

# Psalm 115: Syntax and Versification

**Dr. Harm van Grol**

This paper contains an analysis of the text-syntactic and prosodic structures of Psalm 115. We will present the structures and comment on the choices made.

## Contents

- 1 Text-syntactic analysis
  - 1.1 The first part, verses 1-8
  - 1.2 The second part, verses 9-13
  - 1.3 The third part, verses 14-18
- 2 Prosodic analysis
  - 2.1 The first strophe, verses 1-3
  - 2.2 Two strophes about the idols, vss 4-6.7-8
  - 2.3 The first stanza, verses 1-8
  - 2.4 The second stanza, verses 9-13
  - 2.5 The third stanza, verses 14-18
  - 2.6 The prosodic structure of Psalm 115
  - 2.7 The communicative domains of Ps 115

## Attachments

- Psalm 115: Text-syntactic hierarchy
- Psalm 115: Participants & communicative domains
- Psalm 115: Prosodic hierarchy
- Bibliography

## Text-syntactic analysis

The psalm contains three volitive passages, the imperative clauses in verses 1 and 9-11 and the jussive clauses in verses 14-15(!). Provided with the vocatives *YHWH* and *Israel*, and the pseudo-vocative *you and your sons*,<sup>1</sup> they are strongly deictic and draw the attention. They refer to the moment of speaking, in contrast to the rest of the text, which offers reflections and expectations. The volitives mark the beginning of the three main parts of the psalm.

There is no text-syntactic connection between the three parts. Of course, (1) lexical repetitions concatenate the three sections into one coherent text.<sup>2</sup> Even the parallel between clauses 8.2 and 9.1 is not of a text-syntactic nature. Verb and preposition are repeated (בַּמַּחֲזֵה בֵּי), and one may detect some phonemic play between subject and vocative (יִשְׂרָאֵל // כֹּל אֲשֶׁר), but the clauses do not have the same text-syntactic level, and verb form and clause type are different, so that the clauses are not parallel in a text-syntactic sense. And, of course, (2) participants *YHWH* and *WE* are present in all three parts, but the communicative domains are in a constant state of change and with them the renominalizations of participant *WE*.

Because there is no text-syntactic connection between the three parts, while the text is evidently a unit, the question arises how to present the text-syntactic hierarchy. We will add a level zero and connect the three parts to this level. In this way we avoid fragmenting the text on the one hand and creating forced links (mother\daughter pairs) on the other.

## The first part, verses 1-8

We will start with a discussion of paragraphs and communicative domains and then continue with the syntactic details.

First some expectations and definitions.<sup>3</sup> A paragraph is marked by syntactic continuity. The clauses of a paragraph are connected by subordination, parallel, close, or sequential syntax.

- parallel syntax: clauses have the same clause-constituents, verb-form, and subject-participant.

<sup>1</sup> The conspicuous and, in a sense, redundant phrase עלֵיכֶם ועַל־בְּנֵיכֶם is in apposition to the complement עלֵיכֶם.

<sup>2</sup> See below: *The prosodic structure of Psalm 115* and the third attachment.

<sup>3</sup> See the meta-analysis of the text-syntactic results in our analysis of Psalm 116: *Psalm 116: Text-syntactic structure*.

- close syntax: the same verb-form and subject-participant; nominal // participle clause-pairs.
- sequential syntax: subject-object switch, and eventually a sequential *waw* or a strong repetition; sequence of e.g. situation > action, situation > experience, action > reaction.

Subordinated clauses may be bridged by parallel, close or sequential syntax.

Paragraph boundaries are marked by syntactic discontinuity. A syntactic break implies the absence of subordination, parallel, close, or sequential syntax and may coincide with strong deixis, a macro-syntactic signal, or a *new* subject-participant.

- Syntactic breaks may occur within the paragraph for non-syntactic reasons.

The first part has two paragraphs, verses 1-3.4-8. Clause 2.1 interrupts the syntactic flow in many respects: a new subject-participant, a new clause type, etc. It could be the start of a new paragraph, but I am not convinced, because clauses 2.1-2 are a stereotypical argument to persuade God to act in behalf of the supplicant. Compare Joel 2,17 and Psalm 79,10. The appeal in verse 1 and the argument in verse 2 belong together. The word אלהיהם in clause 2.2 is an essential link between appeal and argument. It refers to the participants of verse 1 YHWH and WE. The syntactic break may be marked by an asterisk (\*).

Clause 4 shows no marks of continuity and has a new subject-participant, עצביהם, *their idols*, so that it is the start of a new paragraph. The suffix of עצביהם refers to הגוים in clause 2.1, but that clause may hardly be called the mother-clause of clause 4, because there is no real syntactic relation. In our analysis of Psalm 116, we called this kind of vague connection between paragraphs thin syntax. We mark it with an asterisk.

The first part has two communicative domains, which, by the way, do not coincide with the paragraphs, verses 1-2.3-8. The whole psalm is spoken by one speaker who belongs to participant WE. In verses 1-2 the addressee is YHWH. He is not addressed in verse 2, but there is no new addressee mentioned, and the layered question is a stereotypical one and elsewhere part of an appeal to God (Joel 2,17; Psalm 79,10). Of course, the embedded question, clause 2.2, has its own communicative domain. The next domain starts in clause 3.1. YHWH is no longer the addressee, in fact, there is no addressee mentioned until clause 9.1.

