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The persistence of space: formalizing the polysemy of spatial relations in functional elements

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Part III

Authority and dignity

Lipnē ‘in the face of’

A Locative preposition with a threatening connotation

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Abstract The Biblical Hebrew expression *lipnē*, literally ‘to the face of’, has grammaticalized into a Locative preposition ‘before’. Its function in combination with the root *ngp* ‘inflict, defeat’ is not clear: what is the role of the Philistines in ‘Israel was defeated *before* the Philistines’ (1 Sam. 4:2)? Some scholars have used grammaticalization theory to argue that *lipnē* is an Agent marker here: ‘Israel was defeated *by* the Philistines’. However, this view is untenable in the face of arguments based on narrative structure, syntactic-semantic restrictions, grammaticalization theory, and language typology. I show that *lipnē* is a simple Locative prepositional expression, but that the element ‘face’ has the connotation that Israel is threatened by the Philistines: Israel is in the ‘realm of influence’ of the Philistines. In present-day English, the near-literal translation ‘in the face of’ is a better alternative. Based on parallels in the active voice, I argue that Yahweh is the actual, implicit, Agent of *ngp* ‘inflict, defeat’. In fact, English *before*, like *lipnē*, used to have a connotation of threatening influence. In recent times, this meaning shifted so that the original translation became misunderstood.

5.1 Introduction

The expression *lipnē*, formed by *lā* ‘to’ with the construct state of *pānūm* ‘face’, usually functions as a preposition with a spatial or temporal meaning (‘in

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front of'; 'before').¹ It has a figurative sense when it marks an argument of the verb *ngp* 'inflict, defeat', and is then commonly translated either as 'before' ([N]KJV, A/R/ESV, NASB95) or as the Agent marker 'by' (NLT, NIV, NASB20).² Some examples follow:³

- (5.1) 1 Sam. 4:2: וַיִּגָּדֵף יִשְׂרָאֵל לְפָנָי פְּלִשְׁתִּים
way-y-innāḡēp-Ø yisrā'el li=pn-ē pālīštī-m
 WAYQ-3M-defeat\MID-SG Israel to=face-of Philistine-PL

'Israel was smitten *before* the Philistines.' (KJV)

'Israel was defeated *before* the Philistines.' (ESV)

'Israel was defeated *by* the Philistines.' (NIV)

- (5.2) 2 Sam. 2:17: וַיִּגָּדֵף אַבְנֵר וְאֲנָשָׁי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְפָנָי עַבְדֵי דָוִד
way-y-innāḡēp-Ø 'abnēr wə=anš-ē yisrā'el li=pn-ē
 WAYQ-3M-defeat\MID-SG Abner and=man-PL.of Israel to=face-of
 'abd-ē dāwid
 servant-PL.of David

'..., and Abner was beaten, and the men of Israel, *before* the servants of David.' (KJV)

'And Abner and the men of Israel were beaten *before* David's servants.' (ESV)

'..., and Abner and the Israelites were defeated *by* David's men.' (NIV)

For modern readers, the translation 'before' is hard to understand in this context, because in present-day English *before* has a purely spatial or temporal meaning (*the bill is presently before Congress; the day before yesterday*). Recent, freer translations have gone a step further in their interpretation

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- 1 This type of expression is commonly called a "complex preposition". Joüon & Muraoka (2006: §1030) describe them in Biblical Hebrew as "pseudo-prepositions", by which they mean "a combination of one of the prepositions ... and a substantive, often lexemes denoting parts of the body ... in the status constructus". According to Waltke & O'Connor (1990: §11.3a), their meaning is often not predictable from the constituent components and these expressions "function syntactically as prepositions" (Waltke & O'Connor 1990: §11.3.1a). In the theoretical linguistic literature there is some debate as to how these expressions should be analyzed (Seppänen et al. 1994; Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 620–623; Hoffmann 2005; Pullum 2006). These issues have repercussions for the analysis of the Hebrew expressions as well, but this must be left for another occasion. For this chapter we can assume that these expressions are functionally, if not syntactically, prepositions. However, to avoid any confusion I will refer to them as "expressions", not prepositions.
- 2 I will use the capitalized terms Agent, Patient, Intermediary Agent, Instrument, Cause, Locative, and Source for thematic roles in the tradition of Gruber (1965). There is no

and use the Agent marker ‘by’, an analysis that finds support from Sollamo (2003), Rodriguez (2017: 180), and Jones (2018). Although translation to English is not the focus of this chapter, different choices reveal different interpretations of the underlying Hebrew construction, and thus show that this construction requires explanation. This will be the focus of this chapter.

In contrast to the recent tendency to interpret *lipnē* as an Agent marker, I will show here that the meaning of *lipnē* and *before* in cases like (5.1–5.2) is actually Locative. To explain its meaning in this context, I draw attention to a pragmatic connotation of the body part ‘face’ which expresses that the complement (e.g. the Philistines in [5.1]) has some threatening influence over the subject (Israel). This connotation can be approximated with ‘in the face of’ or ‘in confrontation with’ in present-day English. I show that *before* also had this connotation in older stages of English, which suggests that the traditional translations in (5.1–5.2) were perfectly intelligible at the time of writing. The problem is therefore not that the meaning of the He-

universally agreed upon list of thematic roles and their definitions, but the ones I use here are all relatively standard in theoretical linguistics. It is important, however, that they are understood as prototypes in the sense of Dowty (1991: 571–575), so that an argument can fill an Agent slot even if it is not in all aspects like the Proto-Agent. This is somewhat similar to the Actor and Undergoer macroroles in Role and Reference Grammar (Foley & Van Valin 1984), and the argument advanced in this chapter can be reformulated in that framework. For Dowty, the Proto-Agent is a *sentient* argument that *volitionally* brings about an *event or change of state in another participant* and *moves relative to the position of another participant*; finally it *exists independently of the event* (Dowty 1991: 572). The Proto-Patient *undergoes a change of state* and is *causally affected by another participant*; it is *stationary relative to movement of another participant* and *does not exist independently of the event or not at all* (Dowty 1991: 572 — Dowty’s additional property *incremental theme* is not relevant to us here). The traditional roles can be defined using these properties (Dowty 1991: 577): the Agent has volition, causation, and sentience (and movement, but this is not relevant for our purpose). The Patient has change-of-state and causally-affectedness (stationarity and dependent existence are again not relevant here). An Instrument has causation without volition or sentience. I define the Intermediary Agent as an Agent with low volitionality. For Cause I rely on Palancar (2002), who defines this role as “the role played by a given entity — normally conceived of as either an abstract or natural force — construed as the causal force which has brought about a certain state of affairs” (Palancar 2002: 27). A Locative picks out a position in a region, which can be spatial (*The ball is in the box*) or temporal (*He was elected in 2008*); a Source refers to the point of origin of an event of motion. For modern discussion on thematic roles, see the reference works (e.g. Davis 2011; Harley 2011; Primus 2016).

3 An exhaustive list will be provided in table 5.1 on page 182.

brew expression *līpnē* is obscure and requires explanation (the path taken by Sollamo 2003, Rodriguez 2017: 180, and Jones 2018), but that older translations have become misunderstood due to changes in English. After elucidating these, there is no need for an Agent marker interpretation anymore. Below I also show why this interpretation is in itself unlikely regardless of any alternatives.

Before turning to the evidence for a connotation of threatening influence for Biblical Hebrew *līpnē*, let me clarify what I mean with this connotation by examining English *in the face of* and *in confrontation with*. English has phrases like *in the face of adversity/death/...*, where the complement has an unpleasant connotation by itself. By contrast, combinations with a complement with a beneficial or pleasant connotation are infelicitous or receive an ad hoc negative connotation: *#in the face of profit/the weekend/...* Likewise, phrases that are of themselves neutral receive a negative connotation when used as the complement of these expressions: *in the face of change/...; in confrontation with the system/other communities/...* Therefore, the prepositional expression provides a pejorative connotation if its complement does not have one already. The complement has a threatening influence in the sense that it has the ability to negatively influence another entity.

