

Canaano-Akkadian

Some Methodological Requisites for the Study of the Amarna Letters from Canaan

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1 Introduction¹

1.1 *The Amarna letters and their language*

The Amarna letters are named after the site in Egypt in which they were discovered. These letters were sent to the Egyptian pharaohs Amenophis III and his son Akhenaten around the middle of the 14th century B.C. Among the senders were the kings of Babylonia, Assyria, Hatti and Mittanni, as well as minor rulers of the Near East at that time. The letters were written in the cuneiform script, most of them in Akkadian or what was thought to be Akkadian by the scribes who wrote them (I will elaborate on this issue later). During the second millennium B.C., Akkadian, or what is now termed Peripheral Akkadian, served as the lingua franca, i.e., the diplomatic language, of the Ancient Near East. Many of the letters were sent to the Egyptian pharaohs by the rulers of Canaanite city-states, which were at that time under the sovereignty of Egypt. When we examine the letters in terms of their linguistic structure, we realize that most of them were not written in the common Peripheral Akkadian dialect, but rather in a mixed language: Akkadian almost entirely predominated in its lexical inventory, while Canaanite, the mother-tongue of the scribes who wrote these letters, predominated in the domain of grammar. The latter influenced the syntax and the morphology of this mixed language, and affected its phonology and semantics. Here and there a purely Canaanite word appears, written in the cuneiform syllabary, to translate a particularly difficult Akkadian word or a (Sumerian) logogram. These are the famous glosses of the Amarna letters.

To highlight the characteristics of this mixed language and the differences between the language of the Canaanite letters and that of letters from other sites, let us take a look at two passages from the Amarna correspondence.

- (1) *m*ḥa-ti-ip i-il-la-kà-am (5) ù ú-ub-bá-la-am a-ma-te.MEŠ (6) LUGAL EN-ia bá-nu-tam ù DÛG.GA-ta (7) ù ḥa-ad-ia-ku ma-gal ma-gal (8) ù KUR-ia ù ŠEŠ.MEŠ-ia (9) LÚ.MEŠ.İR ša LUGAL EN-ia (10) ù LÚ.MEŠ.İR m^{tu}-u-tù EN-ia (11) ḥa-du₄-nim ṽma-galṽ ma-gal (12) i-nu-ma i-il-la-kà-am (13) ša-ar-ru ša LUGAL EN-ia (14) UGU-ia iš-tu a-ma-te.MEŠ (15) EN-ia DINGIR-ia ṽdUTU_x(ERIM)-iaṽ (16) ù iš-tu a-ma-te.ṽMEŠṽ m^{tu}-u-tù (17) EN-ia la a-pa-at-tar Ḥatip has come and brought the nice and good words of the king, my lord, and I am very very glad. My land and my brothers, the servants of the king, my lord, and the

¹This paper is a revised version of a paper delivered at the El-Amarna Centennial Symposium held in Chicago on February 1987. The written version of that paper was submitted for publication in the proceedings of that conference, which, however, have never been published. Machine-typed copies of that paper have been circulating and were occasionally referred to by some of my colleagues on various occasions (I am thankful that they have found this paper worthy of academic discussion). Therefore, I felt it necessary to make the paper available to the public. The original version, very slightly edited and with some (very few) bibliographical additions was recently mounted on the web, anticipating the version published here (Izre'el 1987c). I thank the editors of this volume, Manfred Bietak and Orly Goldwasser, for making this forum available for this paper, which, so I believe, conforms to the goals of this publication. Thanks are also due to Robert Wilson, Anson F. Rainey, and the late Naphtali Kinberg, who commented on some of the issues presented in this paper when preparing the original version. Thanks to Tony Badran who read the second version. I further thank Uri Horesh, who kindly assisted me in eliminating substratal influence from this revised version. Lastly, I wish to thank Eitan Grossman, my copy editor, whose skills and knowledge have contributed significantly to make my ideas expressed clearly to my audience.

servants of Tutu, my lord, are very very glad when the breath of the king, my lord, comes to me. From the orders of my lord, my God, my Sun-God, and from the orders of Tutu, my lord, I shall not deviate.

(EA 164: 4-17)

- (2) *a-nu-ma* (23) ʾiṣ-ṣú-ru ù *a-nu-ma* (24) [i]š-te-m[u] UD.KAM-*ma* (25) ù *mu-ša a-wa-ti*₇.MEŠ *ša* (26) LUGAL EN-*ia* ù *yi-il*₅-*ma*[-ad] (27) LUGAL EN-*ia a-na* ÌR-*šu* (28) *nu-kúr-tu*₄ *iš-tu* ḪUR.SAG (29) *a-na ia-ši* ù *ra-aṣ-pa-ti*₇ \ *b[a-n]i-t[i]* (30) É 1-*en* URU *ma-an-ḫa-ti*₇ *šum-ši* (31) *a-na šu-ši-ri a-na pa-ni* (32) ÉRIN.MEŠ *pí-tá-at* LUGAL EN-*ia*

Here I guard and here I obey day and night the orders of the king, my lord. May the king, my lord, be informed about his servant: There is war from the mountain against me. So I built ‘*bani:ti*’ one house, Manḫati by name, to prepare for the *pdt*-troops of the king, my lord.

(EA 292: 22-32)

The first passage is taken from a letter of Aziru, the ruler of the northern land of Amurru, and it is written in a language that shows close affinities with Akkadian. The second passage is taken from a letter of Baʿlshiptu, ruler of the city of Gezer in southern Canaan, written in the mixed language used by Canaanite scribes, which I have termed Canaano-Akkadian (Izreʿel 1998a).

For the differences note especially the use of the verbs. The two letters can be distinguished both in their verbal morphology and in their TMA (=Tense-Mood-Aspect) system. The letter from Amurru, EA 164, has the prefix *a-* for the 1SG (*apaṭṭar*, l. 17) and *i-* for the 3rd person (e.g. *illakam*, ll. 4, 12); it also has the ending *-u:ni(m)* for the 3PL (*ḫadu:ni(m)*, l. 11). It uses the ventive ending *-am* extensively (*illakam*) and the normal Akkadian imperfective (‘present-future’, ‘durative’) and stative forms. The Gezer letter, on the other hand, has forms with initial *i* for the 1SG (*iššuru*, l. 23), while the 3SGM has a *y-* prefix, as in the Northwest Semitic (henceforth: NWS) languages (*yilmad*, l. 26); there is extensive use of the NWS suffix conjugation with active meaning, both by means of attaching the suffix verbal person morphemes to Akkadian stems (as in *raṣpa:ti*, l. 29), and by using pure Canaanite patterns (this feature is attested here only in the gloss for *raṣpa:ti*, viz., *bani:ti* ‘I built’). Another important feature is the use of the Canaanite verbal modus morphemes, as in *iššuru* and *ištemu* (ll. 23 and 24 respectively), reflecting the indicative ending, or *yilmad*, reflecting the jussive *-ø* suffix.

1.2 The state of the art

The Amarna tablets have drawn much attention since their discovery in 1887, and considerable research effort has been invested in studying the linguistic characteristics of these letters. The last decade of the 19th century saw the decipherment and the publication of the texts. The first decade of the 20th century witnessed Knudtzon’s great achievement in the publication of his monumental edition of the texts (Knudtzon 1907 [=1915, vol. 1]gi), still the standard edition in use today. There immediately followed studies by Böhl (1909), Ebeling (1910; also in Knudtzon 1915: II: 1358-1583) and Dhorme (1913-14), who gave us the first descriptions of the language of these texts and noted the mixed nature of Canaano-Akkadian, in which many of the letters from Canaan were written. After a few decades of neglect, the fifth and sixth decades of the 20th century gave us the studies by Albright (mainly 1942, 1943a,b, 1944) and especially by Moran, who described the syntactic features of the Amarna letters from Byblos and who was the first to see that the Canaanite modal system was an inherent feature of the language of these letters (Moran 1950a; see his collected Amarna studies, 2003). The eighth decade of the 20th century was the age of morphological study, mainly by Rainey (1971, 1973, 1975, 1976, 1978b), and the beginnings of holistic and detailed

studies of several subcorpora within the Canaanite domain, written at Tel-Aviv University under Rainey's supervision (Nitzan 1973; Izre'el 1976, 1978; Finkel 1977; Rabiner 1981). These lines of research have become mainstream in the linguistic study of the Amarna letters. Scholars followed the path paved by Moran and Rainey with studies of the larger corpus or of specific subcorpora, either holistically or for specific linguistic domains, mainly morphology and morphosyntax (Youngblood 1961; Kossmann 1987-1988; Smith 1998; Westhuizen 1992, 1993). Syntax and discourse structure have also been given attention (Hayes 1984; Gianto 1990; Rainey 1992; 1996: vol 3: in passing and ch. XIII; Westhuizen 1994; Zewi 1995, 1999), as has phonology (Shehadeh 1968, 1987; Izre'el 1987a, 2003a; Sivan 1984). Apart from these studies, progress has been made in the study of the lexicon (mainly Ebeling in Knudtzon 1915, vol. II; Rainey 1970, 1978a; Moran 1984; Sivan 1984; Izre'el 1998b, 2003b), as well as in the study of phraseology, idiomatics, style and rhetoric (e.g., Böhl 1914; Jirku 1933; Gevirtz 1973; Liverani 1983; Hess 1989, 1990, 1993b, 1998; Mangano 1990; Izre'el 1995a; Rainey 2002: 50-53). Rainey has continued his research in both the morphology and semantics of the verb and in other domains, a research effort which culminated in his four-volume book (Rainey 1996), a significant achievement that includes penetrating observations on the verbal system and on other domains (writing, nominals, adverbs and particles). I myself have published a concise grammar of Canaanite-Akkadian, which consists of a description of its phonology, morphology, and syntactic structure (Izre'el 1998a). This research effort has benefited much from Moran's comprehensive edition of the Amarna tablets in translation, which includes a detailed commentary with philological and linguistic notes (Moran 1987, 1992). Hess (1984, 1986, 1993a, 2003) has studied the proper names, including personal, divine, and geographical names.

Also, minute investigations of other subcorpora from the Amarna archives have been conducted (Adler 1976 on the Mitanni letters; Izre'el 1985, 1991a on the letters from Amurru; Cochavi Rainey 1988, 1989, 1990a, 1990b 1993, on the Egyptian letters; Cochavi Rainey 2003 on the Alashiya letters; for a very brief summary, see Rainey 2002: 47-49).

In addition to the Amarna find, cuneiform tablets have been unearthed in the Canaanite territories (Horowitz, Oshima and Sanders 2002). These tablets have enriched our linguistic data, having added some interesting linguistic insights on the accumulated knowledge of Canaanite-Akkadian (e.g., Rainey 1976), but more significantly, they have taught us lessons about the sociolinguistic setting of Canaanite-Akkadian. An interesting find in this respect is a small cylindrical letter found in Beth Shean (Horowitz 1996), written in Canaanite-Akkadian. While cuneiform tablets for internal objectives had been known for quite some time, this latter find perhaps suggests that Canaanite-Akkadian was employed also for correspondence within the Canaanite territories and not only for correspondence between Canaanites and foreigners.²

1.3 Attitudes towards Canaanite-Akkadian and its linguistic nature

Considerable progress has indeed been made. During the last few decades, scholars dealing with the language of the Canaanite Amarna letters have become more and more aware of its structural nature. This awareness is the result of the change in attitude towards the language: once considered a

² Rainey (2003: 239-40) suggests that this cylinder-inscribed letter was a scribal artifact rather than a real letter, which, admittedly, weakens the suggestion made above. Outside the borders of Canaan, EA 170, sent to Aziru, the notorious ruler of Amurru, by his brother and son, was written in (Peripheral) Akkadian (with Hurrian interference and Hurrian glosses; Izre'el 1991: I: 371-3). One might ask at this juncture why would a confidential letter like this be written in the lingua franca if not by either the lack of other written codes to forward a message to their king, or by the rote of using Akkadian in the written medium. The latter assumption seems more appealing, as Hurrian had had the tradition of being written in the Akkadian cuneiform syllabary. In another place (Izre'el 1995: §105-7) I suggested that it was the scribe himself that served as the messenger carrying himself this tablet to Egypt. If indeed so, this would make the case even more intriguing.

degraded form of Akkadian, it has now been recognized that it possesses an elaborate linguistic system of its own.