Verse 1 consists of three clauses with backwards ellipsis.<sup>4</sup> The particle כִּי cannot be a subordinator here, because the clauses are parallel. It is used as a restrictive clausal adverb (*rather, but*).<sup>5</sup>

Verse 2 starts with a question *Why should the nations say: ...?! It addresses God making him responsible for the anticipated, sensible behavior of the nations. It introduces a rhetorical, mocking question: Where, now, is their god?! This question is not meant to be answered. It is a rhetorical and a virtual one. Nevertheless, verse 3 is a reaction.*

The syntactic relation between verses 2 and 3 is twofold. The *waw* of clause 3.1 may be read as an adversative *waw*, which will be a link with the main clause 2.1 and not with the quote 2.2. It is short for: ‘But we say: ...’. The remainder of the clause is a chiasmic parallel of the quote: *Where (A) is their god?! (B) // Our God (B) is in heaven! (A).*

Verse 3 has a [waw-NOMINAL]clause: *Our God is in heaven, isn't he?* and an asyndetic [QATAL]clause with fronted complement: *Whatever he pleases, he makes,*<sup>6</sup> in full [zero-COMPLEMENT[כִּי-שֵׁנ-QATAL]-QATAL].

The asyndetic clause gives an implication of the nominal clause.<sup>7</sup> The fronting is pragmatic, which will become relevant in the next paragraph. The [QATAL]clauses are not retrospective (*\*Whatever he pleased, he did\**), but have the time perspective of the nominal clause and describe expected behavior. Probably, *qatal* is chosen to express confidence and certainty.<sup>8</sup> By the way, the *yiqtol* of clause 2.1 has ‘a future-modal function’ and expresses a mix of eventuality and (un!)desirability.<sup>9</sup>

The first clause of the second paragraph is a [NOMINAL]one, with apposition, *Their idols are silver and gold, the making of man's hands*, and is followed by a series of [zero-NOMINAL][waw-שֵׁנ-YIQTOL]sequences, giving the implications of the

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Van Grol, *Inleiding*, 56-57.

<sup>5</sup> Waltke/O'Connor § 39.3.5d: ‘the restrictive use of כִּי (...) in a clause after a negative clause.’

<sup>6</sup> The awkward translation with ‘to make’ is to visualize the connection with ‘to make’ in verses 4, 8, and 16.

<sup>7</sup> As far as I know, it is not clear whether the *syntax* of this mother\daughter pair [NOMINAL][zero-X-QATAL] expresses implication. There is a very general association of asyndesis and ‘explicative development’ (Joüon/Muraoka §177a). Kalkman does not explore this kind of mother\daughter pair (cf. *Verbal Forms*, 305-308); in fact, in his description of Psalm 115 he twists the relation and takes the [QATAL]clause as retrospective info with the [NOMINAL]clause (see *Companion Website*).

<sup>8</sup> See for this pragmatic use of *qatal* Joosten 206-208: ‘The intended effect of this non-literal, figurative, use of QATAL is generally to lend the statement a measure of certainty, urgency, or dramatic effect’ (206).

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Joosten 266; on eventuality see 274-275.

nominal clause: *They have a mouth, but cannot speak*, etc.

After the fourth sequence, the sequences vary. They appear to start with elliptic [NOMINAL]clauses: \*(They have) *Hands, but cannot feel\**, etc., but the fact that the nouns are suffixed: *their hands* and *their feet*, makes this analysis less probable. The two sequences would have been left-dislocations if the nouns had been referred to by suffix in the main clause. In fact, they are variant left-dislocations, with an intervening *waw* and without reference.<sup>10</sup> *With their hands, they cannot feel*, etc. and as such they are an intermediate form between the first four sequences and the seventh sequence with just a [S<sup>ל</sup>-YIQTOL-MODIFIER]clause, *They cannot even groan with their throat*.

4x	[zero-NOMINAL]	[waw-S <sup>ל</sup> -YIQTOL]
2x	[zero-MODIFIER]	[waw-S <sup>ל</sup> -YIQTOL]
1x		[S <sup>ל</sup> -YIQTOL-MODIFIER]

The paragraph closes with a clause that is linked up with the first clause, by having in common an apposition and the verb *עשׂה*, but differs in an important way. It is not a nominal clause like the first one but a nominal clause with anticipating perspective: *Like them their makers will become, everyone who trusts in them*, in full [zero-NOM<sup>PRED</sup>-YIQTOL<sup>ת</sup>-SUBJECT].

The *yiqtol* forms in this paragraph have ‘a future-modal function’ and express potentiality (*cannot...*) and in the last clause, futurity (*will become*).<sup>11</sup>

### The second part, verses 9-13

We will start with a discussion of paragraphs and communicative domains and then continue with the syntactic details.

The second part has two paragraphs, verses 9-11 and 12-13. The repetitive structure of the first one stops after clause 11.2. The subject of clause 12.1 is the same as that of the preceding clause, but it is renominalized. Moreover, the clause-type is new,

<sup>10</sup> Gunkel translates: ‘Ihre Hände, damit fühlen sie nicht’ (496) and states: ‘*Casus pendens* mit folgendem’ (499). Cf. Genesis 22,4: ביום השלישי וישׁא אברהם את עיניו - *On the third day, (and) Abraham raised his eyes*. On *casus pendens*, see Joüon/Muraoka § 156. Booij states that the subject of the verb stays the same (the idols), and remarks that hands and feet are feminine, the verbs masculine (33). In fact, *their hands* and *their feet* are modifiers. ‘The preposition can be omitted before the noun in the *casus pendens*.’ (Joüon/Muraoka § 156d) Therefore the translation ‘with their hands’.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Joosten 266; on futurity see 267-268 and on potentiality 273-274. The [X-YIQTOL]clause 8 cannot be a wish according to recent research – this against LXX, Gunkel and Allen among others.

