straw yourselves, wherever you can find it; but your work will not be lessened in the least (**אין נגרע מעבדתכם דבר**)” and “But the LORD will make a distinction between the livestock of Israel and the livestock of Egypt, so that nothing shall die of all that belongs to the Israelites (**ולא ימות מכל-לבני ישראל דבר**).” In both instances we have what appears to be a formulaic/idiomatic expression beginning with a negative particle followed by a verb indicating loss, then the preposition **מן** governing the item subject to loss, then **דבר**.⁴⁰ Since the item subject to loss is stated in each instance, the function of **דבר** is not at first clear. The translations offer only confused assistance. The LXX translation of 9:4—**οὐ τελευτήσει ἀπὸ πάντων τῶν τοῦ Ἰσραηλ υἰῶν ῥητόν**—appears to construe **דבר** as the neuter singular adjective used adverbially to indicate the literal or non-approximate nature of the preceding statement.⁴¹ The other translations of the formula are less “literal.” The LXX of Exod 5:11 uses the force of the double negative to underline that there will be no diminution in the demand to make bricks at all (**οὐ γὰρ ἀφαιρεῖται ἀπὸ τῆς συντάξεως ὑμῶν οὐθέν**) and the *targumim* at both 5:11 and 9:4 render **דבר** with **מדעם**. The translations thus raise a question over the choice of **דבר** instead of, say, the indefinite pronoun **מאומה** in the Hebrew text. For a comparable use of a similarly formed expression with **מאומה** see 1 Sam 25:21: **ולא נפקד מכל מאומה אשר לו מאומה**. That said, the term in these instances is best viewed functionally or grammatically and interpreted as individuating—much as **איש** functions after a plural subject—items in the prepositional phrase. We might translate 5:11: “but your work will be lessened, not a bit”; or 9:4: “not a one of all (the cattle) that belongs to the Israelites will die.” We might be tempted to try to lead these instances back to a metonymic chain (cf. the proximity of the two idioms at Exod 5:11 and 13), but the individuating factor is new. We will return to this point below.

Lev 5:2 reads: “Or when any of you touch any unclean thing (**נפש אשר תגע בכל-דבר טמא**)—whether the carcass of an unclean beast or the carcass of unclean livestock or the carcass of an unclean swarming thing—and are unaware of it, you have

⁴⁰ Cf. also Judg 18:10—**אין-שם מחסור כל-דבר אשר בארץ** and 19:19—which is slightly different in dropping the prepositional phrase in view of, it can be argued, the use of **כל** before **דבר**. 18:7 is omitted from consideration as it appears corrupt.

⁴¹ Philo uses the same word to indicate the literal meaning of a text over-against its allegorical interpretation. Cf. Philo, *Det.* 95: **πρὸς μὲν οὖν τὸ ῥητόν ἢ λέξις τὸ εὐλογον οὐ περιέχει**—‘Literally the saying lacks sense’ in speaking of Exod 2:23 and the Israelites’ mourning over the death of Pharaoh. See also *Leg.* 2.19; *Det.* 95; *Agr.* 157; *Ebr.* 130; *Sobr.* 65; *Her.* 258; *QG* 3 frag. 24, 4 frag. 168, 4 frag. 172; *QE* 2 frag. 21 and 38a.

become unclean, and are guilty.” Clearly the verb “to touch” makes salient the physical nature of whatever the **דבר** is, and the “relatively abstract and subjective construal” of the term itself makes it necessary for the law-giver to provide specificity in this instance by listing the carcasses of named unclean animals. Moreover, the absence of a negative particle and the placing of **כל** before **דבר** makes its force fully felt, when this example is compared with the **דבר אין** idiom discussed in the previous paragraph. Indeed, the two expressions appear to be related as the opposite sides of the one coin, one individuating and the other generalizing, both requiring the term to become more abstract/grammatically functional and less semantically/content specific. And like the above idiom, it is difficult to explain this usage by reference to metonymic chaining alone.

