

Dear reader,

This is an author-produced version of an article published in *Vetus Testamentum* 71 (2021). It agrees with the manuscript submitted by the author for publication but does not include the final publisher's layout or pagination.

Original publication:

Ziegert, Carsten

A Case for Grace? Case-Grammar, Frame-Semantics, and Biblical Hebrew |

in: *Vetus Testamentum* 71 (2021), pp. 133–150

Leiden: Brill 2021

<https://doi.org/10.1163/15685330-12341442>

Access to the published version may require subscription.

Published in accordance with the policy of Brill: <https://brill.com/page/selfarchiving/sharing-your-work-selfarchiving>

Your IxTheo team

Liebe*r Leser*in,

dies ist eine von dem/der Autor*in zur Verfügung gestellte Manuskriptversion eines Aufsatzes, der in *Vetus Testamentum* 71 (2021) erschienen ist. Der Text stimmt mit dem Manuskript überein, das der/die Autor*in zur Veröffentlichung eingereicht hat, enthält jedoch nicht das Layout des Verlags oder die endgültige Seitenzählung.

Originalpublikation:

Ziegert, Carsten

A Case for Grace? Case-Grammar, Frame-Semantics, and Biblical Hebrew |

in: *Vetus Testamentum* 71 (2021), S. 133–150

Leiden: Brill 2021

<https://doi.org/10.1163/15685330-12341442>

Die Verlagsversion ist möglicherweise nur gegen Bezahlung zugänglich.

Diese Manuskriptversion wird im Einklang mit der Policy des Verlags Brill publiziert:

<https://brill.com/page/selfarchiving/sharing-your-work-selfarchiving>

Ihr IxTheo-Team

1. Introduction: the lexeme *ḥēn* and the concept of “grace”

One of several translation equivalents that dictionaries of Biblical Hebrew offer for the noun *ḥēn* is “grace”. The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew (DCH), e.g., gives two major senses: “1. favour, grace” and “2. charm, elegance”. In Brown-Driver-Briggs (BDB) we find the main senses “1. favour, grace, elegance” and “2. favour, acceptance”. The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon (HALOT), on the other hand, has “1. agreeableness, charm” and “2. favor (approval or affection of s.one)”, without indicating “grace” as a possible meaning. Apart from the fact that *ḥēn* can presumably designate something as profane as “charm”, it is usually regarded as one of the Hebrew lexemes that shaped the theological idea of grace.¹ In fact, theological encyclopaedias trace back the theological concept of grace as God’s undeserved favour to the Hebrew noun *ḥēn*,² before they elaborate on the New Testament concept of grace as it is expressed, especially in the Pauline letters, by χάρις which is also the Septuagint’s standard equivalent of *ḥēn*. This is usually followed by a discussion of grace from the perspective of historical, systematic, and practical theology.

This provokes the following questions: Is *ḥēn* really ever used to express a concept that corresponds to the Christian idea of “grace”? Is “grace” ever a valid translation equivalent or should one rather follow HALOT in opting for “favour” only? And, finally, is there a concept of “grace” at all in the Old Testament?

1 Another important lexeme involved here is *hesed* which is not the topic of the present paper (cf., however, section 2).

2 E.g., H. Graf Reventlow, “Gnade I. Altes Testament”, *TRE* 13 (1984), cols. 459–464.

The present study of *ḥēn* is based on cognitive linguistics. After briefly evaluating previous research (section 2) I will present a new methodology for lexical studies (section 3), which I will then apply to the lexeme *ḥēn* (section 4) before drawing some conclusions (section 5).

2. Research review: lexical studies on *ḥēn*

Lexical studies on *ḥēn* and other lexemes of the root *ḥnn* are sparse. Nevertheless, two main positions can be identified. For a first group of researchers, the meaning of *ḥēn* (or *ḥnn*, respectively) shows affinities with the Christian concept of grace. These perceived affinities are based on the presumption that the lexeme designates an undeserved favour. In 1933, William Lofthouse presented a comparative investigation on *ḥēn* and *ḥesed*. For the latter, he drew heavily on the influential study by Nelson Glueck who considered *ḥesed* to designate a conduct corresponding to a mutual relationship of rights and duties (“gemeinschaftsgemäße Verhaltensweise”), especially within the framework of a covenant.³ In contrast to the assumed sense of *ḥesed*, Lofthouse defined the meaning of *ḥnn* (G-stem) as an action of favour that is not restricted by any conditions, that cannot be claimed, and that passes from the superior to the inferior. Although, according to Lofthouse, the substantive *ḥēn* is not used in a religious sense, the similarities of the root's meaning to the idea of grace are obvious.⁴ One generation later, Dafydd Ap-Thomas agreed with Lofthouse and presented further aspects of the root *ḥnn* as a whole. He regarded *ḥēn* as designating the protective response of a superior to a supplication

3 N. Glueck, *Das Wort »ḥesed« im alttestamentlichen Sprachgebrauche als menschliche und göttliche gemeinschaftsgemäße Verhaltensweise* (BZAW 47; Gießen, 1927). For criticisms and an alternative position see, e.g., S. Romerowski, “Que signifie le mot *hesed*?”, *VT* 40 (1990), pp. 89–103.

