Toward the Peak of Mount Sinai:
a Discourse-Pragmatic Analysis of Exodus 19[1]

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Thunder, terror and talking on top of Mount Sinai

The story of the events after the arrival of Israel at Mount Sinai, as told in Exodus 19, soon reaches a high point atop the mountain. Their leader Moses twice climbs the mountain to meet God. After three days of waiting and preparation the people of Israel suddenly see in the distance a devastating storm with thunder, lightning and a flaming fire in thick layers of cloud and smoke (19:16-19). As they approach the dreadful mountain, they hear an ear-splitting sound of *shofar*-blasting, and they shake in terror as the mountain shakes. Moses is talking with Yahweh who is revealing himself at the holy mountain and delivers messages between him and the people. In Exodus 20-23 various laws are communicated to the people before they enter into covenant in Exodus 24.

Readers of this story may very well wonder at a number of apparent problems.[2] Moses goes up and down the mountain and it is not easy to keep track of his movements and doings,[3] since all of a sudden he is in conversation with God in 19:19, while both before and after (19:16-17.20) Moses is located below at the foot of mountain. Meanwhile God is twice reported to have descended on the mountain (19:18.20). Another challenging statement for the people is that *they* first are to ascend the mountain (19:13), but later most of them are prohibited to approach (19:21.24). Meanwhile the people of Israel are first treated as a treasured kingdom of priests (19:6), but in the end only a few priests are allowed to ascend the mountain after a special consecration (19:22.24).

Old Testament scholars traditionally have dealt with such enigmatic statements as proof for some diachronic history of the story and traced its sources.[4] Much of the modern scholarly

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[1] Earlier versions of this paper was read at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, Department of Semitic Linguistics (November 6, 1998) and at the discourse seminar for staff and PhD students at Southern Baptist Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky (November 9, 1998). In this final version I have had challenging questions asked by David Kummerow and Kirk Lowery. The latter I want especially to thank for following up on his diligent language work on my dissertation in the mid 90'ies.

[2] For a convenient overview of noted problems such as repetitions and inconsistencies see Houtman (1996:427).

[3] Moses walks up in 19:3, 8c and 20, and down in 7a, 14a and 25; he continues up in 20:21 and down 24:3. He then gradually walks his way up to a 40 days stay atop the mountain in 24:9, 13, 15 and 19 and then down, and up and down two more times in Exodus 32-34. Tracking the steps of Moses is "one of the main problems of Exodus 19" (Niccacci 1997:217). Some find it hard to believe "the picture of an old man having to scale a high mountain three times in a short span of time" (Houtman 1996:428), and it is impossible for traditional Jewish interpretation to accept that man can "attain to the place of the Divine Presence" (Cassuto 1967:233) – accordingly Moses ascended only "half-way up" (!)

[4] Traditional source criticism assumes that in the Elohist source the people stands below the mountain in fear (19:2b-8.13b.16.17.19b), while in the Yahwist source the people are forbidden to ascend the mountain and remains at a distance (19:12-13a.18.19a.20-25; 20:18-21). For discussion of such approaches see Childs (1974:244-249), Dozeman (1989:3-12), Niehaus (1995:43-85), Oswald (1998:1-19) and Van Seters (2003:47-53).

debate has been influenced by Childs (1974:349-350.364) who rejected the established consensus of traditional 19th Century source criticism and instead traced two forms of the oral tradition for Exodus 19-20 and 24. The dominant pattern is that God dwells on the mountain and Moses leads the people, i.e., the theophany of Exodus 19 combined with 19:3-8; 20,18-20; 24:3ff. Against this a minor pattern has a different view of Moses' office as the one who was to approach God and hear the Decalogue as a preparation for the covenant making (19:9.19). Furthermore, while 20:18-20 originally was placed before the Decalogue, a redactional move in pre-Deuteronomic times placed it in its present location to serve as an introduction to the Book of Covenant in 20:22ff. Childs (1974:351-352) found this double tradition confirmed by a striking discrepancy in Deuteronomy. According to the dominant view God spoke the law directly from heaven to all of Israel (Deut 5:4), but according to the minor view Moses approached God and mediated the Decalogue to Israel (5:5). Nicholson (1977:428) soon responded to the novel approach of Childs and argued against the redactional relocation of 20:18-20, because the speaking of God from the heavens (20:22-23) presupposes that the Decalogue was spoken directly to all of Israel just like in Deut 4:36 and elsewhere. Accordingly, much research for the last two decades has tried to unravel the alleged traditions behind the text.[5] However the challenge is still to decide whether God spoke the Ten Commandments from heaven directly to the people or whether his words were mediated by Moses, and how a choice on this issue will affect the interpretation of Exodus 19.

Furthermore, even within the diachronic-genetic readings tradition scholars like Nicholson (1977:423) admits that the final form has not been fully appreciated in prior approaches. At present several Old Testament scholars propose synchronic readings that move away from multiple layer hypotheses to synchronic readings of the texts as wholes and solve some of the problems otherwise pointed to in order to justify the diachronic constructs.[6] Even more interesting are the new linguistic approaches that wrestle with the grammatical features of the extant texts. In a contribution to the Tilburg conference on the Hebrew verb Niccacci (1997:216) combined his linguistic analysis with a narrative analysis that took Jewish exegesis into account, and he proposed that resumptive techniques could handle repetition.[7] Talstra (1997) even more forcefully argued for a linguistic solution "against the confusing mixture of literary and grammatical arguments" (1997[W]:122) and wanted to "base an interpretation of verbs and clauses on a syntactically constructed textual hierarchy" rather than "smoothing the text according to particular desires concerning its literary form".[8]

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[5] Scholars like Dozeman (1989:19) reconstruct an earliest mountain of God tradition (19:2b-3a.10ab-11a.12aa.13b-15a.16ab-17). This is quite similar to the solution of Oswald (1998:112-113) who posits 7 layers, cf his synopsis (1998:255-262). Other scholars posit larger units with less redactions, but still remove disturbing verses like 19,1-2.9.13c.15.22.24bc; 20,18-20 (Avishur 1999:187-190), or whole chunks like Exodus 19:20-20:17 (Van Seters 2003:353-354).

[6] Sailhamer (1992:282. 1995:282-287) argued that Israel had to wait to access the mountain (19:12-13), but then stopped at the mountain (19:17), and Moses were given the Decalogue in 19:19. This early and innovative approach has been completely overlooked in German research, even by Krüger (2000) whose interpretation of Exodus 19 is quite similar except for his redactional late-dating. Polak (1996:130-131) declines to set up a contrast between theophany and mediated role. Alexander (1999) argues from structural parallels within the story for its basic unity. Hauge (2000:46) points to synchronic patterns of revolts in 19:21-24; 20:18-21; 32. Childs (1974:374-375) rejects such attempts as modern midraschic methodology.

[7] See Niccaci (1997:211.213 n.13). Niccaci structures Exodus 19-20 and 24 according to mainline forms (*wayyiqtol* of Hebrew narrative), secondary information (*waw-x-qatal* etc) and direct speech (1997:203; note also his display of the text in 1997:204-210).

[8] Talstra (1997:89) first establishes the textual hierarchy and cohesion within paragraph units and local functions of clause sequences. He uses the tools developed by the *Werkgroep Informatica* to illustrate "the computer-assisted "reading" process used for establishing the syntactic structure" (1997[H]:90). He establishes the minimal paragraph units (1997[W]:124) and much of the peculiar structure of 19:16-19 (1997[W]:125-126).