So how do we best explain these two instances of idiomatic expression? It has already been noted that the use of **דבר** in these cases introduces a new element. It has also been argued that by metonymic chaining **דבר** came to designate the object that was referenced by ordering, requesting, etc. without any specificity. It may then just be the case that as the **דבר** came to mean “thing,” this meaning developed along its own course to individuate or generalize anything. The question also arises as to whether the diachronic developments in language which grammaticalization seeks to document need to be considered as well.

6. **דבר** AND GRAMMATICALIZATION

For Hopper and Traugott “grammaticalization” refers to that part of the study of language change that is concerned with such questions as how lexical items and constructions come in certain linguistic contexts to serve grammatical functions or how grammatical items develop new grammatical functions.⁴² Though in the long term as the process of grammaticalization moves to completion a lexical item tends to lose its semantic content in assuming a grammatical function, this is not the case in its early stages which are marked by polysemy.⁴³ Change in interpretation (e.g., syntactic bracketing) and meaning (by conversational implicatures and more specifically metonymy)⁴⁴ is the first stage of development (= reanalysis/rule change as a

⁴² Hopper and Traugott, *Grammaticalization*, 1. Importantly, a number of features need to be noted in addition to what is covered in the discussion above. They are: (a) as grammaticalization does not entail the loss of original meanings, older meanings can still persist (called “layering”) and their persistence can place constraints on the grammaticalized items; (b) grammaticalization does not necessarily go through to completion (see 39), i.e., the lexical item does not necessarily need to become a function word; and basic/general words grammaticalize, e.g., “word” and not “whisper” is likely to grammaticalize.

⁴³ Hopper and Traugott, *Grammaticalization*, 94–98.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 87–93.

result of abductive reasoning).⁴⁵ Although it does not involve any change in the surface structure, it does create polysemes. We have in the discussion above shown the importance of metonymy for the explanation of meaning extension in the case of דָּבַר. In particular, we have noted that the *word for words* metonym allows the singular דָּבַר to name the type of utterance, e.g., demand, command, plea, etc. But we have also seen that through metonymic chaining דָּבַר can also stand for the object or thing that is the aim of the utterance, whether it be an action or a physical object/thing. One may reasonably postulate that the evidence suggests the early stages of grammaticalization. With the widening in meaning, Hopper and Traugott argue, one of those meanings motivated by its increased expressiveness (often highlighting a more abstract or subjective meaning) increases in frequency of usage in specific contexts and becomes “lexicalized” as an expression.⁴⁶ In this regard also we find the evidence adduced for דָּבַר suggestive; for example, *word for words (request)* highlights a subjective meaning, namely, the intention of the speaker, and *word for words (report) and report for reported action* adds a level of abstraction as the action is not specified. Clearly also in the case of the Deuteronomic formula the usage has been lexicalized as an expression.

The second stage (analogy/rule generalization) paradigmatically extends the usage to other, though unrelated, words or expressions by analogy.⁴⁷ This stage generalizes what is perceived to be a rule (e.g., childhood > falsehood where ‘hood’ was originally a marker of ‘person, condition, rank’ but its usage is extended by analogy to an abstract concept). For Hopper and Traugott metaphor, as a device of comparison, is mostly to be associated with this stage of grammaticalization. As such it is less important for the present study in so far as its focus has been on metonymy. Still it may well explain how דָּבַר in the sense of act or thing envisaged as the object of an utterance might in time be extended by analogy and used of acts or things that were neither demanded nor requested, in other words that were not the object of some verbal utterance or other. Unfortunately, we do not have access to a representative linguistic corpus of ancient Hebrew nor the chronologically preserved layers of that corpus to be able to make a definitive judgement, albeit that the mechanisms of language development are generally held to be universal. All that the evidence allows is the suggestion that analogy might account for this further generalization in the usage of דָּבַר.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 39–63.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 76: “meaning changes and the cognitive strategies that motivate them are central in the early stages of grammaticalization and are crucially linked to expressivity. Furthermore, the meaning changes are initially pragmatic and associative, arising in the context of the flow of speech. At later stages, as grammaticalization continues and forms become routinized, meaning loss or ‘bleaching’ typically occurs, and even so, older meanings may still continue to constrain newer, ‘emptier’ ones.”