As late as the 1970s, the scribes of Canaan were regarded as writing in a barbarous language. The following is an exemplary remark by William L. Moran, the scholar who — more than anyone else — has contributed to our understanding of the structure of Canaanite-Akkadian. In his entry on the Amarna tablets in the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* from 1971, he writes:

The letters are ... written in Akkadian, the lingua franca of the Ancient Near East in the second millennium B.C.E. In general, the language belongs to the ‘peripheral Akkadian’ found at Nuzi, Alalakh, Ugarit etc. Eloquent and moving as it may be at times, it lacks all elegance; it is awkward, often barbarous, betraying the scribes’ ignorance not only of Akkadian but of their native speech.³ This is especially true of the letters from Phoenicia and Palestine... (Moran 1971: 933)

Well, this is a good description as far as an ‘Akkadophile’ is concerned. From the eyes of a potential member of the Babylonian Language Academy, had one existed, the language of the Canaanite scribes would indeed be regarded as barbarous Akkadian:

It is no wonder that Assyriologists found the texts difficult and frustrating; they represent such a radical departure from the Akkadian norm that many were disposed to call them ‘barbaric.’ Today that charge can no longer be sustained, especially for the letters written from the land of Canaan, that is the Levant south of the Nahr el-Kebîr and ancient Kedesh on the Orontes. (Rainey 1996: II: 1)

Indeed, some twenty years later, in his introduction to his translations of the Amarna letters, Moran writes:

In the southern tradition the transformation of the Babylonian language and the resulting deviations from normal usage were far more radical than in most forms of Hurro-Akkadian (i.e., the Peripheral Akkadian dialects used in the northern Levant and beyond, marked by Hurrian influence; S.I.). Indeed, so radical is the transformation that one may ask whether the language of this tradition, even when qualified as ‘extremely barbarized,’ should be called Babylonian at all. It is a pidgin in which the Babylonian component is mainly lexical, whereas the grammar is profoundly West-Semitic, most notably in the word order and, most important of all, in the verbal system. The language can only be described as an entirely new code, only vaguely intelligible (if at all) to the West Semite because of the lexicon, and to the Babylonian because of the grammar. (Moran 1992: xxi-xxii)

1.4 Theoretical background

This change in attitude is the result of substantive progress in general linguistics and theoretical linguistics during the twentieth century. First, we have been provided with many descriptions of hitherto unstudied languages. We have come to know various types of languages, some of them the product of mutual contact between different languages. We have come to know contact languages with features similar to those of Canaanite-Akkadian, such as stem borrowing in Maltese (Aquilina 1965: 201-7; Drewes 1994: 89-91; cf. already Izre’el 1978: 79-80 n. 262); the African language Ma’a (or Mbugu), which consists of Bantu grammar and a non-Bantu lexicon (Goodman 1971; Thomason 1997b); the hybrid language of Persian Jews known as Loterā’i, in which Hebrew and Aramaic lexemes are introduced into the grammatical frame of their Persian dialects (Yarshater 1977); Michif, a North-American language with Cree-based verbs (native American) and French-based nouns (Bakker 1994; Bakker and Papen 1997); and the Aleut dialect of the Copper Island in

³I find this comment quite perplexing. How can speakers be ignorant of their own native speech?

the far eastern part of the Russia (near Alaska), where the majority of the vocabulary is Aleut, and in which the Russian inflectional morphemes have been introduced into the verbal system, yet the morphology of the noun remains practically untouched (Menovshchikov 1968: 404-5; Golovko 1994; Thomason 1997a). This last case reminds us strongly of the structure of Canaanite-Akkadian. Data from these and many other languages of contact may now greatly advance our ability to understand the complicated phenomena that we are faced with when studying the language of the Amarna letters. Indeed, a relatively recent collection of linguistic descriptions of mixed languages (Bakker and Mous 1994) includes also a brief description of Canaanite-Akkadian (Kossmann 1994).

Theoretical linguistics has developed new ways of looking at languages and analyzing them. Structuralism brought with it the need to distinguish between synchronic and diachronic studies of language. This highlighted the necessity of defining and describing the systemic relationships between linguistic components. It has also resulted in the recognition of the essential difference between *langue* and *parole*, or — much later — between *competence* and *performance* (see, e.g., Sampson 1980: 45-46, 49-50). For our needs, it would be better to follow the Saussurian conception of these terms. Thus *langue* will be considered as the linguistic system of the community, *parole* as the speech production of an individual within the linguistic community (de Saussure 1955: 37).

Linguistics has developed an interest in various specific aspects of human language behavior of the community and of the individual. Subdisciplines of linguistics – sociolinguistics, dialectology, anthropological linguistics, cultural linguistics, etc. – have arisen in response to new questions and problems, such as those related to registers, diglossia, bilingualism, multilingualism, and other phenomena of language contact, to name but a few. Notably, variation has become an issue of importance in the study of both synchronic and diachronic aspects of a language, and the recognition that variation is an inherent feature of language is slowly gaining general acceptance. A convenient, comprehensive overview of the state of the art in these areas will be found in Chambers, Trudgill and Schilling-Estes 2002.

This widened focus on societal and cultural aspects of language goes hand in hand with accumulating research in sociology, anthropology, and other cultural sciences. Notably, many of the phenomena dealt with in this paper are reflections of cultural features like those described in Sela-Sheffy's paper (this volume).

1.5 Terminology and concepts

When scholars began to realize the nature of the structural profile of the language written by the Canaanite Amarna scribes, they looked for a convenient term to describe it. Terms are important, because a term is a linguistic sign, of which the *signifié* is a concept, and therefore reflects our view of the nature of this language. In the first version of this paper (Izre'el 1987c), I used the term *jargon* (cf. also Albright 1966: 4), referring more to the sociological aspect of the term than to its linguistic one. As a sociological term, a jargon is a type of language used by a professional or another specialized group. However, as a general term it can also be understood as a 'confused unintelligible language,' or as 'a strange, outlandish, or barbarous language or dialect' (*Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary*, Electronic Edition, version 1.5, 1994-6; see also Crystal 1997: 430). While it had been used in the past to indicate a mixed language (Hall 1966: xiv), in more recent studies of language contact, this term has come to stand for an unstable pre-pidgin state of a language, extremely reduced in form and use (Mühlhäusler 1997: 6, 128-138). My faithful reader already knows, and will become even more aware later, that this is not a happy term for Canaanite-Akkadian.

Moran has used the term *pidgin* (see citation above), a term used also by Ikeda (1992). It is also used indiscriminately by Rainey (e.g., 1996: II: 17, 29), along with other terms (including *jargon*; see below), although he claims that the term *interlanguage* better fits this type of language than *pidgin*

(1996: II: 31-32, in a section entitled ‘The Late Bronze *Jargon* in Canaan’; my emphasis). For both Moran and Rainey, it seems, the term *pidgin* means a linguistic type consisting of features from different languages.

A pidgin is a much-reduced language that arises on the lexical basis of a model language in a bilingual or a multilingual society, where no indigenous tongue serves as a common language. When such a language becomes a native language for a specific community, it is called a *creole*. As such, it expands so that it can serve for all needed communicative purposes like any other native tongue (Hymes 1971; Romaine 1988; Holm 1988-9; Mühlhäusler 1997). Pidgins and creoles are, hence, products of language contact *par excellence*, so that — apart from the study of various contact phenomena and languages of contact — it is this specific branch of the linguistic science that may prove central to a deeper understanding of language contact phenomena.

Clearly, Canaano-Akkadian was not a native tongue, and hence the use of the term *creole* for it would be inappropriate. But also the use of the term *pidgin* for this linguistic continuum hardly fits. Among other issues, one may note that ‘pidgins are not mixed languages in the sense most often intended. It appears that the most mixed area is the lexicon, where syncretisms of various types are common, and not syntax’ (Mühlhäusler 1997: 5). This is certainly not the case of Canaano-Akkadian. I further believe that the emergence of Canaano-Akkadian was not similar to the emergence of the commonly attested pidgins, i.e., it was not developed out of an urgent need for oral communication among parties or individuals, but was rather the result of a break in a long tradition of cuneiform writing in the Levant (Izre’el 1995a: 2418).

The term *interlanguage*, or rather, *institutionalized interlanguage*, has been suggested for Canaano-Akkadian by Gianto (1990: 10-11). It is regarded by Rainey (1992: 331) as ‘the best (term) put forward to date’. *Interlanguage* is ‘a system of rules said to develop, in the mind of someone learning a foreign language, which is intermediate between that of their native language and that of the one being learned’ (Matthews 1997: 182). Again, I doubt whether the circumstances of the emergence of Canaano-Akkadian would permit us to regard the outcome as an imperfectly learned language, as demanded by this term. Was Akkadian education so impoverished that scribes could not learn enough as to make their way towards the goal of writing a sentence in Peripheral Akkadian? As against Gianto’s claim, it seems to me that access to the target language was not denied to the Canaanite cuneiform scribes, since they were receiving letters written in Peripheral Akkadian throughout this whole period (see below).

To my mind, the best term used so far for indicating the nature of Canaano-Akkadian is *mixed language*. While not attempting a definition of the term, Bakker and Mous do see similarities between the languages described in their collection *Mixed Languages* (1994). They do, however, propose the term *language intertwining* ‘for the process forming mixed language showing a combination of the grammatical system (phonology, morphology, syntax) of one language with the lexicon of another language’ (Bakker and Mous 1994: 4-5). As mentioned above, Canaano-Akkadian is included among the languages represented therein.⁴

One other term that fits well the nature of Canaano-Akkadian is *fused language*. This term, which I prefer over *fused lect* (Auer 1999),⁵ refers to a linguistic continuum that has resulted from the mixing of two linguistic systems and that has gone through a process of grammaticalization so that it has become characterized by ‘rule governed, nonvariable structural regularities’ (Auer 1999: 310). In

⁴ Kossmann terms it *Amarna Akkadian*. I myself fancied once the term *Amarnaic* (1995: 2418; also Ikeda 1992). Both terms imply that the interference took place in Egypt, which is obviously not the case.

⁵ Auer refers to Matras 1996 for this term, and to Scotton 1988 for the term *fused variety*. For the term *lect* see below, note 6.

this meaning, ‘nonvariable’ does not mean that linguistic variation does not exist, but that the use of elements borrowed from the two languages in contact is governed by rules and the borrowed elements are not freely interchangeable. In other words, variation is not random, and the system shows stabilized form-function relationships. The difference between language mixing and a fused language is that

[w]hile L[anguage] M[ixing] by definition allows variation (...), the use of one ‘language’ or the other for certain constituents is obligatory in F[used] L[ects]; it is part of their grammar, and speakers have no choice. (Auer 1999: 321)

While this definition of the term may seem to be too neat, it may fit well the nature of Canaanite-Akkadian, as is perhaps the case with the other mixed languages mentioned above (§1.4), like Michif, Ma’a (Mbugu), and Copper Island Aleut. However, the difference between the hitherto categorized mixed languages and the so-called fused lects still bears further investigation (Auer 1999: 321-2 and note 20). Therefore, I see no real point at this stage of research in abjuring the accepted term *mixed language* as the term that best fits the nature of Canaanite-Akkadian.