4 W.F. Lofthouse, “Ḥen and Ḥesed in the Old Testament”, *ZAW* 51 (1933), pp. 29–35, 29–31.

of an inferior. According to Ap-Thomas, the adjective *ḥannuîn* denotes the willingness to show favours to someone on an entirely voluntary basis.⁵

A second group of researchers did not find the idea of an undeserved or unconditioned favour in the Biblical texts. The first study along these lines appeared in 1954 when William Reed observed that *ḥēn* is sometimes used in collocation with *ḥesed* (e.g., Gen 19:19). For the latter, he assumed the meaning “covenant-love”, drawing on Glueck's study. Because of these collocations he assumed a relatedness in meaning between the two lexemes. He did not regard *ḥēn* as an “arbitrary condescension”, but rather as a “good will” providing a basis for *ḥesed*. Reed also challenged the opinion that *ḥēn* is always bestowed by the superior party on the inferior party.⁶ Going one step further, Karl Wilhelm Neubauer explicitly states that *ḥēn* is a favour based on preconditions. In profane usage, *ḥēn*, according to Neubauer, denotes the favour that is expected from a lord by his faithful servant and that the lord owes to his servant within the relationship of duty.⁷ Correspondingly, in theological usage *ḥēn* and the verb *ḥnn* designate the expected help and favour of YHWH in the context of the covenant.⁸ Finally, Ina Willi-Plein challenged the two common translation equivalents “grace” and “charm” which she thinks are based on an undue separation of the “theological” from the “secular” meaning. Instead, she argued in favour of a very general meaning: *ḥēn*, she claimed, designates something that makes an object or a person amiable or that makes it/him/her appear amiable (“das eine Sache oder Person liebenswert sein oder erscheinen läßt”). For the meaning of the root *ḥnn* as a

5 D.R. Ap-Thomas, “Some Aspects of the Root HNN in the Old Testament”, *JSS* 2 (1957), pp. 128–148, 130–131, 139–142.

6 W.L. Reed, “Some Implications of ḥēn for Old Testament Religion”, *JBL* 73 (1954), pp. 36–41.

7 K.W. Neubauer, *Der Stamm CHNN im Sprachgebrauch des Alten Testaments* (Diss. Berlin, 1964), pp. 13–20.

8 Neubauer, *Der Stamm CHNN*, pp. 59, 104–108.

whole, she assumed a relation of sympathy between persons (“eine zwischenmenschliche Beziehung der Sympathie”).⁹

An intermediate position between the two extremes just mentioned can be found in theological dictionaries. As to be expected, these articles summarise older research on *hēn* in order to present a synthesis. Both in ThWAT and in THAT, the authors offer “favour” (“Gunst”) as the predominant meaning, while at the same time allowing for the meaning “grace” (“Gnade”) in exceptional situations, e.g., in contexts with a divine agent¹⁰ or in collocations with *mš*’ and *bʿ êne*.¹¹ It seems obvious that trying to reconcile positions as diverse as those mentioned above will probably not lead to any new insights. Hence, the time has come for a fresh approach.

3. A new methodology: cognitive linguistics

3.1. Outline of the theory

Many linguists do not regard language any longer as an autonomous system that is separated from non-linguistic cognition, claiming that language cannot be investigated without taking extra-linguistic information into account.¹² This is where cognitive linguistics comes into play, an approach that emerged in the 1970s and has had a growing impact on Biblical studies over the last two decades.¹³

9 I. Willi-Plein, “הן – ein Übersetzungsproblem. Gedanken zu Sach. xii 10”, *VT* 23 (1973), pp. 90–99, 91, 95–96.

10 H.J. Stoebe, “הן *hnn* gnädig sein“, *THAT* 1 (1971), cols. 587–597, 594.

11 D.N. Freedman, J.R. Lundbom and H.-J. Fabry, “הן *hānan*”, *ThWAT* 3 (1982), cols. 23–40, 29–30.

12 W. Croft and D.A. Cruse, *Cognitive Linguistics* (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 1–4.

13 Cf., e.g., E. van Wolde, *Reframing Biblical Studies. When Language and Text Meet Culture, Cognition, and Context* (Winona Lake, 2009).

One subfield of cognitive linguistics, frame semantics, is itself based on case grammar. Both were promulgated by Charles Fillmore (1929-2014) who observed that a grammatical case can have different semantic functions. A striking example in the area of Biblical studies is provided by the Greek nominal phrase ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ θεοῦ (I Joh 4:9, 5:3). Morphological case endings are of no help in deciding whether the genitive attribute τοῦ θεοῦ should be considered a subjective or an objective genitive. Even the nominative case can have more than one semantic function as is shown by the subject “he” in the English clauses “He hit the ball” (agent), “He received a blow” (patient), and “He received a gift” (beneficiary).¹⁴ Fillmore strongly argued in favour of focusing on the functional relations between a verb and its nominal concomitants rather than on grammatical case. With this objective in mind, he defined a set of “case roles”, namely “Agentive” (animate instigator), “Instrumental” (inanimate force), “Dative” (affected animate being), “Factitive” (resulting object), “Locative” (location or orientation), and “Objective” (“the semantically most neutral case”).¹⁵ As a first step towards investigating the meaning of *hēn* in Biblical Hebrew, one could ask what semantic roles are discernible in sentences containing this noun, e.g., as part of the well-known verbal idiom *mš' hēn b' ēnē*.

In the course of his research on case until 1977, Fillmore changed the number and the labels of his case roles several times. The “Dative” case, e.g., was later renamed “Experiencer”.¹⁶ It became more and more obvious that a closed group of standardised case roles that work for each and every sentence could not be defined. Hence, Fillmore refrained from regarding semantics as something based on formal rules, instead, he strongly argued in favour of taking social aspects into account. He redefined the notion of “context” as referring not only to the text-internal environment of an utterance but also

14 C.J. Fillmore, “The Case for Case”, in E. Bach and R.T. Harms (eds.), *Universals in Linguistic Theory* (New York, 1968), pp. 1–88, 6–7.

