Object Marking in Biblical Hebrew Poetry

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1. Introduction

The definite article ה, the relative pronoun אשר, and the object marker את have been called the "prose particles" because they are used relatively infrequently within biblical poetic texts. Consequently, the count of prose particles per total number of words has been proposed as a statistical measure of genre.[1] For instance, D. N. Freedman (1999: 30) suggested that "[A]ny piece of literature with a prose particle count of 2% or less is bound to be a poem." Andersen and Forbes (1983) confirmed the basic relationship between a low prose particle count and the poetic genre in a comprehensive statistical study, but the exact nature of the relationship remains unexplained and they concluded by stating that "The distribution of the phenomenon and its significance for the history of the Hebrew language and literature await attention" (1983: 167).

For the purposes of this paper, and because it is my main area of research, I will isolate the object marker את from the other prose particles. I am not particularly concerned with whether the prose particle count marks a threshold at which a piece of literature is no longer a poem, as I am somewhat suspect of the theoretical basis of this mechanical measure. Rather, to the extent that the frequency of use of the object marker does correlate to genre, the question is whether there are any valid linguistic reasons why poets would avoid the object marker. In this paper, I will propose two main reasons for the infrequent use of the object marker in poetry: dialect and discourse structure.

2. Dialect

In the typological method epitomized by Cross and Freedman, chronology has been seen as a major factor in the distinction between poetry and prose with respect to the prose particles. Cross (1998: 146) suggested that the prose particles only developed around 1200 BCE and, therefore,

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1.   The topic is discussed in Watson (2005: 54). Among others, see Hill (1983) who applied the method to Malachi, and C. Meyers and E. Meyers (1987) use the method in discussing Haggai and Zechariah 1–8.

would not have been included in the inventory of the early poetic traditions. Presumably, later poets would have attempted to imitate this style, however, Freedman (1977: 8) has suggested that, over time, the distinction between poetry and prose may have broken down such that a higher incidence of prose particles may indicate a later poem.

In Biblical Hebrew, the object marker את indicates the direct object of a transitive verb. As you learn in Hebrew 101, the object marker is restricted to definite objects, but it is not obligatory with a definite object. This is an example of a Differential Object Marking (DOM) system. In DOM languages, object marking is conditioned by a complex set of semantic and pragmatic factors, but the use of an object marker can typically be correlated to definiteness and/or animacy, which are represented as scalars.

Definiteness Scale
proper noun > definite noun > indefinite noun

Animacy Scale
proper noun > human-referring noun > nonhuman-referring noun

While the use of the object marker cannot be predicted by rule in most instances, the distribution of object marking along these scales in a reasonably sized corpus can function as something of a typological fingerprint for the particular language or dialect. The main questions for typological comparison are:

1. How frequent is object marking overall?
2. How far down the definiteness and/or animacy scales has object marking spread?
3. Have distinct subregions developed along these scales in which marking is invariable, optional, or absent?

I have applied these criteria to three categories of biblical texts in Table 1: the poems that are typically grouped as early,[2] a representative sample of 30 Psalms,[3] and Standard Biblical Hebrew

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2.   The set of early poems includes: Genesis 49, Exodus 15, Balaam's oracles in Numbers 23–24, Deuteronomy 32 and 33, Judges 5, Hanna's song in 1 Sam 2:1–10, 2 Samuel 22 = Psalm 18, and Psalm 68. The dialect of the language in these poems is commonly labeled Early Biblical Hebrew based on the presence of a cluster of features that are representative of an early stage of the language. See Pat-El and Wilson-Wright (2013) for a recent defense of the traditional position against Young, Rezetko, and Ehrensvärd (2008) and other similar works.
3.   This study included every fifth psalm (Psalm 1, 5, 10, 15, etc.).

prose.[4]

Table 1. Distribution of object marking in Biblical Hebrew by genre[5]

Category	Early Poetry	Selected Psalms	SBH Prose
Proper Noun	0%	35%[6]	> 99%
Definite *and* Human	1%	17%	88%
Definite *and* Nonhuman	< 1%	5%	67%
Indefinite	0%	0%	< 1%