It is with this theoretical background that we can now take a deeper look into the linguistic continuum attested in the Amarna letters, in our attempt to gain a better understanding of the linguistic structure of Canaanite-Akkadian, of its sociolinguistic background, and of its emergence. The aim of this paper is to pinpoint some key features of Canaanite-Akkadian and its sociolinguistic setting, which may serve us well in deepening our understanding of this linguistic continuum in any future research.

1.6 Variation

When studying the subcorpus of the Amarna letters from Gezer, I suggested that

due to the special character of the <Amarna> corpus, i.e. the geographical distribution of the senders of the epistles, it seems that there is no other way to encompass the entirety of the material but to divide it into several smaller reference groups, from which the common aspects will be gathered later on, and will be compiled into a complete and comprehensive grammar. Concurrently, we will be able to single out the geographical-dialectal features of the different corpora. (Izre’el 1978: 14)

Indeed, this seems to be the most logical way to deal with the Canaanite Amarna corpus as a whole. Yet a serious obstacle immediately arises. Any subcorpus studied will also reveal variation within itself. Variation appears to be found everywhere throughout Canaanite-Akkadian, and is not dependent on geographical factors alone, but is also influenced by the tradition of each scribal school, sometimes by idiosyncrasies of a certain scribe; moreover, variation may be found within one and the same letter.

It thus appears that variation is an inherent characteristic of the language employed by the Amarna Canaanite scribes. As such, it must not be dismissed from our description of its grammatical structure. In other words, we must seek a way to deal with variation as it is: an inherent structural component of this language. Our task is to formulate rules for its different manifestations within the letters. What is needed, then, is a sort of *polylectal grammar*⁶ that will encompass all existing variants and integrate variation into the description of the structure of the language.

⁶That is, describing many ‘lects’ as a single linguistic system. The term *lect* (used in sociolinguistics or dialectology aside the term of *language variety*) is used here to indicate a single linguistic system, whether of a single scribe or of a single text reflecting a unique linguistic system of its own, even from among a choice of texts written by one and the same scribe. The notions of *lect* and *polylectal grammar* were introduced by C.-J. N. Bailey, who used *lect* as a ‘non-committal term for any bundling together of linguistic phenomena’ (Bailey 1973: 11). The notion of *polylectal grammar*

Parallels to the linguistic situation attested in the Amarna correspondence can be found in similar contexts elsewhere. Variation in the context of two different linguistic structures may be found in diglossic situations as defined by Ferguson (1959), viz., the use of significantly different linguistic systems in various registers, notably in writing and speech, as in Arabic speaking communities (for the state of the art in the study of diglossia see Kaye 2001). Variation is also a characteristic feature of creole, or post-creole continua situations, where there has been a continuous mutual contact between the spoken indigenous creole and its model language (see, e.g., Holm 1988-9: I: 9, 52-60; Mühlhäusler 1997: 11-12, 211-221; Kaye and Tosco 2001: 96-7).

In both these cases it is usually only the model language that serves in the written medium. In the Amarna situation, it is both the Canaano-Akkadian mixed variety and the (Peripheral) Akkadian model language that are written.

Being a written language is not a minor aspect of Canaano-Akkadian, and may explain many of its linguistic traits. However, although it may explain the origin of various components of this complicated linguistic structure, the *structuring* of the system is essentially the same as in spoken languages. It must be stressed: the formation of Canaano-Akkadian cannot be understood unless it was spoken at the time of its emergence. This insight bears most important implications for the sociolinguistic, cultural, political, and historical understanding of the relationship between the nations and peoples in the Ancient Near East during and prior to the Amarna period. We shall later return to the possibilities for future research in this field. However, already at this point it must be stressed that an underlying spoken reality for the language attested in the Amarna letters can be shown to have existed, albeit not as a native tongue or in use in everyday speech.

This point deserves some dilation, as it serves a crucial point of departure for establishing a polylectal grammar for Canaano-Akkadian.

2 Canaano-Akkadian had an underlying spoken reality

2.1 Akkadianisms

Being a written language used for special purposes, the language of the Amarna Canaanite scribes manifests conventional scribal formulaic phrases of various kinds, and some adopted learned spellings. These are also found elsewhere in the Akkadian correspondence, both in the core areas, viz., Mesopotamia proper, and in the periphery. This trait was one of the characteristics of scribal training in the Mesopotamian culture in all periods (cf. Lambert 1957-1960; Oppenheim 1964: chapter V, especially p. 276; Knutson 1982; cf. Artzi 1990; Izre'el 1997).

Akkadianisms of this kind are found in Canaano-Akkadian in letter opening formulae and in a few other formulaic phrases. But there are many other Akkadianisms as well (§3.2.3). I will later (§4.2) draw attention to the possibility of establishing rules for the occurrences of all or most Akkadianisms within the various subcorpora of the Amarna letters, viz., within the various subdialects of Canaano-Akkadian. I believe that such an investigation will demonstrate that Canaano-Akkadian could not have been an artificial invention of a certain scribal school or of a specific scribal community, as has been suggested by Rainey (1975: 423-4; cf. also Izre'el 1978: 83 cited in §2.4 below; Rainey 2002: 50). It must have been a product of a natural linguistic development, as attested in various linguistic communities elsewhere (see section 1.4). By implication, this supports the assumption of an underlying spoken reality for that language.

was used to suggest the competence of a member of a linguistic community in more than one lect (*op. cit.*, 23ff.). These notions are further associated with the work of Bickerton on creole systems (e.g., Bickerton 1973, 1975).

In the meantime, I would like to touch upon some spelling outputs in the Amarna letters that may give us some clues regarding the question of whether or not they represent an actual spoken, phonological reality.

2.2 *Phonetic or phonological features representing an underlying spoken reality*

2.2.1 $i \rightarrow E = i \rightarrow e$ (evidence from the Lebanese Beqa)

Let us first note some spellings attested in letters from the Lebanese Beqa, which are unusual elsewhere in the Amarna correspondence, yet are the norm in this group of letters. These letters were written by scribes of the same school, as they exhibit striking similarities, not only in contents, but also in form, at least for some of them (cf. Knudtzon 1915: II: 1278 n. 1). In these letters, we find only once the sign *i*: $\lceil i \rceil$ -*na* ‘in’ (EA 179: 21).⁷ This spelling is in complete accordance with the standard Akkadian norm. In all other instances where we would have expected *i* to appear, the sign *e* is used instead:

e-ba-ša-nu ‘we are’ (EA 274: 8 etc.); *e-din* (most probably for *idin*) ‘give!’ (EA 179: 23); *e-na-ša-ar* ‘I guard’ (EA 179: 26; for 1SG forms with initial *i* see below, §5.2; for *naša:ru*, §5.2.2.3.3); also *e-ša-te* ‘fire’ (EA 174: 13); etc.

In EA 178 we find two 1PL forms:

ni-e-ta-lí ‘we have come’ (l. 4); $[ni]$ -*e-na-ša-ar-šu* ‘we guard it’ (l. 6).

The scribe of this letter felt it necessary to show the full verbal stem in the script while adding the 1PL person prefix *ni-*, so he did not omit its initial *e* sign. This *e* sign, which shows the basic pronunciation of the stem used in this area, thus becomes superfluous for these specific forms. At least for the second form, a long vowel is not expected. These forms may be explained as idiosyncrasies of a specific scribe who did not use this language but in his writings. Still, the constant use of the sign *e* in all other forms, as well as in these two specific forms, may reflect a phonemic or phonetic reality in the substrate dialect. We would think of a timbre [e], which would appear in all these instances when the scribes were trying to *pronounce* these forms on the grounds of their foreign phonological system. Cf. also the following examples:

ni-e-nu ‘we’ (EA 174: 8 etc.); *te-na-ša-ru* ‘they (will) guard’ (EA 180: 8);
e-ba-aš-še ‘he is’ (EA 179: 15).

For the last example, note both *e* at the beginning and *še* rather than *ši* at the end. These spellings, although not rare in themselves in Canaano-Akkadian or in Peripheral Akkadian dialects, may account — in this context — for the same phenomenon.

Whereas all these forms would account for their actual pronunciation in the spoken language of the Beqa scribes, such forms as *ni-e-ta-lí* and $[ni]$ -*e-na-ša-ru* may perhaps have originated from a scribe who used this language only in his writing, as we have already noted above. Of course, the sign NI, used by rote for the 1PL person prefix, can also be read *né*. These forms would be pronounced *ne:tali* and *nenášsaršu*. Likewise, the first form in the last set of examples would be pronounced *ne:nu*. However, similar plene spellings elsewhere would not necessarily be interpreted in the same manner. Let us see one example to illustrate the case.

⁷The sign *i* is quite clear in Schroeder’s copy (1915: #103). Knudtzon inserted it between square brackets in his transliteration (1915: I: 690).

2.2.2 Pseudo-corrections

EA 129 is quite a long letter sent by Ribhaddi of Byblos to the pharaoh. The scribe who wrote this letter made use of the verbal forms in the manner dictated by his learned linguistic system, and usually spelled them according to the common practice. Out of many prefix-conjugation verbal forms, there is, however, one form that deviates from the norm:

ti-e-te-pu-š[u-na[?]] ‘they have become’ (EA 129: 88).

The underlying phonology of Byblos Canaanite is still unknown to us. We do know, however, that such forms in the Byblos Amarna correspondence usually have *i* in the first syllable (as a matter of fact, all 3rd person forms but three; cf. Izre’el 1987b: 89). This letter also has all 3PL forms beginning with only a *ti* sign (e.g., *ti-pu-šu-na*, l. 8; cf. also the 3SGF *ti-pu-šu*, ll. 34, 44). This is why we should not interpret the exceptional spelling as an overt manifestation of an alleged underlying phonological system, as we did in the Beqa letters, but on the contrary: as a pseudo-corrected form (for the term, being a cover-term including, *inter alia*, the commonly used term *hyper-correction*, see Blau 1970). The scribe, who usually pronounced similar forms with an [i] timbre, knows that in Akkadian an *e* vowel is somehow connected with this verb. Yet he is not sure where to pronounce an [e], since — as is the case with other Canaanite or NWS dialects of that time — his phonology deviates from that of Akkadian in the status and the phonemic or phonetic distribution of the vowels *i* and *e* (cf. Izre’el 1987a). So in this case (which occurs towards the end of this letter), he feels it necessary to indicate this *e* vowel in script. He fails, however, in his endeavor, and inserts it in the wrong form.

We shall see later (§3.2.4) another case of pseudo-correction. These two cases only stress the need for further investigation in order to search for similar phenomena. It must be noted that occurrences of pseudo-corrections in any written language would require postulating an underlying spoken reality (Blau 1970; also Blau 1961, introduction).

