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Cognitive linguistics and the Hebrew Bible. Illustrated with a study of Job 28 and Job 38

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Introduction

In biology and life sciences, the concepts of *monoculture* and *biodiversity* have been introduced to distinguish between ‘vegetation composed of a single species’ and ‘the variability of living organisms from all ecological complexes’.¹ Why use these concepts of monoculture and biodiversity in the field of Semitic languages and biblical studies? For decades, biblical scholarship has known a separate development of the so-called ‘literary’ and ‘historical’ approaches, in which both deliver impressive results, but in complete isolation from each other. Unfortunately, studies that integrate these approaches are very rare, because biblical scholars primarily concentrate on monocultural studies of a single species. The biological sciences have shown that monocultural research is very valuable if we wish to understand a single species as an entity on its own, but that the variability and dynamic complexes of the living organisms from different ecosystems should also be made the object of research. By analogy, in addition to its studies of single species biblical studies need research into the dynamic complexes of textual and historical phenomena, in what I propose to call an ‘integral’ approach. Such an integral study focuses on the dynamic processes of various kinds of organisms.

In linguistic research of Semitic languages, language elements used to be studied as autonomous entities in a monocultural way, too. In reaction to this, more integral approaches arose, such as functional

¹ At the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, also known as ‘the Earth Summit’, in Rio de Janeiro 1992, 153 countries signed the Convention on Biological Diversity. This convention gave the definitions of monoculture and biodiversity presented here. Generally, three main levels of biodiversity are distinguished: biodiversity between ecosystems and habitats, biodiversity between species, and the genetic variation within species.

and cognitive approaches that focus on the language processes and which are comparable to those studies in biology concentrating on biodiversity. In functional linguistics, the word 'functional' denotes that it is oriented towards processes going on outside the head, in the realm of communicative interaction, whereas the word 'cognitive' in cognitive linguistics shows that it is oriented towards mental structures and processes, in particular towards those aspects of language that are covered by the word 'conceptual'.² Within the limits of this paper I will concentrate on cognitive linguistics.

One of this paper's aims is to introduce some concepts developed in cognitive linguistics in the field of Hebrew linguistics. Another aim is to apply these insights in a research of Chapters 28 and 38 in the Book of Job – the song of wisdom presented as Job's final and conclusive answer in dialogue with his friends and the opening part of God's speech from the whirlwind – as a case study to illustrate what a cognitive study of texts in the Hebrew bible might look like.

Cognitive linguistics

In cognitive sciences, *mind* is defined as *mental processing* and a *thought* is described as the occurrence of a complex neurological, ultimately electrochemical event, of which a *concept* is the result. More precisely, a concept is a particular pattern of neurological activity which has become established in a language or culture so that functionally equivalent events can be evoked and repeated with relative ease.³ Only when a cognitive event is more and more deeply entrenched through continued repetition in a time and space bound culture, can it constitute an established conceptual routine that can be carried out automatically once it is initiated. Culture and language do play an important role in this routine building and it is, therefore, the aim of cognitive linguistics to study language as an integral part of human cognition, that is, as mental processing guided by a culture and context-related routine. Its founding father is Ronald Langacker, who wrote in 1987 and 1991 his seminal study in two volumes, viz. *Foundations of Cognitive Grammar*. At present, some excellent introductions to cognitive linguistics are available.⁴ This explains why I

² See Harder (1999: 37).

³ The description of cognitive sciences is based on Langacker (1987: 100–101).

⁴ Ungerer and Schmid (1996), Dirven and Verspoor (1998), Taylor (2002), of which, in my view, Taylor (2002) is the best, because it offers a profound and elaborate study with many examples; it is also very clearly written and accessible. Langacker gives a summary of his theory in Langacker (1988; 2003; 2005).

can concentrate on some of its basic concepts that, in my mind, can be of great value for biblical studies.

Meaning is, according to Langacker, a conceptual phenomenon in the broadest sense. Any aspect of mental experience has the potential to be invoked as part of the meaning of a linguistic element or expression. The conceptions that serve in this manner are referred to as *cognitive domains*.⁵ At the heart of Langacker's cognitive linguistics lies the notion of *conceptualization*, that is, the way something is coded in a particular culture into specific concepts. In order to conceptualize or 'establish a mental contact with something', we establish mental contact with this entity via the typical relation or established routine of a culture and its language.⁶

Take, for instance, the Hebrew word יָם (*yām*). This word is translated in Hebrew dictionaries by 'sea', specified as 'a mass of salt water'. The question is, however, whether people in the first millennium BCE who used this word, had the same concept in mind as we modern people. When we think of 'the sea', we have in our mind's eye a world map with seas that separate continents or countries; thus we conceive of the sea as an in-between, salt-water area. However, maps in the ancient world, from the Babylonian map in the British Museum (BM 92687)⁷ to the Greek maps drawn by Anaximander and Herodotus, share a belief that the inhabited world was surrounded by water.⁸ Therefore, in the ancient world the 'sea' is conceptualized as water surrounding the earth, not as in-between water.

⁵ See Langacker (1995: 52).

⁶ Cf. Taylor (1995: 7).

⁷ For a picture of this Babylonian World Map (BM 92687) and the text on the reverse side, see Horowitz (1998: plate 6 and 7, pp. 406–407). For a transcription, translation and study of its content, see Horowitz (1998: 20–42).

⁸ 'In Greece, the cosmic ocean Oceanus, like the *marratu* on BM 92687, was believed to encircle the continental portion of the earth's surface.' (Horowitz 1998: 41). 'The Babylonian Map of the World and The Bilingual Creation of the World by Marduk demonstrate that the Babylonians, at least, believed that a cosmic ocean encircled the continental portion of the earth's surface.' (Horowitz 1998: 325) In *The Flights of Etana and the Eagle into the Heavens* 'the sea is described as encircling the land just as the cosmic ocean *marratu* encircles the central continent on the World Map' (Horowitz 1998: 60). In a Neo-Assyrian version of *The Flights of Etana and the Eagle into the Heavens* the sea is described as *iku* or 'boundary ditch': 'The cosmic ocean, which marked the boundary of the central portion of the earth's surface, was in effect a cosmic boundary ditch marking the borders of the land.' (Horowitz 1998: 62) In a parallel couplet of the Middle-Assyrian recension of *The Flights of Etana*: 'This couplet seems to explain that the sea encircles the land just as canals and boundary ditches often surrounded fields and gardens' (Horowitz 1998: 63). Cf. also Pongratz-Leisten (2001: 275) who states with regard to *The Babylonian Map of the*

Langacker's pivotal insight is that language does not express 'something', an idea, a view, an action or an event, *per se*, but expresses a thing or relation which stands out on a certain ground; it is in this interaction between what is 'profiled' and the 'base' that meaning arises.⁹ This is what he calls *prominence* building, and in every designation some entity is elevated to a special level of prominence in a predication. Thus, language is taken first and foremost as a conceptual organisation, in which words get their meaning by profiling a certain entity on a certain base within a certain larger configuration or cognitive domain, in which a cognitive domain is the selection of the linguistically relevant portion of our knowledge and experience, and in which this portion stands out against the categorization offered by science, culture and education in a certain time and space.

Consequently, in order to understand the meaning of a word, it is not sufficient to study the language as an autonomous system in the traditional lexicographic way. *Figure 1* summarizes the difference in orientation between traditional lexicography or autonomous semantics and cognitive semantics.

World: 'Dargestellt ist die Erde als schwimmende Scheibe in Aufsicht, die vom Salzwasserozean umgeben wird, der als Streifen um die Erdscheibe gelegt ist.'

⁹ See Langacker (1987: 183–189).