Following this line of research I will apply the discourse-pragmatic approach that I developed in Winther-Nielsen (1995) as well as other similar methods and bring them into play in order to solve the challenges of Exodus 19. As a start I will briefly dwell on some of the sophisticated software for Hebrew linguistic analysis which researchers can use to explore the texts in new and interesting ways.[9] In the attached Appendix ("A hierarchical display of Exodus 19") the proposed analysis is presented in a display of the Hebrew text in the right-hand column and a translation mostly following the NRSV in the left hand column (minor changes are underlined in the display). The display presents the hierarchical structure of the text according to the basic ideas of syntactic and textual analysis developed by Talstra (1997[H]), but with a stronger interpretational input from the reader.[10] These computational tools visualize readings and analyses by indentations that describe the interdependencies among clause fragments. Ancillary clauses or clause fragments are indented if they are dependent on a preceding clause, while parallel clauses are shown on the same hierarchical level.[11] New and more important clauses will then move up to the most salient level for new sections, or higher steps up to show parallelism with earlier clause clusters. The display reflects the discourse-pragmatic, syntactic and literary interpretation of the story.[12] A peculiar system of numeration of clausal units follows the discourse pragmatic interpretation of clause coherence.[13]

Now we are ready to head for the summit meeting between God and his chief deputy and address some of the famous problems noted above as we move along.

Up and down the mountain: Constituent structure and grammar

As the modern reader tries to track the path of Moses in the events, he first has to determine the units in the story which are constituents that combine hierarchically into other units at higher levels. Simple clauses are constituents of complex sentences and they form episodes, stories, sections and books. The basic constituent structure of a narrative is formed by the

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[9] In this paper all syntactic analyses within the Hebrew Bible were performed in the new and advanced software Stuttgart Electronic Bible Study (SESB), see http://www.dbg.de/article.php?channel= S&article=290, which exploits the *Werkgroep Informatica* data base and the Logos technology.

[10] The syntactic programmes of the *Werkgroep Informatica* are the best scientific tools at present for linguistic research into the Hebrew Bible today and have been applied and discussed in an analysis of Exodus 19 in Talstra (1997[W]). A recent discussion is Talstra and Sikkel (2000). Here I have used *Biblical Analysis Research Tool* (BART) from SIL (http://www.sil.org/translation/bart.htm), which in its more recent versions unfortunately at present are restricted to use for Bible Translators only, but in earlier and poorer versions can be bought as part of a Greek and Hebrew Library in Word Search 5 (https://estore.wordsearchbible.com/). BART is the only Bible software program at present that allows the researcher manually to display text divided into clause fragments and hierarchal dependencies according to the principles discussed in Winther-Nielsen and Talstra (1995).

[11] Talstra (1997[H]) in effect defines hierarchical importance in terms of text syntax as the matrix member in of a paragraph dominating less important and embedded clauses or embedded speech in narrative, and it is determined "only preliminarily by their position in a grammatical paradigm" (1997[H]:101). I would argue for the hierarchy first from the persuasive role of local projects that come in part in conversations (Clark 1996:196-201), and thus all text is somehow modelled along interaction. Secondly, the rhetorical structure of all text is predominantly hierarchical spans of heads and modifiers – or nucleus and satellite in terms of Mann, Matthiesen and Thompson (1992), and this structuring is pragmatically motivated, as assisting intentional communication between speaker and hearer.

[12] For Hebrew we have to work with an ideal sentence defined as the complex clause. Clauses are extremely short in Hebrew while sentences with narrative clause-linkage can be extremely long. For grammatical and discourse pragmatic reasons we combine into coordinated clauses, but detach discourse significant adverbial clauses. For details see Winther-Nielsen (1995:61-62). Transliterations of Hebrew are taken from BART.

[13] The system for chapter, verse and linguistic unit is as follows: 1:1a.-1 is used for a first clause fragment in front of the core of the clause; it can be modified (1:1a.-11) and followed by a further parallel fragment (1:1a.-2). Cores can be parallel (1:1a.1 and 1:1a.2) and be followed by dependent elements (1:1a followed by 1:1a.1, 1:1a.11 etc).

episode which develops the plot of the story (Longacre 1989:61). Ideally it has the same configuration of time, place, participants, and action (Winther-Nielsen 1995:82).

The trips of Moses in Exodus 19 clearly form coherent segments within the story. Moses ascends the mountain (19:3a) and returns with a demand from God (19:7a.1-2), which the people accepts (19:8a-b). There is thus a clear development within the first trip. God and Moses are main participants and movement from camp to mountain and back form an episode-internal thematic coherence. A similar coherence will eventually emerge for the rest of the story as we track the further trips of Moses (19:8c-15 and 19:20-25).

This leaves the initial two verses (19:1-2) unaccounted for. On a first reading the sequence seems odd and incoherent, since apparently Israel arrive at Sinai (19:1), but then leave Rephidim (17:1.8) to arrive once more and camp in the desert (19:2; 18:5).[14] However the initial opening clause is a very complex temporal specification with a unique function. From a grammatical point of view the first sentence uses several devices for fronting of salient linguistic entities. Role and Reference Grammar posits two kinds of pragmatically significant sentence slots in its theory of the layered structure of the clause which can also explain several discourse pragmatic elements of Hebrew (Van Valin and LaPolla 1997:26-27.35-40; Winther-Nielsen 1995:40). The layers in the clause and some of the special positions in the clause are illustrated in the complex sentence cluster opening this story in example (1). Arguments of verbs like question words and intonationally stressed words are placed outside and in front of the core which consists of a nucleus with a predicate and the non-fronted arguments governed by the predicate. There are two options for fronting, however. One dedicated position is within the clause in an initial position called 'precore slot' (PCS). Another dedicated position is associated with the sentence level and placed in front of the clause in a so-called 'left-detached position' (LDP). Both occur in the following example.

(1) 19:1 בַּחֹ֙דֶשׁ֙ הַשְּׁלִישִׁ֔י לְצֵ֥את בְּנֵֽי־יִשְׂרָאֵ֖ל מֵאֶ֣רֶץ מִצְרָ֑יִם

baḥōdeš	*haššəlîšî*	*ləṣēʾṯ*	*bənê-yiśrāʾēl*	*mēʾereṣ*	*miṣrāyim*
On- the-moon	the-third	in.relation.to- go out	sons.of-Israel	from-land.of	Egypt
[Sentence [Left-detached position (LDP)		(embedded infinitival clause as phrase modifier)			]

On the third new moon after the Israelites had gone out of the land of Egypt

בַּיֹּ֣ום הַזֶּ֔ה בָּ֖אוּ מִדְבַּ֥ר סִינָֽי׃

bayyôm	*hazzeh*	*bāʾû*	*miḏbar*	*sînāy*
on-the-day	the-that	they. came	wilderness.of	Sinai

on that very day they came into the wilderness of Sinai

[Clause	[Precore slot (PCS)]	[[Nucleus]	Core]	]	]

This kind of construction marks a very prominent temporal break in the discourse, since an important transition occurs during the desert wanderings. The initial temporal phrase is expanded by a preposed temporal clause. This LDP-element clearly reactivates the main content of the previous story and anchors the following account solidly within the story of the rescue from the slavery in Egypt narrated so far in the Book of Exodus. After this follows a fronted PCS (19:1a-2) which puts extra focus on the reactivated general time frame and makes a specific point of time, *on that very day*, prominent for the following events. This overcoding device no doubt divides the Book of Exodus into two major parts, and at the same