2.2.3 (Akkadian) *a* → *e*; (Canaano-Akkadian) *e* → *i*

The differences in phonemic status or phonetic distribution of the vowels *e* and *i* between Akkadian and the NWS dialects may be responsible for the introduction of the vowel *i* to the verbal forms of predominating *e* formations of the Akkadian superstratum in some dialects of Peripheral Akkadian. In another paper (Izre’el 1987a), I suggested a phonological intervention that served as one of the initializing forces for the admission of the Canaanite person prefixes to the Amarna verbal system. As we shall see later (§5.2.1 and subsequent analyses; also Izre’el 1998a: 30-31), Canaano-Akkadian verbal stems can consist of an originally 3SGM Akkadian forms⁸ thus including their initial *i*- person prefix. The phonological rule suggested here may have thus become an impetus, or a support to bring about this structural feature. If structural features of Canaano-Akkadian can be explained by phonological factors, this would support the view that it had a spoken aspect at some point during its history.

In the aforementioned paper, I showed that in some older Amurru letters, verbal forms from roots with *e* as their first radical (usually called ‘*primae aleph* verbs of the *e*-class’) and other verbs with predominant *e* had an initial *i* instead of the expected *e*. The forms affected were 1SG forms of the prefix conjugation and infinitives. The same applies to most of the Byblos letters; e.g.:

⁸ The standard Babylonian dialects (Old Babylonian and on) did not have gender distinction in the 3SG person verbal prefix. Old Akkadian, Assyrian and some Babylonian dialects still distinguish between the two genders also in the 3rd person, which makes gender distinction in the 3SG, attested also in some dialects of Peripheral Akkadian, the originating linguistic standard of Canaano-Akkadian. The reference to 3SGM for the *i*- person marker relates to this originating structural trait.

i-pu-šu-na ‘I should do’ (energic; EA 74: 63 and passim); *i-pí-iš* ‘(to) do’ (EA 69: 17); *i-le-ú* (or, perhaps, *i-li-ú*) ‘I can’ (EA 82: 22 and passim).

The fact that this change between Akkadian and Canaano-Akkadian is a feature not only of finite verbal forms but also of infinitives is better explained by phonology than by morphology. Therefore, it may well be that at Byblos and at other Canaanite sites we can identify a different phonological structure not only of the NWS substrate dialects, but of Canaano-Akkadian as well, and by implication an underlying spoken reality for that language.

2.2.4 Vowel deletion

I believe that in the domain of phonology, we have strong evidence for the spoken reality of the mixed language itself, which manifests occasionally in spelling. Let us look at two examples from Byblos:

ti-ir-bu ‘you enter’ (EA 102: 11)
𐎠𐎢𐎵𐎠𐎢𐎶𐎠𐎢𐎶𐎠𐎢𐎶 ‘they enter’ (EA 127: 22)

The first form, most probably for *tirbu*, attests the deletion of the vowel between the second and the third root radicals *r* and *b*. This deletion is not attested in the cognate standard Akkadian form, which is *te:rubu* (‘you entered’+subjunctive). Note that vowel deletion in standard Akkadian is inhibited by the long vowel in the first syllable. The second form, to be read *irbu:ni*, attests to the same feature, albeit in a letter that exhibits a different subdialect of Byblos Canaano-Akkadian (for this interpretation cf. Ebeling 1910: 44; for another analysis, see Ebeling in Knudtzon 1915: II: 1406). Whether these forms were the ad hoc result of interference from the phonological structure of the local indigenous dialect or the result of analogical processes within the mixed language, these forms could not have arisen in any scenario other than one involving an underlying spoken reality. In any such set of circumstances, these forms simply could not have been generated. The forms that would have been generated would necessarily appear in the script as *ti-ri-bu* and *i-ri-bu-nim* respectively. This is the case with EA 137: 42 ([*ti-r*]i-bu-mi for the 3PL) or in EA 127 itself, several lines before the above-cited form and in a similar context (*i-ri-bu-nim*, EA 127: 19). The spelling of the latter form reflects the correct (Peripheral) Akkadian underlying phonology,⁹ which is — for our scribes — a learned conventional spelling.

2.2.5 *nC* → *CC*

Since Ebeling’s presentation of its verbal system (Ebeling 1910: §21), Canaano-Akkadian has been known to have energic forms (see further Moran 1950a: 53-56 = 2003: 50-1; Rainey 1996: II: 234-244, 263-4; Izre’el 1998a: 42-3; Zewi 1999: 157-173). The energic marker is *-(n)na*, but when followed by a suffix or by an enclitic particle, the final vowel is deleted. In such forms the *n* of the energic marker is assimilated to the first consonant of the suffix, e.g.,

iš-ti-mu-uš-šu (← *ištemun+šu*) ‘I have indeed heard it’ (EA 320: 20; Ashkelon);
mu-ub-ba-lu-uš-šu (← *nubbalun+šu*) ‘we will indeed bring him’ (EA 245: 7; Megiddo);
ni-ik-šu-du-um-mi (← *nikšudun+mi*) ‘we will indeed capture’ (EA 245: 5; Megiddo)

This type of assimilation is certainly a trait of a spoken language transferred to a written medium. There is no other way to explain the assimilation of the final *n* of an originally *Canaanite* morpheme by the following first consonant of an originally *Akkadian* pronominal suffix, viz., *-šu*, other than the

⁹ The second *i* presents a vocalic pattern for this verb which is different from the common standard Akkadian one (with *u*). This *i*- pattern is usually found in Peripheral Akkadian dialects (Hallo and Tadmor 1977: 9).

spoken reality of the mixed language itself, and not just of the substrate language. In the substrate language, which in the case of EA 245 it is the NWS dialect of Megiddo, we would have *-hu* for the 3SGM pronominal suffix. The substrate form is attested in the very same letter, where *ma-aḥ-šú-ú maḥšu.hu* appears as a gloss, translating Akkadian *da-ku-šu* ‘they killed him’ (EA 245: 14) .

2.3 Morphological, morphophonological and morphosyntactic features representing an underlying spoken reality

Morphological creativity is very difficult to understand within an inherited, fixed, solely written linguistic system. The following examples are instances of creativity, which must have occurred in a living, flexible language, representing unconscious processes within an underlying spoken reality. In paragraph §2.3.1, some paths of morphological development are briefly discussed. In §2.3.2, we shall see the generation of a new verb out of a borrowed Akkadian unit taken as a stem in the borrowing language, whereas in the donor language it was an adverbial complex. §2.3.3 adduces examples of verb formation in which the morphophonemic routine of person prefix attachment is simplified. In §2.3.4, I will illustrate the formation of new, simpler, precative forms, which were different from their counterparts in both Babylonian and Assyrian. §2.3.5 will deal with the contraction of final vocalic sequences in *tertia* vocalis verbs

2.3.1 Lines of development

As I have shown elsewhere (Izre’el 1984), morphological and morphosyntactic features from various Amarna letters may be cited as evidence for the gradual development of the mixed nature of this language. In that case, it was the perception of the *-ni(m)* allomorph of the Akkadian ventive ending as a part of the plural morpheme of the 2PL and 3PL inflection of the verb in Amurru Akkadian. This must have been one of the initial steps in the influence of the NWS modal system on some branches of Peripheral Akkadian. It must be emphasized, however, that ‘gradual’ does not necessarily have to be understood in chronological terms, as I will indicate later (§7.2). In any case, these facts show that a ‘written-only’ understanding of Canaano-Akkadian is not a tenable hypothesis, as here too there is evidence in favor of a spoken reality underlying the development and expansion of this mixed language.

2.3.2 Unconscious generation of new verbal stems

We now turn to some forms that attest to an actual, contemporary underlying spoken reality. EA 137 from Byblos attests a hapax verbal form derived from the Akkadian adverb *arḫiš* ‘promptly, quickly, immediately’, viz., *ya-ar-ḫi-ša* ‘may he hasten’ (EA 137: 97). This verbal form is derived in a Canaanite pattern that can be interpreted either as a *qal* form of the *yaqtil* pattern or as a *hifil* form.¹⁰ This must be regarded as a spontaneous production, constructed in accordance with a common procedure in which an Akkadian stem (i.e., root+pattern) is taken as an unanalyzable unit to serve as the lexical morpheme in the verb formation of Canaano-Akkadian (Izre’el 1978: Excursus B; Izre’el 1998a: 30-32). In this case, the borrowed lexical morpheme is the adverbial form *arḫiš*, which in the source language, viz., Akkadian, consists of the lexical stem *-arḫ-* and the adverbial ending *-iš*. Such formations are not made deliberately or consciously, as the following parallels from another language of contact will show.

Modern Hebrew, spoken today after two millennia of almost exclusive use as a literary and liturgical language, has borrowed many new verbal lexemes from other languages, notably European. The usual procedure of such borrowings in Modern Hebrew is according to the common Semitic pattern, i.e., extracting the consonants of the foreign word and taking them as a root morpheme in the *piel*

¹⁰ If we would assume elision of the *h* already at that early period. For the possibility of such forms in the Amarna tablets, see Sivan 1984: 175-6.

pattern, which is the denominative verbal derivation *par excellence* and the default verbal pattern in Modern Hebrew (Izre'el 2007: 118). Thus we have, e.g., *tilfen* 'he telephoned' (< *telephone*); *nitrel* 'he neutralized' (< *neutral*); *fikes* 'he focused' (< *focus*); and many others. There are, however, some borrowed verbal lexemes, which have adopted not the *piel* pattern but the *hifil* one. These are verbs like *hišpric* 'he sprayed' (< Yiddish *špric* 'a jet of water'); *hiflik* 'he slapped' (< English *flick*); *hisnif* 'he sniffed' (< English *sniff*). Such forms are formed according to their original pattern in the source language or preserve the original consonant clustering structure of the originating language (Bolzky 1999: 76-7). They are used exclusively in informal speech, which supports the view that they are popular, unconscious formations. I was lucky enough to witness the ad hoc generation of a verb when my son, upon hearing within a Hebrew context the English expression 'let them bleed,' echoed in response its exact translation as *šeyablidu* (lit.: nominalizer¹¹+they-will-bleed). Obviously, this verb generation in the *hifil* pattern was sensitive to the English consonantal clustering and vocalic pattern of the form 'bleed,' which fits into the Hebrew *hifil* pattern (Izre'el 2007: 115-6). This is exactly the case with Amarna *yarḥiša*, constructed with this pattern in order to preserve its original form.

2.3.3 Creative prefix-conjugation verbal forms

Let us now examine two other instances of verb formation that illuminate another morphological process, viz., the adjunction of inflectional prefixes to the stem. The Tyre letters attest the forms *aš-te-mu* 'I hear' and *ta-aš-te-me* 'you have heard' (EA 149: 42 and 56 respectively). These forms are not borrowings from Assyrian (Babylonian would have *e* also in the prefix vowel). They are genuine, independent innovations of this specific dialect, typical of non-native speech (similar forms are found in other peripheral dialects too, e.g., EA 1: 10 from Egypt). In this process, the person prefixes and the modus morphemes (when they exist in the system) are attached to the stem, which in our case is taken from Babylonian. Thus *a+šteme+u* → *aštemu*; *ta+šteme* → *tašteme*. The view that this is not the Assyrian formation is supported by other forms in this letter, such as *i-lé-ú-nim* 'they can' (EA 149: 66), whereas Assyrian would have had *ila?lu*.

2.3.4 Innovative precative formations

Still in Tyre, note the precative forms *li-ru-ub* 'may I enter' and *li-mu-ur* 'may I see' (EA 148: 16, 17; EA 149: 19, 20; also EA 151: 17, 30). These too are ad hoc formations, sometimes found elsewhere in Peripheral Akkadian (cf. Izre'el 1991a: I: §2.4.2.3). The consonant *l* is attached to the 1SG verbal form, i.e., *l+i:rub* → *li:rub*; *l+i:mur* → *li:mur*. Indeed, this is the way Assyrian structures its precative forms (cf. Izre'el 1991b: 47-48). Assyrian, however, would have *le:rub* and *la:mur* respectively. Babylonian would have *lu:rub* and *lu:mur*. Indeed, the Jerusalem letters do attest such borrowings (Moran 1975a: 153 = 2003: 267; Izre'el 1998a: 40). Therefore, the Tyre formations are an independent innovation of this dialect. They are made of the linguistic materials of Akkadian, without any triggering from the substrate language. For this type of construction, the postulation of an underlying spoken reality is the best hypothesis.