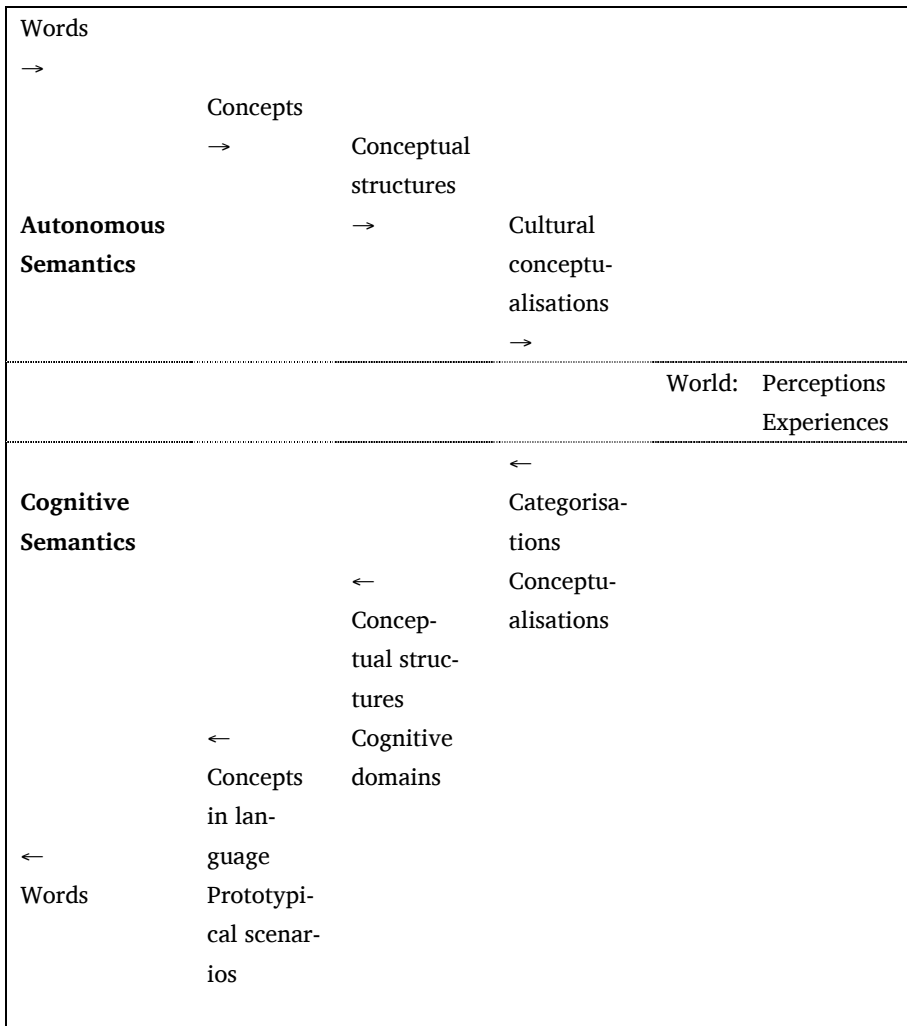


Fig. 1

Take, for example, the concconceptualization of the crescent moon. When people in northwest Europe or in the USA think of the crescent moon, they have a mental representation of a vertically standing crescent. Whenever they read about it, they automatically have such an image in their minds. However, in Assyrian and Babylonian art, we often see the crescent moon 'high in the air', together with the sun and the planet Venus, and there the crescent moon is always pictured horizontally, with the two points directed upwards.¹⁰ In some

¹⁰ See for an extensive description of the Babylonian representation of the moon: Collon (1992) and Colbow (1997).

Babylonian texts, the crescent moon is called a ‘horn’,¹¹ whereas in others, such as those from the Middle-Babylonian or Kassite period, a ‘boat’ stands for the crescent moon (Stol 1992: 247–249), and in quite a few Babylonian pictures, Marduk is visualized with a horizontal sickle on his head.¹² Thus, from ancient Mesopotamia to the present day in Muslim countries, the crescent moon appears to be conceived horizontally. Astronomical research explains that it is the position on the earth with regard to the equator which determines the angle from which we view the Moon.¹³ If the Moon goes up almost straight from the horizon (as it does when seen from the equator), then the crescent appears horizontal. If the Moon rises at a shallow angle (as seen far from the equator), then the crescent moon is mostly vertical. Consequently, in Iraq or Iran people perceive the crescent moon horizontally, and their conceptualization of the crescent moon has its ground in their geographical position.

In conclusion, in order to understand the meaning of a word, it is not sufficient to study the language as an autonomous system in the traditional lexicographic way, in which we start with a study of the words and their relationships in the language paradigm and then study these words’ usages and applications in syntagmatic textual relationships. In addition, a cognitive study is needed of a culture’s conceptualizations and categorizations against its physical, biological and geographical background, and the way these are expressed in language in conceptual structures.¹⁴

One of the theoretical concepts which cognitive semantics developed to study the relation between the linguistic concepts and the experienced reality is ‘prototypical scenario’. This is a procedure in which a continuum of experiences and events is expressed by a more or less fixed series of words.¹⁵ An example of a prototypical scenario in Biblical Hebrew is the following, taken from the cognitive domain of marriage making. Sociological, historical and textual analysis of data in the ancient Near East permits us to create an ‘image schema’

¹¹ E.g.: Enki and Ninmah : “he comes up, Šin, the Lord of the horn and the halo.” (Stol 1992: 245–246).

¹² See for an extensive description on the Babylonians’ conceptualization of the moon: Stol (1992).

¹³ See for an extensive explanation: www.astro.uu.nl.

¹⁴ For a study of: the *category* of causality in biblical studies, see Van Wolde (2002a), of the *conceptualization* of the word עִנָּה (‘rape’ or ‘debase’) in its cultural context, see Van Wolde (2002b), of the *prototypical scenario* of mining in relation to archaeological material, see Van Wolde (2003b), of the *concept* ‘sun’ in its textual context in relation to iconographical information, see Van Wolde (2003c), and of the *textualization of the concept* of ethnicity in its social context, see Van Wolde (2003d).

¹⁵ See Yri (1998: 44–55) and Dirven and Verspoor (1998: 145–156).

or mental picture of marriage in that time and place. Subsequent linguistic research will teach us that in Biblical Hebrew marriage making is represented by a chain of verbs: the future husband's spatial movement (expressed by *הֵלֵךְ* , *קוּם* , *יֵצֵא*), his seeing (expressed by *רָאָה*), (sometimes) his negotiation with the family (expressed by direct discourses marked by *אָמַר*), (sometimes) the man's giving of money or a gift (expressed by *מָוֹהַר/נָתַן כֶּסֶף*), the family's giving of the wife (expressed by *נָתַן לוֹ לְאִשָּׁה*), (sometimes) the celebration of the transaction (expressed by *מִשְׁתָּה* , *שָׁחַת* , *אָכַל*), and (always) the girl's or young woman's spatial transfer, in which the husband takes her into his own house (expressed by *לָקַח*). Hence, in the prototypical procedure of marriage, three elements, the future husband coming to the father's house to which the girl belongs, the father's giving and the husband's transport of the girl from her father's family (*בַּת* (*אָב*) to his own family (*בַּת* (*אָב*), forms the nucleus. In this procedure, the verb *לָקַח* denotes the girl's transfer from one house to another.

Although only shortly sketched, cognitive linguistics may make a reasonable case for biblical studies to develop integral approaches, aimed at research into related data-complexes. In such an approach, all kinds of data provided by linguistics, epigraphy and literary studies, by archaeology, geography, history and iconography, by social studies and by comparative studies of biblical and ancient Near Eastern sources, make up an integral part. However, this integration of diverse material is very difficult, not to say impossible, for a single scholar to do on his or her own. Therefore, it will require teamwork of (among others) archaeologists, historians, sociologists, linguists, literary critics and theologians to make the variability and dynamic complexes of these historical and textual relationships the object of a proper integral form of research. Nevertheless, I will try to present some results of an integral approach, viz. a cognitive linguistic study of Job 28 and Job 38, which can only be fragmentary and provisional. Nevertheless, I intend to show the usefulness of the concept of prototypical scenario for a study of Job 28 and that of cultural categorization for a study of Job 38.

An integral approach of Job 28: 1–13 based on a study of some archaeological data and a prototypical scenario

Chapter 28 in the book of Job is characterized by a refrain that relate to the place of wisdom: 'And as for wisdom, where can it be found?' (v. 12) and 'And as for wisdom, where does it come from?'(v. 20).