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[14] For source analysis, see Dozeman (1989:90-93) and Van Seters (1994:249). In Jewish interpretation, the grammar is understood as an elevation of style (Cassuto 1967:233) or expression of great joy (Niccacci 1997:211 n.5).

time it sets the stage for the new story on the events that occurred at Mount Sinai (see Table 3 below).[15]

The next few clauses describe the main phases in the journey prior to the arrival at Sinai. The reference to Rephidim (19:2a.1. Ex 17:1.8) "picks up the itinerary of the Israelites' journey" (Alexander 1999:14) and therefore performs another clause function than the initial absolute dating (19:1). Role and Reference Grammar here adds significant precision in the analysis of the first two conjoined clauses because the theory of clause layering can be extended into clause combining (Van Valin and LaPolla 1997:441-449). Based on these criteria and distinctions between nexus and juncture the following universal system of interclausal syntactic linking can be posited in Table 1 (labels are from Winther-Nielsen 1995:53-62). The first parameter of clause linkage is juncture, i.e., interlinking at the layer of the nucleus (the predicate), the core, or the clause, the clause units illustrated above. Clauses may be combined as independent clauses, but they can also share elements in between its two cores, as when nominal arguments of the verb are distributed among two verbs of two adjacent clause fragments, and this can also happen at the level of the nucleus. The second parameter is nexus and distinguishes coordination and subordination, as well as an intermediate category of cosubordination: A clause can be subordinated by embedding in a matrix clause or coordinated as independent of the preceding clause, and both clauses can be dependent on each other as mutually linked parts. .

Table 1. The juncture and nexus types in RRG			
	Subordination	Cosubordination	Coordination
	[+embedded]	[+dependent]	[÷dependent]
Predicate	PrSu	Ø	PrCo
Core	CoSu	CoCs	CoCs
Clause	ClSu	ClCs	ClCo

This linkage system can be illustrated by the first two clauses which form an internal unit sharing the place of departure and the place of arrival in example (2). Verbs of movement are combined into a kind of Core Cosubordination (CoCs) in many languages in order to specify accomplished goals, such as 'go over to some place' (19:2a).

(2) 19:2a.1-2 וַיִּסְעוּ מֵרְפִידִים וַיָּבֹאוּ מִדְבַּר סִינַי

wayyisᶜû	*mērəp̄îḏîm*	*wayyāḇōᵓû*	*miḏbar*	*sînay*
and-they.travelled	from-Rephidim	and-they.arrived	wilderness.of	Sinai
[[[predicate]	core argument: source]	[[predicate]	core argument: destination]	]

They had travelled away from Rephidim and arrived at the wilderness of Sinai

The next clause *and camped in the wilderness* (19:2b) once more specifies the known location of camping just mentioned, but the active referent is here referred to once more by a full nominal form related to a new activity and location, so *wayyiḥan* 'and-they.camped' clearly brings the movement to a rest. All three clauses in the overall textual context serves to emphasize the new central location *neḡeḏ hāhār* 'in front of *the* mountain' already introduced

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[15] An alternative solution is to consider 19:1 an independent and loosely superimposed section marker. However, 19:2a has no explicit subject and therefore hardly functions as the opening of an independent structural unit and therefore 19:1 is part of the stage proper of the following story.

as the scene of future events. It restates the explicit subject *yiśrāʾēl*, and has strong anaphoric reference in the place adverb *šām* 'there'. All this gives closure to the stage and introduces the central information necessary for the following plot. All these features clearly indicate that 19:1-2 is a stage introducing a new important location for the following events.

With this background it is possible to compare solutions shown in the display of the text in Talstra (1997[W]:124) with the display in the appendix and in example (3).[16] Talstra (1997[W]:128) defends his choice of linking clauses in a syntactic hierarchy by noting that the *wayyiqtols*, the Hebrew narrative verb form, omits the subject in order to mark clause sequence continuity, while *wayyiqtol*s with an explicit subject may mark a break in the story line and the beginning of a new segment.

(3) Comparison of the display of Talstra and of Winther-Nielsen for 19:1-3

		Clause	Talstra	Winther-Nielsen
19:1a.-1	On the third new moon	(PP)		
1a.-11	. . . . . after the Israelites went out…	InfC	Dep⌐ 1a.-1	
1a-2	. . . . on that very day,	(PP)		
1a	. . . . they came into the wilderness of Sinai.	xqtl	Dep⌐ 1a.-1	
19:2a.1	. . they journeyed from Rephidim	way0	Dep⌐ 1a	Dep⌐ 1a.-1
2a.2	. . . and reached the wilderness of Sinai	way0	Dep~2a.1	Dep⌐ 2a.
2b	. . . and camped in the wilderness;	way0	Dep~2a.2	~
2c	. and Israel camped there in front of the mountain	wayx	**Dep⌐ 1a**	Dep⌐ 1a.-1
19:3a	Then Moses went up to God;	wxqtl	**Dep⌐ 2c**	~ 1a.-1
3b	. . the LORD called to him from the mountain,	wayx	Dep⌐ 3a	Dep⌐ 3b

The display shows that Talstra (1997[W]:124) connects the explicit subject *Israel* (19:2c) backward to 19:1a, while our display connects to all of the preceding as its closure. For 19:3a the hierarchies are in effect similar, even if Talstra's display looks as indentation. This clause narrates that Moses jumps right away up to the mountain, and it is assumed that the *we-x-qatal*, the coordinated perfective verb with a preposed explicit noun (*x*), is perhaps continuing until 19:15 (1997[W]:128-129). This syntactically motivated solution goes against most other proposals.[17] However, if 19:3 is an opening of the first episode after the preceding setting it more closely resembles the opening of the last episode (cf. episodes 19:3-8b and 19:20-25 in Table 3). As is clear from example (4) and (5), in the first Moses jumps to the mountain, while in the latter Yahweh first descends, before Moses ascends, but in both cases a form of the verb *ʿālâ* 'go up' is used with explicit subjects (19:3a; 19:20c). However, the subject in (4) is fronted as a new focal entity, while in (6) the usual narrative *wayyiqtol*-form with explicit subject in this case is a resumed topical nominal used for keeping track of multiple reference. Furthermore in both cases, and only here, do we hear that Yahweh actually called upon Moses to have him approach.

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[16] Contrast the non-hierarchical flat structure in Niccacci (1997:211), who assumes the mainline opens in 19:2 and continues down right to the break in 19:18.

[17] Niccacci (1997:212, 213 n. 13) interprets the function of 19:3a as background as contrast, as if Moses in contrast to Israel did not camp at the mountain. He translates the clause as *when Moses went up* (Niccacci 1997:204; cf *Moses had climbed up* Houtman 1996:440). In this he follows most other interpretations of the clause as antithesis (Cassuto 1967:223), adversative (Oswald 1998:28), or contrast (Alexander 1999:4. Hauge 2000:30).