[zero-SUBJECT-QATAL], resembling that of clause 3.3, [zero-COMPLEMENT-QATAL]. The object belongs to participant WE, but is first person instead of second and third as in verses 9-11. The paragraph has no definite mother clause – again thin syntax and an asterisk.<sup>12</sup>

The second part starts with a change of communicative domain. A group of participants is addressed, *Israel, the house of Aaron, and those who fear YHWH*, which are in all likelihood parts of participant WE. The set of participants changes too. The NATIONS and their IDOLS are done, WE and YHWH are back again.

The first paragraph has a continuous change of communicative domain. As said, three groups are addressed, parts of participant WE. After each address, this group or the whole of participant WE is spoken about in the third person. There is an alternation of you and them, and of appeal and description. A strange structure, because, without too much trouble, there could have been a continuity of communicative domain \*– *he is your help and your shield\** or a liturgical alternation \*– *he is our help and our shield\**. In fact there is a continuous breakdown of communication with the mentioned participants – *he is their help and their shield*.

The next communicative domain starts in clause 12.1. Participant WE is mentioned in the first person. After clause 12.2, there is again third person speech. Parts of participant WE are spoken about, *the house of Israel, the house of Aaron, and those who fear Yhwh*. The same breakdown of communication as in the previous paragraph.

The first paragraph consists of three [VOCATIVE, IMPERATIVE]clauses: *Israel, trust in YHWH!* etc., interrupted by three identical [NOMINAL]clauses. The second paragraph starts with a [SUBJECT-QATAL]clause, *YHWH has remembered us*, followed immediately by a [zero-YIQTOL]clause, *he will bless*. The sequence implies, in all likelihood, that the [QATAL]clause is retrospective and provides the background to the expectation that God will bless (us).<sup>13</sup> The next three clauses round out the missing

<sup>12</sup> The text-syntactic hierarchy of Kalkman shows a bit of hesitation on this point. He links clause 12.1 up with clause 1.1, but he does not enter this pair in his Concordance of Patterns (see his *Companion Website*). The same with the pair 1.1\9.1. Has his hesitation something to do with our thin syntax?

<sup>13</sup> According to Kalkman (*Verbal Forms*, 210-212), the fronting of the subject in the sequence [SUBJECT-QATAL][zero-YIQTOL] blocks the volitive meaning of [zero-YIQTOL]. The implicit subject of the [zero-YIQTOL]clause has to be exactly the same as the explicit subject. Of course, the following [zero-

complement US with the three sub-participants, *he will bless the house of Israel*, etc. The last clause has an apposition: *he will bless those who fear YHWH, both the small and the great*.

#### *The third part, verses 14-18*

After a discussion of paragraphs and communicative domains we will continue with the syntactic details.

The third part has two paragraphs, verses 14-16.17-18. The subject השמים of clause 16.1 is new, but it is prepared by the apposition in the previous clause. One may describe the relation between clauses 15 and 16.1-2 as sequential syntax, a sequence of statement and comment, especially in view of the pragmatic fronting of שמים and ארץ in verse 16. There is a syntactic break between clauses 16.2 and 17.1.<sup>14</sup> The subject המחרים of clause 17.1 and its clause-type, [SUBJECT-YIQTOL], are new, so that a second paragraph will start here. It has no definite mother clause – thin syntax and an asterisk.<sup>15</sup>

Again, there is a change of communicative domain. A second person plural is addressed, which refers in all likelihood to participant WE.<sup>16</sup> At the end this participant is speaking. The boundary between the resulting two communicative domains is vague. Clause 18 is clearly spoken by WE, but it is the second part of an argument that starts in clause 17.1. So, communicative domains and paragraphs will coincide here.

The first clause is a [JUSSIVE-SUBJECT]clause with apposition, *May YHWH give you increase, you and your sons!* The second clause is a [PARTICIPLE-SUBJECT]clause, which will have a jussive mood because of its position immediately after the

---

YIQTOL]clauses inherit the non-volitive meaning of the first [zero-YIQTOL]clause.

Other scholars are satisfied by just the *qatal*. Because it ‘unbestreitbar Indikativ ist, sind die folgende Verbalformen als Explikation dieses Gedenkens ebenfalls indikativisch und nicht jussivisch zu übersetzen’ (Zenger 277). Cf. Allen 108.

<sup>14</sup> The criterion is, as stated above: If there is no subordinate, parallel, close, or sequential syntax, syntax is interrupted.

<sup>15</sup> We may note that the majority of commentaries combine verses 16-18, a curious fact according to Van der Lugt (*Structuren*, 393). Inspired by his otherwise text-syntactically awkward division (12-14.15-16//17-18; in *Structures* and still in *Cantos*) and following *La Bible de Jérusalem*, I proposed the 14-16.17-18 division for the *Nieuwe Bijbelvertaling* (NBV) in April 2000, taking pleasure in Fokkelman’s confirmation of my analysis in 2003.

<sup>16</sup> Zenger takes verses 12-15 as a paragraph. He pays no attention to the change of communicative domain and to the new renominalization of YHWH in clause 14. So he does not recognize the jussive in that clause, but takes, surprisingly, the nominal clause as a wish.

