


Another proposal to the unknown female identity of אַמְרַת in Psalm 16:2

**Author:**Philip S. Chia^{1,2} **Affiliations:**¹University of Religions and Denominations, Qom, Iran²Department of Biblical Studies, Moriah Theological Seminary, Tangerang, Indonesia**Corresponding author:**Philip Chia,
pchia275@students.sbts.edu**Dates:**

Received: 29 Apr. 2023

Accepted: 21 Oct. 2023

Published: 12 Jan. 2024

How to cite this article:Chia, P.S., 2024, 'Another proposal to the unknown female identity of אַמְרַת in Psalm 16:2', *Verbum et Ecclesia* 45(1), a2886. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v45i1.2886>**Copyright:**

© 2024. The Author. Licensee: AOSIS. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution License.

There is a difficulty in determining the subject of אַמְרַת in Psalm 16:2. This problem arises from the context. Psalm 16:1 reveals that the speaker of the whole Psalm 16 is David himself: לְדָוִד and the usage of the first person singular of the verb הִסָּה is to denote that David is the speaker. Psalm 16:2, nevertheless, changes the first person singular from verse 1 to the second person feminine singular. In other words, the subject of verse 1 is David himself or a male speaker, whereas the subject of verse 2 shifts to an unknown female speaker. As a result, this shift creates two difficult questions. Firstly, why does David replace the first person singular in Psalm 16:1 to the second person feminine singular in Psalm 16:2? Secondly, who is this second person feminine singular in Psalm 16:2? This research argues for the influence of Phoenician language to Psalm 16:2; therefore, Phoenician language offers solutions to those difficulties.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: This article is a combination of Biblical Studies and Linguistics. This article attempts to apply a comparative linguistic approach to Psalm 16:2.

Keywords: Psalms; Semitic languages; textual criticism; grammatical analysis; ancient Bible translations; modern English Bible translations.

Introduction

The shifting subject from I or David to a she or an unknown female speaker in Psalm 16:1–2 creates perplexity. This difficulty influences the translations of modern English Bible translations. Berean Standard Bible (BSB), New International Version (NIV), Holman Christian Standard Bible, New Living Translation (NLT), English Standard Version (ESV), New American Standard Bible (NASB), Amplified Bible (AB), Christian Standard Bible (CSB), Douay-Rheims Bible, Good News Translation (GNB), International Standard Version (ISV), NET Bible, New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) and New Heart English Bible use the first person singular in Psalm 16:1 for verse 2. In other words, these English Bible translations change an unknown female speaker in verse 2 to David or I from the previous verse. Some English translations, on the other hand, interpret an unknown female speaker in verse 2 as oh my soul such as King James Version (KJV), New King James Version (NKJV), American Standard Version (ASV) and World English Bible (WEB). At least two English translations, i.e., Young's Literal Translation (YLT) and Literal Standard Version (LSV) translate it literally, as you. In summary, there are three different translations of אַמְרַת in Psalm 16:2: I or David, oh my soul, and you (a literal translation). These translations occur because of the shifting subject from the first person singular in Psalm 16:1 to the second person feminine singular in Psalm 16:2, and the unknown female speaker in Psalm 16:2.

In addition to the modern English Bible translation, this difficulty also perplexes scholars. Interestingly, there is no commentary on this matter from church fathers such as Cassiodorus, Ambrose and Augustine (cf. Blaising & Hardin 2008:121). Diodore of Tarsus and Theodoret of Cyrus interpret אַמְרַת as I said to the Lord or the first person singular (Diodore & Hill 2005:46; Theodoret & Hill 2000:112). Theodoret of Cyrus, however, sees Christ as the first person singular, not David (Theodoret & Hill 2000:112). On the other hand, Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra and Rashi on this commentary on the book of Psalms believe that the subject of אַמְרַת refers to soul (Ibn Ezra Abraham ben Meir & Strickman 2009:112, Rashi & Gruber 2004:229). Modern interpreters are also perplexed by this difficulty. Goldingay (2006:230), Kraus (1988:235), Gerstenberger (1988:90), Villanueva (2008:44), DeClaisé-Walford Nancy, Jacobson and Tanner (2014: 361) follow Jerome and Diodore of Tarsus to have the first person singular or I. However, Allen Ross adds oh my soul before you have said (Ross 2011:397). In short, there are two interpretations of אַמְרַת. First, it is David or I, while the second interpretation refers to soul because of its context (Ps 16:10). Despite of their consideration, they add and/or explain that the second person feminine singular refer to

Read online:

Scan this QR code with your smart phone or mobile device to read online.

soul because it matches the gender. Therefore, this research attempts to solve this difficulty through a comparison of the ancient texts and the Semitic languages as its methodology.

