Complementation and Common Ground:
Discursive effects in Biblical Hebrew

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1   Introduction: Biblical Hebrew *kī*

Kī is a complementizer with many different uses: introducing object and subject clauses (1a) as well as causal (1b), temporal, conditional, adversative (1c), concessive, and resultative (1d) adverbials.

(1)   a.   *way-y-ā̊ḇō’-Ø*   *’ɛl hā̊ḡā̊r wat-t-ahar-Ø*   *wat-t-ērɛ’-Ø*   *kī   hā̊rā̊-ṯā̊*
and.PRET-3M-come-SG to Hagar and.PRET-F-conceive-3SG and.PRET-F-see-3SG KĪ conceive\PFV-3F.SG
'And he came into Hagar and she conceived, and she saw ***that*** she had conceived.'   (Gen. 16:4)

   b.   *way-y-ɛʿtar-Ø*   *yiṣḥā̊q l=yhwh   lənōḵaḥ   ’išt-ō   kī   ʿăqā̊r-ā̊   hī’*
and.PRET-3M-pray-SG Isaac   to=Yahweh on_behalf_of wife-his KĪ barren-F.SG she
'And Isaac prayed to Yahweh on behalf of his wife, ***since*** she was barren.'   (Gen. 25:21)

   c.   *way-y-ōrɛš-Ø*   *’ɛṯ hā̊=hᾱr kī lō’ lə=hōrīš   ’ɛṯ yōšəḇ-ē   hā̊=ʿɛmɛq*
and.PRET-3M-conquer-SG OBJ the=hill KĪ not to=conquer\INF OBJ inhabit\PTCP-M.PL.of the=plain
'And they conquered the hills, ***but*** could not conquer those living in the plains'   (Jdg. 1:19a)

   d.   *mah ḥaṭṭā̊’-ṯī   kī   ḏā̊laq-tā̊   ’aḥăr-ā̊y*
what sin\PFV-1SG KĪ chase\PFV-2M.SG behind-me
'How have I sinned ***that*** you have chased after me?'   (Gen. 31:36)

It is generally accepted that these are not homonymic but all derive from one Proto-Semitic lexeme, deictic **ka*. However, there is disagreement over the relation between the different uses. Previous approaches to explain all uses as synchronically "deictic" have failed (Schoors 1981; Muilenburg 1961). Diachronic accounts cannot be supported by the corpus, and effectively assume massive homonymy synchronically (e.g. Locatell 2017).

In this presentation we argue that:

1. Complementizers are often sensitive to **information status**
2. Biblical Hebrew *kī* is marked for use of **Common Ground**
3. The various syntactic/semantic functions are **pragmatically inferred**
4. The reference to Common Ground derives from a persistent [+**distal**] feature

(For more persistent spatial features, see the preview of Camil's thesis: tinyurl.com/PersistenceOfSpace)

2 Complementation and Common Ground

Causal *since* introduces not-at-issue content (2) and *for* can be used for parentheticals (3), while *because* is relatively unmarked.

(2) *Liz has left, **since** her coat is not on the rack.* (Charnavel 2017: 45)
    ⇒ Liz has left [at-issue]
    ⇒ Liz's coat is not on the rack [not-at-issue]
    ⇒ the absence of Liz's coat on the rack indicates that she left [not-at-issue]

(3) *An automatic timer would soon turn [the light] off, **for** we [Ladover Jews] do not tamper with electricity on Shabbos.*
    (Chaim Potok, 1990, *The gift of Asher Lev*)

In Staps & Rooryck (2023) we argued that English *that* is sensitive to **Common Ground**:

(4) a. *Bio industry is still allowed.*
    b. ***That** bio industry is still allowed!* (Staps & Rooryck 2023: 1204)

(5) a. *I always believed (**that**) the jury was bribed.* (Staps & Rooryck 2023: 1209)
    b. **(**That**) the jury was bribed, I always believed.* (Staps & Rooryck 2023: 1209)

(6) a. *I thought you might need some help.* (Bolinger 1972: 58)
    b. *I thought **that** you might need some help.* (Bolinger 1972: 58)

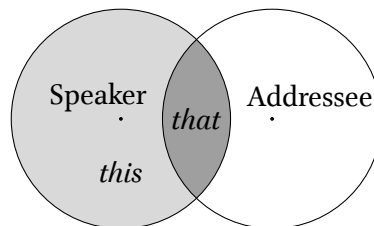We argued that this can be related to a persistent [+distal] feature, as in figure 1.

