How many verbal Patterns are there in Hebrew? From Sibawayh to Judah Ḥayyūj and Abraham ibn Ezra

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Abstract

In the introduction to his dictionary, considered to be the first scientific Hebrew dictionary based on the principle of the triconsonantal root, medieval grammarian Judah Ḥayyūj enumerates the conventional verbal patterns presently accepted, and in addition *pô‛ēl* (פּוֹעֵל). However, Ḥayyūj's identification of this latter pattern was not accepted by all medieval grammarians. Ibn Ezra in particular disputed the existence of this pattern among the strong verbs.

This article suggests that the difference between Ḥayyūj's and Ibn Ezra's views is a result of their different historical contexts. In the tenth and eleventh centuries, the science of Hebrew linguistics, and especially grammar, followed the Arabic model. Accordingly, Ḥayyūj created the pattern *pô‛ēl* as the parallel to *fā‛ala*, one of the four basic forms of the Arabic verb. By the twelfth century, however, Ibn Ezra revaluated the issue using the data of Hebrew itself, and found no evidence for this form.

# Introduction[[1]](#footnote-2)

Judah Ḥayyūj formulated the structure of the Hebrew verbal system in the Middle Ages. In his dictionary dealing with weak and geminative verbs, Ḥayyūj presented all the Hebrew patterns (*binyānîm*), distinguishing, in accordance with the Arabic grammarians, between heavy and light patterns. This dictionary is the first scientific Hebrew dictionary based on the principle of the triconsonantal root.[[2]](#footnote-3)

In the introduction to the dictionary, Ḥayyūj, for the first time in the history of Hebrew grammatical thought, enumerates the conventional verbal patterns presently accepted, with the addition of *pô‛ēl* (פּוֹעֵל).[[3]](#footnote-4) These verbal patterns are divided into heavy and light patterns*.* His student Jonah ibn Janah followed in his footsteps in his *Kitāb al-Luma‛* (*Sēp̱er Hā-Riqmâ*), chapter 13.[[4]](#footnote-5) From their own discussion, it is evident that they did not see this pattern as an innovation and found it natural that the classification of patterns in Hebrew would include *pô‛ēl*.

Several questions arise: Was Ḥayyūj’s view accepted among all medieval grammarians? What evidence does he rely on in establishing the *pô‛ēl* pattern? Does the verbal system as it appears in the Bible support the existence of this pattern?

It emerges that Ḥayyūj’s view was not universally accepted by medieval grammarians. Ibn Ezra held a contrasting view on the *pô‛ēl* pattern, disputing the existence of this pattern among the strong verbs. While his opinion has been examined by several scholars,[[5]](#footnote-6) as I will demonstrate in this article, this examination has yet to encompass the entirety of ibn Ezra’s views on the matter. Similarly, a satisfactory explanation has yet to be provided for the dispute between Ḥayyūj and ibn Ezra.

These issues, which are fundamental to understanding Semitic grammar in the Middle Ages, have received little attention. To the best of my knowledge, not a single study has systematically examined the views of various medieval grammarians on the *pô‛ēl* pattern.[[6]](#footnote-7)

The goal of this paper is to correct this lacuna. The paper identifies two different understandings of *pô‛ēl* among medieval grammarians and explains the divergent views. It also shows that grammarians relied on Arabic grammar in formulating Hebrew grammar, and that the *pô‛ēl* pattern was conceived by Ḥayyūj out of a desire to align the grammar of the two languages.[[7]](#footnote-8) In the second half of the twelfth century, after the consolidation of Hebrew grammar, ibn Ezra, the most original and critical grammarian of this period,[[8]](#footnote-9) began to view the verbal system through a Hebrew lens. Accordingly, he posited that the *pô‛ēl* pattern does not exist among the strong verbs. In his opinion, the supposed occurrences of this pattern in the Bible do not in fact prove its existence, contrary to the views of Ḥayyūj and ibn Janah.[[9]](#footnote-10)­

Before discussing the *pô‛ēl* pattern itself, we will compare the Hebrew verbal system as viewed by Ḥayyūj and his student ibn Janah to the Arabic verbal system as viewed by Sibawayh and his students. This comparison will illuminate why Ḥayyūj felt it necessary to include the *pô‛ēl* pattern in his verbal system.

# The Hebrew and Arabic verbal systems in the Middle Ages

## The patterns *fa‛‛ala*, *fā‛ala*, and *af‛ala* as viewed by Sibawayh

The relationships between the various Arabic patterns and their different roles was a central topic for Arabic grammarians in the medieval period. This section briefly surveys the views of Sibawayh, the greatest of the medieval Arabic grammarians, on patterns 2, 3, and 4. It seems that Sibawayh was the first to see these three patterns as representing one morphological group. In his opinion, these three patterns are similar to quadriconsonantal roots, as he writes: ‘and these three [*fa‛‛ala, fā‛ala, af‛ala*] are similar to the quadriconsonantal roots which do not have additions, like *daḥraja*, since their number is like their number, and they are alike in passivity and movement’.[[10]](#footnote-11)

As Yavrumyan explains: ‘in the classes of the extended three-radical verbal stems there are two models of different morphemic patterns, but with a uniform syllable structure’.[[11]](#footnote-12)

We can put this more simply as:

Past: *daḥraja: fa‛lala = fa‛‛ala = fā‛ala = ’af‛ala.*

Future: *yudaḥrij: yufa‛lil = yufa‛‛il = yufā‛il = yu’af‛il*.[[12]](#footnote-13)

After Sibawayh lists the patterns and distinguishes the different types of the first four patterns, he discusses the other long patterns. As we will see, Hebrew grammarians do the same.