Textual criticism

In this section, Hebrew manuscripts, Greek (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft & Universität Münster. Institut für Neutestamentliche Textforschung 2013), Aramaic, Syriac and Latin, witnesses are compared and analysed to shed a light on this difficulty (cf. Barthélemy 2012; Chia 2021, 2022b). This research starts its investigation from *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (BHS) apparatus, which mentions that many of Greek and Syriac manuscripts have the first person singular or I said (cf. Chia 2023:1–10; Elliger & Rudolph 1997:1096). Jerome follows this reading (Elliger & Rudolph 1997:1096). Origen's hexapla, unfortunately, does not record this difficulty (Field 1875:166). Psalm 16, on the other hand, is missing in Aleppo codex (Aleppo n.d.; cf. online <https://rb.gy/9d5mku>). In *Vetus Testamentum Hebraicum cum variis lectionibus*, Kennicott (1776–1780:316) lists 21 manuscripts that endorse the reading אָמַרְתִּי or I spoke such as 35, 39, 97, 133, 148, 158, 245, 260, 264 A, 267, 272, 332, 396, 495, 623; primo 73, 74, 128, 145, 156; forte 498. There is only one manuscript – 131 – that follows the reading אָמַרְתָּ or refers to the second person (either masculine or feminine) singular. The Vulgate version of Weber uses a participle or *dicens* to serve the main verb in the previous verse (Weber & Gryson 1987:783). Since this participle modifies חָסִיתִי in Psalm 16:1, then the subject of *dicens* follows the previous main verb: David or I. Targum Aramaic and Syriac Peshitta have מְלִילִית and אָמַרְתִּי respectively or you have spoken (Peshitta-Instituut & International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament 1972; Stec 2004). Leningrad codex also has 'you have spoken' (Jacob 1008; cf. online https://archive.org/details/Leningrad_Codex).

The information above demonstrates that the Semitic ancient texts – Leningrad codex, Syriac Peshitta and Targum Aramaic – do have אָמַרְתָּ, while the other ancient texts read it as אָמַרְתִּי. There are two different groups. The אָמַרְתָּ group is testified by Leningrad codex, Targum Aramaic and Syriac Peshitta. The אָמַרְתִּי group is attested both in the Semitic and non-Semitic languages such as Greek and Latin. This research reveals that there is a limitation in comparing these ancient texts. This comparison is beneficial in demonstrating that only the Semitic ancient texts that have the reading אָמַרְתָּ, but this methodology does not provide the reason of the shifting subject in Psalm 16:2 (cf. Strawn 2017). He compared the earliest Hebrew copies of the Psalms to manuscripts in Qumran. Therefore, this research will employ the Semitic languages to answer the reason behind this shifting subject.

Semitic languages

Huehnergard and Pat-El state that the Semitic languages have the longest recorded history (around 4500 years) of any language family in the world (Pat-El & Huehnergard 2019:1). The first Eblaite and Akkadian texts were found in 2500 BCE, Ugaritic texts in 2000 BCE, Sabaic, Hebrew and Aramaic in

1000 BCE. Arabic is widely spoken to the present day (Pat-El & Huehnergard 2019:1). Hebrew, along with Moabite, Phoenician and Ammonite, belongs to the Canaanite (Hornkohl in Pat-El & Huehnergard 2019:534). Therefore, these northwest Semitic languages share similar traits although there are some differences as well (Chia 2022a). For example, Wilson-Wright records that standard Phoenician has the same endings of the first person singular, the second person masculine singular, the second person feminine singular, and the third feminine singular. All of them have *ktbt* (Wilson-Wright in Pat-El & Huehnergard 2019:521). Thus, it is possible that the word אָמַרְתָּ in Psalm 16:2 is influenced by Phoenician language just as this research proposes. If so, then it has no problem with the subject of the verb אָמַרְתָּ, since it could refer to David or I. Is there in other places that the other Semitic languages influence the Hebrew Bible? The book of Ruth is one of the examples (Holmstedt 2010; Howell 2022). In Ruth 1:8, Naomi addresses her daughters-in-law in masculine forms: עֲשִׂיתֶם and עֲנִיכֶם, respectively. Holmstedt records that these mismatched genders of the subject mostly occur from Naomi's mouth (1:9, 11, 13; cf. the narrator's use in 1:19, 22; 4:11). Encountering this gender problem, Holmstedt proposes that the narrator may use marginal language to give this book a foreign or perhaps archaic colouring (Holmstedt 2010:73). Robert Chisholm believes that these unmatched genders of the subject demonstrate the preservation of an archaic dual common ending (Chisholm 2013:75–76; cf. Howell 2022:24). This research, however, argues for the influence of Moabite language to the book of Ruth. The usage of masculine gender in Ruth is because of the absence of the second person feminine plural in the Moabite language. In other words, the second personal masculine plural could be used for both men and women. Therefore, Naomi uses the second person masculine plural to address her daughters-in-law (cf. Figure 1; Pat-El & Huehnergard 2019:516). Howell also endorses this theory. He says that the narrator preserves Orpah, Ruth and Naomi from a foreign country. Naomi, in this case, was revealed to be influenced by the Moabite language after spending many years in Moab (Howell 2022:24).