What might cause this connotation? It is striking that *in the face of* and *in confrontation with* both incorporate a word for ‘face’.⁴ In many languages, words for ‘face’ are related to concepts of authority and dignity. We find evidence for this in English (*lose/save/retain face*) and many languages around the world, as the following examples demonstrate:⁵

- (5.3) Jordanian Arabic (Al-Adaileh & Abbadi 2012: 81)
akal widzhi ‘he has eaten my face’: ‘he has harassed me’
- (5.4) Turkish (Kraska-Szlenk 2014: 30)
yüzü akı ‘clear face’: ‘honor’
- (5.5) Swahili (Kraska-Szlenk 2014: 30)
sina uso ‘I have no face’: ‘I am ashamed’

4 Observe that *confrontation* comes from Latin *frōns* ‘forehead’.

5 However, one must be careful not to generalize here (see e.g. Littlemore 2019: 192–201 on cultural variation in embodied metaphor; cf. Strecker 1993 on the body part face in particular). All these languages show that the body part face is in *some* way related to concepts of authority and dignity, but the exact range in which these metaphors can be used will vary.

- (5.6) Chinese (Yu 2001: 16)
- a. *diu lian* ‘lose face’: ‘lose face, be disgraced’
 - b. *mei lian* ‘no face’: ‘feel ashamed, feel embarrassed’
 - c. *yao lian* ‘want face’: ‘care about one’s reputation’
- (5.7) Thai (Ukosakul 2005: 119–120)
- a. *ráksá nâ* ‘preserve face’: ‘preserve someone’s ego’
 - b. *mâi hâi/wái nâ* ‘not giving/keeping face’: ‘too direct, inconsiderate’

Kraska-Szlenk (2014: 30) recognizes the same relationship in human behaviour, in the fact that we hold our face up when we are proud and want to seem respectable while we bow our heads low when we are ashamed. This observation finds support in the Hebrew Bible itself, when Cain’s face ‘falls’ (*npl*) when his offer is rejected by Yahweh (Gen. 4:5–6).⁶ The combination of cross-linguistic, psychological, and biblical evidence shows that these words are not arbitrarily related, but that this phenomenon reflects a psychological reality.

The ‘face’ is not just a metaphor for concepts like authority and dignity, it also comes to denote the *space* in which a person can exercise authority or enforce their dignity.⁷ This is clear from the many idioms where a word for ‘face’ is combined with a spatial preposition (5.8). These expressions stem from the unwanted intrusion upon someone’s sphere of authority and dignity.

- (5.8) a. *The voters are saying, “In your face, Bush!”*
(*N.Y. Times* 6 Jun. 1992, 23/1 in citation by OED: s.v. face, n., P5d(c))
- b. *Fuck off, scumbag. Get out of my face.*
(Wilson 2005, *Cusp*, 51 in citation by OED: s.v. face, n., P5g(a))
- c. Dutch (Den Boon & Hendrickx 2015–2017: s.v. gezicht, 7)
iemand in zijn gezicht uitlachen ‘laugh in someone’s face’

6 Compare also Job 29:24, where Job speaks of his former glory: ‘(the men around me) would not let the light of my face fall (*hiphil npl*); i.e., they would pay Job respect in order to preserve his face.

7 Such an extension is common in spatial expressions. For example, *front* normally denotes a vertically oriented bounded region on an object (e.g. the *front* of a house), but this region can be projected onto the surrounding (horizontally oriented) environment with *in front of* (Jackendoff 1996: 15). Similarly, words for ‘face’ can denote someone’s authority and dignity, but also the projected region in which someone can exercise their authority or enforce their dignity.

All in all, the cognitive underpinning for a connotation of threatening influence for the body part ‘face’ seems clear: the face is related to concepts of authority and dignity, and comes to denote the abstract region of a person’s authority and dignity. When you enter this realm of authority, two things can happen: either you challenge their authority, as in (5.8), or you relinquish some of your own authority and permit that person’s influence over you. This is seen as a threat, which gives rise to the connotation of threatening influence for *in the face of* and *in confrontation with*.

Biblical Hebrew *pānīm* ‘face’ has very similar connotations.⁸ Example (5.9) is highly reminiscent of the provocative *in your face* in (5.8a).⁹ But being in someone’s realm of authority does not necessarily imply friction, as (5.10) demonstrates: here, ‘to stand to someone’s face’ has come to mean ‘to serve them’.¹⁰

- (5.9) Job 1:11: עַל־פְּנֵיךָ יְבָרְכֶךָ
 ‘al *pānē-kā* y-əbārāk-Ø-ekkā
 on face-yours 3M-bless\IPFV-SG-YOU.OBJ
 ‘He will curse¹¹ you *in your face*.’

8 Rodriguez (2017: 179) already recognized a “metaphor of *face-personal space as dominance*” (emphasis original). The evidence I adduce for the connotation of threatening influence is slightly more general, as it also covers his “service metaphor”, for example (Rodriguez 2017: 178). It is not exactly clear what Rodriguez’ method is to distinguish these categories. We can also relate the metaphors with *pānīm* ‘face’ outlined below to the expression *hēn b’ēnē* ‘favour in the eyes of’, which Vardi (2015) described as expressing a hierarchical relationship.

9 Also Job 2:5.

10 Similarly: Gen. 41:45; 1 Kgs. 18:15; Deut. 1:38; 1 Sam. 16:21, 22; 1 Kgs. 1:2; 10:8 (with *abdekā* ‘your servants’); 12:6, 8; 17:1; 18:15; 2 Kgs. 3:14; 5:16; Jer. 15:19; 18:20; 52:12; Ezek. 8:11; Est. 4:5; Dan. 1:19. With *šrt* ‘serve’ besides ‘*md*’ ‘stand’ we find Num. 16:9; Ezek. 44:11, 15. See also Ringgren’s (2001: 182–183) categories “serve”, “priestly service”, and “worship” in his analysis of ‘*md*’. Even when *līpnē* seems purely Locative and ‘*md*’ ‘stand’ is to be taken literally, the prepositional object is almost always the more dominant party: Gen. 18:22; 19:27; 43:15; 47:7; Exod. 9:10, 11; Lev. 27:8; Num. 3:6; 5:16, 18, 30; 27:2, 19, 21, 22; 35:12; Deut. 19:17; 29:14; Josh. 10:8; 20:6, 9; 21:44; 32:9; Jdg. 2:14; 1 Sam. 6:20; 1 Kgs. 1:28; 19:11; 2 Kgs. 4:12; 5:15; 8:9; Jer. 7:10; 15:1; 35:19; 40:10; 49:19; 50:44; Zech. 3:1, 3, 4; Est. 8:4; Dan. 2:2; Ezr. 9:15; 2 Chr. 9:7; 10:6, 8; 18:20. Two seemingly contradictory cases can be explained away: Exod. 17:6 (God before Moses, but God is helping Moses); Lev. 18:23 (a woman before an animal, but passively allowing it to have sex with her). We also find *pānīm* with *šrt* ‘serve’ without ‘*md*’ ‘stand’: 1 Sam. 2:11, 18; 3:1; Est. 1:10; 1 Chr. 6:17; 16:4, 37.

11 The verb *brk* ‘bless’ can be used as a euphemism for ‘curse’.

- (5.10) Dan. 1:5: וּמְקַצְתָּם יַעֲמְדוּ לְפָנַי הַמֶּלֶךְ׃
ū=mi=qṣāt-ām y-a’amd-ū li=pn-ē ham=melek
 and=from=end-theirs 3M-stand\IPFV-PL to=face-of the=king
 ‘And at their end (of the years in training) they (the men in training) would serve (lit.: stand *to the face of*) the king.’

The threatening connotation of this authority is clearly visible in (5.11–5.13). In (5.11), *mippānē* ‘from the face of’ is not a neutral Source preposition, but expresses that Sarai has a kind of threatening influence over Hagar, her maid at whom she is angry. With this verb, a truly neutral Source is marked with *min* ‘from’.¹² Mercy (*raḥāmin*) is something you need ‘in the face of’ somebody who may otherwise do something to you (5.12).¹³ The use of *mippānē* in the context of fear was already recognized by Rodriguez (2017: 194–195), but he seems to limit it to cases where fear is made explicit with a verb like *yr* ‘fear’ (5.13).¹⁴

- (5.11) Gen. 16:6: וַתַּעַנֶּה שָׂרַי וַתִּבְרַח מִפְּנֵיהֶ׃
wat-t-a’annē-Ø-hā śāray wat-t-ibrah-Ø mip=pānē-hā
 WAYQ-F-oppress-3SG-her Sarai WAYQ-F-flee-3SG from=face-hers
 ‘So Sarai oppressed her (Hagar), and she (Hagar) fled *from* her (Sarai’s) *presence* (lit.: *face*).’