## The Hebrew verbal system in Judah Ḥayyūj and Jonah ibn Janah

In the introduction to the section of his book dealing with ‘verbs with weak letters’ *(ḥurūf al-līn)* Ḥayyūj enumerates four patterns in the Hebrew verbal system, *pā‛al, pi‛ēl, pô‛ēl, hip‛îl*:

And I have divided the verbs into light and heavy, and I have called by the name ‘light’ those which come through the pattern *pā‛altî*, for it is the lightest of the patterns; and by the name ‘heavy’ those which come from outside the pattern *pā‛altî*, like *hip‛altî*, or *pi‛altî*, or *po‛altî*¸ or other patterns.[[13]](#footnote-14)

It may seem strange that Ḥayyūj mentions only these four – *pā‛al* as a light pattern, *hip‛îl, pi‛ēl,* and *pô‛ēl* as heavy patterns – explicitly, and the others only by implication. Regarding the passive patterns *hup‛al* and *pu‛al*, Ḥayyūj’s fundamental principle is that they are included in the active patterns *hip‛îl* and *pi‛ēl*; he does not consider it correct to enumerate them separately.[[14]](#footnote-15) However, a question remains concerning *nip‛al* and *hitpa‛ēl.* Furthermore, a thorough examination of his works shows that Ḥayyūj considers neither *nip‛al* nor *hitpa‛ēl* a ‘heavy’ pattern.[[15]](#footnote-16) These four patterns alone, in Ḥayyūj’s scheme, are described as ‘light’ patterns or ‘heavy’ patterns.

In Jonah ibn Janah’s *Kitāb al-Luma‛* we find a more explicit discussion of this issue. In the thirteenth chapter, dedicated entirely to the Hebrew verbal system, ibn Janah devotes the first and main part to an examination of the four patterns – *qal, hip‛îl, pô‛ēl,* and *pi‛ēl* –which in turn are classified in two divisions.

Ibn Janah then dedicates several pages to the patterns *nip‛al*, *hitpa‛ēl*, *hup‛al*, and *pu‛al.* These are given the title: ‘and the patterns *added to the verb, for adding meaning*,[[16]](#footnote-17) are: *nip‛al, hitpa‛ēl,* and that of which its agent has not been mentioned [that is, *hup‛al* and *pu‛al*]’ (*wa-mimmā yalḥaq al-fiʿl min al-abniya li'l-maʿnā fa-hiya al-infiʿāl wa'l-iftiʿāl wa-mā lam yusamma fāʿiluhu*’).[[17]](#footnote-18) In other words, the basic verbal patterns are the first four, while the rest are extrapolated from them.[[18]](#footnote-19) Ibn Janah goes on to clarify that the *nip‛al* pattern is a variant of the light pattern,[[19]](#footnote-20) although he is not certain whether *hitpa‛ēl* belongs to the light pattern or to *pi‛ēl*.[[20]](#footnote-21)

Judah Ḥayyūj and his disciple ibn Janah consider the four abovementioned patterns as the fundamental patterns of the Hebrew language. As discussed, these are the light pattern *pā‛al* and the heavy patterns *hip‛îl, pi‛ēl,* and *pô‛ēl*.

We can now return to the central question of this article: On what does Ḥayyūj rely when attempting to establish the fourth pattern, *pô‛ēl*, among the strong verbs?

There are only a tiny number of occurrences of this pattern in the strong verbs in Scripture. Only two verbs that are clearly part of *pô‛ēl* appear in the works of medieval grammarians:

1. אֲשֶׁר אִם־צָדַקְתִּי, לֹא אֶעֱנֶה; **לִמְשֹׁפְטִי** אֶתְחַנָּן (Job 9:15)
2. וְאֶת-הַנְּעָרִים **יוֹדַעְתִּי** אֶל-מְקוֹם פְּלֹנִי אַלְמוֹנִי (1 Sam. 21:3)[[21]](#footnote-22)

As Joseph Kimhi writes in *Sēp̱er Ha-Zikkaron* on the form *limšōp̱ᵉṭî* and its grammatical explanation:

And there are found from this form, in the strong verbs, a few words, like *limšōp̱ᵉṭî ’etḥannān*, we cannot judge it to be in any other pattern; for were it in *qal*, it would be *lᵉšōp̱ṭî*, and if it were from *pi‛ēl,* it would be *limšappᵉṭî*, like *limgaddᵉlî*, and if from *hip‛îl*, it would be *lᵉmašpîṭî*, like *lᵉmagdîlî*, thus it was said that *mᵉšōp̱ᵉṭî* is of the model of *mᵉkônᵉnî*, *‘mᵉrômᵉmî mišša‛ărê māwet’* (Ps. 9:14).

Kimhi, as we see, explains the form *mᵉšōp̱ᵉṭî* as representing the form *pô‛ēl*, and hence the form that deviates from the other patterns is explained. The verb *yôda‛tî* is similarly explained as a first person past tense verb in the *pô‛ēl* pattern.[[22]](#footnote-23) Kimhi emphasizes that ‘few words are found from this form’; in other words, we have little evidence attesting to its existence.

Here the central question returns: Are a handful of occurrences adequate to establish the existence of such a significant pattern in the Hebrew verbal system? Moreover, as we shall see below, ibn Ezra, two centuries after Ḥayyūj, correctly argues that there is no clear evidence from the Bible to support the claim for the verbal pattern *pô*‛*el*.