These questions clearly structure the text into three parts, vv. 1–13, vv. 15–19 and vv. 23–28. The very last verse seems to provide the answer to the repeated questions: “He (God) said to humans: ‘Fear of the Lord is wisdom, and to shun evil is understanding.’” (28:28). It is, therefore, not surprising that this text is commonly called a *song of wisdom*.

However, wisdom is not mentioned in the first eleven verses and only through v. 12 are we led to infer that it is wisdom that these eleven verses are referring to. At first face value, vv. 1–11 appear to deal with mining activities only.¹⁶ In order to understand these verses’ meaning and function in the chapter’s context, a short study will be made of the Ancient Near Eastern mining procedure as well as of its linguistic expression in a more or less fixed series of concepts, that is, its prototypical scenario. This will then be compared to the order of concepts and events represented in Job 28.

Digging up information on mining and metallurgy in the ancient Near East brings us to the archaeological research report of mining in the Timna’ Valley made by Rothenberg.¹⁷ In this valley that lies far away from habitation in the Negev desert, mining activities took place in the Early Bronze Age, Late Bronze Age, Iron Age I, Iron Age II, Hellenistic era, Roman era and Byzantine era, and copper smelting places and mines from all these periods have been found all over the place.¹⁸ Archaeological research revealed that deep shafts, some more than 20 metres deep, were carved vertically into the cupriferous white sandstone formations. For example, the rock-cut shaft of site 212 is 21 metres deep, with niches for footholds cut into its sides. Narrow galleries of about 70 centimetres wide and 1 metre high were driven horizontally into the white rock; they branched and sometimes widened out underground.¹⁹ Deep into hillsides through dark, narrow tunnels, crawling on their hands and knees or hanging onto ropes, slaves, criminals and captives laboured, hammering with picks the rock containing copper ore. The pieces were subsequently transported into the open air in buckets. The shaft of site 9 still bears witness of these activities in the marks all round the mouth made by

¹⁶ For a comparison between an autonomous semantic and cognitive semantic research of the separate words in Job 28: 1–11, see van Wolde (2003). For an autonomous semantic study of *חָקַר* in Job 28, see Aitken (2003), and for a cognitive semantic analysis of *חָקַר* in Job 28, see Van Hecke (2003).

¹⁷ Rothenberg (1972, 1978).

¹⁸ Rothenberg (1972) offers many pictures of these sites; some of the main ones are published more recently and with Rothenberg’s permission in van Wolde (2003: 15–20).

¹⁹ See Rothenberg (1978: p. 1202), also published in Van Wolde (2003: 17).

ropes scouring the surface, as persons and buckets were raised and lowered.²⁰ Above the ground, another team (usually women) pounded the stones into smaller bits. The crushed bits were subsequently thrown into a smelting furnace, and the slag tapped out of the furnaces was crushed to extract the metallic copper pellets trapped in the slag. Still visible till the present day are the consequences of centuries of mining activities: the 'Timna' cliffs framing the plain display at their foot empty holes which were once the entrances to the ancient copper mines, and huge slag heaps lay around in the plains where the copper furnaces and crucibles once stood.²¹

This archaeological research gives us an idea of ancient Near Eastern mining procedures, which were apparently executed in a more or less fixed series of actions. In recent ethno-archaeology, studies are made of the more or less fixed series of actions in the area of ceramic making, agriculture, architecture and the like. This tendency is parallel to the cognitive linguistic research into prototypical scenarios, in which a more or less standardized series of actions is expressed by concepts and in a more or less fixed series of words. Thus, from a cognitive point of view, we can explain that, even though the author of Job 28 may never have been a miner himself, nor ever have visited a copper mine, he nevertheless had a mental image, a conception of the conventional procedure of mining at that time. The first part of Figure 2 shows a reconstruction of the prototypical scenario of mining in the ancient Near East.

To what extent does Job 28: 1–11 agree with or differ from this prototypical scenario?²² The first two verses describe the result of extraction procedures and the next two verses tell about the preparatory work of making shafts and about the miners suspended on ropes. But then, in vv. 5–6, the camera no longer focuses on the people but on the earth. It allows us to perceive the effects of the mining activities on the earth. In the double usage of the verb *הִפָּךְ*, 'destruct' or 'devastate' (in v. 5 and v. 9), the earth's complete destruction is evoked for the reader's mind's eye. Finally, the mining episode concludes in vv. 9–11 with a picture of overturned mountains, shafts broken open, dammed up rivers, that is, with the entire transformation of the earth.

²⁰ See Rothenberg (1972: plate 18, 1978, p. 1202), also published in van Wolde (2003: 16).

²¹ See Rothenberg (1972: plate 119), also published in Van Wolde (2003: 19).

²² For an extensive lexicographical study of the words of Job 28:1–11, see Van Wolde (2003).

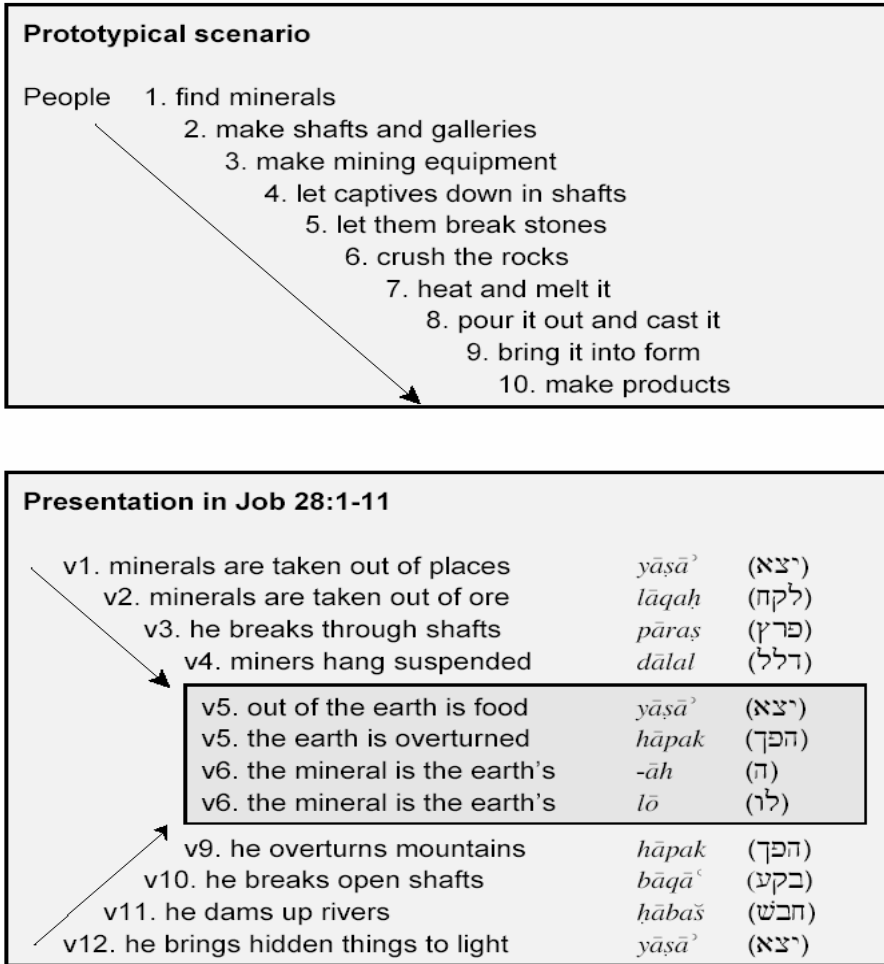


Fig. 2

This deviation from the prototypical order marks Job 28's change in orientation: what is usually understood as a human action is presented here from the perspective of its consequences on the earth. Many elements confirm this particular orientation:

1. the occurrence of the prepositions מִן or מֵ ('out of earth material' in v. 2, 'the earth, out of it' in v. 5), and תַּחַת ('the earth- from beneath it' in v. 5) shows that the cognitive domains are defined relative to the earth: the situation is viewed from the earth's point of view;

2. in v. 1, the extraction procedure of silver and gold is described, but no reference is made to the minerals of silver and gold themselves, but to their place (לכסף מוצא) and their placer (מקום לזהב);
3. in v. 2, explicit reference is made to the earth, viz. to the earthly material (עפר) in iron extraction and the earthly stone (אבן) in copper extraction;
4. in v. 3, the shafts and galleries are described as part of the human mining activities, and the object of their actions is referred to as אבן, 'stone in gloom and darkness';
5. in v. 5, food is said to be the earth's;
6. in v. 6a, the stones (third time אבן) where sapphire is found are said to be the earth's;
7. in v. 6b, the dust of gold is said to be the earth's;
8. in vv. 9–11 the effects of the human mining activities on the earth are explicitly described: the earth's mountains are turned upside down, its inside is burnt and its rivers are dammed up.