15 Fillmore, “The Case for Case”, pp. 19–25.

16 R. Dirven and G. Radden (eds.), *Fillmore's Case Grammar. A Reader* (Heidelberg, 1987), p. 7.

to extra-linguistic experiences of language users. Understanding an utterance or a text depends, according to Fillmore, on the experiences of language users with the respective words in various real-life situations. Prototypical situations are represented by cognitive structures called “frames”.¹⁷

Fillmore's favourite example is a frame for commercial events. It contains all information necessary for understanding how a prototypical commercial event takes place. Frame elements are a “buyer”, a “seller”, “goods” and a “price”. The frame also contains the information that in the course of a commercial event, the “seller” delivers the “goods” to the “buyer” in exchange for the amount of money defined by the “price”. And, prototypically, the price corresponds in value to the goods. This frame with all its information is evoked in a language user's mind whenever one of the words “buy”, “sell”, etc. is used. Hence, understanding is possible even if not all relevant information is made explicit in the speech act.¹⁸ Thus, unlike case grammar, frame semantics takes cognitive elements into account that are not explicit on the surface of an utterance.

The cognitive scientist Marvin Minsky developed frame theory from a different angle. According to him, frames contain “terminals”, or “slots”, which can be filled with specific data, called “fillers”, once the frame is evoked.¹⁹ With this notion, Fillmore's “commercial event” frame has four slots, namely for the buyer, the seller, the goods, and the price. How the “commercial event” frame works has been described verbally in the preceding paragraph. It was another cognitive scientist, Lawrence

17 C.J. Fillmore, “Frame Semantics and the Nature of Language”, *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 280 (1976), pp. 20–32, 20–24.

18 C.J. Fillmore, “Frame Semantics” in The Linguistic Society of Korea (ed.), *Linguistics in the Morning Calm* (Seoul, 1982), pp. 111–137, 116–117, 122.

19 M. Minsky, “A Framework for Representing Knowledge”, in P.H. Winston (ed.), *The Psychology of Computer Vision* (New York, 1975), pp.: 211–277, 212.

Barsalou, who stated that such verbal descriptions are based on relations between the different slots and, respectively, between their “fillers”. These relations are called “constraints”.²⁰

So far, frame semantics has sparsely been applied to Biblical studies. Two book-length studies deserve mentioning, namely, Stephen Shead’s study of the verb *ḥqr* and similar lexemes²¹ and Christian Stettler’s investigation of the New Testament concept of “Final Judgement”.²²

3.2. Application to Biblical lexicography

For an investigation of Biblical Hebrew *ḥēn* that is driven by cognitive linguistics, the following methodological remarks are intended to show the way: First, case grammar provides a good starting point, particularly Fillmore's list of case roles. Identifying the case roles that occur in sentences that contain the lexeme *ḥēn* seems promising.

Second, these case roles can serve as a basis for a set of frame slots. Frame semantics, however, is not restricted to elements on the surface of a sentence, hence, more highly specialised frame elements can be expected in various contexts. In this way a hypothetical mental frame for prototypical “*ḥēn* situations” which was possibly active in the minds of Hebrew speakers can be reconstructed from the texts.

Third, it is advisable to analyse first and foremost those Biblical texts that describe prototypical situations of *ḥēn*. Therefore I will prioritise narrative texts that provide as much information as

20 L.W. Barsalou, “Frames, Concepts, and Conceptual Fields” in A. Lehrer and E.F. Kittay (eds.), *Frames, Fields, and Contrasts. New Essays in Semantic and Lexical Organization* (Hillsdale, 1992), pp. 21–74, 37–40.

21 S.L. Shead, *Radical Frame Semantics and Biblical Hebrew. Exploring Lexical Semantics (BiInS 108; Leiden and Boston, 2011)*.

22 C. Stettler, *Das Endgericht bei Paulus. Framesemantische und exegetische Studien zur paulinischen Eschatologie und Soteriologie (WUNT 371; Tübingen, 2017)*.

possible, at the same time excluding texts with a divine agent, since even in the Bible, divine intervention cannot be regarded as “prototypical”.

Fourth, taking into account James Barr’s warnings, I will not investigate cognates of *ḥēn* in other Semitic languages,²³ nor will I elaborate on translation equivalents in the Septuagint or other sources. The lexeme is sufficiently documented in the Hebrew Bible. Furthermore, from the viewpoint of frame semantics, it can be assumed that different frames are active in different cultures.²⁴ Hence, investigating cognates seems all the more unlikely to yield insight relevant to our purposes.

Fifth, dictionaries of Biblical Hebrew present us with numbered sub-senses of *ḥēn* indicating that the lexeme is polysemous (cf. section 1). Polysemy is accounted for in frame semantics by the idea that a word may evoke different frames in different contexts.²⁵ Hence, if we discover more than one frame for *ḥēn* we will not be surprised.

Sixth, some of the previous studies mentioned in section 2 claimed to investigate the meaning of the root *ḥnn* as a whole. In Semitic languages, however, the root is simply an abstract entity and derivation processes are not always traceable. Therefore, knowledge about other lexemes derived from the root *ḥnn* cannot be used indiscriminately in investigations of the noun *ḥēn*.²⁶ The verb *ḥnn* (G-stem and Dt-stem) and the adjective *ḥannūn* definitely deserve separate investigations.

Seventh, as soon as a frame for *ḥēn* has been reconstructed according to the methodology outlined above, it can be applied to other texts that are not as clear as those used so far. This is where the full strength of the theory comes into play. Admittedly, the frame slots can be determined by working through the contexts and noting common features with regard to content. Frame theory, however, urges us to start this procedure with the most basic texts which describe prototypical situations.