- (5.12) Neh. 1:11: אֲנִי אֶדְוֶי ... וַתְּנֶהוּ לְרַחֲמִים לְפָנַי הָאִישׁ הַזֶּה׃
’ānnā’ ’ādōn-āy ... ū=tən-Ø-ēhū la=raḥāmīm li=pn-ē
 please lord-mine ... and=give\IMP-M.SG-him to=mercy to=face-of
hā=’iš haz=ze
 the=man the=this

‘My Lord, ... grant [your servant, i.e. the Speaker] mercy *before* this man.’

¹² This can be seen in Isa. 48:20, where it marks the Chaldeans when they are no longer a threat to Israel. Apart from this example, *min* usually marks locations (‘the land’ 2 Sam. 19:9; ‘afar’ Isa. 22:3). But with *mippānē* the argument is always threatening: Gen. 35:1, 7; Exod. 2:15; Jdg. 11:3; 1 Sam. 21:11; 1 Kgs. 2:7; 12:2; Ps. 3:1; 57:1; 2 Chr. 10:2. The nuance of *millipnē* as opposed to *mippānē* is unclear: Jon. 1:3. We also find a few other complex prepositions with *min*: *mē’al* ‘from upon’ (2 Sam. 19:9 — paralleled by *mippānē* in 1 Kgs. 2:7; Neh. 13:28); *mē’ēt* ‘from with’ (1 Kgs. 11:23). These do not occur frequently enough to be able to discuss them here.

¹³ Similarly: Gen. 43:14; 1 Kgs. 8:50; Ps. 106:46; Dan. 1:9; 2 Chr. 30:9.

¹⁴ Also Exod. 9:30; Deut. 5:5; Josh. 9:24; 11:6; 1 Sam. 7:7; 18:29; 21:13; 1 Kgs. 3:28; 2 Kgs. 1:15; 19:6; 25:26; Isa. 37:6; Jer. 1:8; 41:18; 42:11; Hag. 1:12; Neh. 4:8. With *millipnē*: 1 Sam. 18:12; Eccl. 8:12.

- (5.13) 1 Kgs. 1:50: וַאֲדֹנִיָּהוּ יָרָא מִפְּנֵי שְׁלֹמֹה
wa=’ādōniyyāhū yārē’-Ø mip=pān-ē šālōmōh
 and=Adonijah fear\PFV-3M.SG from=face-of Solomon
 ‘And Adonijah feared (*because of*) Solomon.’

The use of *’al pānē* ‘on the face of’ in (5.14) does not mean simply ‘alongside’ but underlines the enmity between Ishmael and his kinsmen:¹⁵

- (5.14) Gen. 16:12: וְהוּא יְהִיָּה פְּרָא אָדָם יָדוֹ בְּכֹל יָד בּוֹ וְעַל-פְּנֵי כָל-אִחָיו יִשְׁכֵּן׃
wə=hū’ y-ihyē-Ø pēre’ ’ādām yād-ō b=ak=kōl
 and=he 3M-be\IPFV-SG wild_ass.of man hand-his against=the=all
wə=yad kōl b-ō wə=’al pān-ē kāl ’ēh-’āyw
 and=hand.of all against-him and=on face-of all.of brother-PL.his
y-iškōn-Ø
 3M-live\IPFV-SG

‘And he (Ishmael) will be a wild ass of a man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone’s hand will be against him; and *in the face of* all his brothers he will live.’

Finally, (5.15) shows that a threatening connotation can also be present when *pānīm* is used without any preposition:¹⁶

- (5.15) Gen. 43:3: וַיִּשְׁמַע יוֹסֵף אֶת-כָּל-אֲחָיו וַיִּשְׁכַּח אֶת-יֹסֵף וַיִּשְׁכַּח אֶת-יֹסֵף וַיִּשְׁכַּח אֶת-יֹסֵף וַיִּשְׁכַּח אֶת-יֹסֵף
hā’ēd hē’id-Ø bā-nū hā=’iš lē=’mōr lō’
 warn\INFABS warn\PFV-3M.SG to-us the=man to=say\INF not
t-ir’-ū pān-ay bilti ’āhī-kem ’itt-əkem
 2-see\IPFV-M.PL face-mine unless brother-yours with-you

‘The man (Joseph) has sternly warned us: “You will not see my *face* (i.e., enjoy my powerful presence) unless your brother is with you.”’

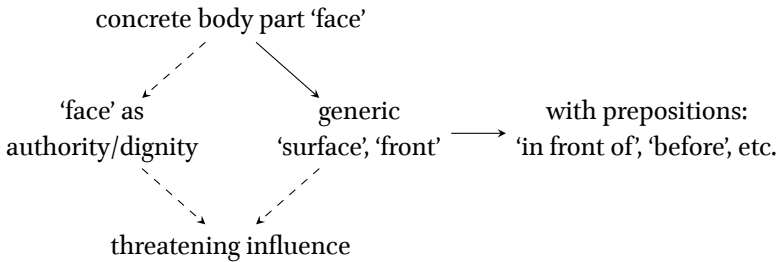
The extensions of Biblical Hebrew *pānīm* relevant here are schematized in the partial semantic-pragmatic network in (5.16). In this diagram, solid arrows represent semantic extensions (through grammaticalization), and dashed arrows represent pragmatic connotations. On the left we see the relationship with concepts of authority and dignity, as seen in (5.9–5.10). At

15 As rendered by some newer translations: ‘in hostility toward all his brothers’ (NIV); ‘in defiance of all his brothers’ (NASB20). Since *’al pānē* can also mean ‘to the east of’ (e.g. 1 Sam. 15:7; Kimron 1980), this verse probably contains a short origin myth explaining why the Ishmaelites live to the east of Israel. See also Gen. 25:18.

16 This example is due to Rodriguez (2017: 179), who also cites Gen. 43:5 and Exod. 10:28.

the same time, the body part undergoes semantic bleaching and becomes a generic noun for ‘surface’ or ‘front’. A similar process can be seen in words like *facade* and *surface*, as well as in the use of *face* for ‘surface’ in *darkness was over the face of the deep* (Gen. 1:2 ESV). The combination of these two developments allows the interpretation of *pānīm* as the ‘realm’ of authority and dignity, which, as explained above, leads to the connotation of threatening influence seen in (5.11–5.15). The combination of *pānīm* with prepositions (*lipnē* ‘to the face of’; *mippānē* ‘from the face of’; etc.), illustrated on the far right, is quite independent from this connotation and only depends on the generic meaning ‘surface’, ‘front’. For instance, *lipnē* describes a location in a region described by *pānīm*; *mippānē* describes the movement away from a location in that region; etc. By virtue of compositionality the connotation is still present in these derived expressions, but the connotation does not depend on the combination with a preposition.

(5.16) Semantic and pragmatic extensions of Hebrew *pānīm* ‘face’.



I purposefully combine the noun *pānīm* and prepositions built on this noun in one diagram in (5.16). The reason for this is that metaphorical extensions like that of threatening influence are found with more than one prepositions (5.9–5.14) as well as without any preposition (5.15). Therefore, the extension is part of the meaning of *pānīm* and did not occur as a result of the grammaticalization of these prepositional expressions. The fact that the extension is also present in these derived expressions indicates that it must have already been part of the meaning of *pānīm* at the moment that these derived expressions became lexicalized. The alternative explanation, that the connotation developed independently in each grammaticalized preposition, is less economical.¹⁷ This is not to say that the expressions did not

¹⁷ This appears to be the path taken by Rodriguez (2017: 178–180) and Jones (2018) — understandably, since they mostly focus on *lipnē* and not on other expressions. In cognitive linguistics one typically tries not to assume many different homonymous lexemes,

grammaticalize: I still allow for semantic change in each prepositional expression (following common grammaticalization clines). I simply do not see them as entirely separate lexemes. This way, their meaning is composed of both “old” meaning common to most expressions built on *pānīm* and “new” meaning particular to specific expressions.

