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Categorical subjects are interpreted as referential, and are understood to refer to kinds.

In contrast, singular reference to kinds in object position requires a definite noun-phrase:

(15) alalmetrim bél ḥemiat ḥa-nafalm

‘alexander bell himsi ‘et ha-telefon

Alexander Bell invented the telephone.’

(16) alolhim bara ‘et ha-‘adam

God created the man

‘God created man’.

Yet in addition to subject position, indefinite singular reference to kinds in Hebrew can come as the object of a preposition, e.g., ל le ‘to’ in (12) above. Moreover, Heller (2002) observes that nouns can also refer to kinds within the Hebrew construct state. When such a structure expresses part-whole relations, a bare annex (the non-head element of the construct state) may refer to kinds. Thus, תثن בעבר ‘ivory’ (literally ‘tooth of an elephant’) is not limited to one tooth of one elephant. Similarly, חספ תונו nosot tavas ‘feathers of a peacock’ or פר תוט parvat še‘al ‘furs of a fox’ are not limited to feathers or fur coming from only one animal, but rather of the peacock kind, or the fox kind, respectively. Some collocations favor plurals, while others prefer singular nouns for the kind-designating annex, as in יזימ בלא parva ‘milk of goats’ versus יזימ בלא הצלב ‘milk of a cow’.

References


MICHAEL LUBLING
(The Hebrew University of Jerusalem)

AVIGAIL TSIRKIN-SADAN
(The Hebrew University of Jerusalem)

Kinship Terms

The literature preserved in the Hebrew Bible provides a wealth of information about the lexicon of kinship in ancient Israel and early Judaism. The most explicit description of the various kinship units in ancient Israel is found in Josh. 7:16–18. The passage occurs as part of Joshua’s search for the member of Israel responsible for taking some of the sacred items to have been devoted to Yahweh following Israel’s defeat at the city of Ai. When Joshua calls up the different tribes for questioning about the incident, he proceeds to identify the guilty man, Achan, by calling out his קַרְטָא ‘šeḥet ‘tribe’, then his לֶשֶׁם ‘miṣpahā ‘clan’, followed by his תֵּב ‘bayit ‘house’, and finally all of the בֵּית ‘male individuals’ within his house. As a result, the story represents an important reflection of the hierarchy of kinship, as well as the relationship between the different kinship units, in ancient Israel.

Josh. 7:16–18 indicates that the basic kinship unit in Ancient Israel was the תֵּב ‘bayit ‘house’, or as it is known more commonly, by its fuller designation, תֵּב ثֵּב ‘bêt ‘ab lit. ‘house of the father’, with the sense ‘father’s household’ (see especially the census lists and related material in Num. 1–4, as well as Josh. 22.14, etc.). The term referred to the extended family of a living male ancestor. Thus, the תֵּב תֵּב ‘bêt ‘ab ‘house of the father’ would have included all of the descendants of a particular living male head-of-household, along with others in the collective domicile. This means that the תֵּב תֵּב ‘bêt ‘ab ‘house of the father’ consisted of several smaller nuclear families belonging to the sons of the father, and possibly the father’s grandchildren as well, as well as non-affinal individuals, such as servants (see below). That the תֵּב תֵּב ‘bêt ‘ab ‘house of the father’ encompassed three or four generations of a father’s male descendants can be inferred from several biblical texts. Most notably, the laws concerning incest in Lev. 18:7–16 have as their cultural referent the three or four generations that may be found in a particular תֵּב תֵּב ‘bêt ‘ab (McClenny-Sadler 2007:31–49). The specific prohibitions, which are directed toward males, define incest within the bounds of one previous and two succeeding generations. Additionally, the so-called statement of transgenerational punishment in the Hebrew Bible, which promises that God will visit the iniquity of the fathers upon the
children to the third and fourth generation, also likely reflects the reality that the בֵּן תָּבָא בֶּט אָב ‘house of the father’ could incorporate up to three or four generations (Exod. 20.5–6; 34.7; Num. 14.18; Deut. 5.9–10).

