Complementation and Common Ground: Discursive effects in Biblical Hebrew

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Introduction: Biblical Hebrew *kī*

(1) a. Complementizer
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b. Causal
'And Isaac prayed to Yahweh on behalf of his wife, because she was barren.' (Gen. 25:21)

c. Adversative
'And they conquered the hills, but could not conquer the people living in the plains' (Jdg. 1:19a)

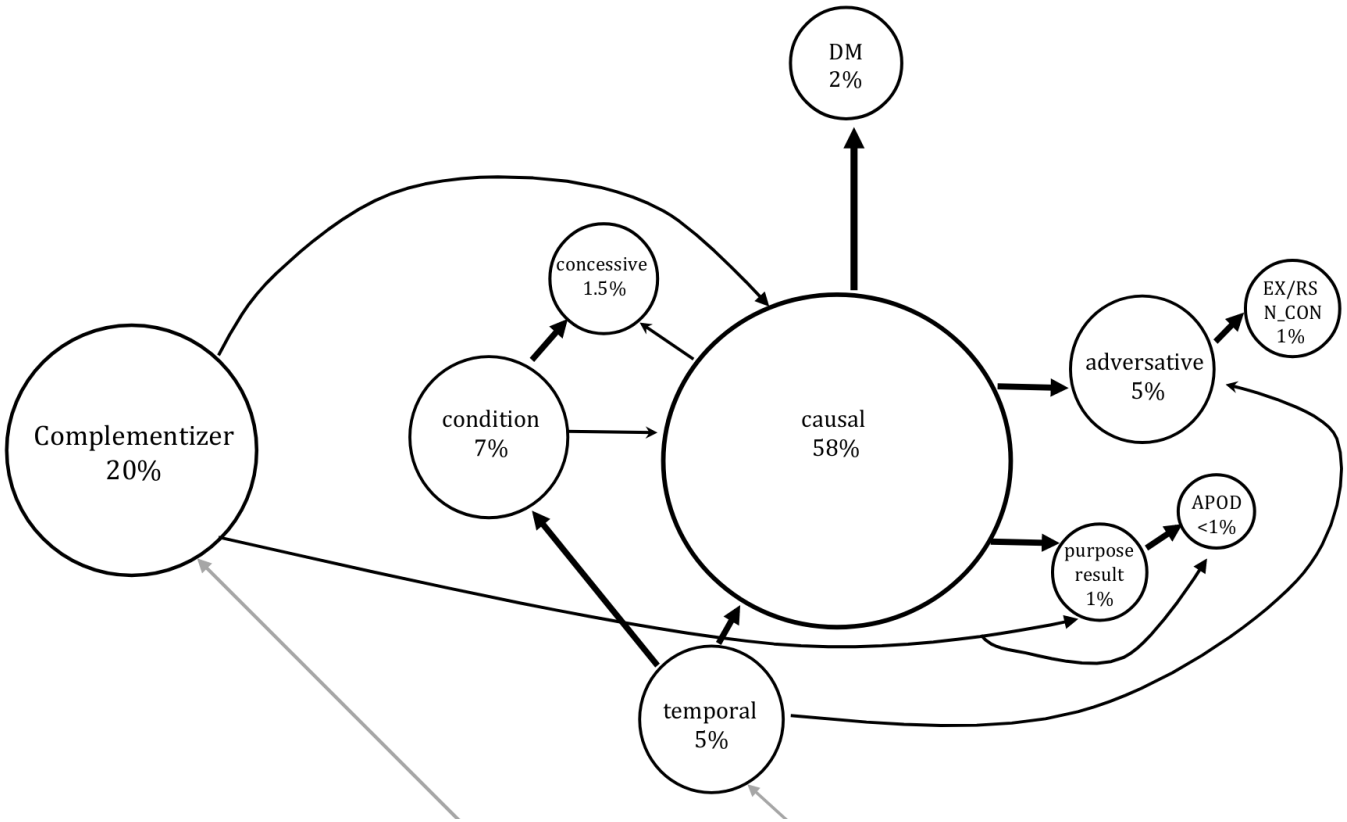
d. Resultative
'How have I sinned [with the result] that you have chased after me?' (Gen. 31:36)

…and more: conditional, temporal, concessive, standalone, …

Introduction: Biblical Hebrew *kī*

- Generally accepted that *kī* derives from deictic **ka*
- Disagreement over relation of connective functions to deixis
- Disagreement over number of distinct functions, synchronically

Introduction: Biblical Hebrew *kī*



(Developmental paths of *kī* according to Locatell (2017: 280); DM = discourse marker; EX = exceptive; RS = restrictive 'only'; N_CON = negative condition 'unless'; APOD = apodosis.)

Christian S. Locatell. 2017. *Grammatical polysemy in the Hebrew Bible: A cognitive linguistic approach to* כי. University of Stellenbosch dissertation

Outline & Claims

1. Complementizers are often sensitive to information status
2. Biblical Hebrew *kī* is marked for use of Common Ground
3. The various syntactic/semantic functions are pragmatically inferred
4. The reference to Common Ground derives from a persistent [+distal] feature

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The persistence of space

Formalizing the polysemy of spatial relations in functional elements

Exclusive preview:
tinyurl.com/PersistenceOfSpace

Complementation and Common Ground

(2) *Liz has left, since her coat is not on the rack.*

⇒ Liz has left [at-issue]

⇒ Liz's coat is not on the rack [not-at-issue]

⇒ the absence of Liz's coat indicates that she left [not-at-issue]

(Charnavel 2017: 45)

(3) *An automatic timer would soon turn [the light] off, for we [Ladover Jews] do not tamper with electricity on Shabbos.* (Chaim Potok, 1990, *The gift of Asher Lev*)

Isabelle Charnavel. 2017. Non-at-issueness of *since*-clauses. *Semantics and Linguistic Theory* 27. 43–58. https://doi.org/10.3765/salt.v27i0.4127

Complementation and Common Ground

(4) a. *Bio industry is still allowed.*

b. *That bio industry is still allowed!* (Staps & Rooryck 2023: 1204)