As adumbrated above, I believe that the comparison with Arabic was the primary factor that influenced Ḥayyūj in conceiving of this form. To clarify the point, there is no question concerning the existence of *pā‛al, pi‛ēl,* and *hip‛îl* in Hebrew, and the parallel with Arabic is obvious: *pā‛al* is the light pattern like *fa‛ala/fa‛ila*/*fa‛ula*; *pi‛ēl* with gemination is like *fa‛‛ala*; *hip‛îl* is like *af‛ala*.[[23]](#footnote-24) But is it possible to find a parallel to the Arabic *fā‛ala*? Ḥayyūj was not unique in his desire to identify a parallel: both he and ibn Janah failed to construct a Hebrew verbal system perfectly mirroring that of Arabic, as the number of patterns in Arabic is greater than in Hebrew. Nevertheless, they wished to maintain the parallelism at least for the first four patterns in the Arabic verbal system: the light pattern and the unitary system of the three first heavy patterns, according to Sibawayh’s view. The need to include a parallel for *fā‛ala* motivated the creation of the *pô‛ēl* pattern;[[24]](#footnote-25) to do so, Ḥayyūj applied the same ā > ô pattern as in the other parallel patterns.[[25]](#footnote-26)

Delgado claims that ibn Barun was the first to compare *fā‛ala* with *pô‛ēl*. I do not dispute this; ibn Barun clearly and openly compares the two, and Ḥayyūj does not explicitly do so. Rather, what I am suggesting is that the desire to create a parallel order stems from Arabic. In other words, in the specific case of *pô‛ēl,* as well as in many other instances in his work on Hebrew grammar, Ḥayyūj had Arabic on his mind.[[26]](#footnote-27)

# The *pô‛ēl* pattern

## Ḥayyūj and ibn Janah

Judah Ḥayyūj appears to have been the first of the medieval grammarians to mention *pô‛ēl* as a pattern in its own right.[[27]](#footnote-28) Ḥayyūj’s central statement on this matter is the one cited above:

And I have divided the verbs into light and heavy, and I have called by the name ‘light’ those which come through the pattern *pā‛altî*, for it is the lightest of the patterns; and by the name ‘heavy’ those which come from outside the pattern *pā‛altî*, like *hip‛altî*, or *pi‛altî*, or *po‛altî*¸ or other patterns.

In his chapter on verbs (*Kitāb al-Luma‛*, chapter 13), ibn Janah similarly distinguishes between the heavy and light verbs:

But the extended triconsonantal verb is that whose pattern is not the like the light pattern, for instance: *hip‛îl*, *pô‛ēl, and pi‛ēl* … and each of these species is called ‘heavy’, as R. Judah explained in *Kitāb Ḥurūf al-Līn* (*al-Luma‛*, p. 139).

Elsewhere he defines the pattern *pô‛ēl* as an ‘extended’ (*mazīd*) verb because of the added *wāw*.[[28]](#footnote-29)

Ḥayyūj’s words present a clear division between the strong verbs and the geminate verbs, on the one hand, and the hollow verbs, on the other. In his opinion, the pattern *pô‛ēl* exists both in the strong verbs and the geminate verbs, but not in the hollow verbs; the occurrences that seem to place it in the hollow verbs are interpreted by him instead as quadriconsonantal instances of the model *pi‛lēl*. As he writes in his introduction to the hollow verbs:

There are those with a duplicated *lāmed* of these weak *‛ayin* verbs, and the *‛ayin* *hapoal* in them is a quiescent *wāw*. Sometimes this is to differentiate in meaning. Such was said in *qām, hēqîm* – *lᵉ’ôyēb yᵉqômēm* (Mic. 2:8) … as for *yᵉsōbᵉbūhā ‛al ḥômōtêhā* (Ps. 55:11), it is not of one those since it is *yᵉpô‛ēl* from *wᵉsābab bêt ’ēl* (1 Sam. 7:16) and not *yᵉpa‛lēl,* the first bet is the *‛ayin* of the verb … and such as *mᵉšômēm* and *’eštômēm* – *mᵉpô‛ēl* and *etpô‛ēl,* for they are from *šᵉmāmâ…*[[29]](#footnote-30)

In other words, the geminate verbs are like the strong verbs. *Sôbēb* represents the pattern *pô‛ēl*, where the *wāw* is part of the pattern, while in the hollow verbs the *wāw* is part of the root. For example, *yᵉqômēm* is modeled by *yᵉpa‛lēl*, where the *lāmed* is doubled;[[30]](#footnote-31) the model *pi‛lēl* is the quadriconsonantal double, similar to *pilpēl*, where the first and the third radicals of the verb are reduplicated, like the verb *ṭilṭēl*. In these two cases, Hebrew makes this duplication for the sake of semantic diversity:

And it may occur that the *‛ayin* of the verb is duplicated differently, I believe that this duplication is to separate the meanings. As I shall explain: *wayyāṭilû ’et hakkēlîm* (Jonah 1:5) – *hinnēh H’ mᵉṭalṭelkā ṭalṭēlâ* (Isa. 22:17); *’im mippānay lō’ tāḥîlû* (Jer. 5:22), *wattitḥalḥal hammalkâ mᵉ’ōd* (Esth. 4:4)…[[31]](#footnote-32)

## Ibn Ezra

Ibn Ezra has an entirely different method regarding *pô‛ēl*, which coincides with his understanding of the hollow verbs, as we will see below. In *Ṣaḥot* (p. 123–4) he explicitly disputes the existence of *pô‛ēl* in the strong verbs:[[32]](#footnote-33)

And I do not admit, at all, that there is a heavy pattern and it is *pô‛ēl.* And the future *’ăpô‛ēl, yᵉpô‛ēl, nᵉpô‛ēl, tᵉpô‛ēl.* For the proof that all the grammarians have brought is not complete, and it is that they found ‘*limšōp̱ᵉṭî ’etḥannān*’, ‘*wᵉ’et hannᵉ’ārîm yôda‛tî’*, and how could it be for there to be a pattern in the language and they will not find thousands of its ilk … and for *yôda‛tî* which is a loan word … we will make an entire pattern? And the word *limšōp̱ṭî* is also not a proof, for the matter shall not be established by one witness!