[JUSSIVE]clause:<sup>17</sup> *May you be blessed by YHWH, maker of heaven and earth!* We read this clause with *maker of heaven and earth* as apposition.

Participant WE disappears after clause 15, but participant YHWH stays on the scene as subject/agent to become an object/recipient only in clause 17.1.<sup>18</sup>

Clauses 16.1-2 comment on the apposition of clause 15, repeating and fronting both words *heaven* and *earth*. First a [nominal]clause, *The heaven is the heaven of YHWH*, and then a [waw-COMPLEMENT-QATAL]clause, *the earth he has given to the sons of man*. The *waw* could be a prosodic *waw* or B-colon marker,<sup>19</sup> but an argumentative nuance has to be preferred in the light of the nature of this sequence and because of the parallel *waw* in clause 18. The fronting of *heaven* and *earth* is pragmatic, *parallel focus* as stated by Simon Dik, *comparing focus* according to Michael Rosenbaum.<sup>20</sup> We will call this mother\daughter

---

<sup>17</sup> In Kalkman’s Concordance of Patterns on his *Companion Website*, this pair belongs to number 1572: [zero-YIQTOL]clauses followed by a [PARTICIPLE]clause with change of subject. There is no relevant parallel among the four other pairs in this category.

It is important to note that Kalkman is not interested in [NOMINAL] and [PARTICIPLE]clauses as such: ‘In principle, these clauses (in particular the nominal clause) indeed fall beyond the scope of our search for an adequate description of the Biblical Hebrew verbal system’ (*Verbal System*, 305). But he makes a promising remark: ‘This all suggests that, to a higher degree than the other clause types, the functional values of nominal and participle clauses are affected by the linguistic context and, in particular, the specific clause pattern in which they are embedded’ (305).

This could imply that a [PARTICIPLE]clause inherits the volitive mood of its [VOLITIVE]motherclause. Too bad, in Kalkman’s view [NOMINAL] and [PARTICIPLE]clauses are always indicative, and, in his discussion of the *Mother Clause > Nominal/Participle Clause* – patterns with *Continuation of a Discursive Mainline Mother Clause*, he does not even consider the possibility of such an inheritance, although he spells out Pss 34,2 and 57,6 (309-311).

The mother\daughter pair we discuss here shows a change of subject (and this is also the case in the just mentioned psalm verses), but this does not block the inheritance of the volitive mood, because the subject stays the same in deep syntax. On the clause *May YHWH give you increase* follows *\*May YHWH bless you\**.

And to analyze the other mentioned psalm verses (though they are incidental):

Ps 34,2: *May I bless YHWH at all times, / may his praise be continually in my mouth.*  
> *\*may my mouth/I praise him continually\**

Ps 57,6: *Be exalted above the heaven, God! / may his glory be above all the earth.*  
> *\*be glorified above all the earth\**

<sup>18</sup> YHWH’s role as subject in clause 15 (deep structure) was discussed in the previous note, but he is also agent in nominal clause 16.1.

<sup>19</sup> See Van Grol, *Syntagma*, 61-103.

<sup>20</sup> See Van Grol, *Syntagma*, 37-40.

pair a comparative sequence. The [zero-SUBJECT-NOM<sup>PRD</sup>][waw-COMPL-QATAL]sequence draws two comparisons between heaven and earth at the same time. It associates heaven with YHWH and earth with humankind and it presents the heaven as property and the earth as gift of God. This explains the combination of a retrospective statement with a present-time statement.

Clauses 17.1, 17.2 and 18 belong together as three [SUBJECT-YIQTOL]clauses with fronting, twice *not the dead* against once *but we: The dead cannot praise Yah, nor all those who go down into silence, but we will praise Yah from now on to eternity*. Clause 17.2 is not an apposition, but an elliptic clause, given the repetition of **ל**,<sup>21</sup> which does not mean that there is any referential difference between *the dead* and *all those who go down into silence*.

#### Prosodic analysis

We will not discuss cola and verse lines. The prosodic rules on these levels are clear. We will focus on strophes and stanzas, i.e. on their delimitation, and abstain from a full description.

#### The first strophe, verses 1-3

Not to us, YHWH, not to us,  
 but to your name bring glory,  
 for your chesed, for your emet.  
 Why should the nations say:  
 Where, now, is their god?!  
 Our God is in heaven, isn't he?!  
 Whatever he pleases, he makes.

The first paragraph will be a strophe, in view of the prosodic rule of the strophe, which says that a strophe consists preferably of two or three verse lines.<sup>22</sup>

The three verse lines are connected by the repetition of **נ** (1a) and **אלהים** (2b) in **אלהינו** (3a).

There is a change of communicative domain within the strophe. Its function will be discussed in a separate section.

#### Two strophes about the idols, verses 4-6 and 7-8

Their idols are silver and gold,  
 the **making** of man's **hands**.  
 They have a mouth, but cannot speak.

*They have eyes, but cannot see.*  
*They have ears, but cannot hear.*  
*They have a nose, but cannot smell.*

With their **hands**, they cannot feel.  
 With their feet, they cannot walk.  
 They cannot even groan with their throat.  
 Like them their **makers** will become,  
 everyone who trusts in them.

The two strophes are one paragraph and its division is because of length. According to the prosodic rules, the strophe has a maximum length of three verse lines.