Let us now look at English *before* again. The claim I will put forward here is that this preposition had the same connotation of threatening influence in earlier stages of English, but that this connotation has been lost. The word therefore instantiates some parts of the semantic network given for Hebrew *pānīm* in (5.16). In present-day English the meaning of *before* is spatial and temporal, although the spatial sense is already somewhat archaic when compared to *in front of* (OED: s.v. *before*). Etymologically, *before* is composed of the prefix *be-* ‘about’, inherited from Germanic, and the adverb *fore* ‘in or of the front’ (OED: s.v. *before*). This latter component is ultimately cognate with Latin *prō* and Ancient Greek *πρό*, both meaning ‘for’; a lexeme, therefore, with a highly grammaticalized meaning for considerable time already. It is therefore hard to see whether *before* is ultimately related to the body part ‘face’. Nevertheless, it is striking that in its spatial sense *before* refers particularly often to people (5.17), which might point to a relationship with a body part.

- (5.17) a. *Before a crowded Dallas press conference, a pleased Perot unveiled new versions of the old props.*
 (Time International 25 Jan. 1993, 18/1 in citation by OED: s.v. *before*, B.I.3a)
- b. *An Italian proverb runs thus, “Who flatters me before, spatters me behind.”*
 (Marlburian 31 Jan. 1883, 3/1 in citation by OED: s.v. *before*, A.I.3b)

What we do know is that the element *fore* had, at some point, a generic meaning ‘front’ similar to *surface* and *facade*. This can be seen in fossilized expressions like *bring something to the fore*. Furthermore, if we go back to the seventeenth century, we find quite clear evidence for a connotation of threatening influence (5.18). Both of these examples describe fleeing from someone who is exercising a kind of threatening influence (cf. [5.11]). In (5.18a), the threatening connotation is also nicely paralleled by *darest not ... look me in the face* in the next line. In present-day English, this connotation

nor many unrelated semantic functions, but rather to show how the various meanings of a lexeme interact with and depend on each other (e.g. Tyler & Evans 2003: 37–63).

ment of the second party: in examples like (5.18ab) it is the mere presence of the complement of *before* that is relevant rather than any physical action on their part. The expression ‘in the face of’ therefore seems a better translation for the combination of *ngp* and *lipnē*. In the sections below I will address the question who the Agent of *ngp* is, if *lipnē* does not mark the Agent. I will argue that the Agent is Yahweh, who determines the outcome of battles.

Having made a positive case for a Locative interpretation of *lipnē* (i.e., ‘in the face of’ rather than the Agent marker interpretation ‘by’), we should now also show that an Agent marker interpretation is unlikely regardless of any alternatives. Indeed, there are many reasons on various levels why it is very unlikely that *lipnē* would be an Agent marker. In the remainder of this chapter I discuss five reasons: one from narrative structure, two language-internal, one theoretical, and one typological.

5.2 Narrative structure: *ngp* ‘defeat’ in context

To properly appreciate the function of *lipnē* in contexts like (5.1–5.2) we must first understand the meaning of the verb *ngp* ‘inflict, defeat’. We can do this by looking at the structure of the larger narrative in which it usually appears. Previously I have shown that the description of battles in the Hebrew Bible follows a specific prototypical scenario (Staps 2018: 169–171; cf. Van Wolde 2009: 59–60). One can distinguish seven stages, each of which is characterized by the use of specific verbal roots. Not every stage is necessarily explicitly mentioned in each episode, but the order in which they appear is fixed. The stages can be described as:

1. Gathering: the armies gather together (*ʿsp* ‘gather’; *yʿd* ‘meet up’).
2. Motion: the armies move to the battleground (common verbs of motion, often *ʿlh* ‘go up’).
3. Preparation: the armies prepare themselves (*hnh* ‘encamp’; *ʿrk* ‘set in array’).
4. Fighting: the physical conflict itself, that is, the act of fighting (*lhm* ‘fight’).
5. Settlement: it becomes clear who wins (*lkd* ‘seize’ (of cities); *ntn* ‘give’ in the expression ‘Yahweh gave X in Y’s hand’).
6. Physical conclusion: the final blow, determined by the previous stage (*nkh* ‘strike’).

7. Aftermath: various endings are found. The winner can take possession of the land of the opponent, they can destroy it, or the loser can flee and be chased.

Two examples with many of the stages are the following, with numbers in parentheses indicating the different stages:

- (5.19) Josh. 10:34–35: וַיַּעֲבֹר יְהוֹשֻׁעַ וְכָל־יִשְׂרָאֵל עִמּוֹ מִלַּכִּישׁ עַגְלֹנָה וַיַּחֲנוּ עָלֶיהָ וַיִּלָּחֲמוּ עָלֶיהָ: וַיִּלְכְּדוּהָ בַיּוֹם הַהוּא וַיַּכּוּהָ לְפִי־חֶרֶב וְאֵת כָּל־הַנְּפֹשׁ אֲשֶׁר־בָּהּ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא הִחָרִים

way-y-a'ābōr-Ø *yəhōšua'* *wə=kāl* *yisrā'ēl* *'imm-ō*
 WAYQ-3M-pass_on-SG Joshua and=all.of Israel with-him
mil=lākīš *'ēglōn-ā* *way-y-aḥān-ū* *'āle-hā*
 from=Lachish Eglon-ALL WAYQ-3M-encamp-PL against-it
way-y-illāḥām-ū *'āle-hā* *way-y-ilkəd-ū-hā* *b=ay=yōm*
 WAYQ-3M-fight-PL against-it WAYQ-3M-seize-PL-it.OBJ on=the=day
ha=hū' *way-y-akk-ū-hā* *lə=pī* *ḥereḅ*
 the=that WAYQ-3M-strike-PL-it.OBJ with=mouth.of sword
wə='ēt *kāl* *han=nepēs* *'āšer* *b-āh* *b=ay=yōm* *ha=hū'*
 and=OBJ all.of the=being REL in-it on=the=day the=that
heḥērim-Ø
 destroy\PFV-3M.SG

‘Then Joshua, and all of Israel with him, *passed on* (2) from Lachish to Eglon. They *encamped* (3) against it and *fought* (4) over it. They *seized* (5) it that day, and *struck* (6) it with the edge of the sword, and all the people that were in it he *destroyed* (7).’

- (5.20) Josh. 10:29–30: וַיַּעֲבֹר יְהוֹשֻׁעַ וְכָל־יִשְׂרָאֵל עִמּוֹ מִמַּקְדָּה לִבְנֵה וַיִּלָּחֲמוּ עִם־ לִבְנֵה: וַיִּתֵּן יְהוָה גַּם־אוֹתָהּ בְּיַד יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֵת־מַלְכָּהּ וַיַּכּוּהָ לְפִי־חֶרֶב וְאֵת־כָּל־הַנְּפֹשׁ אֲשֶׁר־בָּהּ לְאִה־שְׂאִיר בָּהּ שָׂרִיד

way-y-a'ābōr-Ø *yəhōšua'* *wə=kāl* *yisrā'ēl* *'imm-ō*
 WAYQ-3M-pass_on-SG Joshua and=all.of Israel with-him
mim=maqēdā *libnā* *way-y-illāḥem-Ø* *'im* *libnā*
 from=Makkedah Libnah WAYQ-3M-fight-SG with Libnah
way-y-ittēn-Ø *yhwh* *gam* *'ōt-āh* *bə=yad* *yisrā'ēl* *wə='et*
 WAYQ-3M-give-SG Yahweh also OBJ-it in=hand.of Israel and=OBJ
malk-āh *way-y-akke-Ø-hā* *lə=pī* *ḥereḅ* *wə='et*
 king-its WAYQ-3M-strike-SG-it.OBJ with=mouth.of sword and=OBJ

kâl han=nēpēš' äšer b-āh lō' hiš'ir-Ø b-āh
 all.of the=being REL in-it not remain\CAUS.PFV-3M.SG in-it
šârid
 remnant

'Then Joshua, and all Israel with him, *passed on* (2) from Makkedah to Libnah, and they *fought* (4) with Libnah. And Yahweh *gave* it, too, *in the hand* (5) of Israel, as well as its king. And he²⁰ *struck* (6) it with the edge of the sword, and all the people that were in it: he *left no survivors* (7).'