In contrast to the prototypical conceptual scenario of mining, the structure and conceptual order in Job 28:1–11, starting with a reference to the human activities but then immediately shifting the focus to the earth, demonstrates that these verses' main point of reference is not the glorious human enterprise as such, but rather this human enterprise's limitations and its disastrous effects on the earth.

In addition to these data, it should be mentioned that vv. 1–11 do not refer to human beings alone, but also to vultures and wild animals and their impressive faculties. Yet, even these animals are not able to discover wisdom or to tread on wisdom's path. Verse 13 sums it up very well: *on the earth of the living*, בארץ החיים, no one is able to find wisdom. Therefore, the first section of this wisdom song deals with *wisdom's place on earth*. Because wisdom cannot be found by the smartest of all people inside the earth, cannot be seen by the sharpest-eyed of all birds on earth, and not traced by the wildest of all animals, the conclusion is inescapable: wisdom cannot be found on earth, at least not by animate creatures.

Wisdom in Job 28: 14–28

At the same time, something else comes to the fore. The idea that wisdom cannot be extracted through human mining activities, or discovered by vultures' eyes or found by wandering wild animals implies that wisdom is an entity that can be located. Thus, wisdom is conceptualized as a spatial entity, which is visible, too, in the open-

ing verse of the next episode, v. 14: ‘The deep says, “It is not in me”; The sea says, “I do not have it”.’ The perspective shared is not the earth’s anymore, but that of the deep or תהום, that is, the vertical space underneath the earth, a space filled with water. And the next perspective shared is that of the sea, i.e. the collection of water surrounding the earth’s continents. The conclusion to be drawn is that wisdom is not positioned in these three places, either on earth, or in the vertically oriented waters below the earth, or in the horizontally oriented waters around the solid substance of the earth. Nevertheless, a spatial conceptualization of wisdom is all the time implied.

In the next verses, vv. 15–19, an enumeration of costly and valuable materials shows that wisdom’s value transcends them all. Hence, wisdom cannot be bartered for gold, silver cannot be paid out as its price, gold or glass, onyx or sapphire, coral or crystal cannot be exchanged for it. This time, wisdom is, though viewed as a single entity, not necessarily linked to a spatial realm, or so it seems. The next verse, ‘But whence does wisdom come?’ (v. 20a), opens with an interrogative adverb of place, מאין, linking the subject of wisdom with a verbal predicate which entails a spatial movement, בוא, and expresses, therefore, a question about wisdom’s local origin. And the subsequent question ‘Where is the place of understanding?’ (v. 20b), contains another interrogative adverb of place, אן, connecting the subject of understanding to a nominal predicate indicated by the noun מִקוֹם. These two questions conclude this second episode (vv. 14–20) showing again (as in the first episode, vv. 1–13) that a spatial conceptualization of wisdom is presupposed.

In the next two verses, vv. 21–22, wisdom is said ‘to be hidden from the eyes of all living, concealed from the birds of heaven. Abaddon and Death say, “We have only a report of it.”’ Here, the contrastive pair of all living beings under the vaults of heaven, on the one hand, and the dead personified as Abaddon and Death in the underworld, on the other hand, is again related to a spatially determined idea of wisdom. This is visible in the spatial prefix מ and the verbs עלם (to be concealed from) and סתר (to be hidden from), both entailing a spatial meaning, because something hidden or concealed from someone is in a place where it cannot easily be seen or found. Neither creatures high in the sky, nor creatures deep down, no one alive or dead have an idea of wisdom’s location. In sum, in the first twenty-two verses of Job’s wisdom song it is self-evident that wisdom is conceived of as spatial entity whose place is as yet unknown.

Things do change in the last episode (vv. 23–28), where God is said to have found wisdom at the time of creation. It is still implied that wisdom is a single entity. But this time, the inadequacy of a spatial conceptualization of wisdom is suggested. In a first stage, vv. 23–

24, God is said to know the way of understanding and the place of wisdom; his perception and knowledge encompass the whole universe: 'He sees to the ends of the earth and observes all that is beneath the heavens.' But then, in a second stage (vv. 25–27), the text moves from place to time, from a spatial to a temporal realm: 'When He fixed the weight of winds, set the measure of the waters; When He made a rule for the rain, and a course for the thunderstorms, Then (וַאֲנִי) He saw it and gauged it, He measured it and probed it.' Wisdom turns out not to be located in present time or in actual places, but to be confined to primeval times.²³ Here, for the very first time in Job's song of wisdom, wisdom is positioned in the semantic or cognitive domain of time and not in the domain of place. And God is the only one who knows wisdom to its full extent. However, this knowledge does not stand in a spatial perspective, but is defined only in terms of the time of creation.

In conclusion, Job 28 appears to conceptualize wisdom implicitly and automatically as a single entity, though not situated in a single specific place or in an overall spatial realm. The search for wisdom leads to the insight that wisdom is closely related to one moment in time, namely the time of creation, and that wisdom is, therefore, intimately linked to God's measuring, probing, in short, to God's creative activities. Even in the very last verse, v. 28, where God is said to proclaim what wisdom is for human beings, wisdom includes but one human activity, that is, the activity of respect and awe for God, the creator, and respect for what He created.

A first sketch of God's speech in Job 38

Is this the ultimate knowledge and insight in wisdom that human beings can get? In other words, is Job 28's wisdom view conclusive? Does God's speech in Job 38 confirm or correct it? In order to answer these questions, a more detailed study will be made of Ch. 38.

God starts his speech from the whirlwind with four questions in vv. 4–6, marked by a three times repeated 'who?'. He wants to know who is the originator of it all. Is it Job? He asks. Explicitly introduced in v. 4 is 'the earth' as the object of God's building activity, and the suffixes in vv. 5b, 6a and 6b also refer back to it.²⁴ The topic referred

²³ See Geller (1987: 166).

²⁴ The infinitive construct בָּרַן, 'when they sang' (v. 7a) indicates an action that is simultaneous with the *wayyiqtol* וַיִּרְיִי in the subsequent main clause (v. 7b): 'When the morning stars sang together, all the sons of God shouted for joy.' Hence, the

to in vv. 7–8 is ‘the sea’. The singing morning stars (presented as God’s sons) constitute the background of the joy against which God’s hedging in of the sea takes place (v. 8). The masculine pronominal suffix in vv. 9–11 shows that the object is still the sea, in which v. 9 provides the temporal framework and grounds the setting against which the actions in vv. 10 and 11 stand out. As a consequence, a correspondence becomes visible between vv. 7–8 on the one hand and vv. 9–11 on the other: in v. 7, the closing in of the waters is profiled in the setting of joy; similarly, v. 9 highlights God’s hedging in and limitation of the waters in the setting of protection with clouds as clothes and swaddling bands. Thus, the first episode vv. 4–11 in its entirety tells about the primeval times in which the creation of the earth is displayed as a building activity with God as architect and builder, and the origin of the sea, although related to the word ‘womb’, is not referred to as created but as restricted or restrained. The sea’s closing in is highlighted and a ground for joy. Creation is, therefore, conceived of in these verses as building the earth and as the limitation of the sea.

In the subsequent section, vv. 12–15, no reference is made to a remote primeval time, but to a time frame that is related to the addressed person ‘you’: it relates to a stretch of time that is related to Job (‘in your days’). This ‘day’ category is confirmed by the concepts of morning and dawn. Here again, as in the previous episode, creation and limitation go hand in hand. Morning and dawn come, but shake off the wicked as well. The metaphors in v. 14 of seal impressions on clay and colour printing on a garment evoke the idea of the earth that is transformed every day anew. Its dynamics and complexity are visualized as a daily process of coming into light as well as of deprivation of light.