(4) 19:3a-b וּמֹשֶׁה עָלָה אֶל־הָאֱלֹהִים וַיִּקְרָא אֵלָיו יְהוָה מִן־הָהָר לֵאמֹר

ûmōšeh	*ᶜālâ*	*ʾel-hāʾĕlōhîm*	*wayyiqrāʾ*	*ʾēlāyw*	*yhwh*	*min-hāhār*	*lēʾmōr*
and-Moses	he-went.up	to—the-God	and-he-called	to-him	the LORD	from—the-mountain	

Then Moses went up to God   the LORD called to him from the mountain

(5) 19:20a-c וַיֵּרֶד יְהוָה עַל־הַר סִינַי אֶל־רֹאשׁ הָהָר

wayyēreḏ	*yhwh*	*ᶜal-har*	*sînay*	*ʾel-rōʾš*	*hāhār*
he-went.down	the LORD	on—mountain.of	Sinai	to-top.of	the-mountain

And the LORD went down on the top of Mount Sinai

וַיִּקְרָא יְהוָה לְמֹשֶׁה אֶל־רֹאשׁ הָהָר וַיַּעַל מֹשֶׁה׃

wayyiqrāʾ	*yhwh*	*ləmōšeh*	*ʾel-rōʾš*	*hāhār*	*wayyaᶜal*	*mōšeh*
and-he-called	the LORD	to-Moses	to—top.of	the-mountain	he-went.up	Moses

and the LORD called Moses up to the top of the mountain and Moses went up

When the LORD descended upon Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain, the LORD summoned Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up (NRSV)

Even if both episode openings are similar, they differ in assignment of the initiating actor, since the roles of Moses and Yahweh are mentioned in chiastic arrangement. In the first episode the initiator Moses goes straight up to God as expected from his prior meeting with God (Exod 3:12),[18] and he is then given permission by God to approach, when God calls Moses the active topic (*him*). In the latter episode Yahweh first descends and then calls Moses in order to command him to ascend the mountain (19:20b), so the meaning of *qārāʾ* is not 'to come closer' (19:3a), but 'to call someone to come' (19:20a).[19] It is mentioned twice that Yahweh descended (19:18a.1 ~ 19:20a), but these clauses have different contextual positions and grammatical forms, so that the first one (conj—*qatal*) is background explanation on the smoking mountain (19:18a.1), while the *qatal* (19:20a) opens a new episode with a verb of movement.[20] Note finally, that Yahweh is mentioned explicitly in three out of four clauses (19:20a-21a), because Hebrew discourse is reluctant in pronominalizing God as actor (Revell 1996:65 and 380).

Moses is also cast in the role of summoning the Israelites on the behalf of God in exactly the same wording, when he returns to the people for the first time (19:7a~19:20b). Moses is pronominalized as active topic while the elders are introduced anew in full nominal form inferable from the prior discourse and therefore determined (from 17:5-6 and 18:12). The determination should probably be explained as part of a schema or frame for a nation and its administrative or religious organization (cf Renkema 1993:163).

The opening of the second episode uses the usual narrative *wayyiqtol*-form (19:8c~19:20a). Yet it is not stated directly that Moses went up again a second time. Instead the narrator places the thematic focus the answer of the people which Moses now brings back to God. The effect is that Moses' second trip down and up again (19:7a and 19:8c) is pictured as barely more than a story detour to illicit the answer of the people as quickly as possible and then get on with events at the top of the mountain. In contrast to this the second return of Moses (19:14a) is more permanent and lasts several days.

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[18] The *hāhār* 'the mountain' is mentioned for the first time in Exod 3:19, in 19:3 and 73 other times (SESB).

[19] Cassuto (1967:233) explains *to come* "in the direction of God" (cf also Niccacci 1997:219 n. 28).

[20] They are different clause types (Talstra 1997 [W]:129-130). Niccacci (1997:211 n.7.213 n.13) explains it as resumptive technique.

The discussion so far has shown how verb forms and nominal reference combine into clause coherence and clustering in order to open and maintain segments that are part of the discourse structure and how they form hierarchical patterns as they combine into higher units.[21] We especially focused on how a structurally and functionally adequate grammar may assist us in unit demarcation which is the first step in exploring information management and demarcation of episode units in stories. We need to remember, however, that the episode units demarcated so far must be explored at higher levels in the discourse structure, and only on this basis can we ultimately justify the demarcations argued from episode openings and closures alone.

The peak atop the mountain: Superstructure and climax

The scope of discourse analysis is much wider than a sentence-focused pragmatically adequate functional theory of grammar like RRG. Discourse-pragmatic studies work with all kinds of oral and written text in order to explore the structure, meaning and use of linguistic entities in narration and conversation (Winther-Nielsen 2002:53-58). For our current investigation, discourse analysis will help us explore how the speakers' attitudes and the participants' interaction in conversation influence the grammatical structure of the story.

At first glance it is immediately apparent that events in episode one, two and four are conversations largely between God and Moses. They are similar in many ways (cf. below in Table 3), while the intervening unit in 19:16-19 clearly is different. To explain its structure and function it is necessary first to understand the various functions of episodes as constituents within the total structure of the story. We will argue that this unit is nothing less than the towering and central peak episode of the whole story.

American discourse grammarian Robert Longacre has observed how in hundreds of the worlds languages units of a discourse develop towards a highpoint and then recede. This approach is conveniently summed up in his typological study of storyline and word order in East and West African languages (Longacre 1990:8-9). The main units of a story will present some conflict that calls for a solution and then build up to a climax of tension or confrontation or to a resolution of this tension or even both. The functions of climax and resolution are expressed structurally in segments of text which he calls peak, and usually is marked by "special surface marking or elaboration" (1990:8). Another type of didactic or thematic peak stops the action towards the end of a story by means of monologue or dialogue, and this kind of peak can be observed in Genesis 9 (Longacre 1989:17), Joshua 23-24 (Winther-Nielsen 1995:263). Exod 19:24-24:3 in many respects can be viewed as a didactic peak, unless one views the story of Exodus 19 as simply an introduction to law discourse with 24:4-11 as part of a narrative frame. Climax and resolution of stories in contrast are peaks in the action and increase or decrease the drama in the plot of the story.

Longacre posits several universal grammatical features of peaks. The first peak-marking device is an augmented sequence with higher verb rate (Longacre 1990:8). It can be a fast-moving series of actions, but also a detailed portrayal of component actions or paraphrase of action portraying a single action as involving several actions, like "speeding the camera and catching more detail at the peak of a movie" (1990:8-9). The second main type of peak-marking device is immediacy which allows the story-teller "to transport his audience more directly into the world of the story" (1990:9). The narrator can shift from third singular to first plural person, introduce drama without quote verbs and provide extra background

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[21] The episode constituents proposed are the same as in Alexander (1999:15-16). It contrasts with the demarcation of Houtman (1996:424-425) into scenes (19:1-2; 19:3-15 [subdivided: 3-8a.8b-13.14-15]; 19:16-20a; 19:20b-24; 19:25) and of Dozeman (1989:14) into movements up and down the mountain (19:1-8a; 19:8b-19; 19:21-20:20) as well as the narrative breaks Niccacci (1997:210) assumes (19:1-20:17, 20:18-23:33 and 24:1-18).

information. The third device is maximum interlacing of participant reference with crowded stage, explicit nouns and pronouns, and a "rapid change of focus from one participant to another" (1990:9). Altogether there are a number of rhetorical and grammatical items on the list of special peak marking effects available to a story-teller in his bag of tricks (in Table 2).