2.3.5 Vowel contraction at the boundary between stem and modal morphemes

The last feature I would like to discuss in this section is the usual way in which modal morphemes are attached to the stem of *tertiaef infirmae* verbs. These verbs exhibit the tripartite morphosyntactic distinction between the indicative (*yqtlu*), the short volitive (*yqtlø*) and the long volitive (*yqtle*), marked by the addition of the Canaanite modus morphemes to an adopted Akkadian stem, as is the usual procedure with any other verb (cf. Izre'el 1978: §7.2 with references; further Izre'el 1998a: 36-

¹¹The nominalizer *še* is frequently used for the expression of deontic modality in the environment of prefix-conjugation forms.

38). However, since the last segment of *tertiaie vocalis* verbal stems is a vowel, it contracts with the vowel of the modus morpheme. The resulting forms are as follows:

yilqu (← *y+ilqe+u*) for the indicative, as in *yi-il-qú* ‘he takes’ (EA 71: 18);
yilqe (← *y+ilqe+ø*) for the short volitive, as in *yi-il-qé* ‘may he take’ (EA 116: 36);
yilqa (← *y+ilqe+a*) for the long volitive, as in *yi-il-qa* ‘may he take’ (EA 71: 30).

All three forms are from Byblos, but are widespread throughout the Amarna correspondence from Canaan. In fact, this is the rule in many of the Canaanite subcorpora. At this stage of research, I am unable to reach any conclusion regarding the length of the final vowel.

These contractions also point to an underlying spoken reality. Similar phenomena are attested elsewhere in contact situations in spoken languages. Such is the case, e.g., with Modern Hebrew words borrowed into the Russian speech of new immigrants from the former Soviet Union. For example, the Hebrew loanword *taxana* ‘station’, when appearing in the prepositional case, changes its last vowel into *e*. The resulting form is *taxane*, as in the phrase *na taxane* ‘in the station.’¹² It is hard to see such contractions occurring in a language that is not spoken at all. On the other hand, non-contracted forms, which do occur here and there in the Amarna letters, by no means serve as a counter-argument, as is demonstrated by such English formations as *soloist*.

2.4 Conclusions

In my first substantive contribution to the study of Canaano-Akkadian (Izre’el 1978), I wondered about its *Sitz im Leben*. As doubts had been raised concerning the underlying spoken reality of Canaano-Akkadian (Rainey 1975: 423-4; see above, §2.1), I could not, at that stage of my research, give a definite answer to this question. I suggested that Canaano-Akkadian, at least in the Amarna period itself, did not have a spoken reality apart from its being taught and spoken in scribal schools. ‘This problem may never be solved,’ I wrote, ‘however we do believe that a thorough investigation of the whole W<est> S<emitic> Akkadian corpus may also lead us to the key for the solution of this problem as well’ (Izre’el 1978: 83). Since then, Moran has come up with the notion of pidgin for Canaano-Akkadian, with the obvious implication of a spoken background (see above, §1.3). I myself have presented the arguments in favor of a spoken reality of Canaano-Akkadian in the centennial celebration of Amarna in 1987 (Izre’el 1987c; see note 1 above), and Gianto has toyed with the idea of an interlanguage. Rainey himself has been vacillating between his stand that Canaano-Akkadian was an invented code and between the possibility of its being a pidgin, a jargon or an interlanguage (see §2.1). Only very recently he writes:

So somewhere between the end of the Middle Bronze Age and the beginning of the Late Bronze Age, the scribes of Canaan came to some kind of agreement as to the method to be employed whereby ‘Canaanite’ inflection would be applied to the Old Babylonian stems. How we would like to know just where and when that happened! Was it due to some dominant, creative personality in one of the scribal schools? Did this result in, or was it the result of, a spoken ‘interlanguage’ that developed among the local administrators? (Rainey 2002: 50).

Similarly, in her review article on Rainey’s *Canaanite in the Amarna Tablets* (Rainey 1996), von Dassow (2003) comes to the conclusion that ‘one must almost characterize the Canaanite scribes’ use of cuneiform as Akkadographic, and the texts they wrote as tablet-length Akkadograms, punctuated by occasional Canaanite words and explanatory glosses’ (p. 215). The implication of this theory, according to von Dassow, is ‘that the true lingua franca shared by Canaanite scribes and their

¹²I thank Baruch Podolsky for this information.

correspondents in the Late Bronze Age was not Akkadian, as is usually assumed, but Canaanite' (p. 216).¹³

Neither Rainey nor von Dassow seems to be convinced of the linguistic evidence, so similar to other language contact phenomena known from all parts of the world. No! There has never been a convention of Canaanite scribes at the Megiddo Hilton¹⁴ that decided upon an artificial written code for correspondence, nor were they writing Canaanite. The evidence points clearly against it.

I hope that the arguments brought above show that Canaano-Akkadian did have important spoken aspects. Some of the features would prove that at some point in its history, certainly during the time of its formation as a mixed language, this language was spoken. Other features lead to the inevitable conclusion that Canaano-Akkadian was spoken contemporarily with our data, at least to some extent.

It would be most interesting to investigate precisely this point: who spoke that language? Was it just the scribes themselves,¹⁵ or can we account for a larger circle of speakers, such as messengers, ambassadors, high officials, clerks and the like? (Cf. Labat 1962; Nougayrol 1962, 1975; Oppenheim 1965).

The conclusion that Canaano-Akkadian had a spoken aspect should bear importance for our investigation into the linguistic details and the linguistic structure of the Amarna letters. It is to the spoken aspect of this language that one has to ascribe many manifestations of variation. The following sections will show further similarities of Canaano-Akkadian with natural languages, notably contact-induced ones.

A short sociolinguistic account is now in order.

3 What did the Canaanite scribes think of their language?

3.1 Egyptian Akkadian and Canaano-Akkadian

The language written by the Canaanite scribes, like any other linguistic system, served as a means of communication, in this case between Canaanite and Egyptian scribes (and officials?) of that time. The Canaanite scribes could understand the letters sent to their rulers on behalf of the Egyptian pharaoh perfectly well. These were written in Egyptian Akkadian, a closely-related variety of the northwestern Akkadian lingua franca of that time (Cohavi-Rainey 1988, 1998; Edel 1994). The Egyptian scribes who received letters from Canaan could, for their part, understand the mixed language of these letters.

Yet there was a significant difference between the languages of these parties. The structure of Egyptian Akkadian was closely related to that of other Akkadian dialects; the linguistic varieties used by the Canaanite scribes had many structural traits similar or identical to contemporary NWS dialects. The structural gap between any of the languages used by the Canaanite scribes and Egyptian Akkadian was sometimes very large. I am not at all confident of the mutual intelligibility

¹³ Von Dassow's article 'Canaanite in Cuneiform' (2004; published in 2006), reached me too late to be discussed here, which is somewhat unfortunate, as her hypothesis is founded mainly on a refutation of my own theory regarding the underlying spoken reality of Canaano-Akkadian. While a detailed discussion must await another occasion, I cannot refrain from noting the following: I find it problematic that — among other things — von Dassow has chosen to dismiss as irrelevant some traits that are difficult to handle within the framework of her own theory, and to disregard others. As such, von Dassow's challenges have not convinced me to change my views or to revise my long-awaited article, which is given here as is to my readers' own scrutiny and judgment. Needless to say, I have not been motivated by von Dassow's article (see p. 674) to discourage young scholars from building careers based on the assumption that Akkadian was the *lingua franca* of the Levant.

¹⁴I owe this metaphor to the late Bill Moran, way back in 1987.

¹⁵Robert Wilson draws my attention to a general tendency to capitalize on the scribes' special skill by using it as a secret language, as scribes and priests have always done with Latin or Sanskrit.

of these languages had an Egyptian scribe encountered his fellow Canaanite scribe in face-to-face interaction. I also suspect that previous training was needed for an Egyptian scribe to understand a Canaanite scribe, and vice versa, even in writing. We shall return to this question shortly.

From a sociolinguistic point of view, the language of the Egyptian scribes was superior to that of the Canaanite scribes. In other words, it served as a superstratum.

3.2 *The Canaanite scribes' perception of Canaanite-Akkadian*

It must be noted that the Canaanite scribes thought of their language of correspondence as a dialect of Akkadian. Apart from the lexical basis of that language and the bulk of its nominal domain, which are almost purely Akkadian, this perception can be shown in different ways, of which the most conspicuous manifestations are: (1) the use of Akkadian opening formulae; (2) the perception of Canaanite glosses as foreign words; (3) the use of genuine Akkadian verbal morphology within the letters; (4) the occurrence of Akkadian-like pseudo-corrections. To these factors one may add the important psychological factor of their using the Akkadian script.¹⁶ Although the use of script cannot serve as a sole argument (cf. the use of cuneiform script for Hittite and Hurrian), in this case it may well do so, given all other arguments.

3.2.1 *Opening formulae*

The Canaanite scribes used letter-opening formulae and some other formulae that had been adopted from Mesopotamian chancellery practice. In these formulae, the scribes used, in most cases, genuine standard Akkadian expressions and standard Akkadian verbal forms. A typical example is the following:

- (3) *a-na LUGAL-ri EN-ia dUTU-ia* (2) *qí-bí-ma* (3) *um-ma mri-ib-dIŠKUR ÌR-ka-ma*
 (4) *a-na GÌR.MEŠ EN-ia dUTU-ia* (5) *7-šu 7-ta-an am-qú-ut*
 To the king, my lord, my Sun-God, say: Message of Ribhaddi, your servant: I fall
 At the feet of my lord, my Sun-God, 7 times (and) 7 times.
 (EA 104: 1-5, Byblos)

The training of the Canaanite scribes had indeed been based on the usual practice of Mesopotamian scribal schools (cf. above, §2.1; further Knutson 1982; for opening formulae in general, see Salonen 1967). In Ugarit, scribes used Akkadian formulae in Akkadian letters, and the opening formulae of letters written in Ugaritic exhibit strong similarities to the Akkadian formulae, to the point that some are literal translations (Ahl 1973; Knutson 1982; Cunchillos 1999; Huehnergard 1999).

3.2.2 *Glosses*

The Canaanite scribes regarded the Canaanite glosses as foreign words. By ‘foreign’ I mean not foreign to their native tongue, but to the linguistic system they were writing in (cf. Gianto 1995: 73). These glosses — and not the so-called ‘Akkadianisms’ (§3.2.3) — were, in most cases, marked by a *Glossenkeil* (cf. Artzi 1963). Most instructive is the gloss *na-aš-ša-a* in the following passage:

- (4) *li-il-ma-ad LUGAL-ru EN-ṛa* (12) *i-nu-ma LÚ.SA.GAZ šṛa* (13) *yi-na-aš-ši *
na-aš-ša-a (14) *i-na KUR.KI.HÁ na-da-an* (15) *DINGIR-lu₄ ša LUGAL-ri EN-ia*
ṛa-na iṛa-ši (16) *ù i-du-uk-šu*
 May the king, my lord, be informed that the Apiru man who had become elevated
 ‘*naššaʿa*’ in the lands, the god of the king, my lord, gave to me and I killed him.
 (EA 366: 12-15, Southern Canaan)

¹⁶I thank Gideon Goldenberg for this observation.