(5) a. *I always believed (that) the jury was bribed.*

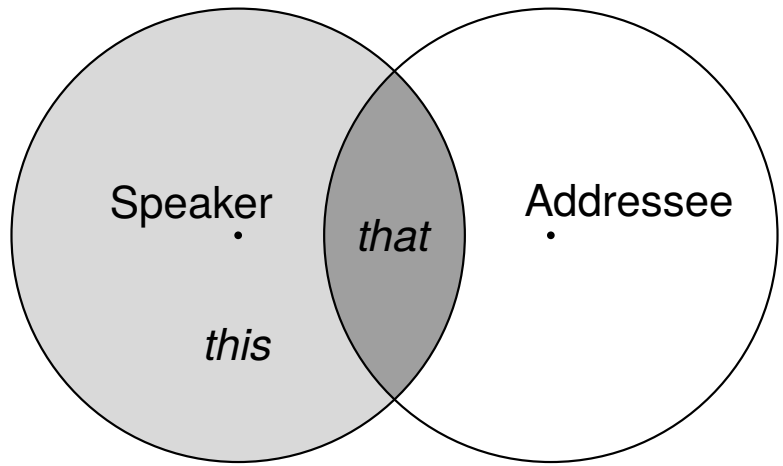
b. **(That) the jury was bribed, I always believed.* (Staps & Rooryck 2023: 1209)

(6) a. *I thought you might need some help.*

b. *I thought that you might need some help.* (Bolinger 1972: 58)

Dwight Bolinger. 1972. *That's that*. (Janua Linguarum 155). The Hague: Mouton
Camil Staps & Johan Rooryck. 2023. The interpretation of [+distal] in demonstratives and complementizers. *Linguistics* 61. 1195–1231. https://doi.org/10.1515/ling-2022-0178

Complementation and Common Ground



(Staps & Rooryck 2023; cf. Colasanti & Wiltschko 2019)

Valentina Colasanti & Martina Wiltschko. 2019. Spatial and discourse deixis and the speech act structure of nominals. In *Proceedings of the 2019 annual conference of the Canadian Linguistics Association*, 1–14. http://hdl.handle.net/2262/100137 (28 August, 2023)

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Complementation and Common Ground

Semitic **ka* is [+distal], too!

	[–distal]	[+distal]
M.SG	*ḏənā*	*ḏenāk*
F.SG	*ḏā(t)*	*ḏāk*
M.PL	*ʾillēn*	*ʾillēk*
F.PL		*ʾillēki*

(Aramaic demonstrative paradigm [excerpt], Lipiński 2001: §36.37–44)

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(7) English [+distal] demonstrative *that*
→ complementizer *that* marking Common Ground (Staps & Rooryck 2023)

Semitic [+distal] particle **ka*
→ Hebrew complementizer *kī* marking Common Ground

Edward Lipiński. 2001. *Semitic languages: Outline of a comparative grammar*. 2nd edn. (Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 80). Leuven: Peeters
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Accommodation and imposition

In many cases, *kī* indeed introduces discourse-old information content:

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(8) 'And when Isaac was old …, he called Esau, his son.' (Gen. 27:1)

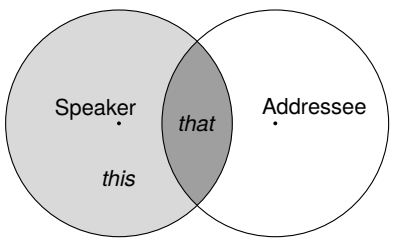
… and can also be imposed on the Common Ground by the Speaker:

(9) 'And Achish said to David: "You should know … that you will go out with me in battle."' (1 Sam. 28:1)

Accommodation and imposition

We see these three types all as reference to the [+distal] area between Speaker and Addressee (Staps & Rooryck 2023)

- Discourse-old: refers to element in [+distal] area
- Discourse-new:
  - Typically: request to move from [–distal] to [+distal]
  - Accommodated: presented as [+distal] to mark assumption
  - Imposed: presented as [+distal] to mark imposition



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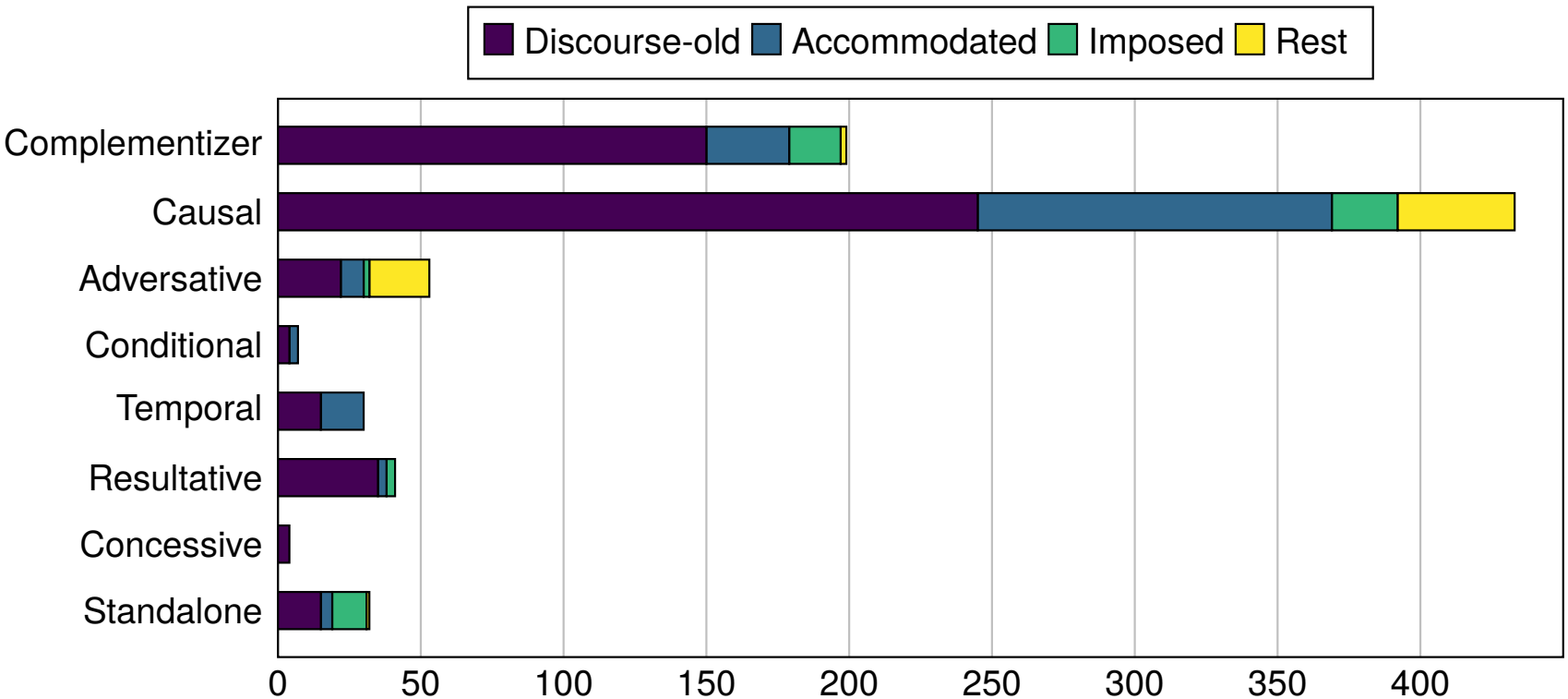
Data