In other words, a pattern should not be added simply to account for rare occurrences. In order to establish a categorical class, such as a form in the verbal patterns, we should find thousands like it. Ibn Ezra proffers alternative explanations for these unique forms.[[33]](#footnote-34) As suggested above, the primary source for Ḥayyūj and his disciple was not the occurrences in the Bible, but rather the Arabic verbal system, which served as their lodestar. It is unclear whether ibn Ezra was aware of the comparison that Ḥayyūj and ibn Janah made to the Arabic verbal system, leading to the creation of the *pô‛ēl* pattern, but it is evident he did not accept it. In order to fully understand his view on this pattern*,* we must examine his approach to hollow verbs as a whole, which he dubs the *šᵉniyyîm*, that is, biconsonantal roots (literally, ‘seconds, those of two’).

As is known, ibn Ezra accepts the principle of the triconsonantal root. His statement on Ḥayyūj’s great innovation is often quoted:

Know, that the early ones would say, the root *yāṣar* is *ṢR* alone, and the root of *šāb* *ŠB* alone, and we will find like that in most of the early *piyyû*‏*ṭim* … this was the opinion of R. Judah ben Quraysh and R. Menaḥem Saruq, and only R. Adonim Halevi awakened slightly from this mistaken slumber, for a deep sleep from the Lord has fallen upon the aforementioned, and the Lord opened the eyes of R. Judah b. R. David, called Ḥayyūj, to recognize the passive letters, and how they are added and missing and replaced (*Sāpâ Bᵉrûrâ* 25:2).[[34]](#footnote-35)

But, as Goldenberg and Eldar have written, establishing that there are no roots with fewer than three consonants was not Ḥayyūj’s greatest innovation; rather, it was the establishment of the latent quiescent (*al-sākin al-layyin*)*,* a termwhich is not found in Arabic, but was invented by Ḥayyūj and applied to Hebrew. The latent quiescent denotes a phonological entity that extends the vowel it follows.[[35]](#footnote-36)

Ibn Ezra theoretically agrees with this term. By way of example, the verb *’eṣṣāq* –as in *’eṣṣāq mayim* (Isa. 44:3) – contains three consonants, and the missing radical is swallowed up by the doubling of the *ṣ*. However, when a long vowel precedes the expected position of the consonant (that is, where an ’*ālep*, *yôd*, or *wāw* is added), ibn Ezra disagrees with Ḥayyūj and claims that we should not see a consonant.[[36]](#footnote-37) Accordingly, ibn Ezra does not see a triconsonantal root in *qām* and similar forms: ‘And R. Šmuel Hanagid of blessed memory said that the truth of *qām* and its ilk are two visible letters and one latent quiescent, this is primary, and my opinion is very close to his.’ (*Ṣaḥot,* p. 120)

Following R. Šmuel Hanagid, ibn Ezra sees the roots this class as composed of only two consonants and a latent quiescent, which is an integral part of the root but is not itself a consonant. Thus for ibn Ezra, forms such as *qômēm and kônēn* do not belong to the pattern of *pô‛ēl*:

[In the matter of the forms] *qômēm, sôbēb, kônēn lammišpāṭ kis’ô*,and a great grammarian said that they are by the model *pô‛ēl* and it is another heavy pattern, and he did not say anything … since if there is a word *qām* from three letters, then *qômēm* is in the model *pa‛lēl*, for the quiescent *wāw* is replacing the *‛ayin* of the verb according to the opinion of all the grammarians that were before me and after ben Saruq, and foremost R. Judah of blessed memory; and if according to my opinion that they are two we cannot put them in the *pô‛ēl* model*,* which is one of the triconsonantal verbs. (*Ṣaḥot,* p. 123)

Ibn Ezra attacks from all possible angles the ‘great grammarian’ who said that the forms *qômēm, kônēn,* and their ilk represent a *pô‛ēl* pattern. If the hollow verbs are triconsonantal and the *‛ayin* of the verb is indeed a *wāw* – which is, is he says, ‘the opinion of all the grammarians that were before me and after ben Saruq, and foremost R. Judah’ – the form *kônēn* must be *pa‛lēl* because the *wāw* belongs to the root and is not an addition. Conversely, if there are no hollow verbs and the root is biconsonantal *QM*, as ibn Ezra indeed believes, it would be absurd to place the form *kônēn* in the triconsonantal *pô‛ēl* pattern. In other words, ibn Ezra disagrees with Ḥayyūj, and rejects the idea that hollow verbs belong to the *pô‛ēl* pattern. Ibn Ezra has another solution for the forms of *kônēn.*

And you should know that regarding these biconsonantals [the hollow verbs according to ibn Ezra – MK] it would be inconceivable that they will be found by way of the heavy patterns with a *dagesh*, for they have no middle letter that would receive a *dagesh*, in my opinion; and according to the grammarians, it is gone and will never receive a *dagesh*, and therefore, the Hebrews have placed in its stead a duplication of the last letter, like *qômēm, sôbēb, kônēn lammišpāṭ kis’ô.* (*Ṣaḥot*, p. 122–3)[[37]](#footnote-38)

Here, Ibn Ezra offers a possible rebuttal, based on both his and Ḥayyūj’s views of the hollow verbs. In his eyes, this class belongs to the biconsonantal roots. In the *qāl* pattern, two consonants are present, but in *pî‛ēl* there is no possibility to place a *dagesh* in the *‛ayin* of the verb since it does not exist. Therefore, the last letter is duplicated. Even according to Ḥayyūj’s view, which holds that this class of verbs is triconsonantal, the hollow verbs, these letters cannot receive a *dagesh* when they appear in *pî‛ēl* (the heavy form with *dagesh*). The duplication of the *lāmed* of the verb is the morphological and phonetic alternative to the missing gemination of the *‛ayin*.