The increase of marking across these three categories—from early poetry to the psalms and then standard prose—while maintaining a distribution weighted toward the top of the scales, fits quite nicely with what we would expect in the historical development of a DOM system.[7] Further, since the use of DOM is shared among the Northwest Semitic languages, the inscriptional material can also provide a chronological framework for comparison, as illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2. Distribution of object marking in Phoenican and Old Aramaic by period

Category	10th–9th century[8]	8th century[9]	5th Century[10]
Proper Noun	N/A	75%	100%
Definite *and* Human	0%	20%	71%
Definite *and* Nonhuman	0%	5%	32%
Indefinite	0%	0%	0%

Here we see a similar increase in the frequency of object marking from one historical period to the next. The general absence of marking in the early biblical poetry reflects an early stage of the language in which DOM had only just begun to emerge, while the system in SBH prose represents a mature and stable DOM system, which is largely maintained in LBH. From a

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4. Data for SBH prose come from Bekins (2014a) based on a random sample of about 1100 transitive clauses.
5. Note that this represent the percentage of objects marked per total number of objects in the category. For instance, of the proper nouns that occured in the grammatical role of object, 35% (12/34) were explicitly marked by את while the remaining 65% (22/34) were left unmarked.
6. Note that this count includes eight examples of the idiomatic הַלְלוּ־יָהּ, which skew the ratio lower. Omitting these objects increases the frequency of marking for proper nouns to 46% (12/26).
7. For discussion, see Bossong (1991, 162–63), Aissen (2003, 471–72)
8. This category includes Old Byblian (Ahiram, Yehimilk, etc., c.1000 BCE), Standard Phoenician (Kulamuwa, c. 825 BCE) and Old Aramaic (Tel Dan and Tel Fakherye, both late 9th century) inscriptions.
9. This category includes Standard Phoenician (Azatiwada, c. 740–710 BCE) and Old Aramaic (Zakkur, c. 800-775 BCE; Sefire, mid-8th Century BCE; Bar Rakkib, c. 730 BCE; and Nerab, c. 700 BCE) inscriptions.
10. This category includes Byblian (Yehawmilk, 5th century) and Standard Phoenician (Tabnit, c.500–450 BCE) and Eshmunazor (mid-5th century).

typological persepctive, therefore, the system represented in the selection of psalms would seem to represent a middle stage of development.

What is interesting about DOM as a typological indicator is that the use of the object marker is not governed by mechanical rules, but it is influenced by underlying semantic and pragmatic factors, which, I might add, are not readily apparent even to the native speaker. Consequently, unlike a frozen idiom or an archaic form, the proper use of the object marker cannot be easily imitated by simply copying the style of an earlier work. To put it differently, if the presence of object markers in biblical poetry were a result of a breakdown in the formal boundary between poetry and prose, then I would expect a general suppression of marking in imitation of the earlier style with random slip-ups here and there or an obvious pattern that betrays the archaism.

For instance, the first colon of 2 Sam 22:8 reads וְאֶת־עַם עָנִי תּוֹשִׁיעַ "a humble people you save," while the corresponding colon in Psalm 18:28 reads כִּי־אַתָּה עַם־עָנִי תּוֹשִׁיעַ "Indeed, as for you, a humble people you save." The presence of the object marker in 2 Samuel is generally considered to be influenced by the prose context of the poem, and it is clearly a mistake since the object עַם עָנִי is indefinite. Another interesting example of clear archaism may be found in the Hodayot from Qumran, which intentionally imitate the biblical poetic style. While the object marker is infrequent in these poems, a brief scan shows that it is found disproportionately in two constructions that are conspicious since they are marked ubiquitously in bibical prose: headless relatives (את אשר ...see 1QHᵃ 4:33, 5:28) and univerally quantifed phrases (את כול ...see 1QHᵃ 5:25, 6:21, 8:27).