		AMARNA CANAANITE	AMMONITE	DEIR ŠALLĀ	EDOMITE	MOABITE
1SG	on nouns	[-ya]				-y
	on verbs					-ny
2MSG			-k		-k	
2FSG				-ky		
3MSG	on MPL nouns	[-hu:]	-h	-h		-h
				-wh		-h
3FSG		[-hi:]				-h
1PL		[-nu:]				
2MPL				-km		-km
2FPL						
3MPL		[-mu:]		-hm, -m		
3FPL						

Source: Pat-El & Huehnergard 2019:516

1SG, first person singular; 2MSG, second person masculine singular; 2FSG, second person feminine singular; 3MSG, third person masculine singular; 3FSG, third person feminine singular; 1PL, first person plural; 2MPL, second person plural masculine; 2FPL, second person plural feminine; 3MPL, third person plural masculine; 3FPL, third person plural feminine.

FIGURE 1: The suffixed pronouns in the rest of the Canaanite languages to illustrate Naomi's second person masculine plural form in addressing her daughters-in-law.

	AMARNA CANAANITE	STANDARD PHOENICIAN	LATE PUNIC
1SG	[katabti:]	<i>ktbt</i>	[katabθi]
2MSG	[katabta(:)]	<i>ktbt</i>	
2FSG		<i>ktbt</i>	
3MSG	[kataba]	<i>ktb</i>	[katob]
3FSG	[katabat]	<i>ktbt</i>	[kataba]
1PL	[katabnu:]	<i>ktbn</i>	
2MPL	[kataltunu]		
2FPL			
3MPL	[katabu:]	<i>ktb</i>	[katabu]
3FPL			

Source: Pat-El & Huehnergard 2019:521

1SG, first person singular; 2MSG, second person masculine singular; 2FSG, second person feminine singular; 3MSG, third person masculine singular; 3FSG, third person feminine singular; 1PL, first person plural; 2MPL, second person plural masculine; 2FPL, second person plural feminine; 3MPL, third person plural masculine; 3FPL, third person plural feminine.

FIGURE 2: The suffix conjugation in Amarna Canaanite, Phoenician and late Punic.

This research also argues for the influence of the Phoenician language to the Psalm 16:2. The standard Phoenician reveals that the first person singular, the second person masculine singular, the second person feminine singular, and the third person feminine singular use the same form: *ktbt* (cf. Figure 2; Pat-El & Huehnergard 2019:521). This standard Phoenician explains further what Gesenius left off in his Hebrew grammar. Gesenius states that the first person singular sometimes appears without *yod* such as in Psalm 140:13; Job 42:2; 1 Kings 8:48; and Ezra 16:59 (Gesenius, Kautzsch & Cowley 2006:122). They, however, do not explain the reason why *yod* sometimes misses from the first person singular. They just assume that the dropped *yod* is a characteristic of an earlier orthography which omitted vowel letters even at the end of the word (Gesenius et al. 2006:122). The proposal of this article offers another possible answer. The dropped *yod* in Psalm 16:2 is because of the influence of Phoenician language since the standard Phoenician does not have a *yod* for the first person singular. Therefore, the unknown identity of אִמְרַת in Psalm 16:2 is David himself. The instance from the Old Aramaic supports this proposal. In Old Aramaic, the first person singular and the second person feminine singular have the same form in a perfect tense: *katabti*; although the first-person singular has another form as well: *katabtu* (Lipiński 1997:379; cf. Proto-Northwest Semitic in Reymond 2017:176). The Kilamuwa inscription (KAI 24) from 9th BC supports the theory that, the first person common singular, the second person masculine singular, and the second person feminine singular, have the same form (cf. Figure 3).