Like his predecessors, ibn Ezra also differentiates between the verbal classes as far as pattern is concerned. The duplication of the *lāmed* of the verb is a morphological solution intended for the biconsonantal class (the hollow verbs).[[38]](#footnote-39) In theory, the geminate verbs, which have three consonants, do not require this solution, and should perform like the strong verbs, eliding the *‛ayin* of the verb in some cases.[[39]](#footnote-40) However, geminate verbs can also mix with biconsonantals and behave like them: ‘And this pattern, which is the biconsonantal verbs alone, will mix with the geminate verbs, *yᵉsōbᵉbû* is said instead of *yāsōbbû,* and this is like *yᵉkônᵉnû.*’ (*Ṣaḥot*, p. 165)

The future conjugation of the root SBB in *qal*, in its original form, entails the doubling of the *bêt*, *yāsōbbû*, and appears as such fifteen times in the Bible. The verb *yᵉsôbᵉbû* (two occurrences: Ps. 59:7, 15) is a mixture of the biconsonantal and the geminate verbs (*yᵉsôbᵉbû* [*SBB*] = *yᵉkônᵉnû* [*KNN*]). But there is not complete overlap. The similarity between the classes, according to ibn Ezra, exists only in the past and future tenses, while in the present progressive the difference is maintained: ‘And the difference between them is in the present, for from SBB it will be said *sôbēb,* and from the biconsonantal roots *mᵉkônēn* with the addition of a *mem*.’ (ibid., p. 165)

According to ibn Ezra, the model *mᵉpô‛ēl* occurs only in the biconsonantal roots, that is, those linguists consider to be the hollow verbs. In the geminate roots, the present is of the model *pô‛ēl,* similar to the occurrences in Scripture.

To summarize, we see that ibn Ezra based his theory of the verbal system, especially *pô‛ēl,* on the occurrences in the Bible. Accordingly, he sees no foundation for the existence of the pattern *pô‛ēl* among the strong verbs. The few cases found in strong verbs in the Bible can be easily interpreted otherwise.

# Conclusion

This article discusses the fundamental difference between Ḥayyūj, the father of scientific Hebrew grammar, and R. Abraham ibn Ezra. The former constructed a Hebrew verbal system similar to that in Arabic, introducing forms corresponding to the first four Arabic patterns. The latter constructed the verbal system internally, based on the evidence and occurrences in Scripture, without resorting to Arabic parallels.

It is interesting to note that in *Sāpâ Bᵉrûrâh* (p. 40), after disputing Ḥayyūj’s view of *pô‛ēl*, ibn Ezra criticizes his predecessors for their comparison between the quadriconsonantal verbs, like *kirsēm,* and the model *pa‛lēl*:

And they erred in everything when they weighed the quadriconsonantal roots on the model of *P‛L* [that is, triconsonantal roots], they said that *kirsēm* is on the model *pi‛lēl*, and how can it be that a quadriconsonantal word has the model of a triconsonantal word?

As we have seen in the article, the comparison between the model *pa‛lēl* and the quadriconsonantal roots lies at the very foundation of Sibawayh’s Arabic grammar, which categorizes the second, third, and fourth roots as one morphological division, syllabically identical and similar to the model *pa‛lēl*. Ḥayyūj and ibn Janah adopted this view from Sibawayh, and, as noted, compared Hebrew to the Arabic verbal system.

The dispute we have described here is also reflected in modern linguistics, which is also divided regarding the existence of the pattern *pô‛ēl* among the strong verbs in Hebrew. Scholars who deny its existence employ claims remarkably similar to those offered by ibn Ezra.

## Afterword

In this article, we see an example of a recurrent process in the history of cultures. In the tenth and eleventh centuries, the science of Hebrew linguistics, and especially grammar, followed the Arabic model. This served, and rightfully so, as the lodestar for the new and innovative science of linguistics. At this stage, the objective was to make the copy as similar to the original as possible. This is why Ḥayyūj and his disciple after him conceived of the pattern *pô‛ēl* as the parallel to *fā‛ala*, one of the four basic forms in Arabic. Several generations later, in the twelfth century, when Hebrew grammar had already established itself, ibn Ezra revaluated the issue using the data provided by Hebrew alone and found no evidence proving the existence of this form.[[40]](#footnote-41) We might liken Ḥayyūj and ibn Janah to someone restoring an ancient sculpture, only partially finished (Hebrew grammar), on the basis of another, more complete statue (Arabic grammar). Even if the original foundation stones (the Bible) are missing, the sculpture can be restored. Ibn Ezra, by contrast, is a sculptor building a new sculpture (Hebrew morphology) using the materials he found (the Bible) for its construction. The old sculpture (Arabic morphology) may serve as an example, illustrating general lines and ideas, but there is certainly no restoration here.[[41]](#footnote-42)

