

SENTENCE GRAMMAR

HOW DOES RASHI COMMENT ON GRAMMAR?

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Grammar refers to word *forms* that indicate *meaning*. A grammatical rule simply pairs a *form* with a *meaning*. There are two types of grammar: Grammar within an individual sentence and grammar within an individual paragraph. Sentence grammar is the type of grammar that most people are familiar with it. While it does include the grammar of verb conjugations, it also includes rules about plurality, pronouns, and conventions. A few examples will show the breadth of the *sentence grammar* category.

Example 1 – Plurality: A simple example in English of plurality is the distinction between *he sings* vs. *they sing*. If the subject is plural then the verb should be plural while if the subject is singular the verb should be singular. A remarkable set of Rashi comments is found on **Lv01-02h,i**: *A person, when he wishes to offer an offering, then from cattle and herd animals they will offer their offerings*. Rashi introduces a new plurality rule: *Mixed plurality indicates that both the individual, the partnership, and the community can offer offerings*.

Example 2 – Indefinite Pronouns: **Gn48-01a** states *After these things, he told Joseph, ‘Your father is ill’*. The pronoun *he* has no reference. Rashi interprets it as an indefinite pronoun. The English translation would be *After these things, someone told Joseph, “Your father is ill”*.

Example 3 – Verb Conjugations: **Gn37-18a,b** states, *Joseph’s brothers saw him approaching from afar; before he got near, they worked themselves up to plot his death*. The underlined phrase reflects Rashi’s translation. Rashi’s translation is in turn based on the use of *hitpael* conjugation to indicate the word *plot*. According to Rashi the *hitpael* indicates an action of someone but done under an external influence (in this case the influence of the brothers steaming themselves up). I in fact published an article *A New Approach to the Interpretation of the Hitpael Conjugation*, **Jewish Bible Quarterly**, 52(2), 2024, 107—119 in which I show consequences of Rashi’s unique approach.

Example 4 – Verb Conjugations: **Ex22-01a,b** states, concerning a thief digging a tunnel to enter a rob a home, *If the thief be found in a tunnel, smitten and dead, then there is no liability for murder* (Rashi explains that since thieves know that owners will defend their property, they are prepared to fight back and therefore killing him first does not carry a liability for murder). From the use of the passive *be found* Rashi infers that this is true whether the owner or someone else kills him since the emphasis in the passive is the activity independent of the subject.