Discourse-old
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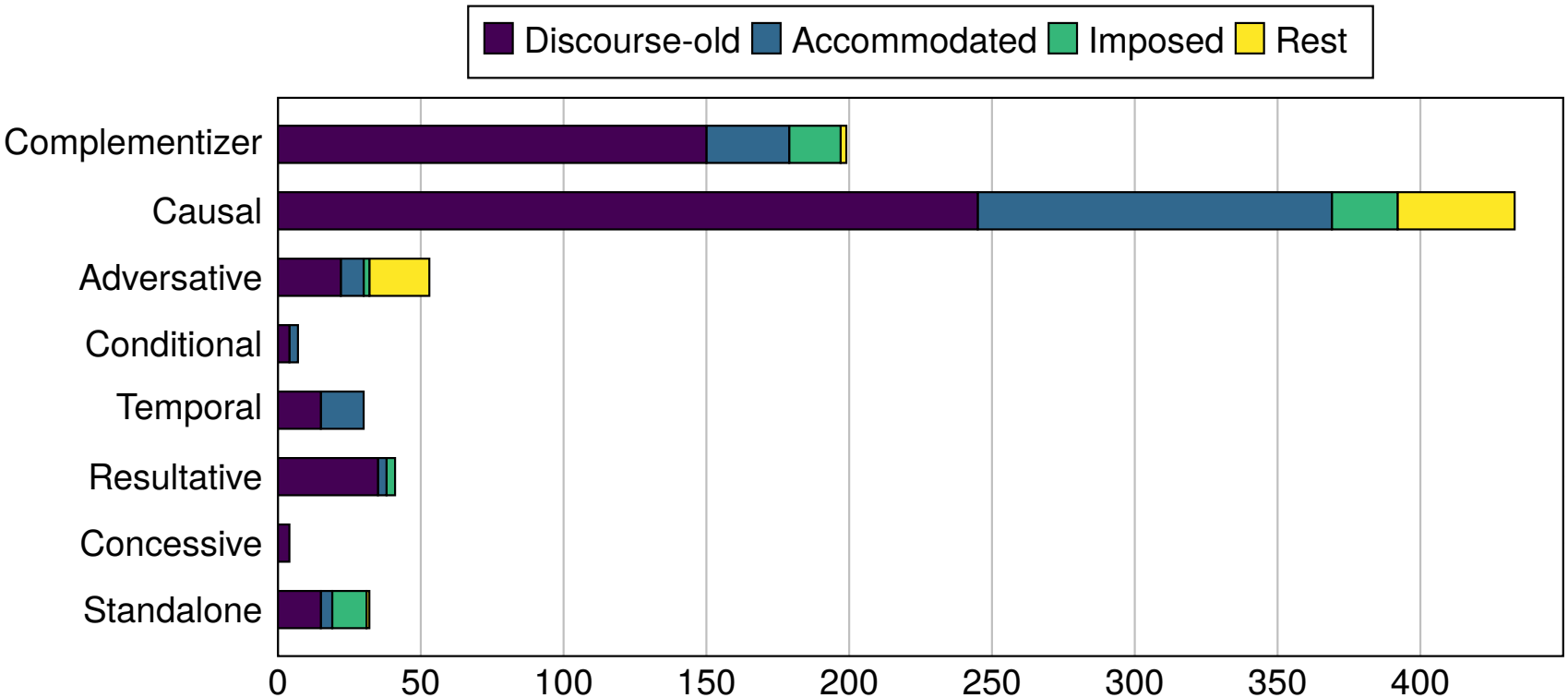