1. I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to Rev Russell McDougall, CSC, Rector of Tantur Ecumenical Institute, and to Dr Daniel Schwake, Executive Director, for permitting me to use the Tantur Library and its extensive collection of books and academic journals. I would also like to offer my sincere thanks to Prof Moshe Bar Asher, Prof Hagai Ben Shammai, Prof Norman Stillman, Prof Geoffrey Khan, and Dr Almog Kasher for reviewing this article and for their valuable corrections. Many of their contributions are reflected in this article. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. On Ḥayyūj, see, for example, A. Dotan, ‘Comparative Linguistics in the Middle Ages: An Examination of a Topic in Judah Ḥayyūj’s Thought’, *Te’uda* 9 (1995), pp. 117–8 (in Hebrew); I. Eldar, ‘Ḥayyūj’s Grammatical Analysis’, Lĕšonénu 54 (1990), pp. 161–9 (in Hebrew); and especially N. Basal, ‘The Grammatical Theory Of Rabbi Judah Ḥayyūj’ (in Hebrew; Ph.D thesis, Bar-Ilan University, Ramat Gan, 1992). See also N. Basal, ‘Remnants of Syntax in Yehudah Ḥayyūj’s *Kitāb al-Nutaf* as an Arabic-Hebrew Cultural Encounter’, in Y. Tobi (ed), *Ben ‛Ever La-‛Arav:* *Contacts between Arabic Literature and Jewish Literature in the Middle Ages and Modern Times* (in Hebrew; Tel Aviv: Afikim, 1999); N. Basal, ‘From the Earliest Buds of Sephardi Biblical Exegesis: Fragments of the Commentary of 1 Samuel by Judah Ḥayyūj’, *Pe‘amim* 68 (1996), p. 68 (in Hebrew). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. See A. Watad and D. Sivan, *Three Treatises on Hebrew Grammar by R. Judah Ḥayyūj: A New Critical Edition of the Arabic Text with a Modern Hebrew Translation* (in Hebrew; Beersheba: Ben-Gurion University, 2012), pp. 30–1. See also Abraham ibn Ezra, *Ṣahot*, ed. Lipmann (Furth: Lipmann, 1827), p. 164, who notes that Ḥayyūj was the first to indicate the existence of *pô‛ēl.* B.K. Waltke and M.P. O’Connor, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990‬), p.‬‬ 359, have, mistakenly, named ‬‬David Kimhi as the first.‬‬‬‬‬‬‬‬‬‬‬‬ [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. For a general examination of Ḥayyūj and his successor ibn Janah, see A. Maman, ‘The Flourishing Era of Jewish Exegesis in Spain: The Linguistic School – Judah Ḥayyuj, Jonah ibn Janaḥ, Moses ibn Chiquitilla and Judah ibn Balʻam’, in Magne Saebø (ed.), *Hebrew Bible/Old* Testament. vol. I (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2000), pp. 263–70. See also A. Maman, ‘ופחד ורחב לבבך: Rabbi ben David Ḥayyūj’s Version’, *Lešonenu* 71 (2009), pp. 101–2 (in Hebrew). Maman demonstrates that ibn Janah was acquainted with all of Ḥayyūj’s works. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Including Behar and Harlap, discussed in further detail below. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Jose Martinez Delgado is one of the few scholars to have addressed the Arabic parallels to Ḥayyūj’s morphology, including *pô‛ēl.* See J.M. Delgado, ‘The Arabicization of the Hebrew Morphology in al-Andalus: The Adaptation of the Faʽala Paradigm’, in J.P. Monferrer-Sala and N. Al Jallad (eds), *The Arabic Language Across the Ages* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2010), pp. 49–63; J.M. Delgado, *El Libro de Ḥayyūŷ* (Granada: Universidad de Granada 2004), pp. 22–30. Basal, ‘Grammatical Theory’, briefly discusses Ḥayyūj’s view of *pô‛ēl*. Chomsky discusses all three thinkers in his book on Kimhi. See W. Chomsky, *David Kimhi’s Hebrew Grammar (Mikhlol) Systematically Presented and Critically Annotated* (New York: Dropsie College, 1952), pp. 92–93, 105 note 59. See also I. Eldar, *Hebrew Language Study in Medieval Spain* (in Hebrew; Jerusalem: Academy of the Hebrew Language, 2014) pp. 100, 147–8, and note 19 there. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Dan Becker has championed this approach and proved the direct influence, including word-for-word copying in several places, of the Arabic grammarians on ibn Janah and Ḥayyūj. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. See D. Téné, A. Maman, and J. Barr, ‘Linguistic Literature, Hebrew’, in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*; Gale Virtual Reference Library:

   [https://link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/CX2587512561/GVRL?u=barilan&sid=GVRL&xid=838642de](https://link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/CX2587512561/GVRL?u=barilan&sid=GVRL&xid=838642de" \t "_blank), accessed 20 July 2015. These authors divide medieval Hebrew linguistics into four categories: (1) tenth century: early attempts; (2) until the middle of the twelfth century: the creative period; (3) through the mid-thirteenth century: the dissemination period (ibn Ezra’s time) and (4) stasis (through the mid-sixteenth century). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. In a forthcoming article, I plan to show that Eliyahu Bahur, apparently following in ibn Ezra’s footsteps, rejects the existence of the *pô‛ēl* pattern, though his view is not entirely compatible with that of ibn Ezra. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. Ibn Al-Saraj writes similarly in *al-Usûl al-naḥw* 3, pp. 114–15.See also D. Becker, *Arabic Sources for Jonah ibn Janah’s Grammar* (in Hebrew; Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 1998), p. 197. See also G. Goldenberg, ‘Principles of Semitic Word-Structure’, in G. Goldenberg and S. Raz (eds), *Semitic and Cushitic Studies* (Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz, 1994), pp. 29–39; E. Goldenberg, ‘Studies in the Agron of Rav Sa’adia Gaon’, *Lešonenu* 37 (1973), p. 88 (in Hebrew). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. M. Yavrumyan, ‘Das System der Verbalstämme in der arabischen linguistischen Tradition: Elemente der morphologischen und semantischen Analyse’ (Ph.D thesis, University of Bayreuth, Bayreuth, 2006)*.* [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. Sibawayh, 2, pp. 360–1 discusses how the basic form of the future tense in the *af‘ala* pattern adds an ’*ālep* (*yu’af‘il* as opposed to *yuf‘il*). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. Judah Ḥayyūj, *Kitāb al-'Af 'āl Dhawāt Ḥurūf al-Līn*, in M. Jastrow (ed), *The Weak and Geminative Verbs in Hebrew by Abu Zakariyya Yahya ibn Dawud of Fez* (Leiden: Brill, 1897). All citations of Ḥayyūj are from here. All translations are my own. See Becker, *Arabic Sources*, p. 197 for the meaning of ‘light’ and ‘heavy’, and other terms. See also I. Eldar, ‘Causes and Effects in the Verbal System’, *Lešonenu* 44 (1980), pp. 157–60 (in Hebrew). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. These are the passive verbs, *mā lam yusamma fāʿiluhu* (that of which its agent has not been mentioned). Ḥayyūj deals with this in the active structures, that is, the *pu‛al* structure in the *pi‛ēl* framework, and *hup‛al* in the framework of *hip‛îl*. See Basal, ‘Grammatical Theory’, pp. 139, 146, 152. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. *Nip‛al* is *infa‛ala,* and *hitpa‛ēl* is *ifta‛ala.* In several places Ḥayyūj calls *hitpa‛ēl* ‘heavy’. See Becker, *Arabic Sources*, pp. 201–202 and note 271. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. All emphases my own. See also Jonah ibn Janah, *Sēp̱er Hā-Riqmâ*, M. Wilensky and D. Tene (eds) (in Hebrew; Jerusalem: Academy of the Hebrew Language, 1964), p. 190 note 4. See also Becker, *Arabic Sources*, pp. 110–11; D. Becker, ‘“The Pāʿūl, the Pōʿēl of which has not been Specified” According to R. Yonah Ben Janāḥ’, *Lešonenu* 56 (1992), pp. 213–21 (in Hebrew). [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. I.e. the *pᵉ‛ālîm šellō’ huzkar pô‛ălām*. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
18. Similar statements were made by the Karaite grammarian Yūsuf ibn Nūḥ, who was active in the second half of the tenth century in Jerusalem, slightly earlier than Ḥayyūj. Cf. G. Khan. *The Early Karaite Tradition of Hebrew Grammatical Thought: Including a Critical Edition, Translation and Analysis of the Diqduq of ʾAbū Yaʻqūb Yūsuf Ibn Nūḥ on the Hagiographa* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), pp. 53–55. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
19. Jonah ibn Janah, *Kitāb al-Luma‛,* ed. J. Derenbourg (Paris: F. Vieweg, 1886), p. 162. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
20. Ibn Janah, *Kitāb al-Luma‛,* pp. 165–6. See also ibn Tibbon’s translation in ibn Janah, *Sēp̱er Hā-Riqmâ*, p. 189 and note 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
21. On the root *YLD*, Ḥayyūj raises the possibility that the verbs *yōladt* (Gen. 16:11), *yōšaḇt* (Jer. 22:23), *šōḵant* (Jer. 51:13), and *šôsētî* (Isa. 10:13) are also part of the *pô‛ēl* structure. See also Basal, ‘Grammatical Theory’, pp. 296–97 and note 347. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
22. Watad and Sivan, ‘Three Treatises’, pp. 66-68. On the root *YD‛*, Ḥayyūj offers two possibilities for *yôda‛tî*:1) the *yôd* replaces the *heh* in the *hip‛îl* structure, 2) it is a structure of its own. In other words, the root *YD‛* and the structure of *pôʿēl*, and the past tense is *pô‛altî.* It seems clear that Ḥayyūj considers *mešōpᵉṭî* to be part of the *pôʿēl* structure, and he is only unsure regarding *yôda‛tî.* See Basal, ‘Grammatical Theory’, pp. 66 note 25, 139, 152, 333, etc. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
23. For comparison, see, among others, E. Lipiński, *Semitic Languages: Outline of a Comparative Grammar* (Leuven: Peeters en Department Oosters Studies, 2001), pp. 378–92; W. Wright, *Lectures on the Comparative Grammar of the Semitic Languages* (Amsterdam: Philo Press, 1966), pp. 165–207, and especially 202–203 with regard to the third structure in Arabic. See also S. Morag, ‘The Tiberian Tradition of Biblical Hebrew: Homogeneous and Heterogeneous Features’, in E.S. Rosenthal(ed), *P’raqim: Yearbook of the Schocken Institute for Jewish Research of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America.* vol. 2 (in Hebrew; Jerusalem: Defus Merkaz, 1969–74), pp.120–25. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
24. Even modern linguistics raises the possibility of its existence (see below), but recognizes the fact that there are a limited number of instances of the structure, and it is hard to definitively confirm that it exists. Ḥayyūj, as mentioned, affirms its existence with complete certainty. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
25. This happens to preserve a pattern in proto-Semitic, but the medieval grammarians were unaware of this fact. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
