Function of the Waw HaHipuch

The waw hahipuch (also called the waw conversive or waw of reversal) is a function of the waw that was lost, to a degree, for a time and only recently, in the grand scheme of the language, came to be fully understood (first expounded in 1803 by Hebrew-autodidact Granville Sharp).

We must keep in mind that **Biblical Hebrew does not have verbal tense** (time of action); it has verbal aspect (kind of action, e.g. completed, incomplete, continuous, etc.). Thus, calling a waw hahipuch/conversive + imperfect a "preterite" (as some grammars do) is incorrect, since any verb form can operate in any time signature. For example, an action can be understood as complete (the value of a perfect verb) in the past, present, or future; or as ongoing (the value of an iterative) in all three time signatures as well... so the imperfect is not always future tense, the perfect is not always past tense, etc. **Context is king.** Of the use of the term "preterite" in Biblical Hebrew, Sharp says, "Never was a plain, regular, and most elegant system of syntax so shackled and confounded with barbarous terms" (p. 5).

Distinctives of the Waw HaHipuch

1. A waw hahipuch/conversive prefixed to an imperfect verb (often called a "wayyiqtol" construction) will look just like an imperfective with a prefixed waw conjunctive, waw disjunctive, etc... except in the Qal of weak verbs and in the Hiphil of all verbs. In these forms, you will notice that the accent will shift from its expected syllable to the last syllable, as indicated in the Masoretic text by the placement of the trope—which almost always marks the stressed syllable (Williams, §176; Sharp, 8).

2. The first vowel on the waw hahipuch/conversive + imperfect form will generally be a *pathah*, but on the waw hahipuch/conversive + perfect will generally be a *shewa*.

3. In the case of a waw hahipuch/conversive + imperfect, the initial yod of the imperfective tends to be dageshed, i.e. doubled, in a waw hahipuch/conversive construction, but undageshed/undoubled normally (Sharp, 6-7). Thank you, Masoretes!

4. There are no attested instances of waw hahipuch/conversive + perfect in the Pual, Hophal, or Hithpael stems in the Hebrew Bible. Therefore, a waw on a perfect of those three stems will never (in a Biblical text) be a waw hahipuch/conversive.

5. In interrogative structures, the waw will never function as a waw hahipuch/conversive on an imperfect or volative verb form, but will regularly be found to do so on a perfect form (Sharp, 15).

6. A waw on a volative verb or an imperfect verb following a volative never functions as a waw hahipuch/conversive; the waw in those cases must be understood/read as conjunctive, disjunctive, etc. This is not true, however, for a waw on a perfect following a volative—which may function as a waw hahipuch/conversive (Sharp, 15; Arnold & Choi, 87).

7. In a string of verbs where the first bears a waw hahipuch/conversive, the waw on the rest of the verbs following it may serve simultaneously as conjunctive and conversive, and thus both alter the aspect of the verb and carry a translation—generally "and" (Sharp, 10). E.g. Sh'muel Aleph 7:16.

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Uses of the Hebrew Waw

1. Waw Conjunctive/Coordinative: simply joining words, phrases, or clauses ("and").

2. Waw Disjunctive: marks a break in the sequence of a narrative.
   a. *waw parenthetic* ("now") to introduce an aside
   b. *waw temporal* ("while," "when")
   c. *waw causative* ("because")
   d. *waw concessive* ("although," etc.)
   e. *waw adversative* ("but")
   f. *waw regenerative* ("now")

3. Waw Precative: *waw conjunctive + volative* (command form) may be translated "in order that," "so that," or "and then" to show purpose or result.

4. Waw Consecutive: expresses narrative sequence ("and then," "so then," or "consequently"). A verb with *waw consecutive* may also sometimes be translated as a subordinate clause ("when").

5. Waw Explicative: used to set off an epexegetical phrase, translated "even," "namely," or "that is." e.g. Malachi 3:1 "YHWH whom you seek, namely the Messenger of the covenant."

6. Waw Emphatic: "even," "especially" e.g. Malachim Aleph 11:1 "Now King Shlomo loved many foreign women, especially the daughter of the Pharaoh.

7. Waw Instrumental: ¨with¨ e.g. Sh'muel Aleph 6:11 "and the box with the golden mice...."

8. Waw of Apodosis: following an if, "then" e.g. Bereshith 3:5 "...then your eyes will be opened."

9. Waw Adjunctive: "also" e.g. Malachim Aleph 2:22 "Also ask for him the kingdom."

10. Waw Hahipuch/Conversive: no independent translation value, just serves to change the sense of a perfect to an imperfect or vice versa, though it can be found to be serving in this function and another simultaneously, in which case it *would* have translation value.

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