⁴⁷ Ibid., 63–70.

In the above discussion we have mentioned the formation of polysemes as a result of grammaticalization. As Hopper and Traugott observe:⁴⁸

The persistence of older forms and meanings alongside newer forms and meanings, whether derived by divergence from the same source or by renewal from different sources, leads to an effect that can be called “layering” or “variability” at any one synchronic moment in time.

We have already discussed the various meanings of דָּבָר created by metonymy and it only remains to show that their occurrence at some point in time is synchronic. This is best demonstrated by proximate but semantically variant uses of the term.

7. PROXIMITY AND SEMANTIC VARIATION

There are numerous passages in which דָּבָר is attested multiple times but reflects a different meaning each time. These instances highlight the broad semantic range of the word and caution against glossing דָּבָר as the same English word throughout a passage based on nothing more than proximity. Before discussing the Hebrew examples, it will be helpful to consider an English example that shows that the presence of the same word does not necessarily indicate semantic similarity. Austin uses the word “healthy” to demonstrate this phenomenon.⁴⁹ He notes that when one speaks of a “healthy body,” “a healthy complexion,” and “healthy exercise” the word is not just being used equivocally.⁵⁰ Instead, while the second two meanings contain the primary sense of “healthy” used in the phrase “healthy body,” they are actually conveying different meanings, namely, the result of a healthy body (complexion) and productive of a healthy body (exercise). Similarly, when דָּבָר occurs multiple times in a passage it can express a range of meanings. Just as “healthy” can refer to a bodily state, its cause, or the result of that state, so דָּבָר can be used of any word, any concept/mental image that words signify, or any thing/event in so far as words are used of things/events. One such example is 1 Kgs 13:32–34, in which דָּבָר occurs four times and takes on four different meanings. The first two occurrences of דָּבָר are in v. 32, “the דָּבָר that he proclaimed by the word (בְּדָבָר) of the Lord. . . will surely come to pass.” The דָּבָר (glossed as “saying” in the NRSV and ESV) refers to the proclamation against the altar at Bethel in 13:2.⁵¹ Considering that דָּבָר is coupled with the verb “will happen” (יִהְיֶה), as well as the phrase דָּבָר יְהוּה,⁵² “saying” in this case is better glossed as “prophecy.” This is an example of PART FOR WHOLE metonymy where a single word (דָּבָר) refers to the words that make up the prophecy. Strictly

⁴⁸ Ibid., 124.

⁴⁹ Austin, *Philosophical Papers*, 71.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ The NIV glosses דָּבָר as “message” here.

⁵² This phrase is commonly used in the prophetic books. For example, see: Ezek 1:3; Isa 1:10; Jer 1:2.

speaking, a “saying/word” cannot “come to pass” rather the events to which the saying/word refers (i.e., the prophecy) will occur. The metonymic chain then would be word for words (prophecy) and prophecy for the event(s) they refer to.

The second usage of **דבר** (**בדבר יהוה**) is instrumental and retains the primary sense “word.” However, only one verse later at 13:33 the next occurrence of **דבר** reflects a different meaning again. It is coupled with the deictic **זה** and refers back to the whole episode described in 13:1–32, namely the fulfillment of the prophecy proclaimed by the “man from God” and his subsequent death after he broke God’s commandment in 13:24. The translation of **דבר** in the NRSV as “event” better captures the sense of **דבר** in this context compared to the ambiguous translation in the ESV as “thing.”⁵³