Recent archaeological work has given concrete expression to the term בֵּן תָּבָא בֶּט אָב ‘house of the father’ reflected in ancient Israelite society. A characteristic feature of domestic dwellings in Iron Age towns is the clustering of several houses sharing walls to form one large compound. Stager (1985:20–22) argued that the clustering of these homes around one original dwelling reflects the development of the בֵּן תָּבָא בֶּט אָב ‘house of the father’, comprised of several nuclear families all tracing their lineage back to one male ancestor. The fact that this unit occupied several houses is most likely reflected in the story about the Danite preserved in Judg. 17–18. When the men of Micah’s house learn that the Danites had taken the house were mustered’ (Judg. 18.22) (see Gott- ter’s 1991:41). A typical intact בֵּן תָּבָא בֶּט אָב ‘house of the father’ would have included the following constituent members (depending on the individual relationships): בֵּן אָב ‘father’, בֵּן בֵּן ‘son’, בֵּן אָב ‘brother’, אָב ‘em ‘mother’, בֵּן אֲחֹת ‘daughter’, and אָב ‘אִשָּׁה ‘sister’. For relations by marriage, some of whom may have been present in the בֵּן תָּבָא בֶּט אָב ‘house of the father’ / ‘father’s household’ (for example, daughters-in-law, especially), see below. In the majority of cases in the Bible, the above kinship terms, which constitute part of the core component of the Hebrew lexis, are used to designate blood relationships within a given nuclear family.

For instance, the term אַח ‘brother’ typically refers to males born of the same father, either via the same mother (e.g., Gen. 4.2; 25.26) or via different mothers (e.g., Gen. 37.16; 1 Kgs 1.10). In a number of contexts, however, the term אַח may designate any type of male kin, especially a nephew. For example, in Gen. 14.14, 16, the narrator refers to Lot as אָבִיו ‘his brother’, with reference to Abram, even though Lot is the nephew of Abram; while in Gen. 29.15 Laban addresses Jacob as אָבִיו ‘my brother’, even though the relationship is once more uncle-nephew. Other texts in the Bible indicate that the term, especially in the plural, could have an even wider sense, denoting the male kin within a given tribe (Num. 16.10; 18.2, 6), or even the Israelites as a whole, as in יִשְׂרָאֵל אִישׁ ‘people of Israel’ (1 Kgs 15:11, with reference to David vis-à-vis Asa), or simply a distant male ancestor, especially with reference to David as the establisher of a royal line (e.g., 2 Kgs 22.2). In the plural form, תָּבָא אֵל ‘fathers’, the term may refer to one’s male ancestors collectively, whether in royal context (e.g., 1 Kgs 22.51) or in non-royal context (e.g., 1 Kgs 21.3–4).

Remaining within the nuclear family, note that Hebrew has special terms for ‘firstborn’ (one for each gender): רֵעֵב baḵɔ̀r ‘firstborn son’ (Gen. 22.21; 38.6–7; Exod. 6.14; 1 Sam. 8.2; 17.13; 2 Sam. 3.2; etc.) and הַרְבִּכְיוֹר baḵɨɾ ‘firstborn daughter’ (Gen. 19.13:37 [4x]; 29.26; 1 Sam. 14.49). In addition, a special term exists for the ‘second son’ within a grouping of brothers, namely, מְשֵׁנֶה mišnê ‘second’ (one)’ (1 Sam. 8.2; 17.13; 2 Sam. 3.3; 1 Chron. 5.12; in all but the last of these verses the specific form is מְשֵׁנֶהוּ ‘his second [one]’, the possessive suffix -hû ‘his’ referring back to the firstborn son, mentioned immediately prior), suggesting that the second-born son bears this rank vis-à-vis his older brother (Gordon 1935:229–230).

The term בָּדָד ‘uncle’ is used to refer to a father’s brother, or paternal uncle (e.g.,
On the other hand, note the specialized legal term for ‘husband’ is דּוֹדִי ‘beloved (m)’, used widely in Song of Songs (1.13, 13, 16; etc.), especially in the form דּוֹדִי ‘my beloved [m]’ in the mouth of the female lover (see also Isa. 5.1, with דּוֹדִי ‘my beloved [m]’ serving as a metaphor for Israel, God’s beloved). This lexical nexus suggests that the ‘uncle’ served as the beloved male relative, which is also true of other traditional societies (albeit usually the maternal uncle in traditional Arab culture).