In contrast, the distribution of object marking in the psalms is not random, but it follows the definiteness and animacy scales as we would expect in a normally functioning DOM system. This statement requires nuance, of course, as these poems come from diverse times and do not represent a single homogenous dialect. The pattern of object marking in any individual poem may indeed appear somewhat random. In the selected set of psalms, however, it is generally the case that object marking follows the definiteness and animacy hierarchies within the individual poems themselves. For instance, Psalm 80 is the only example in which a lone nonhuman referring object is marked without an object occuring higher on the scale, such as a proper noun or human-referring phrase, also marked in the same psalm.

In short, the pattern of the increase of object marking from early poetry to the psalms reflects the natural development of a DOM system, simply at a rate that is lagging behind the standard prose dialect by a century or two. Consequently, the lack of object marking in poetry may be related more strongly to the fact that poets often work with features of nonstandard dialects than to some

formal rule of classical poetry that prohibits or discourages object marking.

Indeed, within the Northwest Semitic languages themselves we can observe similar DOM systems that are developing at different rates. In the previous chart I only included the Phoenician and Aramaic inscriptions, but there is also evidence of DOM from Moabite and Hebrew inscriptions. This is significant since on the continuum of Northwest Semitic dialects, Garr (1985) has shown that Moabite and Hebrew are more closely related to each other than to Phoenician or Aramaic, which form the poles of the continuum.

Figure 1. Dialect continuum in first-millennium NWS (Garr 1985: 229)

Stand. Phoen.	Ammon.	Edom.	Hebrew	Moab.	Deir Alla	Aramaic

Indeed, one of the shared innovations connecting Moabite and Hebrew is the use of the reduced morphological form of the object marker את with elision of intervocalic /y/ (Garr 1985: 228; cf. Phoenician and Aramaic אית). Further, while the use of the narrative preterite (i.e., *wayyiqtol*) is largely replaced by the perfect in most other NWS languages, the Mesha Inscription is characterized by the frequent use of this verbal form that also characterizes biblical narrative.[11] These narrative preterites are concentrated in the first major section of the inscription (lines 5–21a), which presents an extended sequential narrative of Mesha's military victories. As Table 3 illustrates, the distribution of object marking in the 7th–6th century Hebrew Inscriptions matches SBH prose. Somewhat unexpectedly, however, the frequency and distribution of marking in the sequential narrative portion of the 9th century Mesha Inscription is relatively similar.

Table 3. Distribution of object marking in Moabite narrative and Hebrew inscriptions

Category	Moabite Narrative (9th Century)	Hebrew Inscriptions (7th–6th Century)
Proper Noun	100%	100%
Definite *and* Human	75%	91%
Definite *and* Nonhuman	67%	60%
Indefinite	0%	0%

I would tentatively suggest two conclusions at this point. First, if we extrapolate based on the

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11.   The Tel Dan inscription makes frequent use of the narrative preterite, but, unfortunately, the object phrases fall in the breaks so that the distribution of object marking is uncertain. There are also three occurences of the narrative preterite in the Zakkur inscription.

close relationship between Moabite and Hebrew, it seems likely that the DOM system in both of these southern languages was more innovative than the comparably conservative system in Standard Phoenician and Old Aramaic. Which is to say, were we to find a Hebrew narrative from the late 9th or early eighth century in the ground, I would expect a well developed system including frequent marking of proper nouns and many marked nonhuman referring definite objects. Second, while object marking is regular in the first section of the Mesha Inscription, it is completely absent from the second portion of the inscription, which lists Mesha's domestic building projects. Notably, this includes several unmarked proper nouns. In an article soon to appear (Bekins 2014b), I have argued that the stark distinction in the use of object marking within the two major sections of the Mesha Inscription is best attributed to genre. While this second section is not poetry proper, the absence of marking attests to the possibility that two different DOM systems could coexist within a single language community.