The relationship history of Semitic languages does assist to answer two research questions of this article. Firstly, why does David replace the first person singular in Psalm 16:1 to the second person feminine singular in Psalm 16:2? The author of Psalm 16 does not change the person. The dropping *yod* does not mean the subject has been changed, but it is because of a Phoenician language influence. In other words, although there is a change of the ending of verb, from הִסִּיתִי to אִמְרַת, both verbs refer to the same person: the first person singular. The standard Phoenician language has the first person singular with a dropped *yod*. The second question is who is the second person feminine singular in Psalm



Source: Horree, P., 2016, *Kilamuwa Inscription*, Alamy Stock Photo

FIGURE 3: The Kilamuwa Inscription (KAI 24) from 9th-century BC.

16:2? The answer is David himself or I because the standard Phoenician language reveals that the first person singular, the second person masculine singular, the second person feminine singular, and the third person feminine singular use the same form.

Conclusion

The shifting subject – from I or David to a she or an unknown female speaker in Psalm 16:1–2 creates difficulty. This difficulty leads to three different translations of אִמְרַת: 'I or David, oh my soul, and you', (a literal translation) and appears throughout the history in ancient Bible translations, church fathers, medieval and contemporary scholars.

This research, therefore, attempts to solve this difficulty through a comparison of the ancient texts and the Semitic languages as its methodology. The comparison of the ancient texts helps in way of revealing that only the Semitic ancient texts that have the reading אִמְרַת. However, this comparison does not answer two research questions of this article: Firstly, why does David replace the first person singular in Psalm 16:1 to the second person feminine singular in Psalm 16:2? Secondly, who is this second person feminine singular in Psalm 16:2? Therefore, this research offers another proposal to answer these questions which is through the Semitic languages. The history of Semitic languages does assist to answer two research questions of this article. Firstly, why does the subject of verse 1 or a male speaker change to an unknown female speaker?

This research reveals that the author of Psalm 16 does not shift the person: from the first person singular to the second person feminine singular. The standard Phoenician language reveals that the dropped *yod* does not mean the subject has been changed. In other words, although there is a shift of the ending of the verb, from אמרת to חסיתי, both verbs refer to the same person: the first person singular. This phenomenon is because of the influence of Phoenician language. The standard Phoenician language has the first person singular with a dropped *yod*. The second research question of this article is who is the second person feminine singular in Psalm 16:2? The answer is David himself or I, because the standard Phoenician language reveals that the first person singular, the second person masculine singular, the second person feminine singular, and the third person feminine singular use the same form.

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

The author declares that no financial or personal relationships exist that may have inappropriately influenced the writing of this article.

Author's contributions

P.S.C. is the sole author of this research article.

Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human participants.

Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the author, and the publisher.