Hebrew also possesses a set of kinship terms to denote individuals related by marriage. The word for ‘husband’ is לְבַעַל ‘ba’al’, whose literal meaning is ‘lord, owner, master’ (see, for example, Gen. 20.3; Exod. 21.3; 2 Sam. 11.17; Est. 1.17; etc.). At the same time, however, the basic word שָׁאֵא ‘š’ man’ may also serve for ‘husband’ (as in Gen. 16.3; 29.32; 2 Sam. 11.26; Ruth 1.3; etc.). Note the presence of both terms in passages illustrating one of the many instances ofosaic(s) and the form לְבַעַל ‘ba’al’ in the relationship of Uriah to the wife of Uriah (i.e., Bathsheba) heard that Uriah her husband (טָיוֹת אִישָׁ.android) was dead; and she mourned for her husband (לְבַעַל ‘ba’al’)

2 Sam. 11.26).

There is no specialized term for ‘wife’; instead, the basic word שָׁאֵא ‘š’ woman’ (construct: אָשֶׁת ‘ašet’) serves this function, as illustrated once more by 2 Sam. 11.26 cited above (see also Gen. 4.1; 4.17; 16.3; [2x]; etc.). On the other hand, note the specialized legal term לְבַעַל תִּשָּׁמָא ‘ba’alat ‘ba’al’ one (f) married to a husband’ (Gen. 20.3; Deut. 22.22).

The term שָׁאֵא ‘š’ man’ (e.g., Isa. 61.10; 62.5; Jer. 3.14; 16.9) by extension means ‘son-in-law’ (e.g., Gen. 19.14 [those Isa. 5.10; 62.5; Jer. 7.34; 16.9; Mic. 7.6] by extension means ‘daughter-in-law’ (e.g., Gen. 11.31 [Sarah to Terah]; Gen. 38.11, 16, 24 [Tamar to Judah]; Ruth 1.22, etc. [Ruth to Naomi])

The vocable בַּﬠַל תִּשָּׁמָא means ‘husband’s brother’, i.e., ‘levir’ (Deut. 25.5, 7; see also the denominative verb in Gen. 38.8), though it is not clear if the term refers to any brother of one’s husband, or specifically the one who bears the responsibility of performing levirate marriage (Deut. 25.5–10). The corresponding feminine form is הָאָבָה יֹבָם ‘sister-in-law’, used in two different contexts, both that specifically of the woman awaiting levirate marriage (Deut. 25.7 [2x], 9) and that of the ‘sister-in-law’ more generally, as in the relationship of Ruth and Orpah, two women married to brothers (Ruth 1.15 [2x]).

The Bible also attests to the term בֵּית אֵם ‘bēt ‘ēm’ lit. ‘house of the mother’, though more appropriately ‘mother’s household’ (Meyers 1991), the exact connotation of which remains elusive. On the one hand, this term may indicate the presence of households in ancient Israel with female heads (consider, for example, the case of the Shunamite woman in 2 Kgs 4.8–37; 8.1–8; or the poetic portrayal of the ideal woman in Prov. 31.10–31) (see Meyers 1991). On the other hand, closer inspection reveals that בֵּית אֵם ‘bēt ‘ēm’ ‘house of the mother’ may bear a specialized connotation with reference to young women who are in a position to (re-) marry (Gen. 24.28; Ruth 1.8; Song 3.4; 8.2). Note the contrast with בֵּית אֵשׁ ‘bēt ‘ēsh’ ‘house of
the father’, not in the general sense described above, but with specific reference to young women living with their father who are not in a position to marry (Gen 38.11; Judg. 19.2).

Other terms attested in Biblical Hebrew are נִכְנַת (mth ‘purchase of silver’) and נָפַד (mth ‘purchase of his slave-wife’), both of which mean ‘progeny’ (Gen. 21.23; Isa. 14.22; Job 18.19), without more specific designation. They may be simply poetic designations connoting more or less the same as בֵּית זֶרַע lit. ‘seed’ > ‘offspring’ (Gen. 12.17; 13.15, etc.).