Then, in vv. 16–18 the focus shifts to the ‘sources of the sea’ and the ‘recesses of the deep’ and to the gates of death and death’s gloom, which reflect death as such. In contrast, vv. 19–20 appear to refer to every day’s ending, because they evoke an image of the place where the sun goes and the place where the night’s darkness is located. Even in the last verse, v. 21, the direct address ‘you’ in the ‘number of your days’ is an idiomatic expression of a life span, that is, of life including death. Thus, the third episode in vv. 16–21 displays the end of life in general and the end of every day and the end of ‘your’ life more specifically.

infinitive construct in v. 7a provides the temporal point of orientation of vv. 7b, 8a and 8b.

In the fourth episode, in vv. 22–30, the camera zooms in on a new topic, meteorological phenomena. Its opening view (vv. 22–27) shows the place and the path of the vaults of snow and hail, the path of the winds and thunderstorms, and the channel for the torrents, and is immediately followed by some questions in vv. 28–29 about the parents of these phenomena. These questions presuppose a negative answer: ‘No, the rain has no father; and no, a mother did not give birth to the frost of heaven.’²⁵ Finally, the last verse of this episode, v. 30, concentrates on frozen waters. Is it connected with the abyss? Or is this frozen water the end of water, or so to say, water’s death? Here, a negative answer is suggested again. Thus, in vv. 22–30, the topic is that of meteorological phenomena, their places and paths, as well their origin and end, and the rhetorical questions guide us to conclude that weather and water have no beginning or ending.

Another barrage of questions starts in v. 31 to v. 35, with the stars and constellations as the object. The word מַשְׁטָר in v. 33 simply means ‘account, table, rationale, schedule’.²⁶ The schedule or account is that of the stars and constellations. Verses 34 and 35 mention the meteorological phenomena of clouds, water or rain, lightning and thunder again, but this time, in contrast to vv. 22–30, no reflection is offered on their place or path, origin or end, but on the person who is guiding these phenomena.

The final section, vv. 36–38, opens with questions containing a threefold ‘who?’. In addition to these, the כּ + infinitive construct in v. 38a constitutes the stretch of time in which the main action of the ‘sticking together of the clods’ in v. 38b takes place. The subject in v. 38 is not the earth (although most translations add this subject) as this noun does not occur in this section, but ‘the jars of heaven.’ The contents of v. 38 are, however, difficult to understand.

After this first provisional sketch of God’s opening statement in his answer to Job, attention needs to be paid to its conceptual background. In order to do so, I will somewhat more extensively describe the cosmic views in the prevalent culture in the Ancient Near East. Only in this way will I be able to describe some of this text’s main concepts as standing out on these cognitive domains.

²⁵ Arguments for this explanation, see Vall (1995).

²⁶ See Mankowski (2000: 143, n. 533).

Cosmic views in Mesopotamia

In our present-day view of the cosmos or universe, it is only natural to make a distinction between heaven and earth. However, this is not as self-evident as it appears. The endless universe is, in fact, continuous and not split up into a heaven and an earth. Although the word pair ‘heaven and earth’ is a merism that expresses the totality of all and everything, the choice of just these two terms is based on our cultural categorization of the universe in which we are educated and which we therefore conceive as self-evident. However, in the Ancient Near East a very same ‘natural’ categorization is at least tripartite: heaven, earth and underworld. This last level disappeared in our culture after the discovery of the global form of the earth, that is, the scientific discovery that there is nothing ‘underneath’ our earth. Also the self-evident link between the dead and the underworld has disappeared in our days, being transformed into an equally obvious connection between the dead and heaven, that is, somewhere above us. This is what categorization implies: it carves up the world into categories that become a matter of course. However, it is not self-evident that the universe is arranged in levels, with regions and open spaces in between them. Why should the universe consist of levels anyway?

Within this general categorization, a culture conceptualizes specific elements. Take, for example, the material heaven is supposed to consist of. Ask people on the street in our Western countries this question, and most people will answer ‘air’: in their view heaven consists of ‘sky’ or ‘air’. However, in ancient Mesopotamia it is known for a fact that heaven’s surfaces are made of stone (among others, the Lower Heavens are made of lapis lazuli, which explains the sky’s blue color) and contain water. The tradition of watery heavens almost certainly derives from the observation that waters fell from the heavens in the form of precipitation.²⁷

In his impressive book *‘Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography’*, Wayne Horowitz made an extensive study of Mesopotamian texts from all periods dealing with or referring to cosmic geography. And he demonstrated that in all kinds of texts, from the earliest phases of cuneiform writing through the late period, the universe is conceived of as consisting of superimposed levels separated by open space (see Figure 3, taken from Horowitz 1998: xii).

²⁷ See Horowitz (1998: 262).

A View of the Mesopotamian Universe
Heaven of Anu or High Heavens
Middle Heavens
Sky or Lower Heavens
Earth's Surface
Apsu
Underworld

Fig. 3

The longest single surviving account of the building of the universe is found in the Babylonian epic *Enuma Elish*, which, in the form available to us, was composed in the late second millennium.¹ At the start of *Enuma Elish*, the universe consists of water. Only Apsu and Tiamat, the deified underground waters and deified waters of the sea, were in existence. The first couplet explains that even heaven and earth did not exist at this early time. The evolution of the universe begins with the mixing of the waters of Apsu and Tiamat in Ee I 5–6.² The major construction project in *Enuma Elish* begins in Ee IV 135–46 and continues through Ee V 68. The building material is the corpse of Tia-

¹ See Horowitz (1998: 108). A complete edition and translation of *Enuma Elish* is available in Foster (2003).

² Horowitz (1998: 109).

mat, and the architect and builder is Marduk.³ The cosmos at the end of tablet IV (Ee 145–146) consists of the waters of the heavens above (*šamû/šamāmû*) and the waters of the Apsu below, and the level in between these waters, the Ešarra.⁴ Marduk's construction project continues in Ee V 1–68: firstly, he arranges the stars, moon and sun in the visible heavens, then he provides the sources of fresh water in heaven and earth, and finally, he positions the cosmic bonds that hold the various features of the universe in place.⁵

The final result in *Enuma Elish* is a cosmos that consists of three heavens and two earths. The heaven's three levels are the Higher Heaven consisting of water, the Middle Heaven or Ešarra, that is, the level of the winds and the storms,⁶ and the Lower Heaven or visible sky with the sun, moon and stars and constellations.⁷ Hence, the winds in the Middle Heaven are considered to blow on a higher level than the level of the stars that form the Lower Heaven. This is also visible in the lines in which Marduk on earth is said to be able to see as far as Ešarra, through the level of the stars.⁸ Apart from the three levels of heaven, two levels of earth are distinguished: the Upper Earth, where mankind lives with the city of Babylon located at its center, and the Middle Earth or Apsu, the water region where Ea reigns. No other god than Marduk resides permanently on the earth's surface. The other gods travel to the earth's surface from the heavens

³ Horowitz (1998: 112).

⁴ 'Ee IV 145–46, together with EeV 119–22, identify and locate Ešarra. In lines 145–146, Marduk assigns Ešarra to Enlil, the Heavens (*šamāmû*) to Anu, and the Apsu to Ea. Ee IV 138 states that the Heavens (*šamāmû*) are a cosmic 'roof', so that Ešarra must be located below this level. In an analogous passage in *Atrahasis* (Lambert-Miljard *Atra-hasis* 42: 13–18), the same three gods divide the regions of the universe, with Anu ascending to heaven and Enki/Ea descending to the Apsu. Enlil is then left on the earth's surface. In Ee IV 137–46, there is no earth's surface for Enlil to occupy, so Enlil is sent to Ešarra, the region between the Heavens that belong to Anu, and the Apsu of Ea.' (Horowitz 1998: 113).

⁵ Horowitz (1998: 114).

⁶ Ee IV 41–50 suggest that Ešarra is the level of the winds and storms of Marduk and Ee IV 143–146 suggest that Ešarra is just above the level of the winds (Horowitz 1998: 113, n. 7).

⁷ See Horowitz (1998: 125–127).