Table 2. Peak-marking devices according to Longacre

Resource	Marking
Rhetorical	repetition, paraphrase, change in story line, crowded stage, shift to dialogue
Grammatical	variation of sentence lengths, tense (backbone form as main), person

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Most of these special effects are frequently found in the third and shortened episode that completely eliminate dialogue and culminates in a most remarkable shift from past to historical present in example (6).[22]

(6) 19:19b מֹשֶׁה יְדַבֵּר וְהָאֱלֹהִים יַעֲנֶנּוּ בְקוֹל

mōšeh	*yədabbēr*	*wəhāʾĕlōhîm*	*yaʿănennû*	*bəqôl*
Moses	he-speaks	and-the-God	he-answers-him	in-voice

Right from the beginning of episode three there are several unusual grammatical features. A new time horizon is indicated by the opening in the first clause where the discourse marker *wayəhî* 'and-it-happened' (19:16a-1) is followed directly by two more forms of this verb, the first two as temporal expressions specifying the exact time of the day and the third one in an eventive sense of 'there came, occurred, was' in combination with unnatural forces of nature (19:16a.1).[23] These fragments and clauses in turn are followed by a long description of unusual natural phenomena like thunder, lightening, fire, and a dense cloud, as well as strong trumpet blasts that were all part of theophanies, or divine self-disclosures (Niehaus 1995:195). As a result the people tremble in the camp (19:16b), and only then the first volitional action is reported, as Moses brings the horrified people out to meet God (19:17a). However, the action immediately stops again as the people stand on hold below the mountain (19:17b), instead of ascending the mountain.[24]

Afterwards we are carried even further away from the action by an elaborate description of the thick cloud (19:18; cf. 19:16b). The main clause describes how the mountain is totally wrapped in smoke (19:18a-b), while a modifying adverbial reason clause refers to Yahweh's

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[22] The sequence Subject+Imperfective followed by conjunction+ Subject+Imperfective (19:19b.1-2) is found 20 times in the Pentateuch (SESB: Gen 3:15; 46:4; 49:19. Exod 4:16; 14:14; 19:19. Lev 11:24-25; 11:31-32; 13:45; 15:4; 20:2-3; 20:24. Numb 1:50; 30:14; 32:26-27; 34:6-7. Deut 3:9; 9:3; 28:43.44). However, this is the only case occurring within a narrative clause sequence. The imperfective or *yiqtol* is usually translated by frequentative or iterative *Moses would speak and God would answer him in thunder* (NRSV. Cf Childs 1997:343. Talstra 1997 [W]:121.129. Niccacci 1997: 206.214. Oswald 1998:42), but can one really imagine a customary interaction in this very momentarious situation and how would one interpret the proclamation of the Decalogue as habitual? The past time reference of the imperfective could make sense as an incipient past non-perfective *Moses began to speak and God began to answer him in a voice* (Waltke and O'Connor 1990:503-504[§31.2c]), especially since the lights and sounds are intensifying dramatically at this point in the story. An even more interesting alternative to consider is that "imperfective also can portray singular actions in the past as more vivid as present" (Brockelmann 1956:44 [§42e]). In this case a poetical use of historical present (e.g., Exod 15:5. Job 3:3) would apply also as a peak feature in a narrative.

[23] A sequence of three *be* verbs is found 13 times in the Pentateuch (SESB: Gen 4:2-3; 39:2. Exod 4:16; 9:24; 19:16; 26:24.24-25; 28:32.37-38. Lev 15:19. Numb 6:11-12. Deut 25:13-15), but never elsewhere in Hebrew occurring in two initial temporal expressions.

[24] Similarly Sailhamer (1995:285) and Oswald (1998:41). Cassuto (1967:232) overlooks this and claims that they "went as far as they were permitted to go". Similarly Niccacci (1997:221).

action of descending on the mountain (19:18a.1). But the focus is clearly on a description of the circumstances at the mountain, and ultimately the mountain is trembling just like the people (19:18c ~19:16b). Next there is an intensification of the phenomenon of the sound (19:19a ~19:16a.2), described as a long and continuous process of trumpet blasting. At this visual and aural climax we then find the two imperfective verbs and the extremely unorthodox role configuration with Moses speaking and God answering (19:19b). Divine words are now revealed in recognizable communication by the divine audible voice (Houtman 1996:456-457). However, the trumpet sound does not lead into the expected ascent of the people (19:13d). Instead, Moses gets to perform the role predicted for him by God at the former visit (19:9b-d).[25]

This climax is the key to the structure of the story. Every text has some typical features that reflect a superstructure of conventional and culturally variable schematic structure (Renkema 1993:60-62). This structure can only be explained when we have located the peak, since the peak will determine the nature of a profile illustrating the development in a discourse (Longacre 1989:18-19). When we can visualize the profile we can explain how a writer or speaker exploits a superstructure to introduce, state a problem, unfold it, reach the intended goal, compress on remaining issues and conclude in different types of text (Longacre 1992:110-111) as illustrated in Table 2 from Winther-Nielsen (1995:87). We can be relatively certain that the narrator exploited the language to mark the absolute dramatic climax of the story in 19:16-19.

So far we have traced the structural demarcation of episode units, and we have observed how a number of features combine to mark the peak 19:16-19 which is a complete reversal of the offer of ascent for the people and a role reversal for God and Moses. Universal strategies of story-telling have helped us decide how the climax is heavily marked, and we already discovered that it is followed by a further episode rather than a special peak for resolution. It is also remarkable that the story apparently does not have a well marked ending, since the last episode continues right into the Ten Commandments. We can summarize the observations so far in Table 1.[26]

Table 3. Constituents and superstructure in Exodus 19

	CONSTITUENTS		SUPERSTRUCTURE	
	Units	Content	Strategy	Function
19:1-2	Stage	Arrival Sinai	*introduce*	exposition
3-8b	Episode 1	God´s plan	*present problem*	inciting incident
8c-15	Episode 2	1. Conversation	*unfold problem*	mounting tension
16-19	Episode 3	Peak: Theophany	*reach goal (drama)*	climax
÷			*reach goal (solution)*	resolution
20-25	Episode 4	2. Conversation	*compress action*	lessening tension
?			*conclude*	conclusion

God's turn-taking with Moses: Conversational and rhetorical structure

The reader will have noted that the conversations between God and Moses are dominant in Exodus 19. While the peak represents the highest level of excitement in the dramatic development of the plot of the story, the long and rhetorically rich conversations are important for the characterization of the participants and the unfolding of the ideological content. In this particular instance we are involved with a characterization of Moses as the mediator of the people but we are also involved in defining the new character of the people of

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[25] This connection is noted by Niccacci (1997:217.221 n. 35).
[26] Contrast with this a solution based on command and execution which would demarcate 19:10-19; 19:20-23; 19:24-25 (Niccacci 1997:218).

Israel as a people of God bound to him by covenant. The dialogue in this way contributes to the biblical and theological perspective on the law giver and purpose and manner of the revelation of the law. We may expect that a text with a high concentration of reported speech will rely on the points and emphases expressed through the conversational interaction than on the dramatic story-line.