Because the בֵּית אָב ‘house of the father’ could include domestic servants (see above), we include here a discussion of the relevant terms—especially in light of the information provided by an ancient Hebrew epigraph. The Siloam tomb inscription, informs us that the tomb along with, quite surprisingly, the tomb of Hezekiah’s palace (Isa. 22.15), was buried in the tomb of his slave-wife (Avigad 1953). The relevant term נִכְנַת ‘purchase of silver’ appears in the Bible as נִכְנַת נֶכֶד נִין ‘purchase of silver’ [Gen. 20.10 [2x], 12, 13, in conjunction with Gen. 16.17; 19.1; 2 Sam. 3.7; etc.], which suggests a close relationship as the kinship term נִכְנַת-כָּסֶפּוֹ ‘purchase of his silver’ [Lev. 22.11], and the one born in the household (נֶכֶד נִין נִין ‘purchase of his silver’ [Gen. 22.12]; סֵכָם נִין qinyan kasp ‘purchase of his silver’ [Lev. 22.11]), and the one born in the household (נֶכֶד נִין נִין ‘purchase of his silver’ [Gen. 17.12]; מִקְנַת נֶכֶד נִין yilid bāyit ‘one [m] born in the house’ [Gen. 17.12]; מִקְנַת נֶכֶד נִין w-līld bētō ‘and one [m] born in his house’ [Lev. 22.11]), One would presume that the home-born servant might have a higher standing than the one obtained through purchase, but the passages just cited suggest otherwise: both types of male servants are to be circumsiced by Abraham (Gen. 17.12–13); and both types of servants may eat of the consecrated food with the family members of the priest (Lev. 22.11), in contrast to the outsider, sojourner, or hired hand (v. 10). These passages go a long way in aiding our understanding of the אָב נֶכֶד נִין w-līld bētō ‘male-servant’ as a member of the אָב נֶכֶד נִין w-līld bētō ‘male servant’ as a member of the אָב נֶכֶד נִין w-līld bētō ‘family household’ in ancient Israelite society.

Lastly, we note the word נִכְנַת עֲלוֹבִים נָפַד עֲלוֹבִים סִפְּחָה pilgēs ‘concubine’ (Gen. 22.24; 25.6; 35.22; Judg. 8.31; 19.1; 2 Sam. 3.7; etc.), which refers to a secondary wife (for lack of a better term), apparently one whose sons could not or would not inherit from the הָפַר פֵּית paterfamilias. The word itself is very un-Hebraic, sharing affinities with Greek παλλακίς and Latin paelex (→ Cultural Words: Biblical Hebrew) (Rabin 1975; Levin 1983).

We return now to the more general kinship terms mentioned at the start of this entry. Just above the אָב נֶכֶד נִין w-līld bētō ‘house of the father’
mišpāhā ‘clan’ of the tribe of Manasseh (e.g., Num. 26.32; Josh. 17.2) and הַנְּעָת n’h ‘Noah’ and חַגְלָה hglh ‘Hoglah’, two of the daughters of Zelophehad of the tribe of Manasseh [Num. 26.33]). As such, the Samaria ostraca may provide testimony to the fact that this particular kinship term included a spatial dimension (Aharoni 1979:367; Stager 1985:24).

The broadest kinship unit in Biblical Hebrew, and hence of ancient Israelite society, is the šebet ‘tribe’; note that the word also means ‘staff’ (e.g., Exod. 21.20; Prov. 10.13), suggesting a derivation such as ‘group of people under the leadership of the one who wields the staff’. The word ṭemate ‘tribe’ seems to be a wholly synonymous equivalent (e.g., Exod. 31.2; Lev. 24.11); and it too means ‘staff’ (e.g., Gen. 38.18; Exod. 4.2). The biblical texts indicate that the tribe was the primary kinship unit and generally held a territorial importance in ancient Israel (Num. 32.33; Josh. 13.7; Judg. 21.24). At the same time, the specific meaning of the term šebet ‘tribe’ appears to have been somewhat flexible, for while most often it is used to designate ‘tribe’, in a few instances the word overlaps with mišpēhá ‘clan’ and hence should be understood as ‘clan’. See, for example, אַל־תַּכְרִיתוּ al-takiritu ‘let not the tribe of the clans of the Kohathites be cut off from amongst the Levites’ (Num. 4.18), with the Kohath sub-division of the Levites designated as a šebet. This flexibility of the term šebet in the Bible may indicate that its precise meaning evolved over the course of time from a general sub-group of individuals within a particular people (in this case, the Israelites) to the specific meaning of ‘tribe’, the largest such sub-division (for a counter-voice concerning the word ‘tribe’ and other matters raised herein, see Mojola 1998).