The final instance of **דבר** occurs in 1 Kgs 13:34, again with the deictic **זה** (**זה בדבר הזה** ויהי בדבר הזה) sin to the house of Jeroboam).⁵⁴ The NASB glosses **דבר** as “event,” repeating the sense in v. 33. However, the associated phrase **ויהי לחטאת** suggests otherwise.⁵⁵ **בדבר הזה** refers to the previous sentence that details Jeroboam’s *decision* to continue making priests “from among all the people” even *after* the event that occurred earlier in the narrative (13:1–32)—it does not refer to the “event” itself. Consequently, we suggest that 1 Kgs 13:34 be translated, “And this decision became the sin of the house of Jeroboam and it caused its annihilation and extermination from the face of the earth.”

A similar semantic breadth can be seen in the story about David’s marriage to Michal in 1 Sam 18:17–29. This example is particularly illuminating, as it highlights the fact that proximate uses may include both literal (insofar as they refer to spoken or written “words”) and non-literal senses depending on the context. In this pericope the noun **דבר** occurs five times, as the object or complement of the verbs **ישר**, **דבר**, and **הגיד**, with limited evidence of semantic differentiation at the level of the noun phrase. The first instance occurs in 18:20, where the **דבר** is described as pleasing (**ישר**) in the eyes of Saul. Here, **דבר** corresponds to a report brought to Saul, and so it might be glossed as “message,” or “report.” As such, it is another *word for words (report)* metonym. But the report pertains to the love (**אהב**) of Michal for David, and so **דבר** may equally be glossed as an abstract noun, e.g., “matter,” “thing” (NRSV, ASV, ESV). In this case, **דבר** may be understood as an example of metonymic chaining, i.e., *word for words (report) and report for that which is reported*. The second instance occurs in 18:23. In this instance **את־דברים** functions as the direct object of the verb **וידברו**, and is modified by the deictic pronoun **אלה**, which refers anaphorically to a message from Saul to David (18:22).

⁵³ The NIV translates this phrase as ‘even after this,’ understanding the **דבר** as functioning emphatically.

⁵⁴ The critical apparatus to BHS suggests that **דבר** be read headed with **ה** and not **ב** in accordance with the LXX, *Targumim* and Syriac.

⁵⁵ Compare the similar use of **דבר** at 1 Kgs 12:30.

Consequently, there is no obstacle to glossing דברים simply as “words,” and identifying them with Saul’s message.⁵⁶ It should be noted, then, that in this instance, as in the plural instances that follow, the usage is not metonymic. Instead, the reference is to the words themselves, rather than their contents or meaning. A similar situation obtains in the next verse (18:24), where, once again, we find דברים with the anaphoric pronoun referring back to direct speech and governed by the verb דבר. The final two instances in this passage occur in 18:26. As in the preceding two examples, the first uses the plural אתהדברים האלה as the object of a verb of address (in this case הגיד). The second instance in 18:26 is coordinated to the first with the *waw* consecutive, but, here, it is once again the singular noun דבר which is described as pleasing (ישר) in the eyes of David. However, in this instance the reference is cataphoric, and unambiguously relates to the subsequent explicatory infinitive להתחתן במלך, i.e., “and it (הדבר) pleased David to become the king’s son-in-law.”⁵⁷ In this instance, then, דבר is best glossed as “matter” or “report,” and, as in 18:20, should be understood as a sign metonym referring the idea expressed in by the infinitive, i.e., *word for words* and *words for the idea/plan they express*.