The events described in war contexts of *ngp* fit the same seven-stage pattern. The data set underlying Staps (2018) only included episodes where the verb *lhm* 'fight' is used, which covered only two instances of *ngp* (Deut. 1:42; 1 Sam. 4:10). Because in these two examples not all stages are explicit, they do not provide enough evidence to determine whether *ngp* belongs in stage 5 or stage 6. I then preliminarily placed them in stage 5 (Staps 2018: 177–181), based on the involvement of God with this root in the active voice (see section 5.3 below) and the meaning of the verb in general. However, an Agent marker interpretation would place *ngp* in stage 6, so I will make a better case for *ngp* as a stage 5 verb here.

First of all, it is clear that stage 5 and 6 are distinct stages, given that they frequently co-occur and are always in the same order (Staps 2018: 177–181). The physical conclusion is always performed by a human Agent, whereas the settlement can be determined by God (5.20). War in the Hebrew Bible is a religious event (cf. Walzer 1992, among others), so it is expected that Yahweh plays a pivotal role in this prototypical scenario. It is Yahweh who decides who wins; without him on one's side, one better does not go to battle at all (Deut. 1:42). However, while there is evidence for God's involvement in stage 5, the Agent in stage 6 is always human. God is seen as the divine orchestrator of the battle, determining the outcome, but he does not physically participate in it. He may play a different role in battles that are narrated differently, but not in the ones that adhere to this scenario.

The 24 or 25 occurrences of *ngp* in war contexts that were not yet considered in Staps (2018) also fit the pattern described above.²¹ These examples

²⁰ Based on a comparison with examples like (5.19) we must identify the subject of *strike* as Joshua, not Yahweh.

²¹ Lev. 26:17; Num. 14:42; Deut. 1:42; 28:7, 25; Jdg. 20:32, 35, 36, 39; 1 Sam. 4:2, 3, 10; 7:10; 2 Sam. 2:17; 10:15, 19; 18:7; 1 Kgs. 8:33; 14:12; Ps. 89:24 (unclear); 1 Chr. 19:16, 19; 2 Chr. 6:24; 13:15; 14:11; 20:22; 25:22. See section 5.3 below for a detailed breakdown.

allow us to be more specific as to the place of this root in the prototypical scenario. Concretely, there are instances where a stage 6 verb is present as well, confirming the classification of *ngp* as a stage 5 verb:

- (5.21) Jdg. 20:35: וַיִּגַּף יְהוָה | אֶת־בְּנֵי־מִן לִפְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּשְׁחִיתוּ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּבִנְיָמִן
בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא עֲשָׂרִים וַחֲמִשָּׁה אֲלָף וּמֵאָה אִישׁ כָּל־אֶלֶּה שְׁלֹף חֶרֶב:

way-y-iggōp-Ø *yhwh* *'et* *binyāmin* *li=pn-ē* *yisrā'el*
WAYQ-3M-defeat-SG Yahweh OBJ Benjamin to=face-of Israel

way-y-ašhūt-ū *bən-ē* *yisrā'el* *bə=binyāmin*
WAYQ-3M-destroy-PL son-PL.of Israel against=Benjamin

b=ay=yōm *ha=hū'* *'esr-īm* *wa=hāmiššā* *'elep* *ū=mē'ā*
on=the=day the=that ten-PL and=five thousand and=hundred

ʾiš *kāl* *'elle* *šōlēp-Ø* *hāreḅ*
man each.of these draw\PTCP-M.SG sword

‘Then Yahweh *defeated* (5) Benjamin in the face of Israel. The Israelites *destroyed* (6) Benjamin that day: 25,100 men, each of them sword-drawing.’

- (5.22) 1 Sam. 4:2: וַיַּעֲרְכוּ פְּלִשְׁתִּים לְקִרְאֵת יִשְׂרָאֵל וַתִּטֵּשׂ הַמְּלָחָמָה וַיִּגְּגַף יִשְׂרָאֵל
לִפְנֵי פְּלִשְׁתִּים וַיָּכוּ בַמַּעֲרָכָה בְּשׂוֹדָה כְּאַרְבַּעַת אֲלָפִים אִישׁ:

way-y-a'ark-ū *pālīštī-m* *liqra't* *yisrā'el*
WAYQ-3M-set_up-PL Philistine-PL opposite Israel

wat-t-ittoš-Ø *ham=miḥāmā* *way-y-innāḡep-Ø*
WAYQ-F-spread_out-3SG the=battle(F) WAYQ-3M-defeat\MID-SG

yisrā'el *li=pn-ē* *pālīštī-m* *way-y-akk-ū*
Israel to=face-of Philistine-PL WAYQ-3M-strike-PL

b=am=ma'ārākā *b=aś=šāde* *kə='arba'a-t* *'ālāp-īm* *ʾiš*
in=the=battle_line in=the=field like=four-of thousand-PL man

‘Then the Philistines *arranged* (3) themselves opposite Israel. As *the battle* (4) spread out, Israel was *defeated* (5) in the face of the Philistines. They *struck* (6) around 4,000 men on the battlefield.’

These examples show that the root *ngp* is a stage 5 verb in both the active voice (qal template, [5.21]) and the non-active voice (niph'al template, [5.22]).²² In particular in the qal, where Yahweh is the subject, this is consis-

²² A number of recent studies have discussed the function of the niph'al; see the excellent overview of the debate in Van Wolde (2019), to which may be added the response by Jones (2020). The point of discussion is to what extent the niph'al expresses the passive and/or middle voice. Although we are concerned with *ngp* in the niph'al, this discussion is only tangentially related to the matter at hand: my analysis that *lipnē* is not an Agent

tent with the observation that God plays a role in stage 5 but not stage 6. The fact that the typical order of events and the way the battle is narrated in general is the same regardless of voice suggests that the semantic content, and hence argument structure, of the verb is the same as well. In other words, in both the active and the non-active voice we must understand this root to have three arguments. In the active voice these can all be made overt, as in (5.21): the Agent as the subject, the Patient as the object, and a third argument marked by *līpnē*. In the non-active voice we expect the same three arguments in the underlying argument structure. It would be odd if *līpnē* marked the Agent in this situation, because this would (a) remove God from the argument structure when compared to the active voice and (b) make it impossible to express the third argument (which is expressed by *līpnē* in the active voice). Instead, we should understand an unexpressed Agent in the underlying argument structure. When *ngp* is used in the niph'al, God's involvement is frequently made clear with other verbs in the direct context.²³ The simplest explanation is then that God is still the Agent in the events narrated with a niph'al, but that the Agent is, as usual in Biblical Hebrew, not specified.²⁴ Therefore, *līpnē* does not mark the Agent.

The data of a different root, *kn'* 'subdue', supports this. Like *ngp*, this verb, which uses the causative hiph'il template for the active voice, is trivalent: God is the Agent, an army is the Patient, and a second army is marked by *līpnē* (5.23). The niph'al of this root is used in the same way as the niph'al of *ngp*: God is not mentioned, the Patient is the subject, and the second army is still marked by *līpnē* (5.24). Thus, by the same reasoning as above, *līpnē* cannot mark the Agent. Furthermore, this root also shows that the argument marked by *līpnē* cannot be an Intermediary Agent or Instrument, as

marker is compatible with both the position that the niph'al expresses only the middle voice and the position that it expresses only the passive voice, as well as any position in between. For this reason I will agnostically refer to the niph'al as a "non-active" voice.

- 23 Lev. 26:17 ('I will set my face against you'); Num. 14:42; Deut. 1:42 ('Yahweh is not among you'); Deut. 28:7, 25 ('Yahweh will allow ... to happen'); 1 Sam. 7:10 ('Yahweh thundered loudly ... against the Philistines and confused them'); 1 Kgs. 8:33; 2 Chr. 6:24 ('Israel sinned against you'); 2 Chr. 20:22 ('God wanted to give them in Joash' hand' in v. 20).
- 24 In Biblical Hebrew, "as a rule a proper passive form can be used only if the author of the action (*the agent*) is not named" (Joüon & Muraoka 2006: §132c, emphasis original). The normal way to express the Agent in Patient-oriented syntax is to use a relative clause. Thus for 'the innocent blood shed by Joab' we get 'the innocent blood which Joab shed' (1 Kgs. 2:31). For edge cases where prepositions might mark Agents, see Bicknell (1984: 43–51), but this is definitely not the default.

the hiphil would use a ditransitive construction for this (Joüion & Muraoka 2006: §125u).²⁵

- (5.23) Jdg. 4:23: יִכְנַע אֱלֹהִים בְּיָוִם הַהוּא אֶת יַבִּין מֶלֶךְ־כְּנָעַן לִפְנֵי בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:
way-y-akna'-Ø 'ēlohūm b=ay=yōm ha=hū' ēt yābīn melek
 WAYQ-3M-subdue-SG God on=the=day the=that OBJ Jabin king.of
kanā'an li=pn-ē bān-ē yisrā'el
 Canaan to=face-of son-PL.of Israel

‘On that day God subdued Jabin, the king of Canaan, *in the face of* the Israelites.’