The data for the conversations are as follows. Episode one (19:3-8b) is dominated by a long monologue by God in (19:3c-6b) and a very short response by the people in (19:8b), made instantly on Moses return from the first summit meeting. Special devices single out the opening divine speech as a very fundamental address.[27] God's initial mention of the prior deeds prepares for the exposition of his great plans for the future. This main point of the discourse is singled out by a discourse marker *wəᶜattâ* 'and now' (19:5a) in order to maintain maximum attention on the conditional promise following upon obedience to the covenant. Here the status of the people is first viewed from the perspective of God as *lî səḡullâ* 'to-me treasure', i.e. 'I have/own a treasure', and the copula added in *weqatal*-form to specify the future intent of this offer or purpose. The new status of the people as a priestly kingdom and a holy nation is specified with a clause initial pronoun used for contrastive focus and shift to a new subject (19:6a). The core of this clause is an existential predication with the *be*-verb used for future or directive. Between these two intentional statements is placed a dependent clause conjoined with the multifunctional conjunction *kî* (19:5a.1) introducing a clause which has been variously interpreted as exclamative *Indeed, the whole earth is mine* (NRSV), concessive *Although the whole earth is mine* (NIV) or causal *for the whole earth is mine* (NEB). In Hebrew a preposed adverbial *kî*-clause is rare and apparently only occurs at the opening of a new speech (e.g., Gen 3:14). It is used when some element of the preceding context is currently activated as a basis for some additional new information. This is in contrast with a postposed adverbial clause that provides local background information (Winther-Nielsen 1995:61-62). This may seem to indicate that the information on divine ownership of the whole earth serves as a local pragmatic justification to explain why God is entitled to hold a special treasure among all other people.[28]

In the second episode (19:8c-15), the narrative shifts to reporting of conversational interaction. Yahweh still decisively takes the lead as the dominant conversational partner configuration is still characteristically the sequence Yahweh-Moses-Yahweh. Moses came to tell God about the consent of the people (19:8c), but God immediately took the floor to predict his future appearance in the cloud with his servant referred to by second person singular pronoun in *bāᵓ ᵓēlêḵā* 'coming to-you' (19:9b). Only then is Moses' report on the response of the people summarily referred to and its content presupposed (19:9e).[29] Apparently God intends first to clarify the status of Moses in relation to the impression he is to make on the people as the overhearers of direct communication between God and Moses (cf 14:31. Deut 34:10). As a response to the people's acceptance of the conditional covenant God in two second singular *weqatal*-form commands Moses to consecrate the people (19:10b) and set limits for approach to the mountain (19:12a). Quite specifically a direct unmitigated imperative *hiššāmərû* 'keep yourself' (19:12b) warns them against ascending the mountain here again using the same lexeme that was earlier used for keeping the patriarchal covenant

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[27] The initial speech by God opens with a unique sequence of two metapragmatic verbs, since the first verb *tōᵓmar* 'you-say' surprisingly is more general that the second verb *wəṯaggêḏ* 'and-you-tell' (Miller 1996:151 n.14.350), and the speech proper is doubly framed by 3c and 6a (1996:215).

[28] This conclusion differs from Follingstad (2001:113 *and passim*) who suggests that *kî* is never used as a logical-semantic particle, but always is a focusing particle like *Indeed*.

[29] For discussion, see Childs (1974:374), Dozeman (1989:45-47), and Houtman (1996:449). This is hardly a case of a doublet, since 19:9b is summary language (Cassuto 1967:228) but not so much a stylistic device as a backreference to the speech act in 19:8b (Oswald 1998:35), and for pragmatic effect.

(19:5a). The initial imperative of this embedded quote is backed by an elaboration that they are not even to touch the edge or foot of the mountain (19:12b.2). The warning is even enforced by the death penalty (19:12c-13c).

The final clue is how Moses is to guide the people in the events on the third day: *When the trumpet sounds a long blast, they may go up on the mountain* (19:13d). There is focus on the initial pronoun *hēmmâ* 'they' and it may here have the force of adding them to the company of those persons allowed to ascend the mountain, i.e., the sense of *also*.[30] This closing of God's second turn of speech reactivates God's initial turn when he promised to come to Moses (19:9b). There is an explicit contrast between the prohibition not to go up for two days, and at the enduring trumpet signal on the third to go up (19:12b/19:13d). After this the story reverts to narration on the execution of the orders of God (19:14). It only repeats and interprets the order to be ready for the third day in a quote (19:15b-c ~19:11a).

So far we have only looked at the grammatical devices of the conversations, but the analysis should be widened by the methods developed for conversation analysis. This area is an important research topic in modern linguistics, and in Hebrew studies an important pioneer work by Miller (1996) has studied the structure of conversation in Hebrew narrative by sociolinguistic methods (1996:15). Miller uses insights from conversation analysis on how speakers take turns in ordered pairs of question and answers or other paired pairs (1996:235-243). Such sociolinguistic methods can explain the interaction between God, Moses and the people as speech events and help to sense the rhetorical structure of reported speech. The idea behind the analysis of paired parts is that a speaker's utterance in general calls for a specific kind of reaction from the hearer (Levinson 1983:336). The pair-parts need not follow each other directly and often there are more than two parts in the "pair". The second pair of these conversational pair-parts can be an unexpected response or even no response. Levinson in this way combines pragmatic speech act analysis with conversation analysis and works out a pattern of preferred and dispreferred second pairs set out in Table 4.

Table 4. Pragmatic functions of pair parts according to Levinson					
1. parts:	Request	Offer/Invitation	Assesment	Question	Blame
2. parts: Preferred	Accept	=	Agree	Expected Answer	Denial
Dispreferred	Refusal	=	Disagree	Unexpected/No Answer	Admission

If these distinctions are applied to the analysis of Exodus 19 we may first note that episode one is dialogue across distance by an intermediary. God makes a conditional promise (19:3c-6b: 1A), while Moses as spokesperson secures an acceptance from the people (19:8b: (1B)) as is illustrated in example (7). The pairing is much more difficult in the real-time conversation in episode two. Yahweh first makes a promise to Moses alone (19:9b-d: 1A). Moses does not respond at all, except for experiencing it at face value three days later, and instead he reports on the people's response in an indirect speech with a noun phrase (19:9e; Miller 1996:131). The new conversational contribution therefore refers back to prior speech (19:8b), and at the same time serves as an opening for a new pair-part (2A). In this sense it serves as an assessment or statement on the state of affairs in the camp. Yahweh responds to this in his second pair, and apparently does not fully agree with Moses on the willingness of the people, since he issues a conditional acceptance of their answer in his pair-part 2B (19:10b-13d).

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[30] The tension between 19:13d and 19:23b is often explained diachronically (Houtman 1996:453), but could be a deliberate blurring or ambiguity (Hauge 2000:47-48). That the pronoun originally referred to Moses and Aaron (Niccacci 1997:221 n.33) is unlikely in relation to the preceding context (see further Oswald 1998:37 who unfortunately rejects our solution for no good reason (38)).

(7) Conversational parts in Episode 1 and 2

Episode 1: first pair-parts
Monologue à dialogue by intermediary
1A   God   conditional promise (3c-6b)
1B   people   acceptance (8b)

Episode 2
Conversation with turn-talking
1A   God   promise to Moses (9b-d)
Ø
2A   Moses   statement reported (9e < 8b)
2B   God   conditional acceptance (10b-13d)

However, even an analysis of the adjacency structure does not necessarily reveal the full pragmatic force and strategy of extended talk. An interesting tool for this kind of analysis is to use the Rhetorical Structure Theory (RST) developed by Mann, Matthiessen and Thompson (1992).[31] The RST theory is an account of the fact that all kinds of texts communicate very well without conjunctions or with multifunctional conjunctions, and even when there is no interaction with a speaker who can correct the rhetorical intentions for the hearer. The theory claims to be a comprehensive and consistent pragmatic explanation for the nature of inter-clausal and higher level relations in texts. It explains how textual coherence is mostly shaped by relations between heads and modifiers. The modifying text elements, the so-called satellites, are adjuncts which support a preceding or following nucleus. Nucleus and satellite in turn together combine to serve as satellite for a higher level nucleus, and this process reoccur up to the highest level of a text. The theory posits that about 25 relations will suffice to describe the pragmatic functions of segments in texts, regardless of genre or style. Only a few relation types are multi-nuclear or non-satellite in nature. [32] It is of course always possible to argue on a proposed interpretation of the purposive effect of segments in any analysis of textual non-interactional communication.