Almost all exceptions fall in one of two interrelated categories

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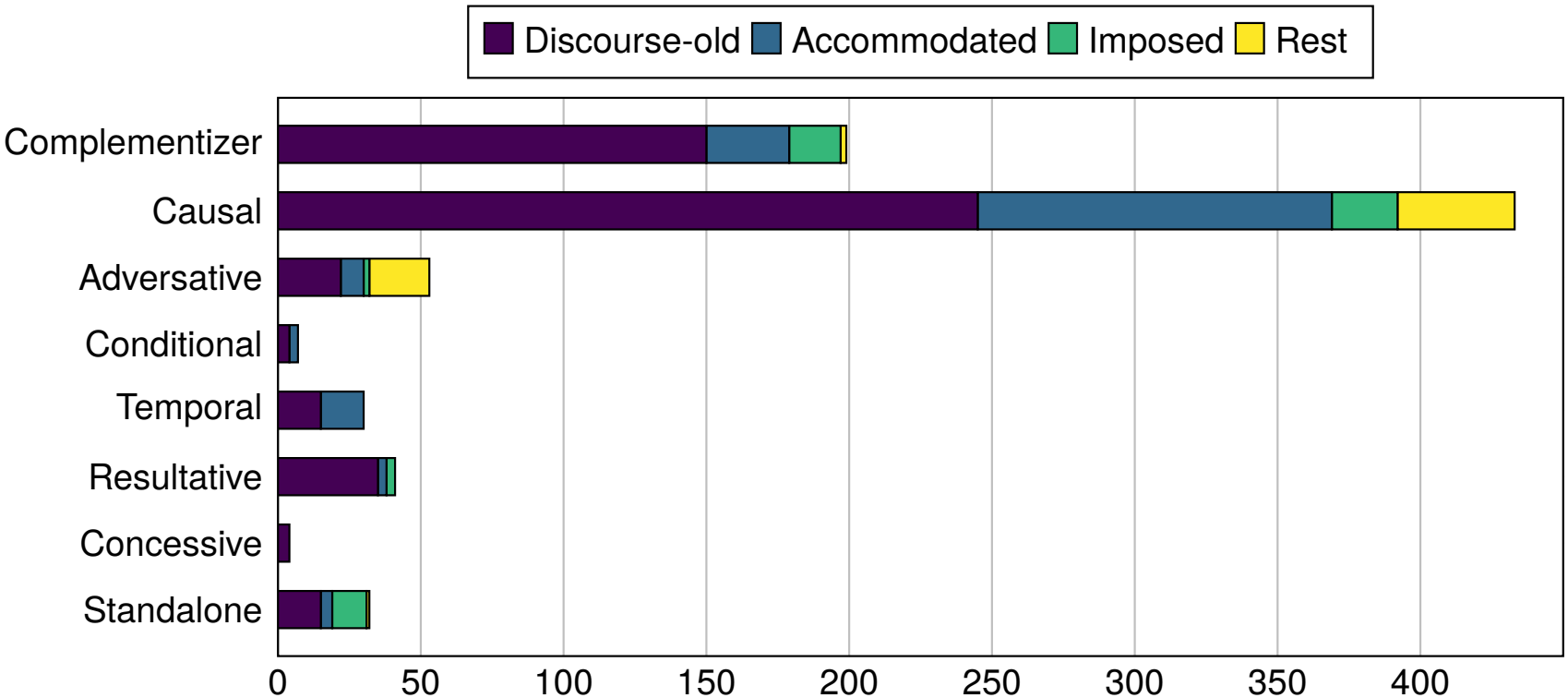

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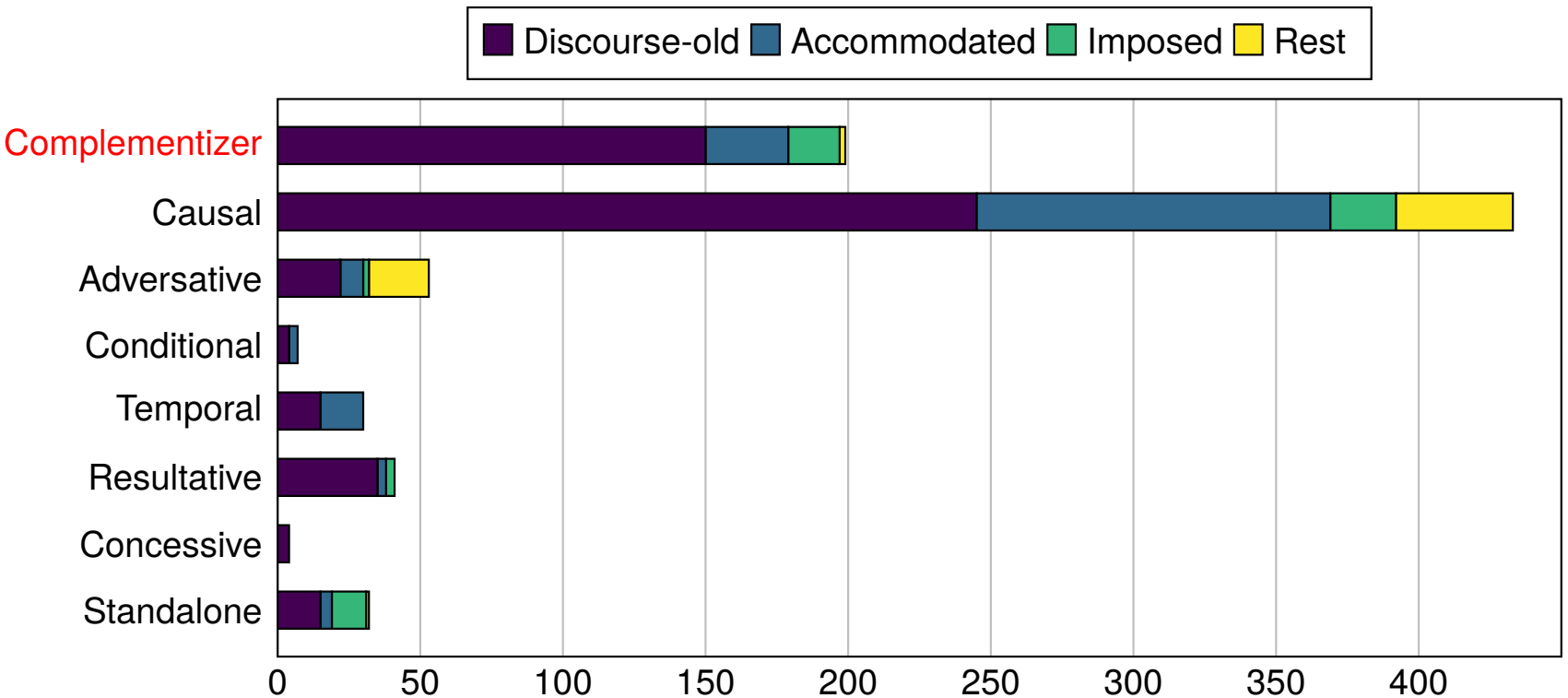
But this is not enough: maybe all complementizers (causal adverbs, …) have such distributions?