The gloss *na-aš-ša-a* translates *yi-na-aš-ši*, a verbal form typical to the language of the Canaanite Amarna letters. It has NWS markers for person (*y-*) and mood (*-ø*), and these are annexed to a stem taken from Akkadian, viz., *-inašši-* (<*i+našši*; see the discussion in §5.2). The roots were very similar in the three cognate languages, viz., Akkadian, Canaanite, and Canaanite-Akkadian. This similarity is even more striking in the respective graphic representations of this root. The reason for glossing the Canaanite-Akkadian verb was thus not the lexical, but the *grammatical* difference between the two forms, viz., the one stemming from the scribe's NWS tongue and the one he used in writing this letter. It is the latter form that he regarded as Akkadian.

3.2.3 Akkadianisms

Akkadianisms are pure Akkadian (usually Peripheral Akkadian) forms appearing within a text otherwise written in Canaanite-Akkadian. The occurrence of Akkadianisms thus supports this perception of the scribes that their chancellery language was indeed Akkadian. Akkadianisms may appear in opening formulae and when citing from the pharaoh's letters. More significantly, they are used elsewhere in perfectly fitting contexts. For example, one notes the standard Akkadian imperative, attested with great frequency, and especially precative forms of the verb, which are utterly foreign to NWS dialects. Such are also a plethora of other verbal forms. Note the following example:

- (5) *ù ŠEŠ-ia TUR iš-tu ia-ti* (17) *i-na-kar₅-mi URU.gub-la.KI* (18) *a-na na-da-ni URU.KI-li* (19) *a-na DUMU.MEŠ IR^ma-ši-ir-ti*
 My brother, (who is) younger than me, became hostile towards Byblos, in order to hand the city to the sons of Abdi'ashirti.
 (EA 137: 16-19)

The form *i-na-kar₅-mi* 'he has become hostile' is the only verbal form in this letter of Ribhaddi, the ruler of Byblos¹⁷ that has an Akkadian structure. All other 3SGM forms have an initial *y-* marker for this person, e.g., *yi-iš-mi* 'he heard' (l. 7); *yi-mur* 'he saw' (l. 20); *ia-an-aš-ni* 'he despised me' (l. 23); and many others.¹⁸

Another example comes from a letter of Milkilu, ruler of Gezer:

- (6) *a-wa-at ul-te-bi-la* (10) LUGAL ... (11) ... *a[-n]a ia-ši* (12) *a-nu-um-ma i-šu-ši-ru-šu* (13) *a-na LUGAL* ...
 The order that the king ... has sent me — here I prepare it for the king ...
 (EA 267: 9-13)

Although a borrowing from a letter of the pharaoh (cf. EA 369: 3, a letter from the pharaoh to Milkilu), this form does not occur in a quotation, but in a sentence integral to the letter itself (Izre'el 1978: 43). There is one other 3SGM form in this letter, which does have the preformative *y-*: *γi¹-i-de₉* 'may he know' (l. 15).

Our last example also comes from Gezer, this time sent by Yapa'u:

¹⁷This letter was not sent from Byblos, but from Beirut (cf. ll. 14-15). Yet its language does not resemble that of the other Amarna letters from Beirut (EA 141-3; also probably EA 97-8). Several similarities in style to the other Byblos letters perhaps indicate that a scribe from Byblos may have accompanied Ribhaddi in his journey. Further research may yield more solid conclusions.

¹⁸Knudtzon's *i[-tu-ur]* (l. 9) should be corrected to *i[a-tu-ur]*, to conform with the pattern attested in other forms of this verb in Amarna (Ebeling in Knudtzon 1915: 1530).

- (7) *u a-n[u]-ṛmaṛ [é]ṛl-te₉-néṛ-m[é]* (24) *a-na a-w[a]-ṛti₇[.ME]Š L[UGAL] EN-ia*
 (25) *ṛuṛ iš-ṛte₉-mu [a-na(?)] a-wa-ti₇.MEŠ* (26) *ṛmṛma-ṛiaṛ [LÚ].M[AŠ]KÍM*
 L[UG]AL (27) EN-ia ḏ[UTU] *iš-tu* (28) AN *ša₁₀-me* DU[MU ḏ]UTU

And now, I keep listening to the words of the king, my lord, and I keep listening to the words of Maya, the commissioner of the king, my lord, the [sun]-god from heaven, the so[n of the] sun[-god].

(EA 300: 23-26)

The Akkadian form *eltenemme* is used here alongside its Canaano-Akkadian counterpart, *ištemu*. Both forms have the same semantic and grammatical meaning, and both are used in a similar context (Rainey 1971: 97-98; 1996: II: 22, Izre’el 1978: 40, 58; 1998a: 5-6).

3.2.4 Pseudo-corrections

We have already encountered one case of pseudo-correction (§2.2.2 above). Another case is attested in the form *i-ru-da-am* found in the Gezer letter mentioned just above (EA 300). The context is as follows:

- (8) *tu-šu-ru-ba-ni* (19) *a-na URU.DIDLKI-ni-ia* (20) *u ṛlu-ṛuṛ i-ru-da-am* (21)
 LUGAL EN-ia *ki-ma ša* (22) A.A.-ia *u t[á-p]á-ti-[ia]*

May you¹⁹ (re)admit me into my cities, so that I may serve the king, my lord, like my father and [my] co[llea]gues.

(EA 300: 18-20)

The meaning of the Akkadian verb *ara:du* is ‘to descend’. As a verb of motion, it may be used in standard Akkadian with the ventive ending. In Canaano-Akkadian, however, there exists a verb *ara:du* which is a denominative from *ardu* ‘servant,’ thus denoting ‘to serve.’ Additional ventive endings in forms of this verb with the meaning ‘to serve’ are hence incomprehensible. The verbal form cited above is found in a final clause that requires a (NWS) volitive form of the verb, since it follows another volitive verb (cf. Moran 1960 = 2003: #10).²⁰ Therefore, either the long or the short volitive is expected, since regarding their volitive force, *yqtlø* and *yqtle* are essentially the same (cf. Moran 1950a: 105 = 2003:97-98). The scribe of this letter chose the long volitive not by chance, but since he sought to make use of a ‘good’ Akkadian form. However, he went too far. Knowing the (correct?!) spelling of the ventive ending in Akkadian, he added an *am* sign at the end. By adding the *-am* ending to this verb instead of the long volitive ending *-a* (i.e., with no *m*), the scribe felt he granted it a better Akkadian look (cf. Izre’el 1978: Excursus C and p. 82 n. 278(b)).

Such pseudo-corrections could not have appeared unless the scribes were unaware of the alleged Akkadian nature of the language they were using. While mimation is a feature of older dialects of Akkadian, in this case we might think of this spelling not as an anachronism, but as an indication of the actual pronunciation of this ending (Izre’el 1998a: 13; but cf. Izre’el 1991a: I: §1.7).

3.2.5 Akkadianisms?

The term ‘Akkadianism’ as used by some Amarna scholars (e.g., Rainey 1975: 420; 1996: II: 23) and by myself (here, as well as in Izre’el 1978: §7.2.1; 1998a: 5), may be misleading in a way, as it may suggest that the scribes themselves looked upon such forms as foreign to their linguistic system. Yet, as we have seen, the scribes themselves were writing in a language that they believed to be Akkadian.

¹⁹Moran (1992: 341) takes *tušu:rubani* as a 3SGF. Cf. Izre’el 1978: 80 n. 265.

²⁰There has been some discussion regarding the nature of the ‘long’ volitive. See Izre’el 1978: 80-82; Rainey 1991-93; 1996: II: 254-263; Tropper 1997; 1997/1998: 136; Huehnergard 1998: 71.

Would it be justified also for us, as students of Canaano-Akkadian, to describe this complicated situation as a single linguistic system?

4 Canaano-Akkadian as a single linguistic system and the question of variation

4.1 Theoretical framework

As has already been mentioned in 1.6 above, variation in the Canaanite Amarna corpus is manifold:

1. geographical
2. related to scribal tradition
3. variation between individual scribes
4. variation within the linguistic output of a single scribe, even within a single letter

In this section, I will introduce the theoretical framework which I find most appropriate to deal with the complex linguistic continuum of the Canaanite Amarna letters.

The Canaanite scribe was almost always writing on behalf of a local vassal ruler, who was always inferior in rank compared to the addressee, be it the pharaoh himself or one of the Egyptian officials. From a comparison of the language of each of the Canaanite scribes to the language of the Egyptian scribes, it seems preferable to consider that we are dealing with two distinct linguistic systems, for the most part. Admittedly, in certain instances, there are minor differences between the language of the Egyptian and Canaanite scribes, and as such, they may be regarded as different variants of the same language; nevertheless, in most of the subcorpora from Canaan, the two languages show deep and significant structural differences between them.

We have already noted that the Canaanite scribes had a diglossic-like situation in their use of the chancellery language. They usually read Egyptian Akkadian in the letters they received from the pharaoh's scribes, yet they wrote in a different language. Whether or not they could also write in the standard Peripheral Akkadian system is not a question that can be solved, given our present data. In any case, the language they were using was an accepted linguistic system among the chancellery officials of Canaan.

A continuum of variants used by scribes in various diglossic settings is probably not the case here (for a suggestion to thus treat the Arabic diglossia see Hary 1996). In the Arabic speaking communities, a single person would use both extremes and the continuum between those two extremes in various situations. He would speak his native dialect at home and write in Modern Standard Arabic, and when speaking in a formal situation, he would go along the continuum to various extents. As against this situation, Peripheral Akkadian and the mixed language of Canaano-Akkadian would not be used discretely by one and the same scribe. He would read a letter in Egyptian Akkadian and write in Canaano-Akkadian. However, when taking Canaano-Akkadian as a whole, viz., the language of the scribal community of Canaan, a linguistic continuum is what we have. The Amarna letters indeed form a continuum of lectal varieties.

Clear cases of continua within a linguistic community which are similar in some respects to the Amarna Canaanite situation may be found in several creole speaking areas where there has been continued contact with the model language. In such communities, a plethora of lects forms a vast continuum of linguistic varieties. The creole basilect is found at one of its extreme points. The acrolect, i.e., the model language, is found at the other extreme. This linguistic situation is generally termed a *post-creole continuum* (cf. above, §1.6).

Two approaches have been developed to handle such cases of variation. One tends to distinguish between two or more linguistic systems with a great deal of overlapping between the systems (e.g.,

Tsuzaki 1971; cf. also Winford 1985). The other approach regards this linguistic situation not as a static one, but rather as a dynamic system, in which both the community and the individual play different rôles within each situation. As such, this approach provides for one linguistic system, in which variation follows specific and orderly rules. Such rules may be either obligatory or optional, and are regulated by linguistic and by extralinguistic (usually sociolinguistic) factors.

It is this latter method that has been preferred and adopted by dialectologists and sociolinguists, since variability has gained recognition as an inherent structural feature of language per se (Decamp 1971; Bailey 1973; Labov 1971; Petyt 1980: chapters 5 and 8; Chambers and Trudgill 1998: chapter 9; Chambers, Trudgill and Schilling-Estes 2002 in various chapters).

Two main objections have been raised against postulating more than one system. One is in the domain of the community. Here it would require either attributing to each idiolect its own distinct system or postulating two or three systems within the community with many points of interference and overlapping between them, and a lot of variation within each. The second objection is relevant to the domain of the individual, i.e., the idiolect. Here we would have to posit too many switches from system to system within a single discourse.