Figure 1   The information content tracked by the Speaker and Addressee. The intersection, the Common Ground, is seen as "far" from the Speaker (Staps & Rooryck 2023: 7).

Like demonstrative *that*, Semitic *ka is [+distal]. This is most easily seen in West Semitic demonstrative paradigms, e.g. Aramaic *ḏǝnā* 'this' vs. *ḏenāk* 'that' (Lipiński 2001: §36.37–44). This suggests the hypothesis that Hebrew *kī*, like complementizer *that*, marks Common Ground:

(7) English [+distal] demonstrative *that* → complementizer *that* marking Common Ground

    Semitic [+distal] particle *ka → Hebrew complementizer *kī* marking Common Ground

3 Accommodation and imposition

Presenting information as part of the Common Ground can have one of three **discursive effects** (Staps & Rooryck 2023). Most straightforwardly, *kī* can indeed introduce **discourse-old** information content:

(1a) *way-y-ǎḇō'-Ø   'ɛl hǎḡǎr wat-t-ahar-Ø   wat-t-ērɛ'-Ø   kī hǎrǎ-t̬ǎ̊*
    and.PRET-3M-come-SG to Hagar and.PRET-F-conceive-3SG and.PRET-F-see-3SG KĪ conceive\PFV-3F.SG
    'And he came into Hagar and she conceived, and she saw ***that*** she had conceived.' (Gen. 16:4)

In other cases the information is new, but unsurprising. It can be **accommodated** by the Addressee:

(8) *wa-y-əhī-Ø*   *kī* *zå̄qēn-Ø*   *yiṣḥå̄q* ... *way-y-iqrå̄ʾ-Ø*   *ʾεt̠* *ʿēśå̄w* *bən-ō*
     and.PRET-3M-be-SG KĪ be_old\PFV-3M.SG Isaac   ... and.PRET-3M-call-SG OBJ Esau   son-his
     'And ***when*** Isaac was old ..., he called Esau, his son.'   (Gen. 27:1)

When new information content cannot be accommodated, the Speaker can still **present it as** part of the Common Ground, thereby **imposing** it on the Common Ground:

(9) *t-ēḏaʿ-Ø*   *kī* *ʾitt-ī*   *t-ēṣēʾ-Ø*   *b̠=am=maḥănε*
     2-know\IPFV-M.SG KĪ with-me 2-go_out\IPFV-M.SG in=the=camp
     '(And Achish said to David:) "You should know ... ***that*** you will go out with me in battle."'   (1 Sam. 28:1)

These three types can all be seen as reference to the [+distal] area in figure 1:

- Discourse-old: refers to element in [+distal] area
- Discourse-new:
  - Typically: request to move from [−distal] to [+distal] (not presented as [+distal])
  - Accommodated: presented as [+distal] to mark assumption
  - Imposed: presented as [+distal] to mark imposition