Two features are particularly noteworthy in this passage. First, is the remarkably high concentration of direct and reported speech, and, correspondingly numerous verbs of address. Did this perhaps influence the author’s lexical choices, especially in those instances in which דברים refers anaphorically and elliptically to a preceding speech event? Second, we note a general tendency in this pericope to distinguish between דבר used metonymically to mean “matter,” or “report,” and דברים used literally to mean “words,” by means of the plural with the anaphoric deictic pronoun. That is not to say, however, that the author was consciously aware of a semantic distinction. In other words, in those instances in which דברים is used anaphorically and elliptically, it refers literally to the particular words spoken, whereas in those instances in which the singular דבר is used, the reference is to a sense unit or unit of meaning, and, as such, it is metonymic and used to refer to that which was expressed. The lack of semantic differentiation can be demonstrated by the ambiguity surrounding דבר in 18:20, which may denote either the report (which is mentioned but not repeated), or the love of Michal which is the content of that report. Consequently, the double usage in 18:26 is particularly interesting. In that verse דברים clearly refers to the words spoken, while דבר refers to the content of that speech event; however, the distinction is determined by each noun’s context and collocated terms, and there is little evidence that the author was conscious of a transition between semantic domains (cf.

⁵⁶ Note especially the repetition of the verb דבר in Saul’s instruction to his messengers (v. 22), and in their report to David (v. 23).

⁵⁷ Literally ‘and the thing (הדבר) was pleasing in David’s eyes, to become the king’s son-in-law.’

the English example cited above: “The seller must ship your order within 30 days of receiving it”).

The semantic breadth that characterizes the noun **דבר** was clearly not limited to the specialized registers of the Hebrew Bible. Yet another example can be seen in Lachish ostracon 6.⁵⁸ There the noun **דבר** occurs twice, in lines 5 and 11 respectively (although it is partially restored in the latter). In the first instance the plural form occurs as a *nomen regens* in the expression **לא טבם [השרם] דברי**, “the words of the [princes] are not good.”⁵⁹ In this instance, the modification of the noun by the adjective “good” indicates that the reference is not to the words themselves but the message they convey (cf. the discussion of “evil word” above). As such, we once again have a metonym, where **דברי השרם** is apparently meant to signify the advice or reports contained in the letters (**ספרי**) mentioned in the preceding line.

The second instance is somewhat more difficult. In this instance, the noun **דבר** occurs in the context of direct discourse, as part of a proposed response to the letters alluded to in lines 4–5: **הלא תכתב אלהם [לאמר] למה תעשה כזאת** in lines 4–5: **הלא תכתב אלהם [לאמר] למה תעשה כזאת** [הז] ובי[ר] שלם ה[נ]ה למלך [ו]ל[בית]ה [ת]עשו הד[בר] הז[ה], “will you not write to them s[aying], ‘why do you do this, even in Je[ru]salem? Be[ho]ld, it is against the king [and] his [house] that [you] are doing thi[s] th[ing]’ ” (lines 8–12). Notwithstanding the damage to these lines, it is clear that **דבר** is associated with the verb **עשה**, “to do,” and modified by the demonstrative **זה**; however, in this instance the object of the anaphora is elided and the reader is left to infer the referent of **דבר**. To this end, it is important to consider the use of the expression within its wider context. In particular, it may be noted that although the verb **עשה** + demonstrative pronoun is repeated twice in these lines, it is only in the second that the noun **דבר** occurs. In other words, in the second instance the object of the verb is specified as “this **דבר**” (lines 11–12), yet in the first instance it is simply and elliptically “this” (line 10). But is the referent the same in each instance? At first glance, this would seem to be the case, but on closer inspection the distinction may prove to be more nuanced. To begin with, it is necessary to take full cognizance of the comparative preposition in the expression **תעשה כזאת** (lines 9–10), and the fact that the verb is a verb of action rather than speech (e.g., **דבר**, **אמר**, etc.). As such, it seems unlikely that the referent is the “words of the [princes]” in line 5. Rather, it is likely that the expression refers to the message conveyed by those words, and more specifically to their consequences, which are described in lines 6–8, viz.

⁵⁸ Based on the restored text in F.W. Dobbs-Allsopp et al., *Hebrew Inscriptions: Texts from the Biblical Period of the Monarchy with Concordance* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2005), 322–24.