This strophic structure is supported by lexical repetition, syntactic variation, and a chiasmic pattern. The phrase **מעשה ירי** [אדם] in the second colon is split into (chiasmically!) **יריהם** and **עשייהם**, connecting the verse lines of the second strophe. The description of the idols has a fixed syntactic structure, [<sup>3pl</sup>YIQTOL-**ל** **להם** **ל**-X], but it becomes varied at the start of the second strophe. The preposition **ב** is used on the last position of colon 7c [**בגרונם**] and on that of colon 8b [**בהם**], thereby connecting the verse lines of the second strophe.

The two strophes are patterned in a chiasmic way:

A	introduction	<i>their idols</i>
B1		<i>they have a mouth, but cannot speak</i>
B2	description	<i>eyes, ears, a nose</i>
B2	description	<i>their hands, their feet</i>
B1		<i>they cannot even groan with their throat</i>
A	conclusion	<i>like them their makers</i>

The association of introduction and conclusion is enhanced by resembling syntactic structures.<sup>23</sup>

The three-part description of the idols starts with the essential capabilities of a god: to provide oracles, to see human beings, to hear their prayers and to smell their offerings.<sup>24</sup> The following abilities, in the second strophe, are already less godly and more humanly, feeling and walking, and with the last ability expectations are down to a beastly level: they cannot speak, but do they groan?

#### The first stanza, verses 1-8

The first three strophes, verses 1-3, 4-6, and 7-8, form a stanza. The second and the third strophes are close, but the first strophe is connected with both other strophes by participant reference and by lexical repetitions.

<sup>21</sup> See Van Grol, *Inleiding* 55-56 on the distinction between an appositive phrase and an elliptic clause, and 58-59 on ellipsis and negation.

<sup>22</sup> Van Grol, *Inleiding*, 14-18.

<sup>23</sup> See the syntactic analysis. There is no reason at all to suppose an envelope structure, taking verses 4 and 8 as the envelope strophe and verses 5-7 as the enveloped strophe (against Fokkelman, 223-226 and 371).

<sup>24</sup> Gunkel, 497.

The NATIONS of colon 2a are present at the start of the second strophe and the end of the third. The suffix in עֲצֻבֵיהֶם, *their idols*, is a minor reference, but the NATIONS themselves are renominalized in the last colon: כָּל אֲשֶׁר־בָּטַח בָּהֶם, *everyone who trusts in them*.

The lexical repetitions go the same way. The first strophe starts with a double לֹא לֹא and concludes with כָּל אֲשֶׁר־חָפֵץ עֲשֵׂה. The second strophe repeats לֹא לֹא four times in the reversed order, לֹא וְלֹא. The third strophe concludes with a reversal of עֲשֵׂהם כָּל אֲשֶׁר ... כָּל אֲשֶׁר־... עֲשֵׂה.

#### The second stanza, verses 9-13

Israel, trust in YHWH!

– he is their help and their shield.

House of Aaron, trust in YHWH!

– he is their help and their shield.

You who fear YHWH, trust in YHWH!

– he is their help and their shield.

YHWH has remembered us – he will bless,

he will bless the house of Israel,

he will bless the house of Aaron,

he will bless those who fear YHWH,

both the small and the great.

No doubt, the two paragraphs are two strophes, and no doubt, they belong together in a stanza. There are only a few words that are not repeated, both inside each strophe and across their border.

#### The third stanza, verses 14-18

May YHWH give you increase,  
you and your *sons*!

May you be *blessed* by YHWH,  
maker of *heaven* and *earth*!

The *heaven* is the *heaven* of YHWH, / man.  
but the *earth* he has given to the *sons* of

The dead cannot praise *YAH*,  
all those who go down into silence,  
but we will *bless* *YAH*,  
from now on to eternity.

Two paragraphs give us two strophes. Should one still doubt about the place of verse 16 after our syntactic analysis, lexical repetitions and a stylo-syntactic structure show us the way.

Verse 16 is bound to verse 14 by the repetition of בָּנִים, and to verse 15 by that of שָׁמַיִם, אָרֶץ, and the preposition לֹא. The second strophe differentiates itself from the first by the short name of God, *YAH*, and by the stylo-syntactic structure וְאֵלֵינוּ..., ... כָּל־לֹא, ... הַמַּתִּים.

The verb בָּרַךְ is common to both strophes.

#### The prosodic structure of Psalm 115

Eighteen verse lines, seven strophes (.) and three stanzas (/): 3.3.2 / 3.2 / 3.2 verse lines. The psalm is written down in its prosodic form in the third attachment. The metrical patterns and the interstanzaic repetitions are added.<sup>25</sup>

There are three verbs that structure the text, √ עֲשֵׂה, √ בָּרַךְ, √ בָּטַח; in each stanza two of this trio are present: √ עֲשֵׂה & √ בָּטַח / √ בָּרַךְ & √ בָּטַח / √ בָּרַךְ & √ עֲשֵׂה. They are, of course, *Leitwörter* too. One could show the thematic development of the text following these words.

All other lexical repetitions link the first and the third stanza – we left out לֹא, בֵּי, and יְהוָה (see the attachment). They do not show any pattern apart of this, but are thematically important, creating contrast and development.

#### The communicative domains of Psalm 115

We delimited the communicative domains in the text-syntactic analysis above and collected them in the second attachment. Now we will focus on the function of the many domain-changes.

At the start of each stanza communication is clear. Someone belonging to participant WE is speaking respectively to YHWH (vv. 1-2), to different parts of participant WE, Israel, the house of Aaron, those who fear YHWH (cola 9a.10a.11a), and to the whole of participant WE (vv. 14-15). Three strong deictic moments.