Both objections will prove valid for the linguistic description of the El-Amarna letters from Canaan, since there is variation not only between the different scribes, but also within the linguist output of each scribe. Therefore, I would like to suggest the second approach for their study. I suggest that Canaano-Akkadian be treated as a single linguistic system consisting of lectal varieties stretching between the extreme of the clear cases of the mixed language of the Canaanite letters, and the opposite extreme of lects closer to standard Peripheral Akkadian as used by some Canaanite scribes. This methodology will not only help us in our endeavor to understand the essence and the spirit of this language as it was perceived by the scribes themselves, but will also allow us to contextualize the variety of Akkadianisms properly, viz., within *Canaano-Akkadian*. It must be stressed: this language, with all its variants, did serve as an accepted – and most probably, learned – means of communication, so that it must have had a basic structural system that was relatively solid. As such, variation must be admitted into the description of this system.

This concept of a single system will also help us to account for Akkadianisms within a single letter, numerous as they may be, and to distinguish them from clear cases of apparent code switching (cf. §5.3). Akkadianisms that regularly appear in the flow of the text should be described according to rules that govern them. If some of the Akkadianisms are to be proven haphazard or when an irregular code switching occurs, these may be considered as calques of or insertions from a different linguistic system.

I believe that a great majority of Akkadianisms would prove to be structurally determined. That is, occurrences of forms that are closely related to or identical with the analogous forms of standard Akkadian can be determined and anticipated by rules. In the following sections, I will deal with several types of variation, the rules that govern them, and the triggers for variant forms.

4.2 Intra-systemic variation

Variation within the system is a feature of the *langue*. Its manifestations can be observed mainly as dialectal or idiolectal peculiarities. Intra-systemic variation usually manifests itself by differences among individual texts or groups of texts. There are, however, notable instances in which variation will be found within one and the same text.

Apparent cases of switching towards the Akkadian superstratum also belong to this kind of variation. It is the task of the student of Canaano-Akkadian to find out whether these switches are structural, and if they are — to describe the circumstances under which they tend to appear in each case. These

circumstances may be triggers that are either linguistic or extralinguistic, obligatory or optional. I will later (§5.2) analyze in detail one specific feature in the Byblos letters to illustrate my suggested methodology in dealing with variation and with apparent exceptions to the system. Yet already at this point I would like to illustrate some types of triggers for variation.

4.2.1 Linguistic triggers

An example of a linguistic trigger that may induce an apparent deviation from the system is the surfacing of an Akkadian prefixed stative verbal form of *idû* ‘to know,’ a form with exceptional behavior also within the structure of standard Akkadian. Many of the Canaanite Amarna scribes (yet by no means all of them) would use the standard Akkadian forms of this verb: *i-de* for the 1SG and the 3SGM, *ti-de* for the 2SGM (also for the 3SGF), etc. (cf. Ebeling in Knudtzon 1915: II: 1420-1; cf. Rainey 1973: 244-7; 1996: II: 323-8). For example, in EA 100 (a letter from the city of Irqata), the scribe wrote:

- (9) *i-de lib-bi* LUGAL EN
 May the heart of the king, the lord, know ...
 (EA 100: 8-9)

In this letter we also have [*t*]*i-de* ‘you know’ (l. 23). All other 3SGM verbs in this letter have an initial *y-*:

- yu-wa-ši-r[a* ‘he sent’ (l. 11); *yi-iq-bi* ‘he said’ (l. 13); *yi-iš-mi* ‘may he listen’
 (l. 31); *ia-di-na* ‘may he give’ (l. 33).

This is, obviously, a lexical trigger which constrains verbal forms from *idû* from admitting the *y-* prefix of the 3SGM. In other words, the verb *idû* does not inflect according to the Canaanite-Akkadian norm and thus constitutes an exception to the system.

4.2.2 Extralinguistic triggers

Several southern Canaanite scribes, when representing the words of the pharaoh to their ruler and quoting them, or when referring to the pharaoh’s words even without directly quoting them, use verbal forms closer to the Akkadian standard than in the rest of the letter. Examples:

- (10) *a-wa-at ul-te-bi-la* LUGAL
 The order that the king has sent
 (EA 267: 9-10; Milkilu of Gezer)
- a-wa-at iq-ba(sic)-bi* LUGAL
 The order that the king has said
 (EA 275: 9-10; Ya’zibhadda, of an unknown city in southern Canaan)
- a-wa-at iš-tap-pár* LUGAL
 The order that the king has sent
 (EA 276: 9-10; same ruler as EA 275 above)
- a-wa-ti₇MEŠ!* *ša iš-pu-ur* LUGAL
 The orders that the king sent
 (EA 292: 18-19; Ba’lushiptu of Gezer)

mì-ma ša i-qa-ab-bi LUGAL
Everything that the king has said
(EA 298: 14-16; Yapa’u of Gezer)

All other verbs in these texts, as well as the system itself, are Canaanite. This extralinguistic trigger that brings about the use of an Akkadian form in an otherwise mixed environment is optional or lect-dependent. Thus, another scribe of Yapa’u of Gezer writes in the same context as follows:

(11) *mi-im-ma ša qa-ba* LUGAL
Everything that the king said
(EA 297: 8-9)

Here the scribe made use of a typical NWS suffix-conjugation pattern, viz., the active Canaanite stem *qatal*, instead of the Akkadian imperfective-*iparras* form (*iqabbi*) that his fellow scribe used.²¹

Note that we can formulate extralinguistic rules that operate on various lects in the same way, yet the output would not necessarily be the same. That is, whereas the rule may determine the conditions for the use of a form comprised of purely Akkadian material, the form itself may vary and be — in the examples given — one of the various forms cited.

When we deal with quotes from the pharaoh’s letters, one may claim that quoting is an act of code switching which takes the scribe from Canaanite-Akkadian to Egyptian Akkadian. However, in the citations above this is not the case, and it is only *reference* to the pharaoh’s orders that brought about the use of Akkadianized forms.

While this rule is optional, as we have seen, whenever the need for the same underlying meaning (*signifié*) shows up, a variant form may still surface. This occurs not only in actual quotes from the pharaoh’s letters, but, interestingly, also in a pseudo-citation from the king’s words:

(12) *ù ki-i i-qa-bu* LUGAL *a-na mi-nim iš-tap-r[u]* (31) *mri-ib-dIŠKUR tup-pa a-na ma-ḥar be-li-š[u]*
Concerning (that) what the king has said.²² ‘Why does Ribhaddi keep sending a tablet to his lord?’
(EA 106: 30-31; Byblos)

Here one notes the surfacing of a form without the *y-* prefix of the 3SGM, viz., *ištapru* ‘he keeps sending.’ Note further the Akkadianized verb introducing the citation, *iqabbu*. In a similar environment in the very same letter, the surfacing form does carry this prefix:

(13) *šá-ni-tam a-na mi-nim* (14) *yi-iš-tap-ru mri-ib-dIŠKUR ki-na-an-na-ma* (15) *tup-pa a-na É.GAL*
Further: Why does Ribhaddi keep sending a tablet this way to the palace?
(EA 106: 13-15)

Here the subject is Ribhaddi rather than the pharaoh, and therefore the surfacing form is the one typical of the mixed language.²³

In some letters, the extralinguistic trigger may act upon the entire letter. In another letter from Byblos, EA 81, the form *iq-bi* ‘he said’ is attested without the *y-* (l. 11). This lack of the Canaanite-

²¹Note further the absence of the subjunctive, typical of these texts.

²²Moran (1992: 179): ‘How can the king say?’

²³Pace Moran 1992: 179 with n. 2, who suggests that this too is a quote from the pharaoh’s letter.

originating prefix is probably triggered by the existence of the same form in the opening formula, common in Byblos, which is also attested at the beginning of this letter as well (although fragmentary):

- (14) [m^{ri}-ib-d]ŠKUR iq-b]i a-na EN-[š^u]
[Ribhaddi sa]y[s] to [his] lord
(EA 81: 1)

In the opening address, this standard Akkadian form is of course the rule. In such cases, we might also posit a lexical trigger, i.e., linguistic rather than extralinguistic. We might formulate a rule that inhibits the annexation of the *y*- prefix in 3SGM forms of *qabû*, as was the case with *idû* (§4.2.1). These questions need, however, much further research.

5 An illustration: The 1SG person morpheme of the prefix-conjugation verb in the letters of Byblos

5.1 Introduction

To illustrate the methodological approach I have proposed here, I would like to analyze in detail the manifestations of a single linguistic feature. This will be done in order to observe some of the most salient features of its variational aspects.

The largest subcorpus of letters within the Amarna correspondence is the group of letters from Byblos. The great majority of the Byblos letters were sent on behalf of a single ruler, Ribhaddi.²⁴ The Byblos corpus might therefore be expected to represent a relatively unified linguistic system. With regard to syntax and morphosyntax, this is generally so. This is why Moran was able to discover in his doctoral dissertation (1950a) the systematic use of the NWS modus morphemes in these letters, and thus open a new era in the research and understanding of the language of the Canaanite Amarna tablets. Still, a survey of the verbal forms in these letters reveals significant structural variation throughout, especially in the morphological domain.

The reason for this difference in behavior between individual domains of language seems clear. Syntax is most vulnerable to contact situations. Unconscious syntactic interference of the substrate language may act on any syntactic feature of the language in use. The latter may, in fact, manifest all or almost all of the syntactic features of the substrate language; in other words, the resulting language can be similar or identical to the substrate language in its syntactic system. Indeed, this seems to be the case with the Canaano-Akkadian in general, the Byblos letters included (Moran 1950a, 1950b, 1951, 1953, 1960 = 2003: ##1, 5, 6, 8, 10).²⁵ In contrast, morphology, of all linguistic domains, is the most resistant to change (Meillet 1914; Thomason and Kaufman 1988: §3.2; Sankoff 2002: §3.4). Therefore, when there is strong linguistic interference between two languages, much of the original morphology may be resistant to change, and if change occurs, morphology may manifest the most significant variation. This is why I have chosen to deal here with a morphological trait.

²⁴Two tablets from the Amarna archive (EA 139 and EA 140), and one tablet, probably from Kamid el-Loz in Lebanon (Huehnergard 1996; henceforth: ZA 86), were sent on behalf of Ilirapi.

²⁵ Still, a thorough investigation of Canaano-Akkadian syntax and its comparison with the syntax of the cognate NWS is still wanting. For a brief outline of Canaano-Akkadian syntax see Izre'el 1998a: §3; for other studies dealing with syntactic features of Canaano-Akkadian, see above, §1.2.

5.2 Intertextual variation

5.2.1 Apparent variation and structural variation

Let us observe variant forms of the 1SG prefix-conjugation verb in the Byblos letters. There is fluctuation between forms beginning with *a-* and forms beginning with *i*. *Prima facie*, this surface-structure variation can be formulated as follows:

a+stem ~ *i*+stem

That is, the 1SG prefix appears to be either *a-* or *i-*. Looking at the ‘community’ at large, i.e., the entire Byblos corpus under investigation, we see that most of the Byblos letters have *a-* for the 1SG person morpheme. This is, of course, a feature of standard Akkadian. Several letters, however, have an initial *i* in all 1SG prefix-conjugation forms. Initial *i* in the 1SG is quite widespread in the Amarna correspondence, especially in letters from the areas southern of Byblos (Izre’el 1998a: §2.5.2). As is the case with these letters, this initial *i* appears not only in the 1SG forms, but throughout the whole verbal paradigm. This is true mainly for the G and N stem groups, yet forms with initial *i* can be found in some D and Š forms as well. Therefore, this *i* must be interpreted not as the 1SG person prefix, but as an integral part of the verbal stem (in fact, a part of the verbal pattern) to which consonantal person morphemes, borrowed from NWS, are prefixed. These are *ʔ-* for the 1SG (not reflected in the orthography and symbolized as \emptyset -; cf. Izre’el 1998a: 25), *t-* for the 2SG, 2PL, 3SGF and 3PL, *y-* for the 3SGM and *n-* for the 1PL (Izre’el 1998a: §2.5.2).²⁶ This verbal inflection is widespread in the Amarna correspondence. The combined form of the Akkadian 3SGM verb serves as an inseparable stem unit when borrowed into the mixed language (Izre’el 1978: §5.2.1 and Excursus B; Rainey 1996: II: 13-15 and passim; Izre’el 1998a: 30-32).