⁸ See Horowitz (1998: 127). The Lower Heavens or the visible heavens with the stars are extensively described in astronomical texts. The visible heavens are divided into paths (*harrānu*), and these paths refer to bands of the sky reaching from the eastern to the western horizon (Horowitz 1998: 252). Both the Astrolabes and Mul-Apin divide the sky into three stellar paths that cross the sky from the eastern to the western horizon: a northern path belonging to Anu, a central path belonging to Enlil, and a southern path belonging to Ea. This system of dividing the sky into Paths of Anu, Enlil and Ea was well known in the first millennium (Horowitz 1998: 254).

or the Apsu at the time of the assembly of the gods in Babylon.⁹ There is no Lower Earth or Underworld in *Enuma Elish*. No human beings die in the text, and the King and the Queen of the Underworld do not appear in the epic.¹⁰ In short, the cosmic regions in *Enuma Elish* are: the Heavens (*šamû/šamāmū*), Ešarra, the Level of the Stars, Sun and Moon, and the Earth's Surface, Apsu.

In another tablet, KAR 307 30–38, a religious explanatory text which dates to the first millennium and is written in Neo-Assyrian script from Assur, three sets of heavens and three earths are listed, while AO 8196 iv 20–22, a late astrological-astronomical tablet also from the first millennium, lists the three heavens but does not list the earth.¹¹ In both *Enuma Elish* and KAR 307 30–38, Marduk/Bel settles the god Ea in the Apsu, mankind on the earth's surface and groups of gods in heaven and on earth. Both texts state that Marduk arranges the stars in heaven and describe the three heavenly regions similarly. However, in KAR 307 30–38 three levels of the earth are distinguished, viz. the Upper Earth, the Middle Earth and the Lower Earth, whereas *Enuma Elish* does not mention the Lower Earth or Underworld. The Upper Earth is the earth's surface where Marduk settles the spirits of mankind; the Middle Earth is the Apsu of Ea; and the Lower Earth is in KAR 307 the underworld, where 600 Anunnaki (the underworld gods) are imprisoned.

I do not claim that the cosmic view in the books of the Hebrew Bible is exactly the same as that of ancient Mesopotamia. What I do want to argue, however, is that in an ancient Near Eastern context the categorization of the universe into multiple heavenly and earthly levels is so self-evident that it might be shared by texts in the Hebrew Bible too; that is to say, texts in the Hebrew Bible may assume such a cosmic view, they may implicitly or explicitly confirm it or they may be in contrast to it.

⁹ Horowitz (1998: 127).

¹⁰ Horowitz (1998: 125).

¹¹ Horowitz (1998: 3–4) translates KAR 307 and AO 8196 as follows: KAR 307: 30–37: 'The Upper Heavens are *luludānītu*-stone. They belong to Anu. He settled the 300 Igigi inside. The Middle Heavens are *saggilmud*-stone. They belong to the Igigi. Bel sat on the high dais inside, in the lapis lazuli sanctuary. He made a lamp of electrum shine inside. The Lower Heavens are jasper: They belong to the stars. He drew the constellations of the gods on them. In the ... of the Upper Earth, he laid down the spirits of mankind. [In the ..]. of the Middle Earth, he settled Ea, his father. [...]. He did not let the rebellion be forgotten / identify rebellion. [In the ...of the Lowe]r Earth, he shut inside the 600 Anunnaki. 38. [...]....[.in]side jasper.' AO 8196: iv 20–22 'The Upper Heavens are *luludānītu*-stone. They belong to Anu. The Middle Heavens are *saggilmud*-stone. They belong to the Igigi. The Lower Heavens are jasper. They belong to the stars.'

Job 38's Cosmic View

Ch. 38 in the book of Job presupposes a certain cosmic view and the hypothesis I will defend here is that the six levels presented in Mesopotamian literature are also present in Job 38. Figure 4 is the summary of what I will try to demonstrate.

It is widely accepted that Ch. 38 consists of two parts that correspond to the division between earth and heaven: vv. 4–21 describe the earth and vv. 22–38 describe the heavens. From there on the opinions start to diverge. In my view, the first main part regards the earth's three levels: the first level is the earth's surface or the Upper Earth, presented in vv. 4–15; the second level is the subterranean water (תהום) or the Middle Earth, presented in v. 16; the third level, the underworld or the Lower Earth, is presented in v. 17–18. The second main part reflects on the heavens' three levels: wind and weather or the Middle Heaven in vv. 22–30, the stars and constellations in the Lower Heaven in vv. 31–35 and the hidden parts of heaven, that is, the High Heaven, in vv. 37–38. This division corresponds to and confirms the earlier presented syntactic and semantic cohesion. The textual elements in Figure 4 make this hypothesis plausible.

The first main part of Job 38 starts in vv. 4–6 with the foundation of the earth, its measurement, the sinking of its pillars and the setting of its corner stones. Although v. 6 does not explicitly indicate onto what these pillars were sunk, in ancient Mesopotamian views the pillars or foundations of the earth were sunk onto the Apsu or Middle Earth.¹²

¹² These include a number of passages where the foundations of temples reach down to Apsu, including *Enki's Journey to Nippur* 21–22: 'Temple, built of silver and lapis, whose foundation is fastened on the Apsu.' Parallels in first-millennium Babylonia include the Sargon I inscription, where a quay wall in Babylon is placed in *an-zanunzû* and passages in Late Babylonian royal inscriptions where foundations are placed by Apsu. In Assyria, the only attested example of foundations resting on the Apsu dates to the reign of Esarhaddon (KAH 127 vi): 'above, its top (of the temple at Assur) reaches to heaven; below, its foundations are entwined in the Apsu.' (Horowitz 1998: 336–337).

Cosmic View in Job 38			
I שמים	High Heaven	Jars of Heaven	38: 37–38
II שמים	Middle Heaven	Wind and Weather	38: 22–30
III שמים	Lower Heaven	Stars and Constellations	38: 31–35
IV ארץ	Earth's Surface	Land Sea Encircling the Land Daily Light and Life	38: 4–15
V תהם	Subterranean waters	Depths of the sea	38: 16
VI / מות רחבי־ארץ צלמות	Underworld	Death Dwelling of the Sun Place of Darkness	38:17–21

Fig. 4

This construction of the earth is in Job 38: 1–11 closely related to the hedging in of the waters. Contrary to those who argue that vv. 4–11 refer to two creations, viz. a creation of the earth (in vv. 4–6) and a creation of the sea (vv. 7–11), the syntactic cohesion of these verses shows that vv. 4–11 do not separate the two. Semantically, this is confirmed by ancient Near Eastern material, which shows that the earth's surface was thought to be basically circular in shape and that

the sea was thought to be a cosmic ocean encircling the continental portion of the earth's surface.¹³ In the Late Babylonian *Flood Story* (BE 39099) and probably also in the Old Babylonian *Astra-hasis* mention is made of 'the bolt of the sea', which may be a bolt on a water-lock that holds the waters of the sea in, similar to the way it is described in Job 38.¹⁴ This explains why in Job 38: 4–11 the sons of God sing out of joy when the sea is hedged in, because it is an essential part of the primeval building of the earth, closely related as it is to the restraining of the waters of the cosmic ocean. The verses 12–15 also relate to the earth. However, this time creation is not related to primeval times but to the creation that takes place every day anew. Here again, creation (light) and limitation (the wicked are removed) go hand in hand.

Subsequently, v. 16 locates the sources of the sea in the תהום or abyss and describes them as 'the depths of the sea', which is very similar to the Mesopotamian Apsu. In v. 17, the 'gates of death' are introduced and related to 'the gates of darkness.' The meaning of צלמות darkness should be understood in the Netherworld context as an epithet of the Netherworld, meaning the 'dark place'.¹⁵ Explicit

¹³ See Horowitz (1998: 334): 'The geographic terms *kippat mātāti* 'circle of the lands', *kippat erseti* 'circle of earth', *kippat tubuqāt erbetti* 'circle of the four corners', *kippat šar erbetti* 'circle of the four winds', and *kippat erbetti* 'circle of the four (regions)' (see CAD K 399 3), if understood literally, demonstrate that the earth's surface was a circle.'