3. Discourse Structure

There are a number of reasons why poets might work with features from nonstandard or peripheral dialects. Indeed, poetry often defines itself in contrast to prose, which the Russian formalists attributed to defamiliarization. While the focus of the literature has been on the relatively infrequent use of object marking in poetry, however, the evidence from the Mesha Inscription suggests that, perhaps, we should instead focus first on the frequent use of object marking in biblical prose. Namely, what is it about prose, particularly narrative, that might encourage the use of object marking? I would like to suggest that there is a fundamental difference in the basic discourse structure of prose and poetry that makes prose much more fertile ground for the emergence and development of object marking systems.

This idea can be illustrated by comparing the role of the tent peg in the respective accounts of the encounter between Jael and Sisera in Judges 4 and 5. Judges 4:21 is typical of biblical narrative. A chain of narrative preterites are used to recount a series of events involving participants who interact with each other:

וַתִּקַּח יָעֵל אֵשֶׁת־חֶבֶר אֶת־יְתַד הָאֹהֶל וַתָּשֶׂם אֶת־הַמַּקֶּבֶת בְּיָדָהּ וַתָּבוֹא אֵלָיו בַּלָּאט וַתִּתְקַע אֶת־הַיָּתֵד בְּרַקָּתוֹ וַתִּצְנַח בָּאָרֶץ וְהוּא־נִרְדָּם וַיָּעַף וַיָּמֹת
"But Jael wife of Heber took **the tent peg** and took the hammer in her hand, and went softly to him and drove **the peg** into his temple, and **it** went down into the ground, meanwhile he was sleeping soundly for he was weary, and he died" (Judg 4:21)

Like Chekov's proverbial gun, note how the section begins by introducing a tent peg and ends

with that tent peg pinning the slain Sisera to the ground. In this manner, the inanimate tent peg is elevated to almost equal importance with Sisera as a participant in the sequence. In the poem (Judg 5:26), however, the tent peg is introduced but never mentioned again.

יָדָהּ לַיָּתֵד תִּשְׁלַחְנָה וִימִינָהּ לְהַלְמוּת עֲמֵלִים
וְהָלְמָה סִיסְרָא מָחֲקָה רֹאשׁוֹ וּמָחֲצָה וְחָלְפָה רַקָּתוֹ

"She put her hand to **the tent peg**
and her right hand to a workman's mallet;
she struck Sisera a blow,
she crushed his head,
she shattered and pierced his temple." (Judg 5:26)

Rather than referencing the tent peg, the second line of the poem plays on the staccato rhythm of the hammer with the short parallel phrases וְהָלְמָה סִיסְרָא מָחֲקָה רֹאשׁוֹ וּמָחֲצָה וְחָלְפָה רַקָּתוֹ.

Indeed, when we compare the distribution of marking in the two chapters, you will note that there is an obvious difference in the types of objects that occur in the narrative and the poem:

Table 4. Comparison of object marking in Judges 4 and 5

Category	Judges 4 (Narrative)		Judges 5 (Poetry)	
	Marked/Total	% Marked	Marked/Total	% Marked
Proper Noun	11/11	100%	0/4	0%
Definite and Human	1/1	100%	0/2	0%
Definite and Nonhuman	5/7	71%	0/7	0%
Indefinite	0/2	0%	0/10	0%

Over half the objects in the narrative are proper nouns compared to only four of the objects in the poem, two of which occur in the refrain בָּרְכוּ יְהוָה (Judg 5:2, 9). This is not because the poem lacks named characters. Deborah, Barak, Jael, and Sisera are all present, but they are consistently found in the grammatical role of subject rather than object. In short, the poet seems to avoid having two major participants interacting directly with each other in the same clause. Instead, almost half the objects in the poem are indefinite nouns which make only brief appearances playing insignificant roles. Consider, for instance the interaction of Jael and Sisera previous to the tent peg incident:

מַיִם שָׁאַל חָלָב נָתָנָה בְּסֵפֶל אַדִּירִים הִקְרִיבָה חֶמְאָה
"He asked water; she gave milk,
in a lordly bowl she brought curd." (Judg 5:25)

Similar results are obtained when comparing the narrative in Exodus 14 with the Song of the Sea in Exodus 15, in which not a single proper noun occurs as an object.