4   Data

808 instances of *kī* in **narrative texts**, excluding one fossilized construction (16 times) and 5 ambiguous cases. All instances classified for **function** and **use of Common Ground**:
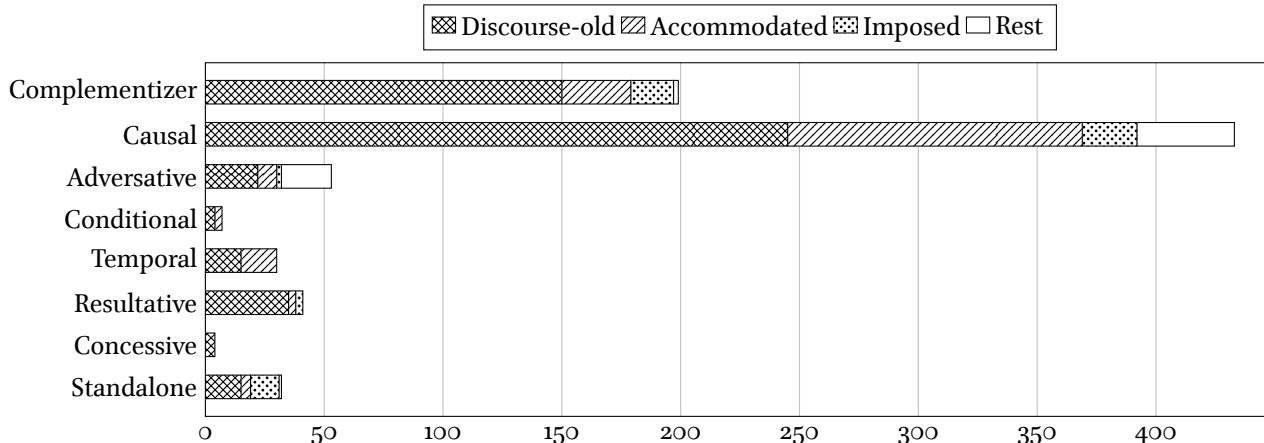

Figure 2   Types of reference to the Common Ground for each function of *kī*.

Two arguments for a Common Ground analysis of *kī*:

1. Exceptions fall almost entirely in two categories: causal and adversative. If these are (partly) lexicalized, the rest can be derived from context.
2. A comparison with other function words with similar functions shows that these occur less with reference to Common Ground.

5   Analysis

Complementizer *kī* occurs mostly with factive predicates ('see', 'know', 'inform' [rather than 'say'], 'witness', ...), which often refer to discourse-old information content. We can also compare with other complementation strategies, which are not marked for reference to Common Ground:

(1a) *way-y-ăḇō'-Ø*　　　*'εl hǎḡǎr wat-t-ahar-Ø*　　　*wat-t-ērε'-Ø*　　*kī hǎrǎ-ṯǎ*
　　and.PRET-3M-come-SG to Hagar and.PRET-F-conceive-3SG and.PRET-F-see-3SG KĪ conceive\PFV-3F.SG
　　'And he came into Hagar and she conceived, and she saw ***that*** she had conceived.'　　　　(Gen. 16:4)

(10) *way-y-iśśǎ'-Ø*　　　*'aḇrǎhǎm 'εṯ 'ēn-ǎyw*　　*way-y-ar'-Ø*　　***wə=hinnē-Ø***　　*'ayil 'aḥar*
　　and.PRET-3M-lift-SG Abraham OBJ eye-DU.his and.PRET-3M-see-SG **and=see.IMP-M.SG** ram behind

　　　nε'ĕḥaz-Ø　　　*b=as-səḇaḵ*　　*bə-qarn-ǎyw*
　　　hold\MID.PFV-3M.SG in=the=bush in=horn-PL.its
　　'As Abraham looked up, he saw—**and look!**—a ram behind [him] had been caught with its horns in a bush.'
　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　(Gen. 22:13)

(11) *way-y-ar'-Ø*　　　*'iššǎ*　　*rōḥεṣ-εṯ*　　*mē='al*　　*hag=gǎḡ*
　　and.PRET-3M-see-SG woman bathe\PTCP-F.SG from=on the=roof
　　'... and he saw a woman bathing (NP+PTCP) from upon the roof.'　　　　(2 Sam. 11:2)

Causal *kī* has many cases of accommodation ([12]; cf. English [2–3]). When the causal clause also includes new information, it is marked by particles like 'and look!' (13):

(12) *lō' n-ūḵal*　　　*... kī ḥεrpǎ*　　*hī' lǎ-nū*
　　not 1PL-be_able\IPFV ... KĪ disgrace it for-us
　　'We cannot (do this, giving our sister to a man who is uncircumcised), ***for*** it is a disgrace to us.'　　(Gen. 34:14)

(13) *qūm-ǎ*　　　*wə=n-a'ălε*　　　*ǎlē-hεm kī rǎ'ī-nū*　　*'εṯ hǎ='ǎrεṣ*　　***wə=hinnē-Ø***
　　stand_up\IMP-M.SG and=1PL-go_up\IPFV to-them KĪ see\PFV-1PL OBJ the=land(F) **and=see.IMP-M.SG**