23 Cf. J. Barr, *Comparative Philology and the Text of the Old Testament* (Oxford, 1968), pp. 86–91.

24 Minsky, “A Framework”, p. 257; cf. Fillmore, “Frame Semantics”, p. 111.

25 Fillmore, “Frame Semantics and the Nature of Language”, p. 25.

26 B.K. Waltke and M.P. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, 1990), §5.1a.

According to frame semantics, the frame elements thus detected are active in language users' minds, even when the context is less than clear. Hence, we can assume that the lexeme *ḥēn* designates the same concept when used with less explicit contextual information.

4. Investigation of the lexeme *ḥēn*

The noun *ḥēn* occurs 68 times in the Hebrew Bible.²⁷ Within these occurrences, there are three prominent syntactic patterns:

(#1) *ḥēn* functions as a *nomen rectum* of a noun in the construct state, e.g., *kī liwyat ḥēn hēm l'ro 'šēkā* (Prov 1:9)

(#2a) *ḥēn* functions as an object of the verb *mš'*, followed by a prepositional phrase with *b' 'ēnē'*, e.g., *wayyimšā' yošēp ḥēn b' 'ēnāw* (Gen 39:4)

(#2b) *ḥēn* in the construct state functions as an object of the verb *ntn*, followed by a prepositional phrase with *b' 'ēnē'*, e.g., *wayyittēn yhw' 'et ḥēn hā'ām b' 'ēnē' mišrāyim* (Ex 11:3)²⁸

Apart from seven occurrences which do not permit any categorisation at all regarding syntax, we find slight modifications of these patterns. E.g., in Late Biblical Hebrew,²⁹ the verb *ns'* can replace *mš'*, and the preposition *lipnē'* can substitute for *b' 'ēnē'* (Est 2:15,17, 5:2, 8:5). It should be noted that pattern #1 does not occur in narrative contexts.

27 In the exclamation *ḥēn ḥēn laḥ* (Zech 4:7) it is counted once whereas in Ex 33:13 there are two clauses with *ḥēn* which are therefore counted twice.

28 It will be clear from the remarks in section 4.2 that Ex 11:3 is not an example with a divine agent.

29 Cf. A. Hornkohl, "Biblical Hebrew: Periodization", *EHL* 1 (2013), pp. 315–325.

4.1. Basic meaning

Looking at the occurrences that fit pattern #1, we find that all except one communicate the idea of beauty which is indicated in the dictionaries by “elegance” or “charm” (cf. section 1).³⁰ Thus, the passages mention “a beautiful wreath” (Prov 1:9, 4:9), “a beautiful ibex” (Prov 5:19), “a beautiful woman” (Prov 11:16), and “a beautiful stone” (Prov 17:8). Regarding the latter case, not a few commentators emphasise the idea of “favour” rather than “beauty” considering an *’eben ḥēn* as something that causes favour.³¹ This interpretation no doubt emerges from the topic “bribery” (*šōḥad*) of this proverb. It is, however, unnecessary here to deviate from the meaning “beauty” which is evident in the remaining passages of Proverbs. Probably, the “beautiful stone” is a gemstone³² which, of course, causes favour when given away. Nevertheless, the basic meaning “beauty” without any metonymic extension is fully sufficient to grasp what this proverb means to say (“bribery is [like] a gemstone for the one who applies it ...”). Thus, “beauty” seems to be the basic meaning of the lexeme *ḥēn* which is clearly indicated by a fair number of passages, although they do not occur in narrative contexts.³³ A simple frame structure for this sense is depicted in figure 1.

30 The exception is the phrase *ruʿḥ ḥēn wʾtaḥʾanūnūm* (Zech 12:10) which will be treated in section 4.3.

31 See, e.g., O. Plöger, *Sprüche Salomos (BKAT 17; Neukirchen-Vluyn, 2011)*, p. 202; B.K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs. Chapters 15-30 (NICOT; Grand Rapids, 2005)*, pp. 48–49.

32 Cf. the expressions *’abne’eqdaḥ* and *’abne’ḥēpeš* in Isa 54:12 which most probably designate gemstones.

33 The remaining passages where *ḥēn* has the simple sense “beauty” are: Prov 31:30 (*šeqer haḥēn*, general meaning), Nah 3:4 (*zōnāḥ.tōbat ḥēn*, “of exceptional beauty”), Zech 4:7 (*ḥēn ḥēn laḥ*, “how beautiful is he”, of the capstone), Ps 45:3, Prov 22:11 (of lips, i.e., metonymically of speech), Prov 3:22 (“for your neck”). Some of them deviate syntactically from pattern #1.

<p>Frame: <i>ḥēn</i> state (“beauty”)</p> <p>Slots:</p> <p>○ Objective [+/-animate]</p> <p>Constraints:</p> <p>○ is assigned the attribute “beautiful”</p>
--

Figure 1: A frame for the basic meaning of *ḥēn*

The label “Objective” for the only slot of this frame has been taken from case grammar where it designates “the semantically most neutral case” whose function in the sentence cannot be further specified.³⁴ Here, it represents the entity that is attributed as being “beautiful”. Possible fillers for this slot, according to the texts discussed above, are “wreath”, “ibex”, “woman”, etc.