The Biblical Hebrew term most commonly used for all of Israel is בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל bnei yisra’el, lit. ‘sons of Israel’, hence ‘children of Israel’ or ‘Israelites’ (534x). This core term bespeaks a pattern of tribal organization, as can be seen by comparisons with both ancient Near Eastern (e.g., the Banu-Yamina attested at Mari; the Banu-Zamzum attested at Ugarit) and later Arabian (e.g., Banu-Quraysh,
Banu-Qurayza) parallels. Less frequent are ובשאול יִשְׂרָאֵל 'am yisraël 'people of Israel’ (4x) and a combination of the two above terms, 'בְּנֵי يִשְׂרָאֵל 'am banê yisraël, lit. ‘the people of the sons of Israel’ > ‘the people of the children of Israel’ (Exod. 1.9 only). With the definite article, the form ובשאול הָﬠָם 'am ha'am 'the people’ frequently refers to the entity of Israel as a collective group (e.g., Exod. 1.20; 3.12). Prayers frequently refers to the entity of Israel as a collective noun (e.g., Exod. 1.20; 3.12). The term יִשְׂרָיֵל בחורגת 'torah' 'conceive' (see already בהרוה bôra, lit. ‘the one (f) who conceives’, as a parallel word to ב ענ 'em 'mother' in Hos. 2.7; Song 3.4), begins to appear in later rabbinic texts.

Four new kinship terms entered Hebrew during this period, namely: ובשאול סב 'saba 'grandfather' and ובשאול סבת 'sabta 'grandmother' (note that in common usage, the pronunciation of ובשאול סַב ašer 'grandfather' shifts to ובשאול סָב, due to analogy with ובשאול אба 'father'), also borrowed from Aramaic; and the pair ובשאול בור 'step-son' and ובשאול בורג 'step-daughter’. In the modern period, the old generic word for ‘progeny’ ובשאול נֵכד (see above) came to specify ‘grandson’, alongside which its feminine counterpart, ובשאול נֵכְדָה 'granddaughter’, was created.

Most of the vocables for individual family members mentioned herein remain as standard usages in Modern Hebrew. The prime exceptions are ובשאול יבם 'brother-in-law’ and ובשאול יבה 'sister-in-law’, which are not typically no longer widely practiced. In their stead, the words ובשאול גיס and ובשאול גיסה 'brother-in-law’ and 'sister-in-law’ relationships.

The picture concerning the terms for 'father-in-law’ and ‘mother-in-law’ is a bit more complicated. The distinction between ובשאול גות 'father-in-law’ and ובשאול גותנ 'mother-in-law’ (referring to the wife’s parents), on the one hand, and ובשאול זי 'father-in-law’ and ובשאול זמ 'mother-in-law’ (referring to the husband’s parents), on the other hand, is not always observed in Modern Hebrew. The latter pair is commonly used for ‘father-in-law’ and ‘mother-in-law’ regardless of which side (in addition, note that זמ גות 'sister-in-law’ is replaced by זמה גות in colloquial Hebrew)—though curiously זמה גותנ 'mother-in-law’
retains a specific function as a pejorative term, for example, in mother-in-law jokes.

Modern Hebrew coined new terms for other family relations. The other Biblical Hebrew word for ‘progeny’ mentioned above, namely, נין (colloquial: sabra) and נינא, received the specific connotation of ‘great-grandson’, on the basis of which its feminine counterpart, הנינה ‘great-granddaughter’, was created. For ‘great-grandfather’ and ‘great-grandmother’ the phrases סבא סבא (colloquial: sabra) raba and סבתא סבתא were coined, with the second element derived from the word רב ‘great’.