　　　ṭōḇ-ǎ　　*mə'ōḏ*
　　　good-F.SG very
　　'(And the Danites returned to their brothers ... and said:) "Come on, let's go up against them, ***for*** we saw their land, ***and look***: it's very good!"'　　　　(Jdg. 18:9)

But there are relatively many exceptions, so the causal function must be lexicalized (a generalization of the causal function *with* reference to Common Ground, based on the high frequency of the causal function):

(1b) *way-y-ε'tar-Ø*　　　*yiṣḥǎq l=yhwh*　　*lənōḵaḥ*　　*'išt-ō*　　*kī 'ăqǎr-ǎ*　　*hī'*
　　and.PRET-3M-pray-SG Isaac to=Yahweh on_behalf_of wife-his KĪ barren-F.SG she
　　'And Isaac prayed to Yahweh on behalf of his wife, ***since*** she was barren(, and God heard his prayer and Rebekah his wife conceived.)'　　　　(Gen. 25:21)

The same is true for **adversative** *kī*, which probably developed from the causal function:

(14) not X, **because** Y > not X, **but** Y

(1c) *way-y-ōrεš-Ø*　　　*'εṯ hǎ=hǎr kī lō' lə=hōrīš*　　*'εṯ yōšəḇ-ē*　　　*hǎ='ēmεq*
　　and.PRET-3M-conquer-SG OBJ the=hill KĪ not to=conquer\INF OBJ inhabit\PTCP-M.PL.of the=plain
　　'And they conquered the hill country, ***but*** they could not conquer the people living in the plains'　　(Jdg. 1:19)

Conditional/temporal *kī* is more 'when' than 'if', and thus introduces a proposition that can easily be accommodated:

(15)   wa-y-əṣaw-Ø   ʾɛṯ   hǻ=riʾšōn   lē=ʾmōr   **kī**   y-ipəgåš-Ø-kǻ   ʿēśǻw
      and.PRET-3M-command-SG   OBJ   the=first   to=say\INF   **KĪ**   3M-meet\IPFV-SG-you.OBJ   Esau
      'He (Jacob) commanded the first [servant], saying, "#*If*/***When*** Esau meets you"'   (Gen. 32:18)

(16)   ʾǻḏǻm   **kī**   y-aqrīḇ-Ø   mikk-ɛm   qårbǻn   l=yhwh   min   hab=bəhēmǻ   min   hab=bǻqǻr
      man   **KĪ**   3M-present\IPFV-SG   from-you   offering   to=Yahweh   from   the=animals   from   the=herd

         ū=min   haṣ=ṣōʾn   t-aqrīḇ-ū   ʾɛṯ   qårban-ḵɛm   **ʾim**   ʿōlǻ   qårbǻn-ō   min
         or=from   the=flock   2-present\IPFV-M.PL   OBJ   offering-yours   **if**   burnt_offering   offering-his   from

         hab=bǻqǻr   zǻḵǻr   tǻmīm   y-aqrīḇ-Ø-ɛnnū
         the=herd   male   perfect   3M-present\IPFV-SG-it.OBJ
      '*If*/***When*** (*kī*) a man amongst you brings a sacrifice to Yahweh, you must bring your offer from the animals of the herd or the flock. *If*/*When (*ʾim*) it is a burnt offering from the herd, he shall offer a male without blemish.'
                                                      (Lev. 1:2–3)

Resultative *kī* refers to a result that is already under discussion, and thus refers to discourse-old information content (17), in contrast to other resultative markers (18):

(17)   mī   ʾǻnōḵī   ...   **kī**   ʾ-ɛhyɛ   ḥǻṯǻn   l=am=mɛlɛḵ
      who   I   ...   **KĪ**   1SG-be\IPFV   son_in_law   to=the=king
      '(Saul said to David: "Here is my oldest daughter Merab; I want to give her to you in marriage ...") But David said to Saul:) "Who am I ... ***that*** I should be the king's son-in-law?"'   (1 Sam. 18:18)