Table 5. Comparison of object marking in Exodus 14 and 15

Category	Exodus 14 (Narrative)		Exodus 15 (Poetry)	
	Marked/Total	% Marked	Marked/Total	% Marked
Proper Noun	8/8	100%	0/0	0%
Definite *and* Human	1/1	100%	0/2	0%
Definite *and* Nonhuman	18/20	90%	0/4	0%
Indefinite	0/1	0%	0/6	0%

This basic difference in discourse structure is highly relevant to object marking. Contrary to expectation, the primary function of object marking is not to help the audience distinguish the grammatical object from the subject. Rather, object marking has a discourse-pragmatic motivation that is related to the audience's need to organize and track the various referents that are under discussion within a text. This derives from an association between the grammatical roles of subject and object and the pragmatic roles of topic and secondary topic. In general, the topic of a sentence can be defined as what the sentence is about, and the referent of the topic phrase must represent known information. A sentence can also involve a secondary topic, however, which can be illustrated by the following mini-discourse (Lambrecht 1994: 148).

> a. Whatever became of **John**?
> b. **He** married **Rosa**,
> c. but **he** didn't really love **her**.

A referent for John is introduced in sentence (a) and fills the role of topic in sentence (b). Rosa is then introduced in sentence (b). Sentence (c), however, is about Rosa almost as much as it is about John, and she is referenced using an unaccented pronoun. While John is the more salient participant overall, Rosa may be considered a secondary topic in this final sentence. You will also note that Rosa is expressed as the grammatical object in both sentences (b) and (c).

Object Marking often begins with objects having referents that fill the pragmatic role of topic or secondary topic. As the system develops, this connection may weaken, and marking may spread to other objects having semantic and pragmatic features in common with their topical counterparts (Dalrymple and Nikolaeva 2011: 221). For instance, proper nouns and human-referring nouns are most likely to be marked as objects because they are most likely to play prominent roles within texts as characters. In my research, I have also found a strong correlation between topicality and object marking in Biblical Hebrew prose. Namely, object phrases with

referents that persist throughout the text are much more likely to be marked than those with referents that are mentioned only once then dropped.

Table 6. Distribution of object marking with respect to topicality in SBH prose (Bekins 2014)[12]

Topicality	% Marked
High (discouse-old *and* persistent)	100%
Medium (discourse-old *or* persistent)	77%
Low (discourse-new *and* isolated)	55%

Despite being inanimate, for instance, the referent for יְתַד הָאֹהֶל 'the tent peg' in Judges 4:21 is highly topical and the referent is expressed twice as a marked object. This concept can also be illustrated by the referent for העיר 'the city (i.e., Shechem)' in the following example from Judg 9:45.

וַאֲבִימֶלֶךְ נִלְחָם בָּעִיר כֹּל הַיּוֹם הַהוּא וַיִּלְכֹּד אֶת־הָעִיר וְאֶת־הָעָם אֲשֶׁר־בָּהּ הָרָג וַיִּתֹּץ אֶת־הָעִיר וַיִּזְרָעֶהָ מֶלַח:
"And Abimelech fought **against the city** all that day. He captured **the city** and killed the people who were **in it**. He razed **the city**. He sowed **it** with salt." (Judg 9:45)

In contrast, objects that have been moved to the preverbal position, such as the following sequence of fronted objects in 2 Kgs 8:12, are marked less than half the time in biblical prose.

מִבְצְרֵיהֶם תְּשַׁלַּח בָּאֵשׁ וּבַחֻרֵיהֶם בַּחֶרֶב תַּהֲרֹג וְעֹלְלֵיהֶם תְּרַטֵּשׁ וְהָרֹתֵיהֶם תְּבַקֵּעַ
"**Their fortresses** you will set on fire,
and **their young men** you will kill with the sword
and **their little ones** you will dash in pieces
and **their pregnant women** you will tear open." (2 Kings 8:12)

This correlation is counterintuitive if object marking primarily functions to differentiate the object from the subject since we would then expect objects occurring in the noncanonical position to be frequently marked. This type of structure is characteristicaly disjunctive, however, and it is often used to introduce a group of referents that form a set. Each clause introduces a new member of the set, and no one member persists in the immediately following text. Further, we tend to find such structures as summary statements at boundaries within narrative or dialogue. The lack of marking here is strongly related to the low topicality of these referents.

