Summary
Participants, Characters and Roles: A Text-Syntactic, Literary and Socioscien-
cific Study of Genesis 27–28

The research has shown that it is fruitful to combine the linguistic text-syntactic, literary and socioscientific approaches to the study of Genesis 27–28 in particular and biblical narratives in general. It has also illustrated that the computer-assisted linguistic analysis of the Eep Talstra Centre for Bible and Computer and Moretti’s application of the Network Theory to literary studies are important tools to the understanding and analysis of biblical narratives.

Besides the introductory section in which I have paid attention to the definition of the methodological approaches, this research falls into three main sections as indicated in the title. In the introduction, I sought to make a difference between various approaches to the study of Genesis 27–28 and the approaches that I applied. Initially, I acknowledged the division of biblical interpretation into the two broad streams of diachronic (historical-critical) and synchronic approaches and their adherents. I moved forward to establish that my methodology falls within the synchronic approach based on the acceptance of the final form of the text as my starting point, albeit it incorporates some socioscientific findings which are considered in the broader diachronic approach. To differentiate my methodology, I argued for the ahistorical (text-syntactic and literary) and the historical-cultural (socioscientific: sociocultural and anthropological) approaches.

The first part of this research has focused on the linguistic text-syntactic study of participants. I observed that there is diversity in the way linguists apply the linguistic devices to the referencing of participants at various stages of a narrative. A survey of recent linguistic approaches to participant referencing revealed that the referencing patterns identified have been affected by the classification of participants into major, minor and prop. Besides, when it comes to “distance” to the last mention of a participant, it appeared that different definitions of the textual units such are “clauses” are used and that the text-syntactic connections between clauses (which affects, e.g., the count of sentences) are not always taken into account. Building upon the works of de Regt, Runge, Talstra and the ETCBC, I have proposed an expansion of the types of participants to include main, central, dominant and dominated participants, besides the major, minor and prop. In the analysis of Genesis 27–28, I gave preference to the text-syntactic approach of the ETCBC in which the grammatical analysis of the text moved beyond the clause to higher-level patterns and communication processes, identifying embedded (sub)paragraphs, narratives in discursives and direct speeches embedded in discursives; with a resulting text hierarchy in which lower-level (sub)paragraphs are embedded recursively into higher-level (sub)paragraphs.

The second part of this research has focused on the literary portrayal of characters in a narrative and the effects of the methods of portrayal on the understanding of narratives. It built on the results of part one by stressing the importance of linguistic devices to a proper literary study. This part of the research has three subsections. This first subsection has dealt with the general
portrayal of characters in biblical literature. A survey of modern authors revealed that there are generally acknowledged methods of character portrayal, which can be divided into direct and indirect methods, and that characters can be categorized as “round” or “flat”. However, Berlin moved further to advocate for a third class of characters (agent), and the application of point of view as a method of portrayal, while Sternberg did the same for the analytic and proleptic uses of epithets as important methods of character portrayal. The survey also revealed how biblical literary analysts argued for the importance of linguistics to a proper literary analysis but usually paid little attention to the way in which a character’s portrayal was sustained or continued in a narrative through the applications of linguistic devices. Thus they took the use of pronouns as referencing devices for granted. I have tried to incorporate the linguistic observations in the literary analysis and argued that pronouns are a method of portrayal, applied by narrators to sustain or continue a character’s portrayal which then enables a reader to understand a narrative.

The second subsection studies the structuring effects of character portrayals. A survey of literary structures proposed by literary analysts, including symmetric (ABCC'B'A') and concentric (ABCB'A') patterns revealed some pandemonium as each literary analyst developed a structure based upon his/her interests. The units in these patterns were identified on the basis of word repetitions or other similarities, rather than on linguistic structural markers. Walsh’s (2001) study of literary structures in Biblical Hebrew presented some tools which could guide literary analysts to common structural markers. Important to this research has been his demarcation of linguistic (text based) (sub)unit markers and stylistic markers. His preference to linguistic markers laid emphasis on the importance of linguistics to proper literary analysis. I realised that Walsh’s linguistic text-based markers agreed largely with the linguistic devices applied in the development of the text hierarchy of the ETCBC database. Building upon the works of Fokkelman, Walsh, and the ETCBC database encoding, I have proposed a symmetric (ABCC'B'A') structure for Genesis 27–28 and also a method of developing the concentric (ABC'B'A') and symmetric (ABCC'B'A') structures for the patriarchal narratives based on the Toledoth of each patriarch.

The last subsection focused on Moretti’s Network Theory which studied the amount of space occupied by each character and applied it to determine characters’ importance in narratives. This theory which is a quantitative stylistic approach applied computer operations to measure the distances between characters through the number of words spoken and displayed visual graphical outputs in which characters’ interactions are quantified. The aim of this theory has been to determine how character-space affected centrality and prominence. When Moretti applied this theory, he considered that characters interacted only when there was a speaking action between them and he moved on to illustrate its efficacy in Shakespearean drama. I adapted
Moretti’s analytical model by (1) including soliloquys (which are excluded in Moretti’s work) and (2) distinguishing between “central” and “main” characters (3) applying other centrality algorithms in addition to the Degree Centrality that Moretti relied on.

When I applied the network theory to the study of Genesis 27–28 I differentiated my approach from his by arguing that all spoken words be accounted for and by incorporating other network indices applied in the gephi 0.8.2 visualisation software. This proved effective because the results corroborated with those of the linguistic and other literary approaches with respect to the central and main character, actor or participant.

The third part of this research has focused on the socioscientific study of the roles of participants, characters or actors. It built upon the results of parts 1 and 2 and argued that the devices used in participant referencing and the methods of character designation highlighted the sociocultural and anthropological roles of the participants or actors in the cultures within which these narratives originated. While "Isaac his father" is overspecification from a text-syntactic perspective, it is a methods of character portrayal from a literary perspective, and defines the socioscientific role of Isaac as "father." Thus Part three has studied the importance of such roles to the understanding of the narrative. The socioscientific approach applied Ancient Near Eastern tablets and sociocultural/anthropological practices from some non-western (African) cultures to enlighten our understanding of the roles of individuals within cultures similar to those of Ancient Israel. A survey of the application of these materials indicated a clear divide between scholars who saw a correlation between ANE discoveries and the patriarchal narratives and others who rejected the application of such discoveries as historical proof of the dating of the patriarchs, or as "proof texts." Nevertheless, scholars agreed that such material could inform our understanding of the patriarchal narratives. Building upon this agreement, I argued that the Bible should be the most important interpretative key to such similarities. This means that the role of Isaac as "father" for example had to be understood from the way it developed in the patriarchal narrative. Applying this to Genesis 27–28, I have studied how each character developed his/her role based on their relationships with each other as members of the same family. I found out that success in Isaac’s family was measured in terms of its effect on the family. I also drew insights from Ancient Near Eastern and some African customs on firstborn, firstborn rights and succession, studied how both Esau and Jacob developed their potential for heirship, and proposed why Jacob became heir. Rebekah’s contributions to influence Jacob’s choice as heir led me to devote a paragraph on Rebekah’s motherhood. The results indicated that Jacob’s comportment and his obedient relationship to both parents increased his chances. While Rebekah has often been labeled negatively, I have argued she exercised her motherhood perfectly because she used every opportunity to change things for the welfare of the family.
The fact that three approaches to the study of Genesis 27-28 came to the same conclusions indicated the importance of the interdisciplinary study to scriptures. However, I have argued, in line with Talstra, Van Peursen and Bakker, on the primacy of the linguistic approach because the literary and socioscientific approaches are only applied to answer questions raised from the linguistic reading of a text.