4.2. *Extended meaning*

For our initial question regarding “grace”, syntactic patterns #2a and #2b are of greater interest. Starting with pattern #2a, the basic meaning “beauty” does not seem appropriate, at first, to explain the expression *mš’ ḥēn b’ éné*. Obviously, the expression is idiomatic; that is to say, the meaning of the whole cannot be explained by simply combining the meaning of its parts.³⁵ In fact, *mš’ ḥēn b’ éné* can be used as a formulaic expression to introduce a request, particularly when combined with the conjunction *’im* like in *’im nā māšā tī ḥēn b’ énekem dabb’ ru nā b’ zne’ par’ oh* (Gen 50:4).³⁶ On the other hand, it can be used to express gratitude, this being the case for main clauses with the verb *mš’* in the *yiqtol* conjugation, e.g. (at the end of a dialogue), *timšā sīphātkā ḥēn b’ éneykā* (1 Sam

34 Cf. Fillmore, “The Case for Case”, pp. 24–25 and section 3.1 above.

35 See H. Bussmann, *Routledge Dictionary of Language and Linguistics* (Abington, 1996), s.v. idiom.

36 J.-M. Babut, *Les expressions idiomatiques de l’hébreu biblique* (CahRB 33; Paris, 1995), pp. 132–153.

1:18).³⁷ These formulaic uses notwithstanding, the idiom represented by syntactic pattern #2a can yet be used to investigate the meaning of *ḥēn*. To this end, it is advisable to concentrate not so much on the formulaic uses, but rather on texts either stating that somebody has found or indicating that somebody intends to find *ḥēn* “in the eyes of” someone else. Two examples shall be given briefly: First, in Gen 39:4 we are told that Joseph found *ḥēn* “in the eyes of” Potiphar (*wayyimṣā yôšēp ḥēn b^o ‘ēnāw*). And second, in Gen 33:8 Jacob explains to Esau why he has sent to him several herds of cattle (*wayyo ‘mer limṣo ‘ ḥēn b^o ‘ēne ‘a doni*). The following considerations are based on the fact that in case of polysemy, a lexeme's sub-senses are expected to be related to some extent.³⁸ Thus, the simple meaning “beauty” (cf. section 4.1) will be taken as a basis for further investigation.

Obviously, the idiom *mṣ ‘ ḥēn b^o ‘ēne* involves metonymy. The complex preposition *b^o ‘ēne* (“in the sight/opinion of”) is composed of the simple preposition *b^o* and the noun *‘ayin* in dual number and construct state. It is used to indicate the evaluation of persons, objects, actions and events as is shown by its frequent collocation with the adjectives *toḥ* and *ra ‘* as well as with the verbs *yṯb*, *r ‘ ‘*, and *yšr*. The noun “eyes” is used to refer to the eyes’ function of seeing (“body part for function” metonymy), which is to be understood as the act of evaluating something or somebody (“means for goal” metonymy).³⁹ This analysis fits well with the simple meaning “beauty” for *ḥēn*. Beauty is a quality perceived by means of the eyes. The expression *ḥēn b^o ‘ēne* can be interpreted as a metonymy indicating that somebody is perceived or evaluated as being “beautiful”, i.e., s/he is appealing or

37 Babut, *Les expressions*, pp. 167–170. However, this is not the only possible meaning for expressions formed with the *yiqtol* conjugation of *mṣ ‘*. See, e.g., Gen 34:11 where Shechem uses the formula before obtaining something from Jacob and his family; cf. Babut, *Les expressions*, p. 155.

38 Cf. Bussmann, *Routledge Dictionary*, s.v. polysemy.

39 E. Jenni, *Die hebräischen Präpositionen*, vol. 1, *Die Präposition Beth* (Stuttgart, 1992), pp. 213–215. For a discussion of conceptual metonymies in the area of cognitive linguistics see, e.g., G. Lakoff and M. Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (2nd ed.; Chicago, 2003), pp. 39–40.

pleasing to the person who evaluates him/her. Furthermore, the verb *mš*' (G-stem) has the prototypical meaning of “finding something that has been lost and therefore searched” but can also be used for designating the event of “finding something by chance” or, even more generally, of “obtaining something”.⁴⁰ Hence, as a first approximation, the idiom *mš' hēn b' ênê* can be interpreted as designating the event that a person “obtains acceptance by some other person”, or, more simply, that a person is being accepted by some other person.⁴¹ This interpretation does not cover those formulaic uses of the idiom that express gratitude as mentioned above. It is consistent, however, with formulaic uses introducing a request.⁴²

After this preliminary work, expressions of pattern #2a will be analysed further by means of frame semantics, starting with two examples:

wayyimšā' yošēp hēn b' ênāw (Gen 39:4)

wayyimšā' h^adad hēn b' ênê par 'oh m^a'od (1 Ki 11:19)

With the preliminary designation of *hēn* as “acceptance”, two case roles can be identified. First, there is a person who “finds *hēn*”, expressed by the grammatical subject in the examples above. Choosing from Fillmore's list of semantic roles mentioned in section 3.1, this one will be called the “Experiencer” of acceptance (“Joseph”, “Hadad”). Second, there is a person “in whose eyes” the Experiencer is “accepted”. This role will be called the “Agentive” (“Potiphar”, “Pharaoh”). Comparing this analysis

40 G. Gerlemann, “אָמַן *mš*' finden”, *THAT* 1 (1971), cols. 922–925.

41 The notion of “acceptance” corresponds to one of the translation equivalents offered by BDB and is similar to Willi-Plein's general description of אָמַן as something that makes an object or a person (appear) amiable (Willi-Plein, “אָמַן – ein Übersetzungsproblem“, p. 95).