26. For other examples and studies of this influence on Ḥayyūj, see N. Kinberg, ‘Some Syntactic Notions of Judah Ḥayyuj’, *Lĕšonénu* 52 (1988), pp. 144–56; N. Basal, ‘Remnants of Syntax’*,* pp. 95–111. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
27. Ibn Ezra credits him with this innovation too; see note 2. It should be noted that the Karaite ibn Nūḥ (who predated Ḥayyūj) and other Karaite grammarians regard it as a distinctive morphological pattern (Khan, *Diqduq*, p. 366), but he was not using the system of abstract patterns of *piʿel, hiphʿil,* etc. See also N. Vidro, *Medieval Karaite Pedagogical Grammar* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), pp. 226–29. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
28. Ibn Janah’s initial division of the triconsonantal root at the beginning of Gate 14 (13) involves the comparison between *mazīd* and *ġayr mazīd*. The *mazīd* is ‘that which is not light’ (*al-Luma‛*,136). Ibn Janah himself equates *mazīd* and ‘heavy’ verbs. See Eldar, ‘Causes and Effects’, p. 157. It may very well be that ibn Janah prefers the term *mazīd*,which reflects the transformation of the verb from triconsonantal to quadriconsonantal, as we saw in Sibawayh on structures 2, 3, 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
29. Basal, ‘Grammatical Theory’, pp. 84–86. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
30. This is disputed in modern linguistics. J. Blau, *The Phonology and Morphology of Biblical Hebrew* (in Hebrew; Jerusalem: Academy of the Hebrew Language, 2010), pp. 295–96, presents the weak verb structure *pi‛lēl* and the strong verb structure *pô‛ēl* exactly as Ḥayyūj does. For a different presentation, see P. Joüon and T. Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1991), pp. 156–57. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
31. Basal, ‘Grammatical Theory’,p. 87. Ibn Janah presents a similar approach in *Kitāb al-Luma‛,* pp.142–43. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
32. In *Môznayim*,he counts *pô‛ēl* among the verb structures in the strong verbs. But in his later works, and primarily *Ṣaḥot,* his all-encompassing work on the Hebrew language, ibn Ezra rejects it. See Becker, *Arabic Sources*, pp. 74–75; L.R. Charlap, *Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra’s Linguistic System: Tradition and Innovation* (in Hebrew; Beersheba: Ben-Gurion University, 1999), p. 133. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
33. *Mᵉšōp̱ṭî* is explained here by ibn Ezra as an adjectival form; *yôda‛tî* is explained as a *yôd*-*hê* swap, a possibility which Ḥayyūj raises in his dictionary, entry *YD‛*. See above note 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
34. Regarding the question whether Dunash (Adonim Halevi in ibn Ezra), composer of the commentary on Saadia Gaon, is the same Dunash who disputes Menahem, see S. Poznanski, ‘New Material on the History of Hebrew and Hebrew-Arabic Philology’, in *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 16 (1925), pp. 237-66; M. Wilensky, *Studies in Language and Literature* (in Hebrew; Jerusalem: Academy of the Hebrew Language,1978), pp. 190–94; Eldar, ‘Ḥayyūj’s Grammatical Analysis’, p. 175. R. Hazon, ‘The Linguistical Theory of the Author of the “Responses” to Saadia’ (in Hebrew; Ph.D. thesis, Tel Aviv University, Tel Aviv, 2006) is the definitive study on the topic, and it demonstrates that there were almost certainly two different authors. See also Dotan,‘Comparative Linguistics’, p. 130; Morag, ‘The Linguistic Heritage of the Spanish Communities’, *Pe’amim* 53 (1993), p. 11 (in Hebrew); Basal, *Kitāb*, pp.140–1; Basal, ‘Remnants of Syntax’, pp. 95–6. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
35. N. Basal, ‘Latent Quiescent (Sākin Layyin)’, in G. Khan (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Hebrew Language and Linguistics* (….).See also the entries Root: Medieval Rabbanite Notionsand *Grammarians: Medieval Spain*. Se also N. Basal, ‘The Concept of Compensation (*‛Iwaḍ/Ta‛wīḍ*) as used by Yehuda Ḥayyūj in Comparison with Sībawayhi’, *Journal of Semitic Studies* 44 (1999), pp. 227–43. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
36. G. Goldenberg, ‘On the Weak Quiescent and the Hebrew Root’, *Lešonenu* 44 (1980), pp. 287–92. For further explanation see Eldar, ‘Ḥayyūj’s Grammatical Analysis’, pp. 171–74. See also N. Faust and Y. Hever, ‘Empirical and Theoretical Arguments in Favor of the Discontinuous Root in Semitic Languages’, *Brill’s Annual of Afroasiatic Languages and Linguistics* 2 (2010), pp. 80–118. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
37. I have punctuated this somewhat differently from Charlap. As I noted, ibn Ezra addresses two possibilities: his view and Ḥayyūj’s. See Charlap, *Ibn Ezra’s Linguistic System*, pp. 142–3. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
38. Muraoka presents this similarly from a modern linguistics perspective. See Joüon and Muraoka, *Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, pp. 156–7. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
39. Ibn Ezra believes that in the geminate verbs the *‛ayin* is omitted and not the *lāmed*. See *Ṣaḥot*, p. 25: ‘For they said that its model is *P‛*, for it is missing the *lāmed*; but what is correct is that it is missing the *‛ayin*.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
40. G. Bergsträsser, *Hebräische Grammatik, mit Benutzung der von E*. *Kautzsch bearbeiteten* (Hildesheim: G. Olms, ), p. 28; Auflage von W. Gesenius, *Hebräischer Grammatik* (Leipzig : F.C.W. Vogel, 1962), p. 108. See also Joüon and Muraoka, *Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, p. 59a; Waltke and O’Connor *Biblical Hebrew Syntax*; Blau, *The Phonology*, p. 226; Morag, ‘The Tiberian Tradition’. Wright, *Lectures on the Comparative Grammar*, p. 34 even makes the direct connection between *fāʿil* and *pô‛ēl.* [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
41. It must be emphasized that this article has not attempted to resolve the question of *pô‛ēl*, but rather to examine the main views on the subject in the Middle Ages. It must further be emphasized that this article does not deny the existence of comparisons in ibn Ezra between Hebrew and Arabic, of which there are a great many. However, in defining the verbal system, ibn Ezra did not see a need to compare the two languages. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)