Complementizer *kī*



Complementizer *kī*

Mostly with factive predicates: ‘see’, ‘know’, ‘inform’ (rather than ‘say’), ‘witness’, …

(1a) and.PRET-3M-come-SG to Hagar and.PRET-F-conceive-3SG and.PRET-F-see-3SG KĪ conceive\PFV-3F.SG

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Can compare with other complementation strategies, which are not marked for CG:

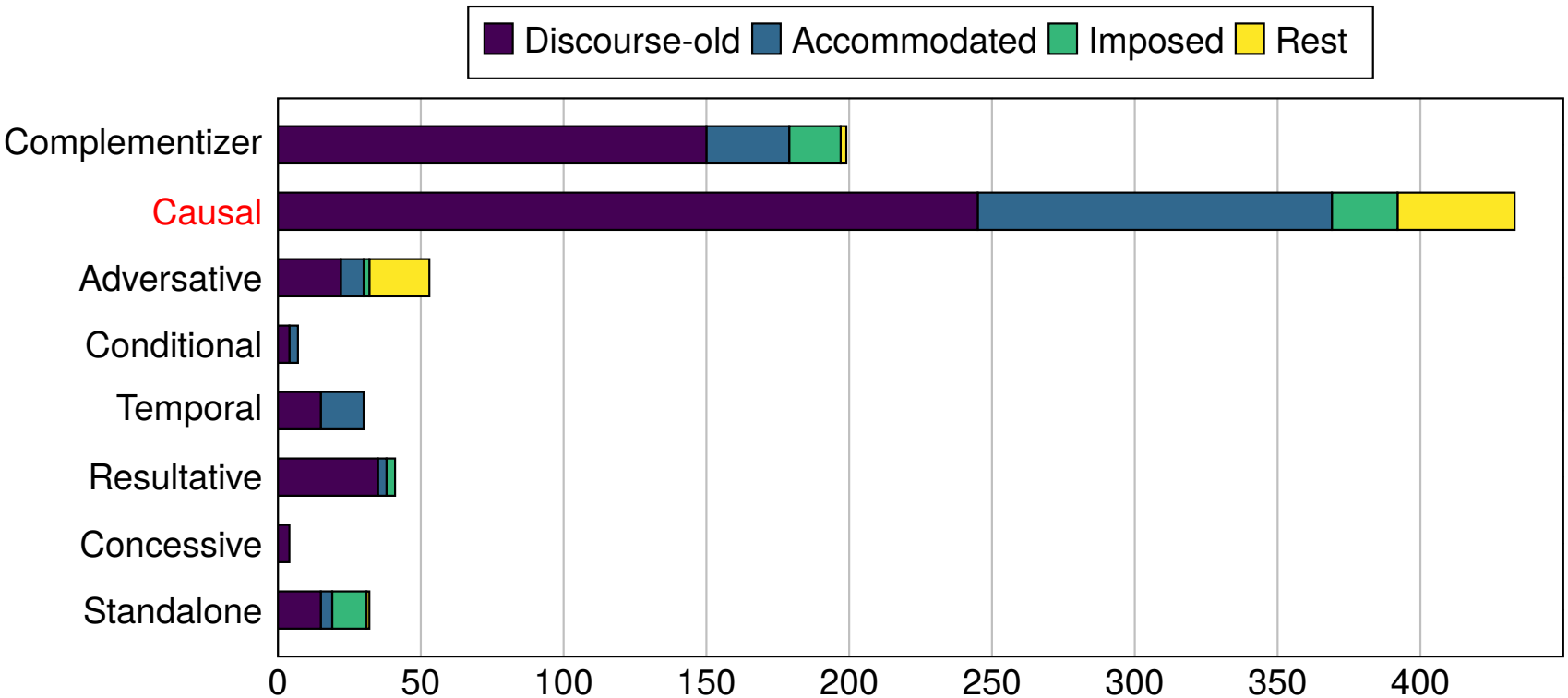
(10) and.PRET-3M-lift-SG Abraham OBJ eye-DU.his and.PRET-3M-see-SG and=see.IMP-M.SG ram behind hold\MID.PFV-3M.SG in=the=bush in=horn-PL.its

‘As Abraham looked up, he saw—and behold!—a ram behind [him] had been caught with its horns in a bush.’ (Gen. 22:13)

(11) and.PRET-3M-see-SG woman bathe\PTCP-F.SG from=on the=roof

‘… and he saw a woman bathing (NP+PTCP) from upon the roof.’ (2 Sam. 11:2)

Causal *kī*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Causal *kī*

Many cases of accommodation, similar to English *for*/*since*, e.g.:

(12) not 1PL-be_able\IPFV … KĪ disgrace it for-us

‘We cannot (do this, giving our sister to a man who is uncircumcised), for it is a disgrace to us.’ (Gen. 34:14)

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When the causal clause also includes new information, it is marked by particles like ‘and behold’:

(13) stand_up\IMP-M.SG and=1PL-go_up\IPFV to-them KĪ see\PFV-1PL
OBJ the=land(F) and=see.IMP-M.SG good-F.SG very

‘(And the Danites returned to their brothers … and said:) “Come on, let’s go up against them, for we saw their land, and look: it’s very good!”’ (Jdg. 18:9)

Causal *kī*

But there are relatively many exceptions, e.g.:

(1b) and.PRET-3M-pray-SG Isaac to=Yahweh on_behalf_of wife-his KĪ barren-F.SG she

'And Isaac prayed to Yahweh on behalf of his wife, because she was barren (, and God heard his prayer and Rebekah his wife conceived.)' (Gen. 25:21)