42 E.g., Laban requesting something from Jacob (Gen 30:27) and Joseph requesting something from Pharaoh's courtiers (Gen 50:4).

with the traditional grammatical one, it is worth noting that the subject of a clause containing an active verb has more of a “passive” role, while the prepositional object takes on the “active” role.

The next step will be the transition from case grammar to frame semantics. What we have identified so far as semantic roles can now be used as slots of a frame which will still be called “Agentive” and “Experiencer”. Furthermore, a third slot can be postulated taking the respective contexts into account. These contexts mention or at least presuppose a (potential) conflict or a disequilibrium of some sort between the Agentive and the Experiencer. The examples given in table 1 illustrate this point.

Table 1: Examples of the expression *ms' hēn b' êné*

	Agentive	Experiencer	(potential) conflict or disequilibrium
1 Gen 33:8	Esau	Jacob	Jacob has cheated on Esau
2 Gen 34:11	Jacob and his sons	Shechem	Shechem has raped Dinah
3 Gen 39:11	Potiphar	Joseph	Joseph is a slave and a foreigner
4 Num 32:5	Israel's leaders	Reubenites and Gadites	Reubenites and Gadites will suffer a loss of esteem if they settle in the East
5 1 Sam 20:3	Jonathan	David	Jonathan's father Saul persecutes David
6 1 Sam 25:8	Nabal	David's men	Nabal despises David and his men
7 2 Sam 14:22	David	Joab	David has for a long time refused to grant Joab's request
8 1 Ki 11:19	Pharaoh	Hadad	Hadad is a foreigner and a refugee
9 Ruth 2:10	Boas	Ruth	Ruth is a Moabitess

Traditionally, researchers felt that *ḥēn* always passes from the superior to the inferior party.⁴³ It seems quite unlikely, however, that this is a valid characteristic of every instance of *ḥēn*, given the balanced situation of power between Jacob and Esau (Gen 33:8), and between David and Jonathan (1 Sam 20:3).⁴⁴ Instead, the more general notion of a potential “conflict” between the two parties has stronger explanatory force. This conflict may have a variety of facets to it. It may be immediate and open (no. 1 and 2), it may be merely a potential one (no. 4), it may be based on foreignness (no. 3, 8, 9), on a disequilibrium of status (no. 3, 6, 7, 8, 9), or on loyalty to someone else (no. 5).

On closer examination, it becomes clear that the Experiencer is likely to be at a disadvantage should the conflict not be settled, and that only the Agentive is able to settle it. And it is precisely a *ḥēn* event that leads to the resolution of such a conflict situation, taking place by means of a specific action that is performed by the Agentive alone. Hence, a frame for this meaning of *ḥēn* is depicted in figure 2.

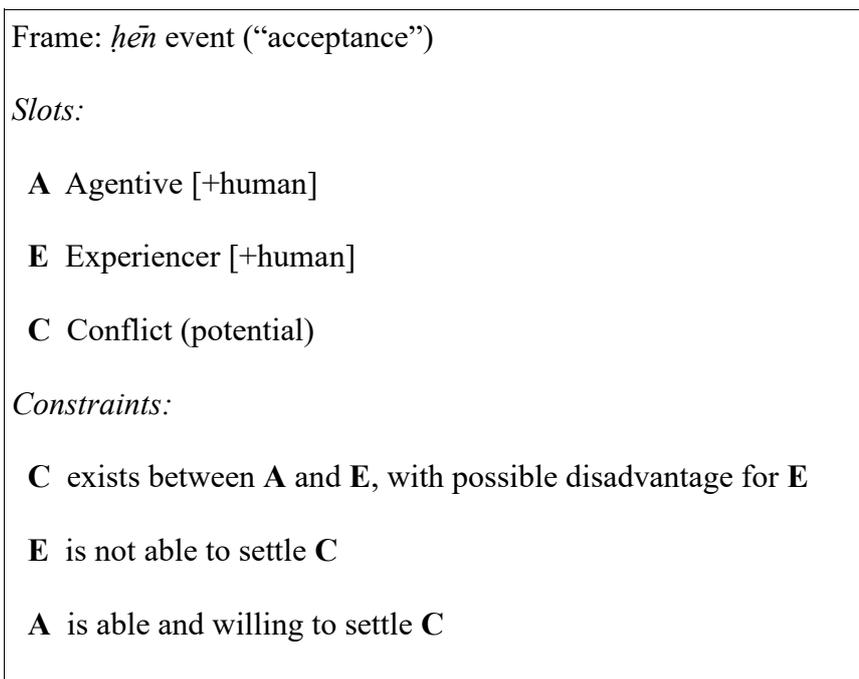


Figure 2: A frame for the extended meaning of *ḥēn*

43 See, e.g., Lofthouse, “Ḥen and Ḥesed”, p. 30; cf. section 2.

44 Cf. Reed, “Some Implications”, pp. 39–40.

The label “acceptance” in this frame specification derives from what was said earlier on the metonymic sense of *ḥēn* which in turn is based on the basic sense “beauty”. We are now in a position to formulate a concise definition of the extended sense of *ḥēn* which follows directly from the description of the frame:

“*ḥēn* (noun, extended sense) – the settling of a (potential) conflict between two parties that only one party can bring to a conclusion.”

Dictionaries of Biblical Hebrew should provide not only glosses but also short sentences that explain the meaning of the lexeme in question.