Table 5. Definition of relations in RST-analysis (cf Winter-Nielsen 1995:95)		
Elab	Elaboration	R recognizes situation in S as additional detail on situation in N
Enab	Enablement	Comprehending S increases R's potential ability to perform action in N
Moti	Motivation	Comprehending S increases R's desire to perform action in N
Just	Justify	Comprehending S increases R's readiness to accept W's right to present N
VRes	Vol. Result	R recognizes that situation in N could cause volitional situation or action in S
Purp	Purpose	R recognizes that the activity in N is initiated to realize the situation in S
Mean	Means	R recognizes that the sit. in actually tends to make possible or likely the sit. in N
Cond	Condition	R recognizes how the situation in N depends on the realization of a hypothetical, future or otherwise unrealized situation in S
Summ	Summary	R recognizes S as a restatement of N of shorter bulk
Rest	Restatement	R recognizes S as a restatement of N of comparable bulk

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[31] See conveniently Winther-Nielsen 1995:87-95). In Winther-Nielsen and Talstra (1995) RST is applied to the entire Book of Joshua and compared with a computer-assisted description of the text. For much more detail and current discussion note the RST Web Site (http://www.sil.org/~mannb/rst/index.htm).

[32] The full set of 25 relations and their definitions according to their pragmatic effect on the reader are used in the displays of Joshua in Winther-Nielsen (1995:94 and published in Winther-Nielsen and Talstra (1995). Only three are formed without satellites (the multi-nuclear ones). Most relations cover discourse-oriented ideational material, but seven relations are pragmatic and serve explicitly in interpersonal communication.

The small bundle of relations briefly presented in Table 5 above can help us explain the nucleus of the first speech by God (19:5a-b) as a conditional promise. Example (8) shows how the conditional element is motivated by God's former acts of rescue from Egypt which is elaborated by examples from the first part of the desert wandering (19:4a-b) and intended to impress Israel to be grateful and responsive. The nuclear promise (19:5a) is in turn modified first by a justification for God's right to select one particular people (19:5a.1), but then also by a statement of the result intended by God which affects the status of the people as a priestly kingdom (19:6a).

(8) God´s monologue in Ep1 (3c-6b: 1A)

3c	Summ	. " Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the Israelites:
4a	Moti	. . " You have seen what I did to the Egyptians,
b	Elab	. . . and [ ] I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.
5a	Cond	. Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant,
b	**Cond. Promise**	. . . <u>I shall have you as</u> my treasured possession out of all the peoples,
	Just	. . . . <u>for</u> the whole earth is mine,
6a	VRes	. . but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. "
b	Rest	. . These are the words that you shall speak to the Israelites. "

The second speech by God in the second episode begins with a nuclear directive which has the pragmatic function of a conditional accept in the overall structure. The consecration order is explained by statements (19:10c-11b) specifying how to do the consecration (enablement) and why to do it (purpose), and this is properly backed by threatening information on the presence of the Yahweh (motivation). The second order by God states the condition on the preparation that Israel must stay away from the mountain and this is elaborated and motivated by several segments. If this condition is meet the result is that they may approach God on the third day (19:13d).

(9) God´s second speech in Ep2 (10b-13d; 2B)

10b	**Cond. Accept.**	. " Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow.
c	Enab	. . . Have them wash their clothes
11a	Purp	. . . . and prepare for the third day,
b	Moti	. . . . . because on the third day the LORD will come down upon Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people.
12a	Cond	. . You shall set limits for the people all around, saying,
b	Elab	. ' Be careful not to go up the mountain or to touch the edge of it.
c	Moti	. . Any who touch the mountain shall be put to death.
13a	Elab	. . . No hand shall touch <u>it</u>,
b	Moti	. . . . . <u>for he</u> shall be stoned or shot with arrows<u>,</u> whether animal or human being<u>;</u>
c	Summ	. . . . <u>he</u> shall not live.'
d	VRes	. . . . When the trumpet sounds a long blast, they may go up on the mountain."

The conversations between God and Moses in the final episode again have speeches in the order Yahweh-Moses-Yahweh.[33] The most interesting feature in this case is the explicit parallels and contrasts in relation to earlier parts of the story. When God descends on the mountain and calls Moses to approach him, God again initiates the interaction (19:21a ~ 19:9a). Moses also gets an order concerning the people (19:21b ~ 19:10b), but this time the imperative has a menacing force commanding Moses to witness against the people (19:21b.2).

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[33] Most scholars consider 19:21-25 secondary (Childs 1974:343), but Alexander (1999:18-19) argues that the preceding would be incomplete without this information, while Hauge (2000:45) defends it as preparatory for 20:18-21. The repetition in 19:24 of 19:21 hardly marks a new unit (contrast Niccacci 1997:219).

This results in three negative purpose clauses prohibiting the people to ascend the holy mountain and approach the presence of God (19:21c.22b.24d), otherwise they will perish (19:21d). Moses answers as already hinted at earlier (19:23a ~19:19b.1), that God's prohibition to approach before they are permitted to do so had never been annulled (19:12b-13c). The trumpet had sounded a long blast (19:13d.19a), but the people had not ascended, so Moses simply upholds the preceding prohibition in its function of a witness against the people (19:21b.23c). The final contribution by Yahweh in the conversation directs Moses on how to act in the near future (19:24b). Moses is to bring Aaron up the mountain together with Aaron and his sons, and this order is later repeated with the addition of the elders (24:1). Now the law remains in force under divine punishment for law-breaking –break it (19:21c) and he will break you (19:24d) and your non-consecrated priests (19:22b)! The conversation after the peak thus confirms the proposed interpretation of the peak as a major dramatic reversal.

A peek ahead from the top of Mount Sinai

So far we have worked in great detail to explore how episode constituents perform the structural and rhetorical jobs of a narrative in delimiting episodes, marking peaks and conveying the ideational contents of the conversations prior to and following the exciting events on top of mount Sinai. But how does the discourse context look from this vantage point? Can discourse linguistics help us unlock some of the most important theological challenge in the story of the theophany of Sinai?

The dramatic narrative plot is interrupted in the following discourse by a series of abrupt shifts in text types. There is first a digression into the divine monologue of the Decalogue (20:1-17). This is followed by a reported situation of exchange between Moses and the people (20:18-21) and then further divine monologue (20:22-23:33). The shift to a new participant in the speech introduction *And God told all the following words, saying* (20:1) has as documented in the beginning been interpreted as evidence that the Decalogue is not very well integrated into the story of the events and is considered a diachronic intrusion or addition. However, in a textual holistic approach there is every reason to search for a possible explanation and face this assessment head on from a linguistic angle and take a look at possible connections between God's proclamation of the Decalogue and the preceding narration of how Moses had just descended from the mountain in example (10).[34] It is then crucial to ask what Moses really did communicate by the following verb form *and he said* since this verb usually introduces a quotation and therefore can not refer to the Decalogue which is introduced as content spoken by God.[35]

(10) 19:25-20:1 וַיֵּרֶד מֹשֶׁה אֶל־הָעָם וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם

19:25 *wayyēred*   *mōšeh*   *ʾel-hāʿām*   *wayyōʾmer*   *ʾălēhem*
    and-he-went.down   Moses   to—the-people   and-he-said   to-them

וַיְדַבֵּר אֱלֹהִים אֵת כָּל־הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה לֵאמֹר

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[34] According to Hauge (2000:44) Moses descended (19:24) and should then have come up again with Aaron (so also Cassuto 1974:234), but "the divine speaker of 20.1 seems to has forgotten his earlier instruction" (Hauge 2000:44) and in stead God in 20:1 have the Decalogue "proclaimed into thin air."