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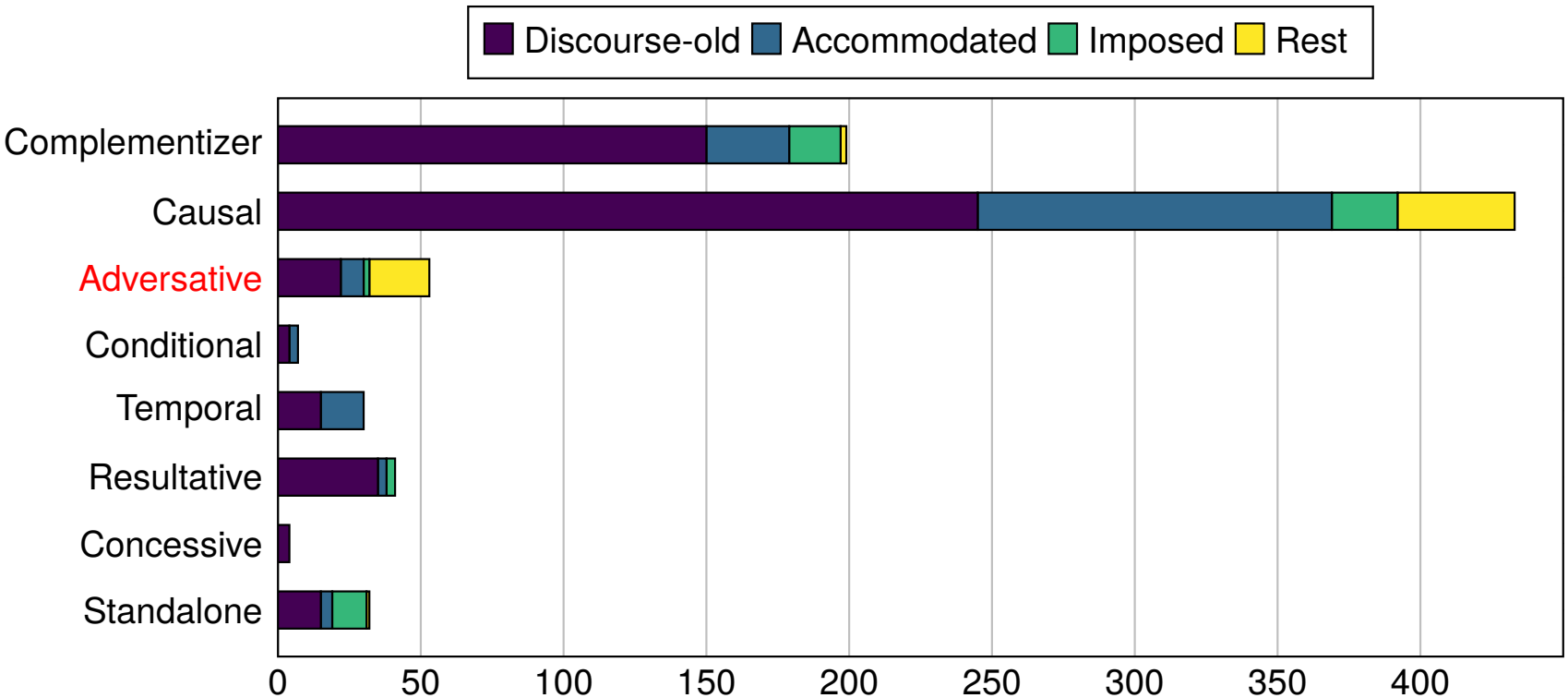
(, and God heard his prayer and Rebekah his wife conceived.)' (Gen. 25:21)

So we must assume that the causal function is lexicalized

- Based on high frequency
- Also note that the causal clause is still backgrounded and in that sense [+distal]

Adversative *kī*



Adversative *kī*

Adversative easily develops from causal:

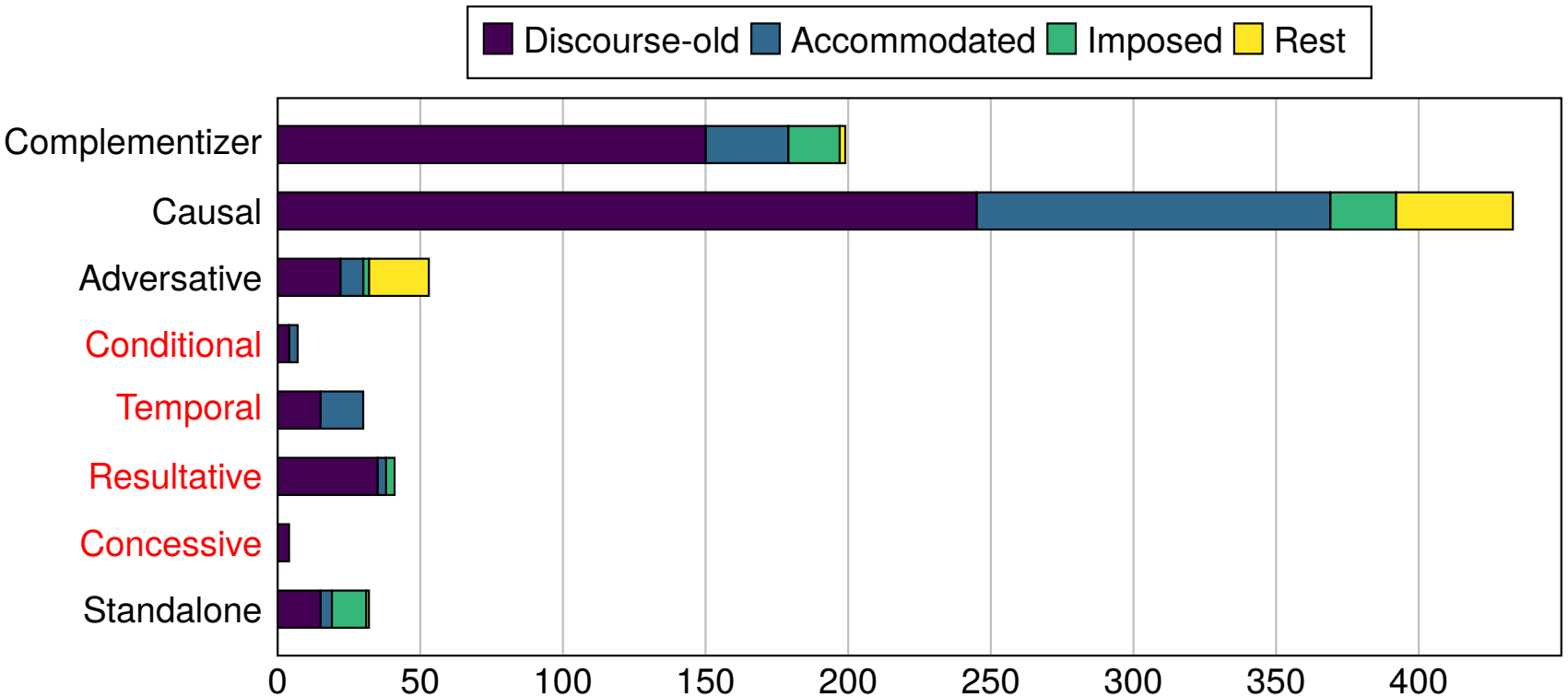
(14) not X, because Y > not X, but Y

This accounts for the high number of exceptions, e.g.:

(1c) and.PRET-3M-conquer-SG OBJ the=hill KĪ not to=conquer\INF OBJ inhabit\PTCP-M.PL.of the=plain

‘And they conquered the hill country, but they could not conquer the people living in the plains’ (Jdg. 1:19)

Conditional/temporal *kī*



Conditional/temporal *kī*

More ‘when’ than ‘if’, so *kī* introduces a proposition that can be easily accommodated:

(15) and.PRET-3M-command-SG OBJ the=first to=say\INF KĪ 3M-meet\IPFV-SG-you.OBJ Esau
‘He (Jacob) commanded the first [servant], saying, “#If/When Esau meets you”’
(Gen. 32:18)

(16) man KĪ 3M-present\IPFV-SG from-you offering to=Yahweh from the=animals
from the=herd or=from the=flock 2-present\IPFV-M.PL OBJ offering-yours if
burnt_offering offering-his from the=herd male perfect 3M-present\IPFV-SG-it.OBJ
‘If/When a man amongst you brings a sacrifice to Yahweh, you must bring your offer from the animals of the herd or the flock. If/*When it is a burnt offering from the herd, he shall offer a male without blemish.’ (Lev. 1:2–3)

Resultative *kī*

Kī refers to a result that has already been introduced:

(17) who I … KĪ 1SG-be\IPFV son_in_law to=the=king

‘(Saul said to David: “Here is my oldest daughter Merab; I want to give her to you in marriage …” But David said to Saul:) “Who am I … that I should be the king’s son-in-law?”’ (1 Sam. 18:18)

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… in contrast to other resultative markers, e.g.:

(18) and.PRET-3M-say-SG to-them Reuben … in_order_to rescue\INF OBJ-him from=hand-theirs

‘But Reuben said to them, (“Don’t shed blood; throw him into this pit … but do not stretch out your hand against them,”) in order to rescue him out of their hand’ (Gen. 37:22)

Concessive *kī*

Concessive clauses typically contain discourse-old information content:

(19) *Though France did not win the World Championship, they did bring home a silver medal.*

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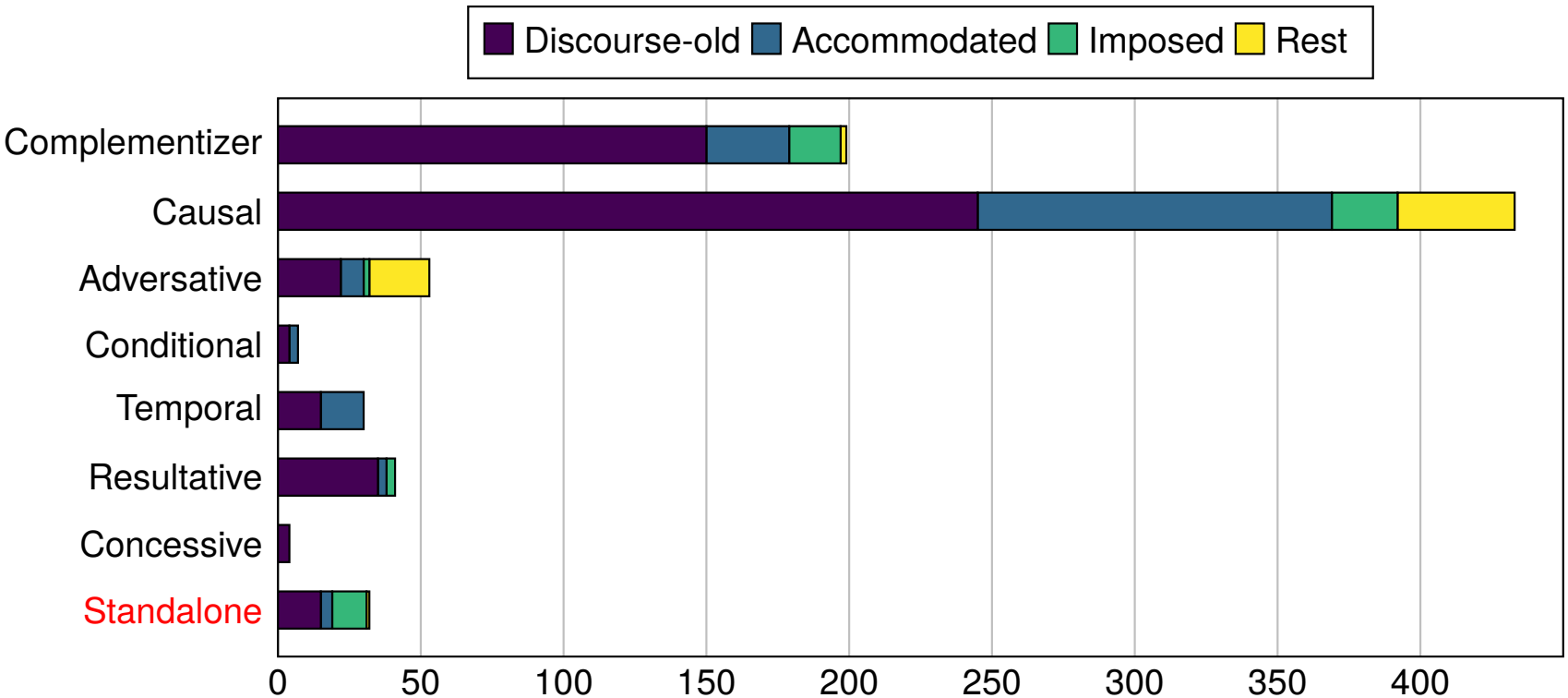
It's the same with *kī*, but we cannot compare with other concessive adverbs:

(20) kī you do\PFV-2M.SG in=the=secret and=I 1SG-do\IPFV OBJ the=thing the=this before all.of Israel

'Though you have acted in secret, I will do this before all of Israel.' (2 Sam. 12:12)

Standalone *kī*



Standalone *kī*, type 1: exclamatives

(21) outcry(F)-of Sodom and=Gomorrah KĪ be_great\PFV-3F.SG and=sin(F)-theirs KĪ be_heavy\PFV-3F.SG very

‘That the outcry of/concerning Sodom and Gomorrah is so great! And that their sin is so heavy!’ (Gen. 18:20)