Syntactic pattern #2b can be viewed as a causative variant of pattern #2a. E.g., in *wayyittēn yhwh 'et ḥēn ḥā'ām b' 'ēne' mišrāyim* (Ex 11:3), *yhwh* is the subject of the verb *ntn* which serves to indicate that what follows is caused by the subject.⁴⁵ In fact, what follows is the linguistic realisation of a *ḥēn* event. As in pattern #2a, the Agentive is indicated by a prepositional phrase with *b' 'ēne'*. Furthermore, the direct object of the verb *ntn* is a construct chain consisting of the noun *ḥēn* in the construct state, followed by the linguistic realisation of the Experiencer. The latter can be expressed either by a noun, or by a pronominal suffix as in *wayyittēn ḥinno' b' 'ēne' sār bêt hassohar* (Gen 39:21, with the pronominal suffix referring to Joseph). In either case, the second part of the construct chain constitutes an objective genitive. For the sake of clarity and comparison, patterns #2a and #2b can be formalised as follows (with the slot labels A and E indicating the Agentive and the Experiencer):

(#2a) *mš' (E, ḥēn) b' 'ēne'(A)*

(#2b) *ḥēn [st.cstr.] E b' 'ēne'(A)*

45 Cf. DCH, s.v. נתן.

Two more remarks are in order here: First, as regards pattern #2b, the subject and the verb (*ntr*) of the clause are not part of the pattern, neither do they occur in the frame. They are not essential for a semantic description of events referred to by the noun *ḥēn*. Secondly, it should be stated clearly that the frame depicted in figure 2 covers both syntactic patterns #2a and #2b. Hence, in clauses of pattern #2b, *ḥēn* designates exactly the same thing as in clauses matching pattern #2a.

4.3. Applying the frame to difficult passages

Now that we have reconstructed a frame for *ḥēn* events of “acceptance” (section 4.2), we can assume that this frame was activated in language users’ minds each time the word *ḥēn* was used (except for cases where the basic sense “beauty” was intended; cf. section 4.1). Hence, we can apply the frame to passages that are not as clear as the ones discussed above. I will briefly comment on four such passages, progressing from easier to more difficult texts:

mokī^aḥ ḥāḏāḥ ḥā^aray ḥēn yimṣā (Prov 28:23)

The proverb states that someone who rebukes others will become the Experiencer of a *ḥēn* event. The Agentive is not explicitly stated since a prepositional phrase with *b³ ḥē^e* is missing. The Conflict is most probably caused by the fact that the prospective Experiencer rebukes other people, it thus exists between him/her and the person reproved. Hence, according to the frame structure presented above, the proverb states that in spite of the conflict caused by a reproof, its addressee will later become the Agentive of a *ḥēn* event, probably because s/he is grateful for the reprimand.

w³no^aḥ māṣā ḥēn b³ ḥē^e yḥwh (Gen 6:8)

In critical scholarship, this verse is usually regarded as the end of a non-P passage (6:5–8), supplemented by a P passage (6:9–22). Researchers consider the non-P passage to be wanting from a logical point of view since no information is given as to why Noah has found *ḥēn* on the eve of destruction. Researchers then assume that Noah’s characterisation as *ṣaddīq* and *tāmīm* in v.9 (P) provides the reason for his finding *ḥēn*.⁴⁶ From a frame-semantic point of view, however, Gen 6:5–8 seems quite coherent. Language users can apply their cognitive abilities to interpret Gen 6:8 according to the structure of the *ḥēn* frame (cf. figure 2) which presupposes a conflict between the Agentive (God) and the Experiencer (Noah). This conflict is to be found in the fact that Noah belongs to sinful humankind (Gen 6:5–7). In the course of the cognitive evaluation, prototypical scenes of *ḥēn* events come to the recipient’s mind: A foreigner is welcomed, a request is kindly granted, a servant is valued, a foe is forgiven. Moreover, the frame constraints determine that the divine Agentive alone can settle the conflict with the Experiencer. Hence, conflict resolution does not depend on Noah’s “perfect” behaviour as described in Gen 6:9 but is affected by God alone.

w³ḥāyāḥ ’im lo’ timṣā’ ḥēn b³ ’ēnāw kī māṣā’ bah ’erwat dābār w³kātab laḥ sēper k³rītut (Deut 24:1)

This passage states that a husband can divorce his wife if she “does not find *ḥēn* in his eyes”. The reason for this is that he has found some *’erwat dābār* in her. Since antiquity it has been discussed whether this expression refers to adultery or rather to a physical deficiency. Peter Craigie argues for a physical defect, stating that, according to Deut 22:22, adultery was rather to be punished by death.⁴⁷ Eckart Otto, on the other hand, argues for adultery, hinting at the fact that Deut 22:22 describes a special case, whereupon an adulterous act had to be testified by eye-witnesses before a death penalty

46 Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11* (BKAT 1.1; Neukirchen, ³1983), 553–554; Jan C. Gertz, *Das erste Buch Mose (Genesis). Die Urgeschichte Gen 1–11* (ATD 1; Göttingen, 2018), 242.