- (5.24) Jdg. 8:28: וַיִּכְנַע מִדְיָן לִפְנֵי בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:
way-y-ikkāna'-Ø midyān li=pn-ē bān-ē yisrā'el
 WAYQ-3M-subdue\MID-SG Midian to=face-of son-PL.of Israel

‘Then Midian was subdued *in the face of* the Israelites.’

5.3 Syntactic-semantic restrictions: the arguments of *ngp* ‘inflict, defeat’

Besides war contexts, the verb *ngp* ‘inflict, defeat’ is used in two other environments: in the sense of ‘stumbling’ and that of ‘inflicting illness or injury’. A close look at the arguments it appears with in the different contexts yields two further arguments why the Agent marker interpretation of *lipnē* should be abolished. All 48 occurrences of the verb (not counting the infinitive absolute in Jdg. 20:39) are collected in table 5.1, along with the different arguments they have.

25 Of the studies I consulted, Sollamo (2003: 622–625) was the only one to take *lipnē* as an Agent marker with other verbs than *ngp* ‘inflict, defeat’ and *kn'* ‘subdue’. She sees the passive Agent as “an adjunct which expresses the originator or instrument of the action expressed by the passive predicate or participle and which in most cases can be converted into the subject of a corresponding active construction” (Sollamo 2003: 623). However, she does not take the semantic features of the arguments into account in her analysis. By her own definition, *lipnē* cannot be an Agent marker with *ngp* or *kn'* because it marks a human argument while the subject of corresponding active constructions is always Yahweh. The other cases she considers are rare and doubtful. Most of them are best interpreted as a middle voice rather than a passive voice when one bases one’s reading of the niphil verbs on more recent work like Van Wolde (2019); *lipnē* can be read in its default Locative sense and does not need to mark the Agent.

Meaning	Arguments			Occurrences
'Stumble'	Th: foot			2× qal; 1× hithpael ¹
'Inflict'	A: God	P: human		15 or 16× qal ²
	A: God	P: land		1× qal ³
	A: human	P: human		1× qal ⁴
	A: animal	P: animal		1× qal ⁵
'Defeat'	A: God	P: army	<i>līpnē</i> : army	4× qal ⁶
	A: God	P: army		0 or 1× qal ⁷
		P: army	<i>līpnē</i> : army	19× niphal ⁸
		P: army		3× niphal ⁹

1 In the qal: Ps. 91:12; Prov. 3:23. In the hithpael: Jer. 13:16.

2 Exod. 12:23 (2×), 27; 32:35; Josh. 24:5; 1 Sam. 25:38; 26:10; 2 Sam. 12:15; Isa. 19:22 (2×); Zech. 14:12, 18; Ps. 89:24 (which may also belong to the war context); 2 Chr. 13:20; 21:14, 18.

3 Exod. 7:27.

4 Exod. 21:22.

5 Exod. 21:35.

6 Jdg. 20:35; 1 Sam. 4:3; 2 Chr. 13:15; 14:11.

7 Ps. 89:24 (which may also belong to the injury context).

8 Lev. 26:17; Num. 14:42; Deut. 1:42; 28:7, 25; Jdg. 20:32, 39; 1 Sam. 4:2; 7:10; 2 Sam. 2:17; 10:15, 19; 18:7; 1 Kgs. 8:33; 14:12; 1 Chr. 19:16, 19; 2 Chr. 6:24; 25:22.

9 Jdg. 20:36; 1 Sam. 4:10; 2 Chr. 20:22.

Table 5.1 Contexts in which *nqp* occurs (A = Agent; P = Patient; Th = Theme).

In the meaning 'stumble', the root is intransitive and of little relevance to us here. However, the context of illness and injury is highly relevant, even though *līpnē* is not found in this environment. The exact semantic boundaries of this context are not exactly clear; it is best understood with a prototype model. The prototype is rather concrete and involves Yahweh 'inflicting' a disease upon humans. There is ample evidence for illness in a number of examples, such as the root *ʾnš* 'become ill' in (5.25).²⁶ When disease is mentioned explicitly the verb is always in the qal and the Agent is always Yahweh. Somewhat removed from this prototype, but still clearly related, are cases where God inflicts misfortune, but not necessarily disease (5.26). We also have two cases where humans and animals injure each other (Exod. 21:22, 35).

²⁶ The involvement of illness is explicit in several other examples: 1 Sam. 25:38; Isa. 19:22 (2×); Zech. 14:12, 18; 2 Chr. 21:14, 18.

- (5.25) 2 Sam. 12:15: וַיִּגַּף יְהוָה אֶת־הַיָּלֵד אֲשֶׁר יָלְדָה לְדָוִד וַיֵּאָנָשׁ׃
way-y-iggōp-Ø yhwh ’et hay=yēled ’āšer yālād-ā
 WAYQ-3M-inflict-SG Yahweh OBJ the=child REL bear\PFV-3F.SG
ēšet ūriyyā la=dāwid way-y-ē’ānaš-Ø
 wife.of Uriah to=David wayQ-3M-become_ill-SG
 ‘Then Yahweh *inflicted* the child which Uriah’s wife bore to David, and it became ill.’
- (5.26) Exod. 12:23: וְעָבַר יְהוָה לְנַגֹּף אֶת־מִצְרַיִם׃
wə-’ābar-Ø yhwh li=ngōp ’et mišrayim
 WQAT-pass_through-3M.SG Yahweh to=inflict\INF OBJ Egypt
 ‘Yahweh will pass through to *strike/inflict something upon* the Egyptians.’

Observe that in almost every example God is the Agent of *ngp*. Furthermore, this is always the case for the war contexts in which *ngp* is in the active voice, like (5.27). Therefore, as already seen above, *ngp* is primarily a verb of divine intervention. If *lipnē* were an Agent marker, we would expect its complement to be God. This is however never the case: *lipnē* always marks an army, while armies are never the Agent in the active voice.

- (5.27) 2 Chr. 14:11: וַיִּגַּף יְהוָה אֶת־הַכּוּשִׁים לְפָנֵי אֲסָא וּלְפָנֵי יְהוּדָה׃
way-y-iggōp-Ø yhwh ’et hak=kūšī-m li=pn-ē ’āsā’
 WAYQ-3M-defeat-SG Yahweh OBJ the=Cushite-PL to=face-of Asa
wə=li=pn-ē yəhūdā
 and=to=face-of Judah
 ‘And Yahweh *defeated* the Cushites *in the face of* Asa and *in the face of* Judah.’

The second language-internal reason why *lipnē* should not be analyzed as an Agent marker is even clearer. In table 5.1 we see that *lipnē* is also used when *ngp* is in the active voice, as in (5.27). In the active voice, the Agent slot is taken by the subject. Therefore, with an Agent marker interpretation, *lipnē* must have another function in these four instances. A Locative interpretation does not suffer from this problem.²⁷

27 Jones (2018: 225–226) solves this by reading *lipnē* as an Instrument marker in these cases: ‘by/through/using’. But like an Agent marker reading, this interpretation as an Instrument marker can be ruled out on the basis of theoretical and typological arguments similar to the ones shown in the next sections. In short, it is unclear how *lipnē* would have developed from a spatial preposition to an Instrument marker, and we cannot explain why it would only be an Instrument marker in the context of *ngp* ‘defeat’.

5.4 Grammaticalization and semantic restrictions

The fourth reason why I argue that *lipnē* is not an Agent marker stems from grammaticalization theory. Grammaticalization is the process as a result of which “particular items become more grammatical through time” (Hopper & Traugott 2003: 2). In our case, the particular item is the expression *lipnē*: literally this means ‘to the face of’, but over time it acquires the more grammatical senses of ‘in front of’ (spatial Locative) and ‘before’ (temporal Locative).²⁸ According to Rodriguez (2017: 180) this meaning has then further grammaticalized into Agent marking, and such a development is implicitly understood by Sollamo (2003) and Jones (2018) as well.