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In many other languages a [+distal] complementizer marks exclamatives, e.g.:

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Exclamatives presuppose their propositional content (Zanuttini & Portner 2003), so the Speaker refers to the CG

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Raffaella Zanuttini & Paul Portner. 2003. Exclamative clauses: At the syntax-semantics interface. *Language* 79(1). 39–81. https://doi.org/10.1353/lan.2003.0105

Standalone *kī*, type 2: oaths

Oaths impose their content on the CG; the Speaker makes a strong assertion:

(22) life.of Yahweh KĪ son.of death the=man the=do\PTCP-M.SG this
'By the life of Yahweh, (that) the man who does this is a dead man!' (2 Sam. 12:5)

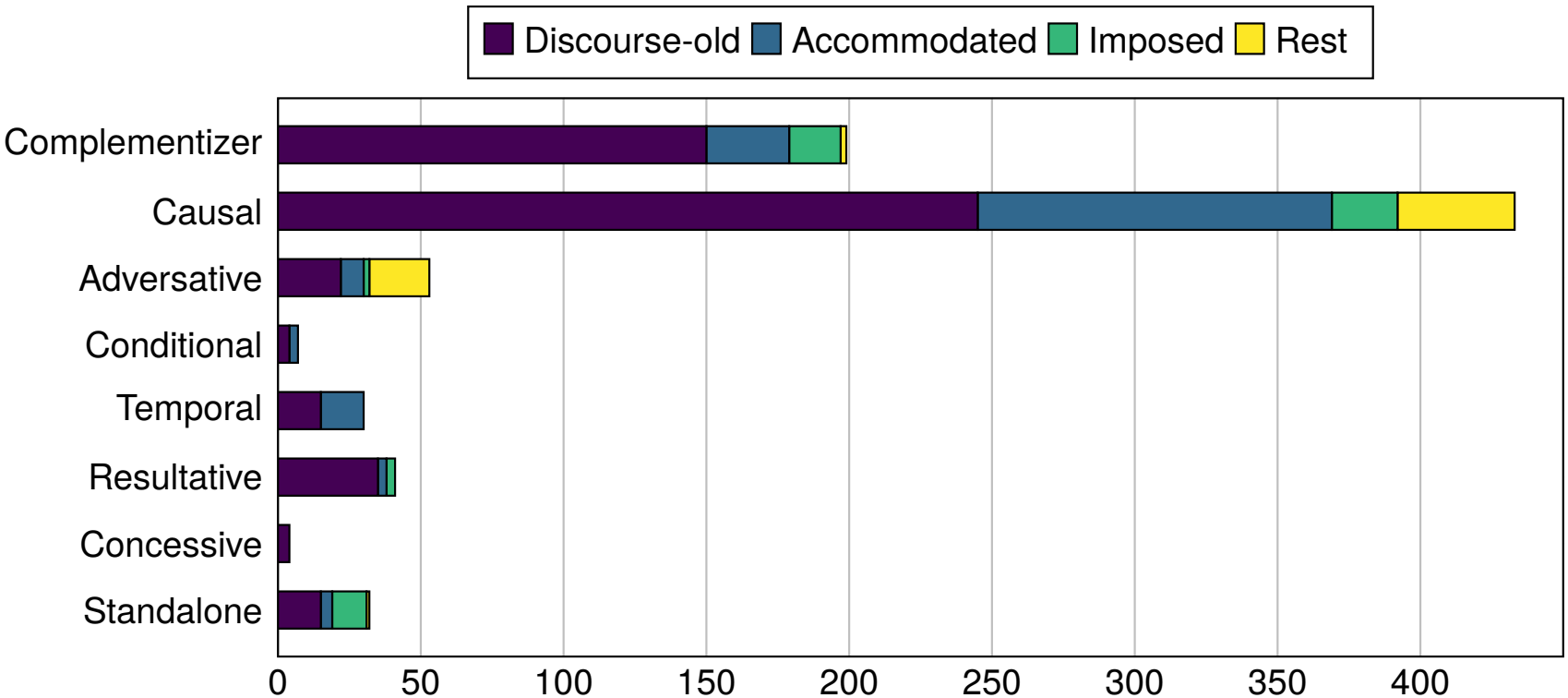
Standalone *kī*, type 3: conducive/rhetorical questions

These speech acts also carry an implicit assertion, which may be accommodated or imposed:

(23) Q=KĪ call\PFV-3M.SG name(M)-his Jacob and.PRET-3M-deceive-SG-me this time-DU

'Isn't his name Jacob? He has deceived me these two times!' (Gen. 27:36)

Biblical Hebrew *kī*: summary & conclusions



Biblical Hebrew *kī*: summary & conclusions

The function of *kī* can be described as:

1. Referring to Common Ground
   a) As a complementizer introducing subject and object clauses
   b) When connecting two clauses: introducing adverbials (causal, adversative, conditional, temporal, resultative, concessive)
   c) When standalone: marking exclamatives, oaths, and conducive/rhetorical questions
2. Lexicalized causal meaning (generalization of causal function referring to CG)
3. Lexicalized adversative meaning (developed from causal function)

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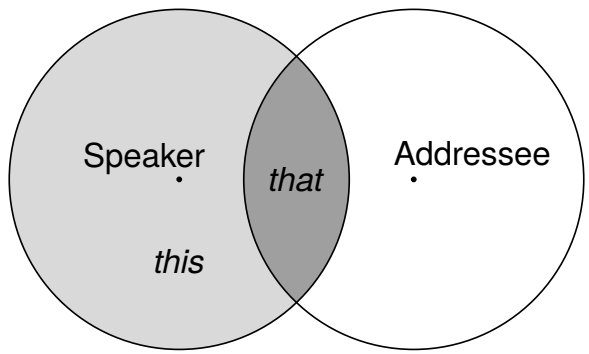
The function in context can easily be deduced based on syntactic and pragmatic clues

Discussion

- Apparent high degree of polysemy can be reduced to Common Ground (incl. accommodation and imposition)
- These are general notions that can also be used to describe Germanic and Romance complementizers (Staps & Rooryck 2023), but here we extended them to adverbial functions
- Common Ground can be linked to a [+distal] feature because the Addressee is "far" from the Speaker



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