All other parts of the poem are descriptive. Someone of participant WE is speaking to nobody specific, not to YHWH, not to the own group, and not to the nations. These parts could be a comment on the derisive statement of the nations in colon 2b: ‘Where, now, is their god?!’

In each stanza there is one moment that this comment becomes personal, because participant WE is mentioned in the first person: *our God, us, we* (vv. 3, 12a, and 18). Twice in opposition to another participant: WE versus the NATIONS, and WE versus the DEAD. We like to combine both oppositions. The nations framed as the dead.

All other parts have a touch of objectivity. The description of the idols (vv. 3-8), the repeated statement ‘He is their help and their shield’ (cola 9b.10b.11b), the triple ‘he will bless X’ (vv. 12b-13), and the third person statements in the last

<sup>25</sup> We do not go through these metrical patterns here. Elsewhere we showed how to read and evaluate this kind of patterns (Van Grol, *Inleiding*, 37-40).

stanza (vv. 16-17). This touch of objectivity strengthens the comment framing it as something self-evident and something devoid of personal feelings and positions. The derisive statement of the nations is taken as the occasion of a theological comment.

## Psalm 115: Text-syntactic hierarchy

level	6	5	4	3	2	1	0	/ clause
						לא לנו יהוה	↵	1.1
						לא לנו		1.2
						כי־לשמך תן כבוד על־חסדך על־אמתך		1.3
						למה יאמרו הגוים	↵*	2.1
						אִי־הִנָּה אֱלֹהֵיהֶם	↵	2.2
						וְאֱלֹהֵינוּ בַשָּׁמַיִם	↵	3.1
						כֹּל אֲשֶׁר־חָפֵץ עֲשֵׂה	↵	3.3
							*	
						עֲצֻבֵיהֶם כִּסֵּף וְזָהַב מַעֲשֵׂה יְדֵי אָדָם	↵	4
						פָּה־לָהֶם		5.1
						וְלֹא יִדְבְּרוּ		5.2
						עֲנִים לָהֶם		5.3
						וְלֹא יִרְאוּ		5.4
						אֲזֻנִים לָהֶם		6.1
						וְלֹא יִשְׁמְעוּ		6.2
						אָף לָהֶם		6.3
						וְלֹא יִרְיָחוּן		6.4
						יִדְיָהֶם		7.1
						וְלֹא יִמְשֹׁן		7.2
						רַגְלֵיהֶם		7.3
						וְלֹא יִהְלְכוּ	↵	7.4
						לֹא יִהְיוּ בַגְרוֹנִים		7.5
						כַּמֹּהֶם יִהְיוּ עֲשִׂיהֶם כֹּל אֲשֶׁר־בָּטַח בָּהֶם	↵	8
						יִשְׂרָאֵל בָּטַח בִּיהוָה	↵	9.1
						עֲזָרָם וּמִגֹּנִם הוּא		9.2
						בֵּית אֱהָרֵן בָּטַחוּ בִיהוָה		10.1
						עֲזָרָם וּמִגֹּנִם הוּא		10.2
						יִרְאִי יְהוָה בָּטַחוּ בִיהוָה		11.1
						עֲזָרָם וּמִגֹּנִם הוּא	↵	11.2
							*	
						יְהוָה זָכְרָנוּ		12.1
						יְבָרֵךְ	↵	12.2
						יְבָרֵךְ אֱתֵיבֵית יִשְׂרָאֵל	↵	12.3
						יְבָרֵךְ אֱתֵיבֵית אֱהָרֵן		12.4
						יְבָרֵךְ יִרְאִי יְהוָה הַקְטָנִים עַם־הַגְּדֹלִים		13
						יִסַּף יְהוָה עֲלֵיכֶם עֲלֵיכֶם וְעַל־בְּנֵיכֶם	↵	14
						בְּרוּכִים אַתֶּם לִיהוָה עֲשֵׂה שָׁמַיִם וָאָרֶץ		15
						הַשָּׁמַיִם שָׁמַיִם לִיהוָה	↵	16.1
						וְהָאָרֶץ נָתַן לַבְּנֵי־אָדָם	↵	16.2
							*	
						לֹא הַמְתִּים יִהְלְלוּ־יָהּ		17.1
						וְלֹא כִלְיָרְדֵי דוּמָה		17.2
						וְאֲנַחְנוּ נִבְרַךְ יְהוָה מֵעַתָּה וְעַד־עוֹלָם	↵	18

The flow diagram is developed to visualize the results of the analysis in an optimal way. It is an adaptation of the one developed by the ETCBC, which shows the results of the digital analysis in a neutral way.<sup>26</sup>

*Clause atoms* such as vocatives and interjections are combined with the nearby clause into one clause, to avoid visual fragmentation (compare clause 1.1).

*Parallel clauses* are put right under each other to show parallelism (compare clauses 5.1 and 5.3).

*Paragraphs* are boxed (compare clauses 1.1-3.3).

The indentations record the text-syntactic *hierarchy*. The text-syntactic *levels* are stated on the top.

Lines and arrows show the *links* between clauses.

An asterisk indicates that the link is *not* of a (purely) text-syntactic nature.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Van Grol, *Syntagma*, 112-116.