Grammaticalization, however, is not simply the acquiring of new, more grammatical, meanings. Grammaticalization theory provides a framework from which falsifiable predictions follow, against which we can check the likelihood of *lipnē* having developed an Agent marking function.²⁹ One of these predictions is that as a lexeme proceeds to acquire more grammatical meanings, it undergoes certain morphological changes that can be schematized by the cline in (5.28).

- (5.28) content item > grammatical word > clitic > inflectional affix
(Hopper & Traugott 2003: 7)

Based on this cline it is clear that Agent marking is a highly grammatical function: in nominative-accusative languages with overt case marking, the Agent is marked with an inflectional affix in the active voice (the nominative case). Furthermore, many such languages mark the Agent in non-active voice with an inflectional affix as well, like the instrumental case in Russian. On the other hand, the spatial and temporal senses of *lipnē* (‘before’) are usually expressed with a preposition, i.e. a grammatical word (even if that preposition requires some case ending). These Locative senses are therefore less grammatical than Agent marking.

²⁸ For our present purposes we can loosely define ‘more grammatical’ using the distinction between content words (*example, accept, green*) on the one hand and function words (*of, and, or, it, this*) on the other: the latter group is more grammatical than the former.

²⁹ It is well-known that grammaticalization itself is unpredictable: we cannot predict the changes some construction may undergo. I use ‘prediction’ here in the sense of a practically testable implication of a hypothesis.

Furthermore, as words proceed down this cline, they lose semantic and pragmatic meanings: “as grammaticalized forms become increasingly syntacticized or morphologized they unquestionably cease over time to carry significant semantic or pragmatic meaning” (Hopper & Traugott 2003: 94). Thus, while the syntactic and morphological environment in which they occur may become more restricted, the semantic-pragmatic environment will become less restricted. Indeed, case-marking languages use the nominative case (which has reduced syntactic freedom and phonetic substance) for the subject regardless of the semantic or pragmatic context; this function is heavily embedded in the grammar.

We thus see that in grammaticalization two processes occur simultaneously: grammatical functions such as Agent marking are acquired, but this tends to go hand-in-hand with a reduction in semantic-pragmatic content (“bleaching”), syntactic freedom, and phonetic substance. It is unfortunate that this second aspect is not always taken into account by Hebraists. In the case of *lipnē*, there is no loss of pragmatic content (the connotation of threatening influence is still present), nor semantic bleaching (there are at most two verbs in combination with which *lipnē* would be an Agent marker). There is furthermore no evidence for reduction in syntactic freedom or phonetic substance. All in all, this is unlikely for a highly grammatical function like Agent marking. On the other hand, the Locative sense with its connotation of threatening influence that I propose is not only clearly less grammatical but also found in more semantic environments, as the example of *‘amad lipnē* ‘stand before’ in the sense of ‘serve’ (5.10) has shown.

5.5 Typology: no arbitrary semantic shifts

Finally, when a word undergoes semantic shifts or grammaticalization, it does not acquire new meanings arbitrarily. These processes follow common paths fueled by cognitive processes. For example, *lipnē* came to mean ‘in front of’ because it describes the space close to or directed towards (*la*) the face (*pānīm*). Since the processes through which expression meanings change are not particular to any language, we would expect similar cases in other languages — indeed, English *before* and *in front of* are parallels to *lipnē* in this sense. This spatial sense then developed into a temporal one (‘before’) on the basis of the widely attested TIME IS STATIONARY AND WE MOVE THROUGH IT metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 43), in which events

are seen as locations. Again, English *before* has here undergone the same development as Biblical Hebrew *līpnē*.

However, it is not at all clear how one of the senses of *līpnē* would have developed into an Agent marking function, and Sollamo (2003), Rodriguez (2017), and Jones (2018) do not attempt to explain this. In default of a cognitive explanation, we can consider the a priori likelihood that *līpnē* developed an Agent marking function from its Locative meaning, by searching for expressions in other languages that may have undergone the same shift. The typological study of Palancar (2002) examines 148 languages with Agent markers (176 distinct markers), of which 87 languages have nominative-accusative alignment (106 passive Agent markers in total: Palancar 2002: 16–17). Palancar cross-references these markers with their other functions. In nominative-accusative languages, Agent markers commonly share the function of Agent marking with the function of marking Source (47%), Cause (33%), Locative (27%), and/or Instrument (23%) (Palancar 2002: 41–43).³⁰ At first sight, it may seem that the relatively high percentage of passive Agent markers with a Locative function (27%) suggests that *līpnē* may be an Agent marker as well. However, closer inspection shows that it is not common that a grammatical item has *only* Locative and passive Agent marking functions: in 14 out of the 18 times that Locative and passive Agent co-occur, other functions are involved as well, like Cause or Instrument. It seems that the Agent marker developed from such an intermediary category rather than directly from the Locative function (Palancar 2002: 206–207). There is no evidence for such an intermediary category in the case of *līpnē*.

Furthermore, those languages that do attest a direct development from Locative to passive Agent marker tend to be centred around Oceania, a pattern that is also found with ergative Agent markers (Palancar 2002: 259–261): Agent markers tend to develop directly from Locative markers with high frequency in Oceania, and the only two cases outside Oceania are of the Chukotko-Kamchatkan family, spoken in the far east of Russia. Direct development of Agent marking from Locative functions therefore seems to be an areal phenomenon. In contrast, the use of body parts as spatial prepositions and the relationship between ‘face’ and authority and dignity is ubiquitous. Hence it seems a priori highly unlikely for *līpnē* to have developed an Agent marking function, especially since no examples of Cause or Instrument marking have been found.

³⁰ Palancar refers to the function of Source as “Ablative”.

5.6 Related work

In the previous sections I have first made a positive case for a connotation of threatening influence for the word *pānīm* ‘face’ and the series of prepositional expressions derived from this noun. I have argued that this analysis is particularly useful to interpret occurrences of *lip̄nē* ‘before’ with the verb *ngp* ‘defeat, inflict’, and advanced five arguments why the recent interpretation of *lip̄nē* as an Agent marker ‘by’ in this context is incorrect. It is now time to discuss how this analysis relates to the work of the proponents of the Agent marker interpretation.

First of all, Sollamo defines the Agent as “an adjunct which expresses the originator or instrument of the action expressed by the passive predicate or participle and which in most cases can be converted into the subject of a corresponding active construction” (Sollamo 2003: 623). She notes that *lip̄nē* “usually means ‘in the presence of, in front of, before’” and that this meaning is also found in passives, but goes on to mention “a few cases [in which] it is better to interpret *lip̄nē* as the preposition of an agent” (Sollamo 2003: 623). The argument is purely exegetical: it is based on the subjective question which interpretation is “better”. In spite of this, Sollamo generally does not consider the wider context, such as the prototypical war scenario I described above, and thus relies too much on a translation like ‘defeat’ to decide whether a verb requires an Agent in the passive voice or not. For the combination with *ngp* ‘defeat, inflict’, she writes: “because *ngp lip̄nē* indicates the victor and not where the victory was won, it is simplest to regard the preposition *lip̄nē* as the preposition of the agent here” (Sollamo 2003: 624). She thus takes thematic roles as discrete: the argument is either Locative or Agent; since it cannot be Locative, it must be the Agent. In my analysis, the argument has indeed some Agent properties (such as sentience and the power to bring about an event or change of state), but not others (like actually bringing about that event or change of state, because a comparison with the active voice shows that Yahweh is the actual Agent).

It is also worth noting that Sollamo’s definition of the passive Agent combines very broad semantic properties (“originator or instrument of the action”) with syntactic ones (“adjunct”; “can be converted into the subject of a corresponding active construction”). This is broad to the point that it loses its explanatory power. Even if *lip̄nē* would mark the Agent with *ngp* according to this definition, it does not tell us whether the army would be

the “originator” of the action or the “instrument” of an action by some other originator. At the same time, we cannot narrow down the semantic aspects of the definition because they are tied to the syntactic properties. A syntactic subject need not be an Agent (in my stricter sense), as is evidenced by well-known examples like *The hammer broke the window*. Therefore, if the definition is to include syntactic aspects, it seems it necessarily loses explanatory power in semantics.