In 1943 the Hebrew Language Committee (→ Academy of the Hebrew Language) proposed new words for ‘nephew’ / ‘niece’ and ‘cousin’: נדן נדה nidan ‘nephew’ and נדנית nidanit ‘niece’ (based on the word נד נד ‘progeny, grandson’); and וודן וודנית yodan ‘cousin’ (m) and ויודנית yidanit ‘cousin’ (f) (based on the word ווד יוד יוד ‘uncle’ / ויודו וודו ‘aunt’). None of these terms gained wide acceptance in the Hebrew-speaking community, however. Instead, the following words serve these functions.

The relations ‘nephew’ and ‘niece’ are expressed in two different ways: (a) האחות אחים bat Yanit ‘niece’ (based on the word אנ ani ‘brother’), especially in the plural form האחיות אחין Yanit ‘niece’ (based on the word אנ ani ‘brother’); and (b) the frequent combinations הבן הבת Yanit ‘son of brother’, תוחא תחת Yanit ‘son of sister’, הבת הבן Yanit ‘daughter of brother’, תוחא תחת Yanit ‘daughter of sister’, each of which defines the ‘nephew’ / ‘niece’ relationship more specifically. In general usage, this distinction does not occur, however, in the combinations for ‘cousin’, with יודו יוד Yanit ‘son of uncle’ and יודו יוד Yanit ‘daughter of aunt’ serving for ‘cousin’ regardless of the specific relationship, though naturally the gender distinction is observable, with the former as ‘male cousin’ and the latter as ‘female cousin’. Some Mizrahi Jews, however, may use terms such as הבן הבת Yanit ‘son of aunt’, as a more specific designation of the relationship, presumably because Arabic retains eight individual terms for ‘cousin’, depending on the precise kinship link.

Of the two aforementioned BH options for ‘husband’, חתן ba’al remains the standard term in Modern Hebrew. In the wake of the women’s movement, however, some speakers resist using the term (recall, from above, its literal meaning ‘lord, owner, master’) and prefer instead to use נשא iš ‘man’ > ‘husband’, on the analogy of נשא iša ‘woman’ > ‘wife’. Also in use today are the terms הבן-ה yanit ‘spouse’ (m), וה yanit ‘spouse’ (f), both of which hark back to earlier rabbinic and medieval usage, though with the more general connotation of ‘mate’ (in the sense of ‘matching item’).

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Gary A. Rendsburg
(Rutgers University)
Jeremy D. Smoak
(University of California, Los Angeles)

Kuntillet 'Ajrud

Kuntillet 'Ajrud (Horvat Teiman) is an archeological site in the northern Sinai where several texts apparently demonstrating linguistic and orthographic features consonant with the northern Israelite dialect of Hebrew have been discovered.

In three seasons of excavations at Kuntillet 'Ajrud (1975–1976), a team led by Zeev Meshel unearthed several 9th–8th-century-B.C.E. texts written on a variety of materials (Meshel 1978; 1992; 1993). Unfortunately, the texts have yet to be published systematically in the form of an editio princeps, meaning that high-quality photos and definitive readings are not readily available (but cf. Ahituv et al. forthcoming). As a result, transcriptions and descriptions of the texts have usually been obtained from the reports of those who have worked with the inscribed objects themselves or have seen the objects on display at the Israel Museum. Nonetheless, several epigraphic handbooks have collected and organized the transcriptions, from which one may begin study of the language represented therein (Davies 1991:78–82; Renz and Röllig 1995:1.47–64; Dobbs-Allsopp et al. 2005:277–298; Ahituv 2008:313–329 [cf. Ahituv 1992:152–162]).

Although many of the inscriptions comprise only one or two letters (e.g., רח, רג, רג, most likely indicating the contents of the vessel), a personal name (e.g., יִשְׁעָר יִר) [Dobbs-Allsopp et al. 2005, KAjur 2], or a title (e.g., ל-שֵׁר יִר, ‘[Belonging] to the governor of the city’ [KAjur 5–8]), several offer important data for reconstructing the language spoken by those passing through this outpost or caravan way-point. Among these important linguistic indicators are the following: (1) In an indeterminate number of inscriptions written on plaster in black and red ink, a few lexical and orthographic items mark the language and scribal system specifically as Hebrew, over against