¹⁴ Cf. Horowitz (1998: 326–7): 'The *šigarū nahbalu tām̄ti* can be at least partially identified by examining the meanings of *šigarū* and *nahbalu*. A *šigarū* is a bolt on a door. In the context of the sea, the *šigarū nahbalu tām̄ti* may be a bolt on a water-lock that holds the waters of the sea in place. Such a bolt (*šigarū*) appears in the Late Babylonian flood story twice in the context of the killing of the 'guards of the sea' (...) (Lambert-Millard *Atra-hasis* 118:23–24, 120:39–40) (...) *nahbalu tām̄ti* 'Net of the Sea' seems to be a proper name rather than an actual object and, if so, may be the name of the 'bolt of the sea'. Although the exact function of the *šigarū nahbalu tām̄ti* is not explained in the Mesopotamian flood stories, it can be compared with doors and a bar that hold the sea in place in the biblical book of Job 38: 8–11. (...) In this passage, the function of the bar and doors of the sea is to keep the waters of the sea within their bounds. The *šigarū nahbalu tām̄ti* was probably meant to serve the same purpose, since it is mentioned in connection with the flood, a time when the normal restraints of the sea may have been removed.'

¹⁵ 'There is obviously no difference between the parallelism מוֹת // צלמות in Job 38:17 and the parallelism שׂוֹר // שׂוֹר in Job 17:13. Finally, note that the use of the phrase שׂוֹר צלמות 'gates of the "dark place"' in Job 38:17 has as its Biblical Hebrew precedent not only the parallel phrase מוֹת שׂוֹר 'gates of the Netherworld' in the very same verse, but also the other three verses where this imagery is found – // שׂוֹר מוֹת שׂוֹר 'gates of the Netherworld' (Isa 38:10; Ps 9:14, 107:18). While this biblical evidence is certainly sufficient, some additional Akkadian evidence from "The Descent of Ishtar to the Netherworld" may also be cited. The Akkadian term *bābu*

proof of the fact that the place of death is conceived of as belonging to the region of the earth can be found in v. 18, where this place is referred to as ‘the expanses of the earth’. In Akkadian, the term *eršetu rapāštu*, the vast earth, is a common name for the underworld.¹⁶ Actually, the best-known features of the underworld in ancient Mesopotamia are its darkness and its gates. These gates lead from the approaches to the underworld into the interior of the region. In the ancient Mesopotamian cosmic view both the heavens have gates and the earth has gates and the earth’s gates are located in the underworld. The underworld gates, like those in heaven, were identical in structure to city gates on the earth’s surface. These gates consisted of many gate parts, including doors, door frames, bolts, locks, and keys. Here, in vv. 16–18, exactly these two features are mentioned: the gates of death and the gates of death’s gloom.

Verses 19–21 introduce the terms ‘dwelling place of the light’ and ‘the place of darkness’ and refer to the way the sun goes to this dwelling place. In Mesopotamia, at the very place where the heavens and the earth touch each other, the gates are located through which the sun, moon and other stars ascend and descend, and this gate is called the ‘gate of Sunset’.¹⁷ Although conventionally the underworld is called the house of darkness, this does not mean that the underworld is always bereft of light. In a number of passages, the Sungod passes through the underworld at night on his way under the earth’s surface from the western horizon to the eastern horizon. Because the dwelling of the sun in v. 19a is placed in a parallel position to the place of darkness in v. 19b, and because previously in vv. 17–18 this darkness is related to the Underworld, we may conclude that Job 38: 19–21 reflect on the Underworld or Lower Earth, too.

In conclusion, the first part of Job 38 (vv. 4–21) reflects on the creation of the earth in its full size. It starts with the foundation of the Upper Earth, that is, the earth’s surface including the seas surrounding the earth. In the prevalent cognitive view of the time, these pillars were conceived of as sunk onto the Middle Earth or Apsu. Subsequently, some attention is paid to this **תהום** or abyss (Middle

‘gate’, the interdialectal equivalent of Biblical Hebrew שַׁעַר occurs no less than 23 times in the 138 preserved lines of this composition, in all cases referring to the (seven) gate(s) of the Netherworld. In view of this abundance of evidence, both from Biblical Hebrew and from Akkadian, there should be no doubt whatsoever that Job 38:17 must be understood as an additional biblical literary allusion to the widespread Mesopotamian tradition concerning the Netherworld.’ (Cohen 1996: 299–300).

¹⁶ See Horowitz (1998: 278).

¹⁷ See Horowitz (1998: 281).

Earth) and to the Lower Earth or Underworld. Reference is made to the gates of death and its darkness – these are the Underworld’s main characteristics – and to the expanses of the earth. And also a connection is laid between this underworld and the dwelling places of light and darkness, which matches the ancient Mesopotamian view of the underworld.

In the second main part of Job 38 (vv. 22–38) on the heavens, the meteorological phenomena are described separately from the constellations. The vaults of snow and vaults of hail are placed in their own local environments.¹⁸ The light or lightning in v. 24 and the thunderstorm in v. 25 are believed to follow their own paths, the east wind is scattered over the earth according to its own rules and the torrents follow their own channels. The word *ḥayyā* is used three times, with regard to the path of the sun in v. 19, with regard to the path of the light(ning) in v. 24 and with regard to the paths of the thunderstorm in v. 25. The system for describing the geography of the sky in terms of ‘paths of the heavens’ is widespread in Mesopotamian literature and astronomy. ‘The division of the visible heavens into paths (*har-rānu*) is the most common system in astronomical texts. In these texts, the term usually refers to bands of the sky reaching from the eastern to the western horizon.’¹⁹ Because this division is so common in the ancient Near East, it is possible or even plausible that this is also the cognitive domain against which Job 38: 19–25 stands out.

Once more, the Mesopotamian categorization of the heavens into three levels, the Higher Heaven, the Middle Heaven and the Lower Heaven, proves to be instructive for the understanding of Job 38, because the winds and weather phenomena are described as parts of the Middle Heaven, and therefore, contrary to our conceptualization, as belonging to a level above the stars and constellations. The stars and constellations in the Lower Heavens are presented in vv. 31–35

¹⁸ See, for example, the Assyrian tile in the British Museum (BM 115706) with the bags of hail and snow hanging under the vault of heaven.

¹⁹ Horowitz (1998: 252–254) describes it as follows: ‘Both the “The Astrolabes” and *Mul-Apin* divide the sky into three stellar paths that cross the sky from the eastern to the western horizon: a northern path belonging to Anu, a central path belonging to Enlil, and a southern path belonging to Ea. The Moon and Sun-gods use similar paths, called “The Path of Sin” and “The Path of Shamash,” on their way across the sky (...). The “The Astrolabes” and star-catalogue of *Mul-Apin* (*Mul-Apin* I I 1-ii 35) list Anu, Enlil and Ea-stars that travel along the Paths of Anu, Enlil and Ea over the course of the year. These paths are also mentioned in many other astronomical and astrological texts where, on occasion, the positions of astronomical phenomena are defined in terms of the Paths of Anu, Enlil, and Ea-stars. (...) This demonstrates that Mesopotamian astronomers used the Paths of Anu, Enlil, and Ea to locate heavenly bodies in the sky, just as modern astronomers use degrees of latitude and longitude.’

as bound by their own bonds. Theirs are the laws of heaven and they set their own schedule on earth. What kind of bonds do these verses suggest? In *Enuma Elish* tablet V, 65–68, reference is made to a similar kind of bond: after Marduk finished his creation of the universe ‘he inspected: heaven and earth are..., [...] their bonds ... twined. After he designed his rites, made his rule[es,] he then cast down the [lead]-ropes, he made Ea take them. From this moment onwards Ea is the guardian of the lead-ropes, which keep the heaven and the earth in its place.’²⁰ A number of other texts refer to the cosmic bonds, including ‘bonds’ (*riksu, markasu*), ‘lead-ropes’ (*serretu*), and the ‘great bond’ (*durmāhu*), which secure the heavens in place.²¹ In BM 78161 mention is made of lines that are established in the sky by joining stars to form *qû* ‘ropes’.²² For more detailed information on ropes and bonds between stars and constellations I refer to Horowitz’s book.