The next work to discuss the combination of *lipnē* with *ngp* is Rodriguez (2017).³¹ He begins with the question whether *lipnē* is actually a “word”, and argues that we should ask this question for each usage separately instead of the construction in general: we can “identify which utterances are composites of two words and which are utterances where the two words have become a frozen union” (Rodriguez 2017: 167–168). This is an enhancement of the position that *lipnē* is either always a “composite” (and hence structurally transparent) or always a “frozen union”. I want to take this even further, arguing that there is no need to categorize usages as either “composite” or “frozen union”, because even a frozen union with a grammaticalized meaning can retain meaning of the composite parts. Thus the grammaticalized Locative meaning of *lipnē* ‘before’ (in which we do not understand an actual face) still carries meaning of the noun *pānīm* (including the connotation of threatening influence). This allows me to distinguish between meaning that results from grammaticalization (Locative) and meaning that results from metaphorical extension (threatening influence). This way we do not need to assume a typologically unlikely grammaticalization path. Furthermore, this approach allows us to attribute the metaphorical extension to the noun *pānīm* rather than the prepositional expression *lipnē*. As a result, we have a more economical explanation for the same connotation with other prepositions and standalone *pānīm* (see [5.9–5.15]).

The last author to discuss here is Jones (2018). He starts out with a methodology much like the one I followed in section 5.3, investigating the number of arguments *ngp* ‘defeat, inflict’ requires and their semantic properties (Jones 2018: 220). However, he includes all usages of *ngp*, including

31 Hardy (2022: 169–175) also discusses *lipnē*, but not the combination with *ngp* specifically. In his analysis these cases are Locative, but it is not clear whether he understands there to be any metaphorical extension (such as threatening influence); given the immense scope of his work, there simply is no space to discuss such infrequent verb-preposition pairs.

the ones that occur in the context of illness and injury. As a result, he concludes that the Agent of *ngp* can be human (based on Exod. 21:22 in the illness and injury context), whereas such cases do not occur in the war context. There is good reason to separate these contexts: both the niph'al of *ngp* and a third argument marked by *lipnē* only occur in the war context. That *lipnē* also occurs in the active voice is ignored in Jones's discussion of the arguments of *ngp*. He only discusses this briefly in his discussion of 1 Sam. 4:2 (Jones 2018: 225–227). This verse is crucial, because in the next verse *ngp* occurs in the qal with *lipnē*:

(5.29) 1 Sam. 4:2–3: וַיַּעֲרְכוּ פְּלִשְׁתִּים לְקִרְאֵת יִשְׂרָאֵל וַתִּטֵּשׁ הַמִּלְחָמָה וַיִּגְּגוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל
 לִפְנֵי פְּלִשְׁתִּים וַיָּכוּ בַּמַּעֲרָכָה בַשָּׂדֶה כְּאַרְבַּעַת אֲלָפִים אִישׁ׃

way-y-a'ark-ū p̄alištī-m liqra't yisrā'el
 WAYQ-3M-set_up-PL Philistine-PL opposite Israel
 wat-t-itṭōš-Ø ham=milḥāmā way-y-innāḡēp-Ø
 WAYQ-F-spread_out-3SG the=battle(F) WAYQ-3M-defeat\MID-SG
 yisrā'el li=pn-ē p̄alištī-m way-y-akkū
 Israel to=face-of Philistine-PL WAYQ-3M-strike-PL
 b=am=ma'ārākā b=aś=sāde kə='arba'a-t 'ālāp-īm 'iš
 in=the=battle_line in=the=field like=four-of thousand-PL man

‘Then the Philistines arranged themselves opposite Israel. As the battle spread out, Israel was defeated in the face of the Philistines. They struck around 4,000 men on the battlefield.

וַיָּבֹא הָעָם אֶל-הַמַּחֲנֶה וַיֹּאמְרוּ זִקְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לָמָּה נִגְּפָנוּ יְהוָה הַיּוֹם לִפְנֵי פְּלִשְׁתִּים׃
 way-y-ābō'-Ø hā=ām 'el ham=maḥāne way-y-ō'mar-ū
 WAYQ-3M-come-SG the=people(M) to the=camp WAYQ-3M-say-PL
 ziqn-ē yisrā'el lāmmā naḡāp-Ø-ānū yhwḥ hayyōm
 elder-PL.of Israel why defeat\PFV-3M.SG-us Yahweh today
 li=pn-ē p̄alištī-m
 to=face-of Philistine-PL

When the people came to the camp, the elders of Israel said: “Why has Yahweh defeated us today in the face of the Philistines?”

Jones admits the possibility that Yahweh is the “deleted agent in 4:2” (Jones 2018: 225), but prefers to take the Philistines as the Agent because they are involved in “striking around 4,000 men”. He argues that the speech of the elders in 4:3 cannot be used to define the description of the event by the narrator in 4:2 (Jones 2018: 227). This is a valid observation, but by

pulling the two verses apart entirely Jones ignores the fact that 4:3 shows that the active voice of *ngp* often occurs with *līpnē*. For 4:3, Jones proposes to read *līpnē* as a marker of the Instrument (“Why did the Lord defeat us today *by* the Philistines?”: 2018: 227, emphasis original). It is more economical, however, to attribute the same function to *līpnē* in all occurrences with *ngp*, both active and non-active. Jones does not accept Locative as a universal function, branding it as an “unhelpful and inappropriate translation” (Jones 2018: 217). However, he understands Locative in a very strict sense and does not consider possible metaphorical extensions. Furthermore, it is clear that he is working with the modern sense of English *before*, while I have shown that this translation is not as bad as one may think — only old-fashioned.

Finally, Jones observes that the niphāl of *ngp* occurs almost exclusively with *līpnē*, implying that this suggests that it may mark the Agent: “It should at the very least be curious that the passive of a transitive action ‘defeat’ appears with a so-called locative *līpnē* in nearly every occurrence” (Jones 2018: 227). However, as I have shown above, the same is true for nearly every occurrence in the active voice (if we limit ourselves to the war context). Therefore, that *līpnē* is also found in the niphāl is not so surprising, and an explanation should not be sought in its co-occurrence with this template. Jones is right to reject a strictly spatial Locative reading, but the solution can be found in the connotation of threatening influence instead of an entirely different function for *līpnē*.

5.7 Concluding remarks

In summary, translations and other scholars have proposed that *līpnē* is an Agent marker when used with *ngp* ‘inflict, defeat’ and perhaps a few other verbs. This is incorrect for five reasons: (a) the larger context in which this verb is used shows that the Agent of these events must be God, but *līpnē* marks humans; (b) the Agent of the verb *ngp* in the active voice is God, but again *līpnē* marks humans; (c) *līpnē* is also found with *ngp* in the active voice, where the Agent slot is already filled by the subject; (d) Agent marking is a highly grammaticalized function that should not be restricted to a specific semantic context; (e) it is cross-linguistically unlikely for a Locative preposition to directly develop an Agent marking function.

Instead, we have seen evidence from various languages that the body part ‘face’ is related to concepts of authority and dignity, which can give rise

to a connotation of threatening influence. This leads to the use of *lipnē* ‘to the face of’ with *ngp* ‘inflict, defeat’ in war contexts, as in (5.1): ‘Israel was defeated *before* the Philistines’ (ESV). Here, ‘before’ denotes the threatening influence of the Philistines, and a more suitable translation in present-day English would be ‘in the face of’.

The exegetical implications of my proposal are clear. When *ngp* ‘inflict, defeat’ is used in the niphāl template, it is the state of being defeated that is described — rather than the event.³² Based on parallels with the active voice, it is clear that the implicit Agent effecting this state is God. He is left unexpressed because the niphāl focuses on the state itself, not the event that caused it. The argument marked by *lipnē* has the same function as in the active voice: it marks the dominant party in that state; the party that has a threatening influence over the subject (e.g., Israel in [5.1]). The implication is that God has allowed Israel to be defeated in confrontation with the Philistines.

32 This matches with recent accounts of the middle voice expressed by the niphāl. Testen (1998: 138) argues that the niphāl ingressively describes the entering into the state described by the verb, whereas Van Wolde’s ‘resultative’ category (2019: 467; 2021: 438) focuses primarily on the state itself rather than the entering into that state. The exact aspect is not important here, as long as the state of being defeated is in view.