47 Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, 1976), p. 305.

could be executed.⁴⁸ Taking the above frame-semantic analysis into account, a case of adultery seems more likely than just an undesirable physical condition as a reason for “not finding *ḥēn*“. The frame contains a slot for a (potential) conflict which was active in language users’ minds. Hence, when the frame is evoked its slots are filled from the actual situational context, supplemented by encyclopaedic information. It seems quite unlikely that a physical defect is a suitable filler that is strong enough to qualify for the frame’s Conflict slot. Other options like adultery or a long-term domestic quarrel are more likely to provide enough conflict potential. Applying the *ḥēn* frame to the negative statement of Deut 24:1, we can assume that in this case the Agentive, i.e. the husband, who alone is in a position to settle the conflict, is not willing to do so.

w³sāpaktī ‘al beṯ dāwīd w³ ‘al yošēb y³rušālam ru^aḥ ḥēn w³taḥ^anūnīm (Zech 12:10)

The final example is intended to show that the reconstructed frame can be applied to texts that pose serious problems to interpreters. The noun *taḥ^anūnīm* which also belongs to the root *ḥnn* and occurs only in the plural is usually glossed as “supplication, plea”.⁴⁹ Traditionally, the phrase *ru^aḥ ḥēn w³taḥ^anūnīm* is rendered “a spirit of grace and supplication (for grace)”.⁵⁰ While a “spirit of supplication” can easily be assumed as referring to a mindset of prayer, the rendering “spirit of grace” remains obscure. Rudolph states, rather unconvincingly, that the pouring out of the spirit is an act of grace which causes supplication.⁵¹ Meyers and Meyers are correct in stating that both *ḥēn* and

48 Eckart Otto, Deuteronomium 23,16–34,12 (HThK; Freiburg, 2017), p. 1804.

49 DCH, s.v.

50 E.g., R.L. Smith, *Micah–Malachi* (WBC 32; Dallas, 1984), p. 276; W. Rudolph, *Haggai – Sacharja 1–8 – Sacharja 9–14 – Maleachi* (KAT 13/4; Gütersloh, 1976), p. 216 (“einen Geist der Gnade und des Gnadeflehens”).

51 Rudolph, *Haggai – Sacharja – Maleachi*, p. 223.

taḥ^anuḥim are used to refer to human dispositions directed against each other.⁵² This is fully in line with the idea developed in section 4.2 that the lexeme *ḥēn* designates “the settling of a (potential) conflict between two parties that only one party can bring to a conclusion.” Though it is not easy to assign fillers to the frame slots, we can assume that the Agentive is “the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem”. It is likely that the Experiencer slot can be filled with the same entity, thus, the event or disposition of *ḥēn* (and of *taḥ^anuḥim*, of course) is reciprocal. A conflict is not explicitly stated, possibly it concerns the fact that somebody has been pierced (*w^ḥhibbītu ʿelay ʿēt ʿašer daqāru*).⁵³ Be that as it may, some conflict is definitely presupposed. In any case, the overall frame structure of the lexeme *ḥēn* helps to elucidate this rather obscure passage at least to some extent: It is not a “spirit of grace” that is poured out but rather a willingness to resolve conflicts and to ask for conflict resolution.

5. Conclusion: a case for grace

The practice of rendering *ḥēn* by “grace” has without doubt been influenced by the lexeme's standard equivalent χάρις in the Septuagint. While χάρις and its English equivalent “grace” share the meaning component of “being for free”,⁵⁴ this notion cannot distinctly be found in the meaning of *ḥēn*. Instead,

52 C.L. Meyers and E.M. Meyers, *Zechariah 9-14. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 25C; New York, 1993), pp. 335–336; similarly K. Elliger, *Die Propheten Nahum, Habakuk, Zephanja, Haggai, Sacharja, Maleachi* (ATD 25; Göttingen, 1975), p. 170; I. Willi-Plein, *Haggai, Sacharja, Maleachi* (ZBK.AT 24.4; Zürich, 2007), p. 199.

53 For a discussion concerning *ʿelay* showing a 1st person suffix see Willi-Plein, *Haggai, Sacharja, Maleachi*, pp. 200–201.

54 Cf. C. Spicq, *Notes de lexicographie néo-testamentaire*, vol. 2 (OBO 22; Fribourg, 1982), pp. 961–963.

it is the idea of a (potential) conflict or a disequilibrium between two parties that accounts for the lexeme's particular sense, distinguishing it from other lexemes in the same lexical field like, e.g., *hesed*.

It is, however, this notion of a conflict and its resolution that justifies the Greek rendering χάρις. According to the frame constraints, it is the Agentive who is able and willing to settle the Conflict, not the Experiencer. This can easily be verified by means of the examples in section 4.2. Considering the fact that Jacob has cheated on Esau, he cannot demand that the conflict be settled. Likewise, Shechem, having raped Dinah, is not in a position to demand anything from Jacob's family. Hence, a resolution (or, a prevention) of the conflict is restricted to the Agentive alone. The Experiencer can ask for it, he can possibly influence the Agentive to grant it but he is completely dependent on the Agentive's goodwill. Thus, the event of *hēn*, if granted, is “for free”, so to speak. Admittedly, “grace” is less appropriate as a translation equivalent of *hēn* than, say, “acceptance”. However, the meaning of the Hebrew lexeme is not fully devoid of notions that are present in the Christian concept of grace. As an afterthought, it should be noted that frame semantics offers interesting and methodologically sound perspectives for studying the meaning of Biblical Hebrew lexemes. It will be worthwhile to use frame semantics for an investigation of the verb *hnn*, too. As a preliminary guess, it seems probable that the same frame can be reconstructed as it was possible for the extended sense of the noun *hēn* (cf. figure 2). Furthermore, nouns like *hesed* or *rah^amîm*, traditionally translated as “mercy”, “goodness”, “love”, etc., come to mind as well as related adjectives like *rahûm* and *hannûn*. When working in the semantic field of the “grace formula” *yhwh yhwh ’el rahûm w^hhannûn ’erek ’appayim w^rrab hesed we^emet* (Ex 34:6)⁵⁵ a frame-semantic approach will certainly contribute to our understanding of God's attributes as they are presented in the Bible.

55 The term “grace formula” was coined by H. Spieckermann, “Barmherzig und gnädig ist der Herr ...”, *ZAW* 102 (1990), pp. 1–18.