⁵⁹ For the restoration of the *nomen rectum*, cf. **ספרי השר[ם]**, ‘the letters of the prince[s]’ in line 4. Note, however, the alternative **דברי** **[[נבא(ם)]]** proposed by H. Torczyner et al., *Lachish I (Tell ed-Duweir): The Lachish Letters* (London: Oxford University Press, 1938), 117; U. Cassuto, “Die Ostraka von Lakisch,” *MGWJ* 83 (1939), 81–92 (90).

“weakening yo[ur] hands [and slack]ening the hands of th[ose] who [are in]form[ed about] them.” Accordingly, the expression **למה תעשה כזאת** could be glossed, “why are you behaving in this way?” This would seem to be confirmed by the fact that, here, the verb “to do” takes the feminine deictic as is usual in Biblical Hebrew. In other words, in this instance there is no metonymic chain and the deictic refers directly to the consequence. Now, if the expression **תעשו הדבר הזה** (lines 11–12) is effectively synonymous, then there is no *prima facie* reason it should be phrased differently. But in lines 11–12 the expression follows after the *dativus incommodi*. Here, then, it seems that it is not so much the consequence as the act itself (represented by the content of the letters) that is in view.⁶⁰ Consequently, **תעשו הדבר הזה** may function to focalize the **דברי ה[שרם]** referred to in lines 4–5. But it is important to note that, once again, it is not the words themselves but the message they convey that is intended. In this way it is possible to understand how the words can be “against the king and his house,” and why they were initially said to be “not good.” But it should also be reiterated that we are dealing with a metonymic chain, i.e., *word for words (command)* and *command for that which is commanded*.

CONCLUSION

If one were to analyse **דבר** in terms of radial categories (i.e., in terms of central and peripheral members) where its semantic extension is largely, though not only, facilitated by conceptual metonymies and motivated by the expressive needs of its speakers, then one might postulate the prototypical member to be the spoken word to which was added later the written word as well. By extension and less prototypically it could mean a type of speech act, i.e., not the single word but the clauses, sentences or utterance as a whole. When this is the case, **דבר** needs to be translated in accord with the nature of that speech act, e.g., “speech,” “report,” “request,” “command,” etc. Such a move was possibly motivated by its expressive succinctness and economy. In turn this extension allowed bifurcating extensions to occur. Thus on the one hand, motivated by the need to express the intellectual correlates of words, **דבר** could be used to mean “thoughts,” “plans,” “ideas,” “intentions,” etc. Such translations often indicate a more subjective/psychological development in meaning, and it has been suggested above that this development may partly be associated with the idiom of speaking to one’s heart. On the other hand, motivated by other expressive needs, **דבר** in conjunction with the verb “to do” could be used to mean the “act” or “event” or by still another metonymic extension the object of that “act” or “event,” e.g., the “thing” that was requested. Both bifurcating extensions were facilitated by metonymic chaining and each semantic extension entails a still less prototypical meaning. But radial categories are not created by metonymy alone. Metaphor or

⁶⁰ Note, also, that **תעשו הדבר הזה** is comparatively more defined than **תעשה כזאת**, and hence serves to focus attention more closely.

analogy/generalization, as discussed under grammaticalization above, is another factor at play in the extension of radial categories. In such instances דבר appears to play a more grammatical or functional role in the sentence and the meanings of דבר are the most peripheral.

In listing the various meanings of דבר, be they literal or metonymic, one should not be misled into thinking that speakers were conscious of the linguistic factors in play. As the discussion shows, occurrences of the term can be found in close proximity but with different meanings—known as “overlapping” in the terminology of grammaticalization. Words can designate deeds or acts (i.e., the actions that words record) but these deeds/acts are written. There is a sliding or equivocation in usage. Determining the meaning of דבר in any given passage thus requires that particular sensitivity be given to the linguistic and thematic context in which it is situated. As we have shown above, proximity provides no guarantee that דבר should be glossed as the same English word in each instance in which it occurs.