References

- Aleppo Codex, n.d., viewed 20 October 2023, from <https://barhama.com/ajaxzoom/viewer/viewer.php?zoomDir=/pic/AleppoWM/&example=viewe5>.
- Barthélemy, D., 2012, *Studies in the text of the Old Testament: An introduction to the Hebrew Old Testament Text Project*, Textual Criticism and the Translator, vol. 3, Eisenbrauns, Winona Lake, IN.
- Blaising, C.A. & Hardin, C., 2008, *Psalms 1–50*, Ser. Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture. Old Testament, 7, InterVarsity Press, Westmont, IL.
- Chia, P.S., 2021, 'The debatable identity in Isaiah 62:5', *Verbum et Ecclesia* 42(1), a2315. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v42i1.2315>
- Chia, P.S., 2022a, 'The complexity of the relationship of vocalisation signs of Semitic pointing systems', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 78(4), a7741. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v78i4.7741>
- Chia, P.S., 2022b, 'Why do the ancient texts differ in their translations of מִיִּצְמָה in Zechariah?', *Verbum et Ecclesia* 43(1), a2568. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v43i1.2568>
- Chia, P.S., 2023, 'The textual problem of Proverbs 30:19', *Journal of Religious & Theological Information*, 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10477845.2023.2250655>
- Chisholm, R.B., 2013, *A commentary on Judges and Ruth*, Ser. Kregel Exegetical Library, Kregel, Grand Rapids, MI.
- DeClaisse-Walford, N.L., Jacobson, R.A. & Tanner, B.L.N., 2014, *The Book of Psalms: The New International Commentary on the Old Testament*, Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI.
- Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft & Universität Münster. Institut für Neutestamentliche Textforschung, 2013, *Biblia graeca*, A. Rahfs, R. Hanhart, E. Nestle, B. Aland, K. Aland, D. Karavidopoulos Iōan (eds.), Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, Munich.
- Diodore & Hill, R.C., 2005, *Diodore of Tarsus: Commentary on Psalms 1–51*, Ser. Writings from the Greco-Roman World, No. 9, Society of Biblical Literature, Atlanta.
- Elliger, L. & Rudolph, W. (eds.), 1967/1977/1997, *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, Stuttgart.
- Field, F. (ed.), 1875, *Origen: Hexapla*, v.2, Clarendon Press, Oxford.
- Gerstenberger, E.S., 1988, *Psalms*, The Forms of the Old Testament Literature, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI.
- Gesenius, W., Kautzsch, E. & Cowley, A.E., 2006, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, Dover, Ser. Dover Books on Language, Dover Publications, Mineola, New York.
- Goldingay, J., 2006, *Psalms*, Ser. Baker Commentary on the Old Testament: Wisdom and Psalms, Baker Academic, Michigan.
- Holmstedt, R.D., 2010, *Ruth: A handbook on the Hebrew text*, Ser. Baylor Handbook on the Hebrew Bible, Baylor University Press, Waco, Texas.
- Horree, P., 2016, *Kilamuwa Inscription: Alamy Stock Photo*, viewed 20 October 2023, from <https://www.alamy.com/stock-photo-inscription-of-prince-kilamuwarelief-825-bc-citadel-of-samalzirli-133916829.html?imageid=F04EBC29-2975-4057-86C1-6D532F6BE66B&p=16611&pn=1&searchid=9512213b4eb0b2328e41231eb79d4df&searchtype=0>.
- Howell, A.J., 2022, *Ruth: A guide to reading biblical Hebrew*, Faithlife Corporation, viewed 22 December 2022, from <https://public.ebookcentral.proquest.com/choice/PublicFullRecord.aspx?p=7008613>.
- Ibn Ezra Abraham ben Meir & Strickman, H.N., 2009, *Abraham Ibn Ezra's Commentary on the first book of Psalms: Chapter 1–41*, Ser. The Reference Library of Jewish Intellectual History, Academic Studies Press, Cambridge.
- Jacob, S. ben, 1008, *Leningrad Codex, Codex Leningradensis*, Internet Archive, San Francisco, CA, viewed 20 October 2023, from https://archive.org/details/Leningrad_Codex.
- Kennicott, B., 1776, *Vetus testamentum hebraicum, cum variis lectionibus*, E. Typographeo Clarendoniano, Oxonii, Oxford.
- Kraus, H.-J., 1988, *Psalms 1–59: A Commentary*, Augsburg Pub. House, Minneapolis, MN.
- Lipiński, E., 1997, *Semitic languages: Outline of a comparative grammar*, Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 80, Peeters, Leuven.
- Pat-El, N. & Huehnergard, J. (eds.), 2019, *The Semitic languages*, Second, Ser. Routledge Language Family Series, Routledge, Oxfordshire.
- Rashi & Gruber, M.L., 2004, *Rashi's Commentary on Psalms*, Ser. The Brill Reference Library of Judaism, v. 18, Brill, Leiden.
- Reymond, E.D., 2017, *Intermediate Biblical Hebrew Grammar: A student's guide to phonology and morphology*, Ser. Resources for Biblical Study, Number 89, SBL Press, Atlanta.
- Ter Haar Romeny, R.B., Van Peursen, W.T., Rijksuniversiteit Leiden, Peshitta-Instituut & International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament, 1972, *The Old Testament in Syriac: According to the Peshitta version*, E. J. Brill, Leiden.
- Ross, A.P., 2011, *Commentary on The Psalms*, Ser. Kregel Exegetical Commentary, Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids MI.
- Stec, D.M., 2004, *The Targum of Psalms*, Ser. The Aramaic Bible, v. 16, Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota.
- Strawn, B.A., 2017, 'Textual history of Psalms', in A. Lange (ed.), *Textual history of the Bible: The Hebrew Bible*, pp. 5–23, THB 1C, Brill, Leiden.
- Theodoret & Hill, R.C., 2000, *Commentary on The Psalms*, vol., Psalms 1–72, Ser. The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation, v. 101, Catholic University of America Press, Atlanta.
- Villanueva, F.G., 2008, *The 'uncertainty of a hearing': A study of the sudden change of mood in the Psalms of Lament*, Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 121, Brill, Leiden.
- Weber, R. & Gryson, R., 1987, *Biblia Sacra Vulgata*, German Bible Society, Stuttgart.