## Psalm 115: Participants & Communicative domains

colon	vs	communicative domain	set of participants			
		speaker is someone belonging to WE	WE	YHWH	NATIONS	IDOLS
לא לנו יהוה לא לנו כִּי־לשֹׁמֵךְ תֵּן כְּבוֹד עַל־חֹסֶדְךָ עַל־אֱמֻנָתְךָ לִמָּה יֹאמְרוּ הַגּוֹיִם אִי־הֵנָּה אֱלֹהֵיהֶם	1	> YHWH – appeal	us 1	YHWH 2 2		
	2	[emb.: nations > ? – derision]			nations 3	
וְאֵלֵהֵינוּ בַשָּׁמַיִם כֹּל אֲשֶׁר־חָפֵץ עָשָׂה עֲצָבֵיהֶם כֶּסֶף וְזָהָב מַעֲשֵׂה יַדֵּי אָדָם	3	> ? – description	our 1	God 3		
	4				their 3	idols 3
פָּה־לָהֶם וּלֹא יִדְבְּרוּ עֵינַיִם לָהֶם וּלֹא יִרְאוּ אָזְנוֹיִם לָהֶם וּלֹא יִשְׁמְעוּ אָף לָהֶם וּלֹא יִרְיָחוּן יָדֵיהֶם וּלֹא יִמְשֹׁן רַגְלֵיהֶם וּלֹא יִהְלִכוּ לֹא יִהְיוּ בַגְרוֹנִים כַּמּוֹהֵם יִהְיוּ עֹשֵׂיהֶם כֹּל אֲשֶׁר־בָּטַח בָּהֶם	5					3
	6					3
	7					3
	8				their makers 3	3
					everyone who 3	3
יִשְׂרָאֵל בָּטַח בִּיהוָה עֲזָרָם וּמִגֹּנֵם הוּא	9	> Israel – appeal	Israel 2	YHWH 3		
		> ? – description	Israel 3	3		
בֵּית אַהֲרֹן בָּטַחוּ בִיהוָה עֲזָרָם וּמִגֹּנֵם הוּא	10	> house of Aaron – appeal	Aaron 2	YHWH 3		
		> ? – description	Aaron 3	3		
יִרְאוּ יְהוָה בָּטַחוּ בִיהוָה עֲזָרָם וּמִגֹּנֵם הוּא	11	> those who – appeal	those 2	YHWH 3		
		> ? – description	those 3	3		
יְהוָה זָכַרְנוּ יִבְרַךְ יִבְרַךְ אֶת־בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל יִבְרַךְ אֶת־בֵּית אַהֲרֹן יִבְרַךְ יִרְאֵי יְהוָה הַקְּטָנִים עִם־הַגְּדֹלִים	12	> ? – description	us 1	YHWH 3		
		> ? – description	Israel 3	3		
			Aaron 3	3		
			those 3	3		
יִסַּף יְהוָה עֲלֵיכֶם עֲלֵיכֶם וְעַל־בְּנֵיכֶם בְּרוּכִים אַתֶּם לַיהוָה עָשָׂה שָׁמַיִם וָאָרֶץ הַשָּׁמַיִם שָׁמַיִם לַיהוָה וְהָאָרֶץ נָתַן לַבְּנֵי־אָדָם	14	> you – wish	you 2	YHWH 3		
	15		you 2	YHWH 3		
	16		you 2	YHWH 3		
				3		
				3		
				3	[sons of man 3]	
לֹא הַמְתִּיִם יִהְלֹלוּ־יָהּ וּלֹא כָל־יִרְדֵי דוּמָה וְאִנְחָנוּ נִבְרַךְ יְהוָה מֵעַתָּה וְעַד־עוֹלָם	17	> ? – description		YAH 3	the dead 3	
	18		we 1	YAH 3	the dead 3	