(18)   way-y-ōʾmɛr-Ø   ʾǎlē-hɛm   rəʾūḇēn   ...   **ləmaʿan**   haṣṣīl   ʾōṯ-ō   miy=yǻḏ-ǻm
      and.PRET-3M-say-SG   to-them   Reuben   ...   **in_order_to**   rescue\INF   OBJ-him   from=hand-theirs
      'But Reuben said to them, ("Don't shed blood; throw him into this pit ... but do not stretch out your hand against them,") ***in order to*** rescue him out of their hand'   (Gen. 37:22)

Concessive *kī*-clauses fit the hypothesis (20), but concessive clauses typically refer to discourse-old information content (19) so this doesn't say much:

(19)   ***Though*** *France did not win the World Championship, they did bring home a silver medal.*

(20)   **kī**   ʾattǻ   ʿǻśī-ṯǻ   ḇ=as=sǻṯɛr   wa=ʾǎnī   ʾ-ɛʿɛśɛ   ʾɛṯ   had=dǻḇǻr   haz=zɛ   nɛḡɛḏ   kål   yiśrǻʾɛl
      KĪ   you   do\PFV-2M.SG   in=the=secret   and=I   1SG-do\IPFV   OBJ   the=thing   the=this   before   all.of   Israel
      '***Though*** you have acted in secret, I will do this before all of Israel.'   (2 Sam. 12:12)

When used **standalone**, *kī* has one of three functions.

Type 1: exclamatives presuppose their propositional content (Zanuttini & Portner 2003), so they refer to the Common Ground (Staps & Rooryck 2023); cf. (4b).

(21)   **ʾim**   ʾ-ɛmṣǻʾ   ḇi=sḏōm   ḥǎmišš-īm   ṣaddīq-im   bə=ṯōḵ   hǻ=ʿīr
      outcry(F)-of   Sodom   and=Gomorrah   **KĪ**   be_great\PFV-3F.SG   and=sin(F)-theirs   **KĪ**

         wə-nǻśǻʾ-ṯī   lə=ḵål   ham=mǻqōm   ba=ʿǎḇūr-ǻm
         be_heavy\PFV-3F.SG   very
      '***That*** the outcry of/concerning Sodom and Gomorrah is so great! And ***that*** their sin is so heavy!'   (Gen. 18:20)

Type 2: oaths impose their content on the Common Ground; the Speaker makes a strong assertion:

(22)   *ḥay   yhwh   **kī**   ḇεn   mā̊wεṯ   hā̊=ʾīš   hā̊=ʿōśε-Ø   zō̊ṯ*
       life.of Yahweh Kɪ̄ son.of death   the=man the=do\PTCP-M.SG this
       'By the life of Yahweh, (***that***) the man who does this is a dead man!'   (2 Sam. 12:5)

Type 3: conducive/rhetorical questions also carry an implicit assertion, which may be accommodated or imposed:

(23)   *hă=kī   qā̊rā̊ʾ-Ø   šəm-ō   yaʿăqōḇ way-y-a'qəḇ-Ø-ēnī   zε   p̄a'ăm-ayim*
       Q=Kɪ̄ call\PFV-3M.SG name(M)-his Jacob   and.PRET-3M-deceive-SG-me this time-DU
       '***Isn't*** his name Jacob? He has deceived me these two times!'   (Gen. 27:36)

6   Biblical Hebrew *kī*: summary & conclusions

The function of *kī* can be described as:

1. Referring to Common Ground

    (a) As a complementizer introducing subject and object clauses

    (b) When connecting two clauses: introducing adverbials (causal, adversative, conditional, temporal, resultative, concessive)

    (c) When standalone: marking exclamatives, oaths, and conducive/rhetorical questions

2. Lexicalized causal meaning ('because', 'for', etc.)

3. Lexicalized adversative meaning ('but'), developed from the causal function

The function in context can easily be deduced based on syntactic and pragmatic clues.

7   Discussion

- Apparent high degree of polysemy of *kī* can be reduced to **Common Ground** (incl. accommodation and imposition)
- These are general notions that we also need for Germanic and Romance complementizers (Staps & Rooryck 2023), but here we extended them to **adverbial functions**
- Common Ground can be linked to a [+**distal**] feature because the Addressee is "far" from the Speaker

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