The strongest proof for the multi-level view of the universe represented in Job 38 is, in my view, the final section, vv. 37–38. So far, most studies I know of have not been able to explain this text within the book of Job and in the Hebrew Bible. However, with reference to the categorization of the universe into six levels, these verses can be explained. In Job 38 it is remarkable that all heavenly phenomena are characterized by water: the weather in vv. 25–30 deals only with water, the laws of heaven related to the stars in vv. 31–35 reign on the order of clouds and the abundance of water, and in vv. 36–38, heaven is characterized as ‘the jars of heaven’ or ‘the bottles of heaven’. In addition, this heaven is referred to as ‘the hidden parts of heaven’, the same description of the invisible or Higher Heaven in Mesopotamian texts. The answer to the question ‘Who can tilt the jars of heaven?’ is clear; only God can, that is, the Hebrew God corresponding to Anu of High Heaven in ancient Mesopotamia. The very last verse, v. 38, should therefore not be translated by ‘the earth melts into dust’ (because it refers back to the jars of heaven in the previous verse), but by: ‘when soil was poured into a mould, the clods stuck together’. The first clause with the infinitive construct **בצקת** constitutes the time frame in which the action of sticking together took place. The question is to what the pouring of soil might refer. The image this verse presupposes is very similar to that presented in *The Bilingual Creation of the World by Marduk*. There, the creation of the lands is described as follows: ‘Marduk wove a raft on the face of the waters; He created dirt/soil and poured it on the raft’

²⁰ See Horowitz (1998: 119–120).

²¹ See Horowitz (1998: 265).

²² See Horowitz (1998: 256, n. 15).

(CT 13 36: 17–18).²³ The land or dry stuff is described in this text as the result of Marduk's pouring of soil on a raft floating on top of waters. The corresponding usage of the words 'pour' and 'soil' and the similar image conveyed in CT 13 36 and in Job 38: 38 express the idea that in primordial times, when the heavenly jars were poured out, the clods of soil that form the lands were glued or stuck together. Thus, the collocation 'the jars of heaven' in the final scene of Ch. 38 describes the Higher Heaven's primordial activities. The lack of a subject in the infinitive construct shows at the same time a distinction: no Marduk is mentioned in Job 38: 38 as in *The Bilingual Creation of the World by Marduk*, it is de-deified.

Against the background of this cosmic geography, it appears that God's opening speech in Job 38 intended to demonstrate that each of the six levels of the universe testifies to its own wisdom. The 'inhabitants' of the three heavens act according to their characteristics and their rules: the constellations in the Lower Heaven know their schedules, the winds in the Middle Heaven know their paths and channels, the jars of heaven in the Higher Heaven are poured according to their own wisdom. The heavenly phenomena know of no parents and know of no death. In contrast, the 'inhabitants' of the three earthly levels have a beginning and an ending. On earth, differentiation is discernible on every level. It is God who made these distinctions, who set his rules, or allowed the phenomena their own rules and schedules. This is a major difference between the ancient Mesopotamian literature that takes the existence of a multitude of gods for granted and Job 38 that acknowledges only one God who governs the creation and the sustenance of all levels in the universe. Whereas in Mesopotamian literature the creator God is called Marduk and various Gods reign in the various regions of the universe, there is only one God in Job 38, who measured the earth and sunk its pillars, limited the sea, knows of the differences between a creation in primeval times and every day's creation, and masters life and deprivation of light. He can go to the abyss and to the underworld, he masters death in general and in particular, he knows of every day's appearance and disappearance of the light. He can go to the vaults of snow and reserve it for times of war, he can let the rain fall on deserts where no human being lives. He can bind the bonds of the constellations and tilt the jars of heaven. And he can command the various schedules and rules of the regions at all levels of the universe. He monitors it all.

²³ See Horowitz (1998: 131).

However, God does not represent a simple view on wisdom. In Ch. 38, God speaks of diversity, dynamic complexes and variable processes in almost every line of his speech. His creation turns out not only to be an action performed at the beginning, but one that happens every day anew. The metaphor of the cylinder shows that when it is rolled on clay a picture emerges, evoking an image of the sun which brings everything to light and life and arouses everyone from death and non-existence. Thus created anew, an immense diversity becomes manifest both in the cosmos and on earth. God's speech exhibits specificity, variety and sustainability, that is, biodiversity both in life and death, in which the phenomena act according to their insight and understanding in accordance with the way they are created. No general wisdom is defended, nor is a general rule presented that explains it all.

Conclusion

One of this paper's aims was to present some new concepts developed in cognitive linguistics, especially the view that language does not express 'something', an idea, a view, an action or an event, *per se*, but expresses a thing or relation which stands out against a certain ground. Thus, in cognitive linguistics, language is studied first and foremost as a conceptual organisation in which words get their meaning by profiling a certain entity on a certain base within a certain larger configuration or cognitive domain, in which a cognitive domain is the selection of the linguistically relevant portion of our knowledge and experience, and in which this portion stands out against the categorization offered by science, culture and education in a certain time and space.

These insights were applied to Job 28, more specifically in the usage of the concept of prototypical scenario in a study of the first eleven verses dealing with mining. Archaeological research provided information on Ancient Near Eastern mining procedures as they were executed in a more or less standardized series of actions. Cognitive linguistics allowed us to reconstruct the way this was conceptualised and expressed in language by a more or less fixed series of words or prototypical scenario. The deviation from this prototypical order in Job 28: 1–11 marked the text's change in orientation: what is usually understood as a human action is presented here from the perspective of its effects on the earth. One consequence of this cognitive study of a prototypical scenario was the insight that Job 28: 1–11 (in contrast to what is commonly stated in biblical commentaries) is not focused on the impressiveness of human mining or on human capacities but

on the earth itself. And this laid the foundation of the subsequent analysis of the next episodes (vv. 12–22) as verses that concentrate on the living (and dead) beings on earth and how they are related to wisdom. Thus, it turned out that Job 28 centres in fact on wisdom's spatial and temporal dimensions.

This is confirmed by the second part of the article, which deals with the cosmic concepts in God's speech in Job 38 as standing out against cultural categorizations in general and ancient Mesopotamian cosmic geography in particular. This is true for Job's song of wisdom in Ch. 28, too, because in it, three earthly levels and two heavenly levels can be clearly distinguished. The earth's surface – including human beings, animals and birds as living beings, the solid substance of the earth and the sea encircling it – is at the heart of the discussion in vv. 1–21; Abaddon or the deep filled with water figure in v. 22 together with the underworld or place where the deceased or dead are staying (v. 22). The longest stretch of Job 28 focuses, therefore, on the earthly realm. Only the last episode in vv. 23–24 concentrates on the heavenly realm, starting with the view from the vaults of heaven over the ends of the earth, which may possibly relate to High Heavens. Then attention is paid to the winds, rains, storms, that is, to the meteorological phenomena in Middle Heavens. Because no reference is made to the stars or the constellations, the Lower Heavens stay out of picture.

This brings me to a final conclusion. In imaginative language, Job's song of wisdom in Ch. 28 evokes a mental picture of wisdom that is not located on any level of the universe. Wisdom, it is said, cannot be conceptualized spatially in either an earthly or a heavenly realm, but only in relation to the temporal category of creation. This mental image presents wisdom as intimately linked to primeval times and to God's creative activities. In his dramatic speech in Ch. 38, God adds complexity and a dynamic dimension to this concept of wisdom. Whereas Job 28 knows a certain monocultural bias, locating wisdom as a single unity in primeval times when it was seen and known by God alone, Job 38 demonstrates that biodiversity is a concept that suits wisdom better. It presents an idea of wisdom that is both everyday anew and active on all levels of the universe. In his own inimitable way, God is all the time breaking open Job 28's closed concept of wisdom by showing the complex of processes in an ever-changing cosmos. In a multicoloured palette of earthly and heavenly phenomena, each with their own rules and ways, wisdom is made manifest in its own, varied and specific ways. All these ways may inspire awe and respect. They may cause wonder and bewilderment. Evolving out of the multiple instants of creation at all possible moments in time,

wisdom is not sited in one place only, but potentially present at every possible place.

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