In summary, discourse structure is a significant factor for object marking. Narrative texts provide

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12. Note that this table is restricted to definite common nouns, for which object marking is optional in SBH prose.

a more fertile ground for the development and use of DOM due to the fact that they rely more heavily on participant tracking than poems. Narrative cohesion is created by threading multiple referents in and out of the storyline, and these participants often occur in the grammatical role of object. As illustrated by the poems in Judges 5 and Exodus 15, however, poets seem to avoid such direct interaction between prominent participants, and the vast majority of object phrases in these two poems fall at the bottom of the hierarchies, being either indefinite or definite but nonhuman.

4. Summary and Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to suggest a more nuanced explanation for the distribution of object marking within biblical poetry, which accounts for both the diachronic spread of object marking within the language as a whole and the distinct characteristics of narrative and poetry. The early poetry reflects a period in which Differential Object Marking is emerging within Northwest Semitic. In this stage, however, it is the distinct needs of narrative related to participant tracking that is driving the innovation. This more developed DOM system seems to have been integrated into the standard dialect within Hebrew and Moabite, while the use of object marking may have remained more conservative in nonstandard or peripheral dialects, as it is in Old Aramaic and Standard Phoenician. The distribution of object marking within the selected group of psalms reflects such a less developed system, in which marking is much less frequent overall but follows the animacy and definiteness scales quite naturally. Further, the prominence of parallelism in the classical poetic style, and the consequent insignificance of participant tracking, reduces the need for object marking within the genre in general. Consequently, to the extent that an increased frequency of object marking correlates to later poetry, I suspect that this may be best explained as the natural development of DOM within these poetic dialects and/or the byproduct of a shift away from the classical poetic structure to some other valid poetic structure that relies less directly on strict parallelismus membrorum.

For these reasons, the correlation of object marking with the poetic genre, particularly in later poetry, requires a more precise method that considers issues of dialect and discourse structure. For instance, Psalms 134 and 137 scored 16% and 12% respectively on the prose particle count in Andersen and Forbes' (1983: 176) statistical study, well above Freedman's 2% threshold, and these scores seem to have been particularly influenced by the use of the object marker. Indeed, as illustrated in Table 7, the distribution of object marking in these late poems is comparable to the standard dialect found in prose.

Table 7. Distribution of object marking in Psalms 134 and 137

Category	Marked/Total	% Marked
Proper Noun	4/4	100%
Definite *and* Human	1/1	100%
Definite *and* Nonhuman	3/4	75%
Indefinite	0/2	0%

It is clear from the opening line of Psalm 137, however, that this is a poem as these lines scan easily as verse.

עַל נַהֲרוֹת ׀ בָּבֶל שָׁם יָשַׁבְנוּ גַּם־בָּכֵינוּ בְּזָכְרֵנוּ אֶת־צִיּוֹן

> By the rivers of Babylon—
>> there we sat down and there we wept
>> when we remembered Zion. (Psa 137:1)

The poet, however, seems to be quite comfortable working with the DOM system of the standard dialect, and this may be related to discourse structure. Note how the marked object אֶת־צִיּוֹן from the end of the first line persists as a referent at the end of the stanza.

וְתוֹלָלֵינוּ שִׂמְחָה שִׁירוּ לָנוּ מִשִּׁיר צִיּוֹן

> and our tormentors asked for mirth, saying,
>> "Sing us one of the songs of **Zion**!" (Psa 137:3b)

Malachi 1 is another interesting example. This post-exilic text has been argued to be prose based on the prose particle count method (Hill 1983: 78), and it is rendered as prose in the NRSV. The distribution of the object marker in this text does match quite closely with prose, as illustrated by Table 8 below.