[35] Note the discussion in Oswald (1998:47 n.50) of cases of a verb of saying without quoted content (*he said* Ø) as influenced by literary and textual critical reasons here and in two other cases (Gen 4:8 and Hos 13:2), and by contextual reasons (Psalm 71:10; Esther 1:18; 2 Chron 2:10; 32:24). Some scholars believe that the words not quoted 19:25 implicitly refers back to the content of the warning of mountain (Niccacci 1997:220), but this is not possible in Hebrew.

20:1	*wayəḏabbēr*	*ʾĕlōhîm*	*ʾēṯ*	*kol-haddəḇārîm*	*hāʾēlleh*	*lēʾmōr*
	and-he-told	god	Acc	all—the-words	the-these	saying

From a syntactic point of view it is highly unlikely that the clause with the speech verb should have the opening of the quotation in 20:1a as its content, because the narrative and sequential *wayyiqtol* can not mark a shift to a new discourse mode of direct speech.[36] However, this second *wayyiqtol* could serve as a further verb of speech elaborating the first quotation verb in 19:25 as in other cases of Hebrew (1 Kings 20:28. 2 Chron 31:10. Neh 3:34. Esth 7:5. Ezek 10:2), except that this is the only case with a most unusual shift of speaker.[37] Yet, odd as this may be, this is not a major problem if the goal of the story is to point out that what Moses told the people is what God had already communicated to him for the people on the mountain. This point may be highlighted by the telic meaning of the Piel stem of *wayəḏabbēr* which emphasizes that the message was given in complete form already at the top of the mountain. The implication in the story is apparently that the talking of Moses (19:19b.1) referred to his comments on the limits for the people in his conversation with God (19:20-24), and God's answer by voice (19:19b.2) refers to the words quoted in the Decalogue (20:2-17) which is singled out as Moses communication of divine revelation for the people.[38]

If this solution is accepted, it can serve as a important new key that may unlock some of the otherwise quite enigmatic details in the overall structure of Exodus 19. After the Decalogue we are at once brought back to a brief report of the crucial events at the foot of mount Sinai (20:18-21). It is clearly not presented as a new development on the storyline, but rather as a digression giving further information on the people's behaviour. The report explains that the people experienced the sounds of thunder and trumpet and trembled (20:18a ~ 19:16b.18). It is now much more carefully set out in detail how the people stood or stopped at a distance (20:18b), and Moses is still talking to them rather than to God (20:19 ~ 19:14-18). Moses now explains the significance of the occurrences as an intentional revelation by God for Moses in front of the people (20:20 ~19:9b-d.11b), and then Moses approaches into the presence of God (20:21 ~19:19.20).

All this seems to imply that the two descriptions are carefully connected with each other. One interpretation of this is that the two parallel descriptions of the ascent of Moses to the mountain are really sequential, so that Moses first descends the mountain to communicate the Ten Commandments (19:20-20:17), and afterwards he ascends once more to receive the laws (20:22-24:3).[39] There is thus a second revelation of law subsequent to a prior revelation of the Decalogue on a former visit. A more interesting and perhaps also more likely suggestion is that both these accounts are presented as overlays in the sense that the same event is told twice from two different perspectives.[40] Here the overlay technique is probably used in order

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[36] Vanoni (1994) discusses the problem within the Richter school theory of verb valency. Hebrew *wayyiqtol* marks continuation, so 20:1a can hardly open a new text segment of quotation (Oswald 1998:47 n.50).

[37] The verb *ʾāmar* in the narrative verb form *wayyiqtol* is followed by another *wayyiqtol* form in only 13 cases in the Old Testament (1 Kings 20:28. 1 Chron 14:12. 2 Chron 2:11; 24:8; 31:10; 35:25. Neh 3:34; 13:9.19 Esth 4:10; 7,5. Psalm 107:25. Ezek 10:2. SESB). In several cases the following verb is a second verb of saying (another *ʾāmar*), but never can this verb be interpreted as a quoted direct discourse.

[38] Similarly, as one possible solution in Sailhamer (1992:282) and Krüger (2000:89). If so, Moses is not at the feet of the mountain when the Decalogue is proclaimed (contrast Niccacci 1997:220). David Kummerow (personal communication) has suggested as an alternative to the solution suggested here that the shift to new participant in 20:1 might be considered another case of overlay; this would tie nicely into the intention to give this part of the revelation a prominent position, and it could support our analysis of 19:24-24:3 as the didactic peak. This is a very interesting proposal to consider in future work on Exodus 19-24.

[39] This long sections opens on the words And Yahweh said to Moses (20:22) just like 19:9a, 10a, 21a, 24a and implicitly also 21:1.

[40] Note the marked overlay for pause posited by Buth (1994:148) or in this case for release of suspense by clarifying details of the dramatic peak in 19:19.

to split an event into separate units that focus attention first on the general commands and then afterwards on particular laws of a less central and solemn status (22:22-33:33). Both were spoken by God on the mountain and communicated by Moses, yet the first set was to be inscribed on the tablets on the mountain (24;12). The old dichotomy between direct or mediated divine speech may thus all along have been a false alternative posed by diachronic Old Testament scholarship.

Conclusions

In this paper we have addressed some of the repetitions and alleged inconsistencies in the story of Exodus 19 and pointed out that the major unsolved problem is whether God spoke the Decalogue, or Ten Commandments, directly from heaven or whether it was mediated by Moses. The exciting answer is that Israel heard God mediate the words to Israel in the heaven, on top on the smoking mountain, and this spectacular revelation was mediated by Moses for them at his return. We understand why Moses can have it both ways in Deut 5:4-5.

We also traced some of the newer synchronic readings and especially the linguistic contributions to the analysis of Exodus 19-24 in papers on the use of the Hebrew verb by Niccaci (1997) and Talstra (1997[W]). We have made a fresh contribution along similar lines and our goal is to show how the approaches in the dissertation by Winther-Nielsen (1995) on the Book of Joshua can broaden the scope of especially a hierarchical analysis similar to Talstra's.

Our analytic "stroll" in the footpath of Moses has led us to participate in the summit meeting between God and his chief deputy after the people were invited, but never turned up. We started out with an analysis of the demarcation of discourse units and exemplified the tools to do the analysis *en route*. We suggested that Role and Reference Grammar offer pragmatic clause positions and an interclausal linkage mechanism that can actually explain some of the important linguistic features central to unit demarcation. We observed that Exodus 19 has no absolute story conclusion. In order to understand the story we need to understand how long conversations cluster around a peak episode (19:16-19) that functions as a dramatic climax in the plot of the story. Finally, we analyzed the conversations using various tools and noted how the two first episodes have dominant speeches by God. In the first it is the conditional offer of covenant in the second God responds to people's acceptance of the terms of covenant by testing their willingness to prepare for a visit with God at the top of the mountain. We also illustrated how the pragmatic functions of intricate speech can very well be explained by setting out their rhetorical structure.

We can conclude then, that the story tells how Moses was meant to enter the presence of God to talk to him (19:9b-d) and how he did so at least three times in Exodus 19-24, but perhaps not more. The highly dramatic historical present in 19:19b definitely covers the mediation of the Decalogue and perhaps also the revelation of the laws in 20:22-23:33. The summit meeting occurred when the people let itself down in horrified despair (19:17b; 20:19).

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