# Psalm 115: Prosodic hierarchy

stanza	strophe	verse line	colon	vs	rhythm	trio	other repetitions	
3	3	[ לא לנו יהוה לא לנו	1	3+3+2			not we but you	
		[ כִּי־לשִׁמְךָ תֵּן כְּבוֹד				תֵּן		
		[ עַל־חֲסֹדְךָ עַל־אֲמֹתֶךָ				עַל 2x		
	2	3	[ לִמָּה יֹאמְרוּ הַגּוֹיִם	2	3+2			
			[ אִי־הֵנָּה אֱלֹהֵיהֶם					
		2	[ וְאֵלֵהֵינוּ בַשָּׁמַיִם	3	2+3		עֲשֵׂה	שָׁמַיִם
			[ כֹּל אֲשֶׁר־חָפֵץ עֲשֵׂה					כֹּל
			[ עֲצֹבֵיהֶם כֶּסֶף וְזָהָב	4	3+3		מַעֲשֵׂה	אָדָם
2	3	[ מַעֲשֵׂה יָדַי אָדָם	5	3+4				
		[ פִּה־לָהֶם וְלֹא יִדְבְּרוּ	6	4+3				
2	3	[ עֲנִיִּים לָהֶם וְלֹא יִרְאוּ	7	3+3+2				
		[ אֲזִנִּיִּים לָהֶם וְלֹא יִשְׁמְעוּ	8	3+3	עֲשִׂיהֶם			
2	3	[ אָף לָהֶם וְלֹא יִרְיַחוּן				בַּטַּח בִּי	כֹּל	
		[ יִדְיָהֶם וְלֹא יִמְיִשוּן						
2	3	[ רַגְלֵיהֶם וְלֹא יִהְלְכוּ	9	3+3	בַּטַּח בִּי			
		[ לֹא יִהְיוּ בַגְרוֹנָם	10	3+3	בַּטַּח בִּי			
2	3	[ כַּמוֹהֶם יִהְיוּ עֲשִׂיהֶם	11	4+3	בַּטַּח בִּי			
		[ כֹּל אֲשֶׁר־בַּטַּח בָּהֶם						
2	3	[ יִשְׂרָאֵל בַּטַּח בִּיהוָה	12	3+3+3	יְבָרֵךְ			
		[ עֲזָרָם וּמִגְנָם הוּא			יְבָרֵךְ			
	2	[ בֵּית אֱהָרֵן בַּטַּחוּ בִיהוָה	13	3+2	יְבָרֵךְ			
		[ עֲזָרָם וּמִגְנָם הוּא			יְבָרֵךְ			
2	3	[ יִרְאִי יְהוָה בַּטַּחוּ בִיהוָה						
		[ עֲזָרָם וּמִגְנָם הוּא						
2	3	[ יְהוָה זָכַרְנוּ יְבָרֵךְ	14	3+3				
		[ יְבָרֵךְ אֶת־בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל						
2	3	[ יְבָרֵךְ אֶת־בֵּית אֱהָרֵן	15	3+3	בְרוּכִים			
		[ יְבָרֵךְ יִרְאִי יְהוָה			עֲשֵׂה	שָׁמַיִם		
2	3	[ יְבָרֵךְ יִרְאִי יְהוָה	16	3+4		שָׁמַיִם 2x		
		[ הַקַּמְנִים עִם־הַגְּדָלִים			וְהָאָרֶץ נָתַן לְבְנֵי־אָדָם	נָתַן	אָדָם	
2	3	[ יִסַּף יְהוָה עֲלֵיכֶם	17	3+3		not they but we		
		[ עֲלֵיכֶם וְעַל־בְּנֵיכֶם					כֹּל	
2	3	[ בְרוּכִים אַתֶּם לִיהוָה	18	3+3	נְבָרֵךְ			
		[ עֲשֵׂה שָׁמַיִם וָאָרֶץ						
2	3	[ הַשָּׁמַיִם שָׁמַיִם לִיהוָה						
		[ וְהָאָרֶץ נָתַן לְבְנֵי־אָדָם						
2	3	[ לֹא הַמְתִּים וְהַלְלוּ־יָהּ						
		[ וְלֹא כִלְיִרְדֵי דוּמָה						
2	3	[ וְאֵנַחְנוּ נְבָרֵךְ יָהּ						
		[ מַעֲתָה וְעַד־עוֹלָם						
		הַלְלוּ־יָהּ		frame formula				

## Bibliography

### Translations

Bible de Jérusalem: *La Bible de Jérusalem traduite en français sous la direction de l'École biblique de Jérusalem* (Cerf: Paris 1998).

NBV: *De Nieuwe Bijbelvertaling* (NBG: Heerenveen 2004).

### Commentaries

Allen: Leslie Allen, *Psalms 101-150* (WBC 21) (Word Books: Waco TX 1983).

Booij: Thijs Booij, *Psalmen IV* (POT) (Kok: Kampen 2009).

Gunkel: Hermann Gunkel, *Die Psalmen* (GHKAT II 2<sup>4</sup>) (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht: Göttingen 1926).

Zenger: Frank-Lothar Hossfeld/Erich Zenger, *Psalmen 101-150* (HThKAT) (Herder: Freiburg 2008).

### Instrumentarium Syntax

Joosten Jan Joosten, *The Verbal System of Biblical Hebrew: A New Synthesis Elaborated on the Basis of Classical Prose* (Jerusalem Biblical Studies 10) (Simor: Jerusalem 2012).

Joüon/Muraoka: Paul Joüon/Takamitsu Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (SB 14) (Pontificio Istituto Biblico: Roma 1991).

Gino Kalkman, *Verbal Forms in Biblical Hebrew Poetry: Poetic Freedom or Linguistic System?* (Diss. VUA) (Box: Den Bosch 2015)

Gino Kalkman, *Companion Website* (a.o. The Concordance of Patterns):

[http://nbviewer.ipython.org/github/ETCBC/Biblical\\_Hebrew\\_Analysis/blob/master/PhD/Introduction.ipynb](http://nbviewer.ipython.org/github/ETCBC/Biblical_Hebrew_Analysis/blob/master/PhD/Introduction.ipynb).

*Shebanq*: System for Hebrew Text: ANnotations for Queries and Markup of the ETCBC: Eep Talstra Centre for Bible and Computer – <https://shebanq.ancient-data.org/>.

Waltke/O'Connor: Bruce Waltke/M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Eisenbrauns: Winona Lake IN 1990).

### Instrumentarium Versification

Fokkelman: Jan Fokkelman, *Major Poems of the Hebrew Bible at the Interface of Prosody and Structural Analysis III* (SSN 43) (Van Gorcum: Assen 2003).

Van Grol, *Inleiding*: Harm van Grol, *Een inleiding in de klassiek Hebreeuwse versbouw: Verkenningen in het grensgebied van versbouw en tekstsyntaxis* (Theologische Perspectieven 11) (2VM: Bergambacht 2015).

Van Grol, *Syntagma*: Harm van Grol, *Een parallel syntagma: Verkenningen in het grensgebied van versbouw en tekstsyntaxis* (Theologische Perspectieven SS 10) (2VM: Bergambacht 2017).

Van der Lugt, *Structuren*: Pieter van der Lugt, *Strofische structuren in de Bijbels-Hebreeuwse poëzie* (DNST) (Kok: Kampen 1980).

Van der Lugt, *Cantos*: Pieter van der Lugt, *Cantos and Strophes in Biblical Hebrew Poetry III* (OTS 63) (Brill: Leiden 2013).