Table 8. Distribution of object marking in Malachi 1

Category	Marked/Total	% Marked
Proper Noun	2/2	100%
Definite *and* Human	N/A	N/A
Definite *and* Nonhuman	5/8	62%
Indefinite	0/9	0%

The first four marked objects occur, however, in lines with a fairly standard poetic structure, and most of the chapter can be scanned as verse based on "the rule of twos and threes" (See Petersen 1995: 165ff).

וָאֹהַ֖ב אֶֽת־יַעֲקֹֽב׃ וְאֶת־עֵשָׂ֖ו שָׂנֵ֑אתִי
וָאָשִׂ֤ים אֶת־הָרָיו֙ שְׁמָמָ֔ה וְאֶת־נַחֲלָת֖וֹ לְתַנּ֥וֹת מִדְבָּֽר

"I have loved **Jacob**

    but I have hated **Esau**

I have made **his hill country** a desolation

    and **his heritage** a desert for jackals." (Mal 1:2b-3)

בֵּ֛ן יְכַבֵּ֥ד אָ֖ב וְעֶ֣בֶד אֲדֹנָ֑יו וְאִם־אָ֣ב אָ֣נִי אַיֵּ֣ה כְבוֹדִ֗י וְאִם־אֲדוֹנִ֤ים אָנִי֙ אַיֵּ֣ה מוֹרָאִ֔י
אָמַ֣ר ׀ יְהוָ֣ה צְבָא֗וֹת לָכֶם֙ הַכֹּֽהֲנִים֙ בּוֹזֵ֣י שְׁמִ֔י וַאֲמַרְתֶּ֕ם בַּמֶּ֥ה בָזִ֖ינוּ אֶת־שְׁמֶֽךָ

A son honors his father,

    and servants their master.

If then I am a father,

    where is the honor due me?

And if I am a master,

    where is the respect due me?

says the LORD of hosts to you,

    O priests, who despise my name.

Yet you say, "How have we despised your name?" (Mal 1:6)

As in Psalm 137, the use of object marking may be influenced by the importance of participant tracking for the rhetoric of this text. Note how the referent of the marked object phrase אֶת־שְׁמֶךָ at the end of verse 6 persists prominently in verses 11–12:

כִּ֣י מִמִּזְרַח־שֶׁ֜מֶשׁ וְעַד־מְבוֹא֗וֹ גָּד֤וֹל שְׁמִי֙ בַּגּוֹיִ֔ם
וּבְכָל־מָק֗וֹם מֻקְטָ֥ר מֻגָּ֛שׁ לִשְׁמִ֖י וּמִנְחָ֣ה טְהוֹרָ֑ה
כִּֽי־גָד֤וֹל שְׁמִי֙ בַּגּוֹיִ֔ם אָמַ֖ר יְהוָ֥ה צְבָאֽוֹת
וְאַתֶּ֖ם מְחַלְּלִ֣ים אוֹת֑וֹ בֶּאֱמָרְכֶ֗ם שֻׁלְחַ֤ן אֲדֹנָי֙ מְגֹאָ֣ל ה֔וּא
וְנִיב֖וֹ נִבְזֶ֥ה אָכְלֽוֹ

For from the rising of the sun

    to its setting

    my name is great among the nations,

 and in every place

    incense is offered to **my name**,

    and a pure offering;

for **my name** is great among the nations,

    says the LORD of hosts.

But you profane **it**

    when you say, "the Lord's table

    it is polluted,

    and its food may be despised." (Mal 1:11–12)

In summary, determining genre in this chapter is more complicated than simply assigning the text as a whole to either prose or poetry based on a count of object markers. Authors are quite

adept at blending genres and forms and drawing from both standard and nonstandard dialects for their specific rhetorical goals. While the form of the text is properly a dialogue, it seems apparent to me that YHWH is speaking in a high style of verse. The use of object marking does not disqualify this late text as poetry but is a component of a different aspect of the rhetoric.

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