A similar verbal inflection is a feature of some of the Byblos letters as well. One of these letters is Ribhaddi’s letter EA 94, where we find, e.g.,

[*i*]q-bu ‘I say’ (l. 7) for the 1SG;
yi-iq-bi ‘he said’ (l. 74) for the 3SGM;
ti-ṭ-iq-bu-na ‘they say’ (l. 14) for the 3PLM.

A morphemic analysis of these three forms yields

\emptyset +iqbi+u for the 1SG
y+iqbi+ \emptyset for the 3SGM
t+iqbi+u.na for the 3PLM

Another letter of Ribhaddi that clearly exhibits the same system is EA 123, as does ZA 86 by Ilirapi. Ribhaddi’s letter EA 106 is perhaps to be grouped with these three letters too. It may well be that other Byblos letters also belong to this group, but lack of 1SG forms or ambiguous evidence makes it impossible for us to draw any further conclusions regarding this matter. We shall return to this question further below.

²⁶That the vowel following the consonantal prefix indeed belongs to the stem in NWS is proved by its absolute dependency on the stem pattern and meaning. Consider, e.g., the opposition in Hebrew between *yaqti:l* and *yuqtal*, which indicates active vs. passive. In some cases there is no vowel following the prefix, e.g., Aramaic *yhaqtel*, Hebrew and Aramaic *yqattel*, etc. That this vowel is indeed a part of the stem is also confirmed by Barth’s law, even if Barth himself referred to this vowel as the vowel of the prefix (Barth 1894; thanks are due to Gideon Goldenberg who drew my attention to this surprising lapse). For a sound structural analysis of the verb in classical Arabic, see Schramm 1962. Schramm’s formulation of the verb morphology can easily be adapted to other NWS tongues; cf. also Izre’el 1991b: 37-8. Unfortunately, Rainey, although he understands well the paradigmatic relationship between the various forms (1996: II: 14-15 and passim), still lists the Canaano-Akkadian person prefixes as if they were syllabic, conforming to their Akkadian counterparts. For him, the 1SG prefix is *Øa-*, *Øi-* or *Øu-* (Rainey 1996: II: 40-43).

The linguistic variation in the ‘community,’ i.e., the intertextual variation, may now be reformulated as follows:

$$a+\text{stem} \sim \emptyset+\text{stem}$$

That is, the 1SG person morpheme of the prefix-conjugation verbs in Byblos may be either *a-*, as in standard Akkadian, or \emptyset -, the written output of the morpheme *ʔ-*, borrowed from the NWS substratum.

5.2.2 Intratextual variation

There are, however, 1SG forms with initial *i* also in letters that regularly have an *a-* prefix for this verbal category. In the following section, I will investigate the circumstances under which such forms may occur.

5.2.2.1 Verbs with first radical *e*

I have already mentioned above (§2.2.3) that verbs with first radical *e* almost always have *i* instead of the expected *e* in the 1SG. In this connection, the verbs *i-pu-šu-na* ‘I should do’ and *i-le-ú* ‘I can’ have been cited. One other example among many is *i-zi-bu* ‘I will leave’ (EA 137: 47). As this change is shared also in infinitive forms, I have argued above (§2.2.3) for a phonological feature. Either phonological or morphophonological rules will determine which of the 1SG verbal forms in these letters will have *i-* instead of the original systemic *a-* as its first segment. Phonological rules may determine the assimilation of the prefix vowel *a-* as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} a+epuš &\rightarrow e:puš \\ e:puš &\rightarrow i:puš \end{aligned}$$

If, however, we are to posit a morphophonological rule, either one of the two variant prefixes, viz., *a-* or \emptyset -, may be postulated as the 1SG marker. In either case, the prefix would not be overtly expressed, and only the stem will surface. The rules governing these formations will be as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} a+i:puš &\rightarrow i:puš \\ \text{or} \\ \emptyset+i:puš &\rightarrow i:puš \end{aligned}$$

The resulting forms are, therefore, ambiguous as regards their underlying prefixes, and only our knowledge of their attribution to a specific lect may help in determining which of the two possible variants is to be posited.

For the Amarna period itself, we should most probably postulate morphophonological rather than general phonological rules to account for these formations (see further §5.2.3).

5.2.2.2 Other verbs with *e*

There is also one indubitable occurrence of a 1SG from a *-t-* form of *ala:ku* ‘go’ in Byblos: *i-ti-lik* ‘I went’ (EA 114: 28). Similar forms are attested elsewhere in Peripheral Akkadian, as well as in core Akkadian dialects (Izre’el 1991a: I: 155 for *i-te-lik*). *Primaes a* verbs, as well as other weak verbs, tend to surface an *i* 1SG prefix in Amurru as well (Izre’el 1991a: I: 133; 1987a). Therefore, as in the case above, I tend to posit morphophonological rules to account for this form too.

The attraction of an initial *i* may also be due to the infix *-t-* of the verbal form. If this is the case, the vowel *i* should be regarded as a part of the stem, as will be shown below for *-t-* forms of *šapa:ru* ‘send, write’ (§5.2.2.3.2). It may well be that there existed a general tendency of verbal *-t-* forms to attract an initial *i* to their stem. This, however, needs further research.

5.2.2.3 Some other verbs; lexical and other linguistic triggers

There are still some other 1SG verbal forms with an initial *i* in Byblos that occur in the same letters along with verbs with an *a*- prefix, and for which a (morpho)phonological rule cannot be posited. Let us have a close look at these formations.

5.2.2.3.1 *izuzzu*

There are two occurrences of 1SG prefix-conjugation forms of *izuzzu* ‘stand’ in Byblos. Both of them have an initial *i* instead of the expected *a*: *i-zi-za* (EA 71: 24; long volitive); *i-zi-zu-na* (EA 124: 16; energetic). As these are the only 1SG verbal forms in these two letters, it is impossible to tell whether other 1SG verbs would have appeared with an *a*- prefix or whether these two letters belong to the same categorical group of EA 94, EA 123 and ZA 86 mentioned above as having the consonantal prefixes borrowed from NWS. However, as far as the verb *izuzzu* is concerned, a survey of all its occurrences in Canaano-Akkadian will reveal that this verb always has an initial *i*, regardless of its inflectional forms, thus not only in such forms as 3SGM *yi-iz-zi-iz* (EA 250: 42; Gath Padala?), but also in suffix-conjugation forms such as *i-zi-iz-ti* (EA 296: 28; Jaffa or Gaza) or *i-zi-za-ti* (EA 103: 14; Byblos) (cf. also Rainey 1973: 248-9; 1996: II: 321-3; Izre’el 1998a: 31).

The last two forms prove that the initial vowel, viz., *i*, is indeed a part of the stem in Canaano-Akkadian. The suffixed person morpheme is attached to the stem, which is *-izziz-* or *-izziz(z)a-* respectively.²⁷ It is to this stem that the person prefixes are attached; thus *y+izziz* for the 3SGM; *∅+izziz* for the 1SG; etc. The 3SGM Akkadian form, which consisted of the person prefix *i-* and the stem *-zziz-*, was borrowed into Canaano-Akkadian to serve as the stem. To this stem, which now opens with a vowel, the person morphemes are added. In our case, this rule should be applied only to this specific verb, viz., *izuzzu*, and not to the entire verbal system.

The verb *izuzzu* has a highly irregular formation, and it is one of the prefixed statives of Akkadian. This may be the reason why it had been difficult for the foreign scribes to make a sound analysis of its forms. The most common and familiar form, viz., *izziz*, was thus borrowed as an inseparable unit to serve as the stem in Canaano-Akkadian. The same tendency, which is general in many Canaanite letters and in EA 94, EA 123 and ZA 86 of Byblos, may hence prove valid for that specific lexeme elsewhere as well. The vocalic initial phoneme of its stem inhibits the adjoining of the *a*- prefix of the 1SG person. The trigger for the use of the stem *-izziz-* is lexical. The morphophonemic rules that this stem attracts may be compared to similar or identical rules that the verb *idû* entails (cf. §4.2.1 above; also Rainey 1973: 242-250; 1996: II: 323-8). The use of this stem is therefore established in the linguistic system. Therefore, it should not be dismissed from the linguistic description, nor should it be referred to as an exception. It must be regarded as an integral part of the system, together with any entailed rules.

Returning now to the two 1SG occurrences of this verb in Byblos, the evidence regarding the underlying prefix is ambiguous. Setting aside the modus morpheme, these forms may be analyzed as the outcome of either one of the following rules:

- (a) *a+izziz* → *izziz*
- (b) *∅+izziz* → *izziz*

Rule (a) would be applicable had we had evidence from other 1SG forms in the same letter that the underlying prefix was *a-*; rule (b) would be applicable in such lects as the ones of EA 94, EA 123, ZA 86, or in other Canaanite sites, where the prefix is *∅-*.

²⁷There is one hybrid form which includes both a prefix and a suffix, viz., *ta-šap-pár-ta* ‘you wrote’ (EA 102: 10). This form constitutes an exception, and must be regarded as *lapsus calami* (cf. also Rainey 1973: 257-8 n. 110; cf. Rainey 1996: II: 338).

5.2.2.3.2 -t- forms of *šapa:ru*

The same lexical trigger, which shows in the tendency to have an initial *i* in the 1SG, is also found in some lects for the -t- forms of *šapa:ru* ‘send, write.’ Thus in letters where other forms have the prefix *a-*, we have:

iš-tap-ru (EA 85: 6); *iš-tap-ru* (EA 85: 55); *iš-[tap-]ru* (EA 114: 27).

A similar form (*iš-tap-r[u]*) is attested in a letter that perhaps has consonantal prefixes (EA 106: 12; cf. above, §§4.2;5.2.1). Cf. also *iš-tap-pa-ar* (EA 134: 31), where the two other 1SG forms attested in this letter are of verbs with predominant *e*, so that any conclusions regarding the form of the underlying prefix are impossible. In yet another text we have *iš-t[a-pár]* alongside *aš-t[a-pár]* (EA 90: 14 and 10 respectively).

Although the evidence is mostly ambiguous for the Byblos letters, it nevertheless seems that at least EA 85 and EA 114 exhibit a tendency to have an initial *i* in all occurrences of this verb. In other words, the surface form of the 1SG prefix conjugation of the -t- stem of *šapa:ru* does not carry an overt person morpheme. Its initial *i* must be interpreted as a part of the stem. It was borrowed thus from Akkadian, inseparable from the 3SGM prefix of that language. This is exactly the same phenomenon we have already encountered in the case of *izuzzu*. With the -t- stem of *šapa:ru* this is just a tendency, found in only a few texts. There are many 1SG forms of this verb in other texts with the prefix *a-* (Ebeling in Knudtzon 1915: II: 1516). It is interesting and most instructive to note the formation of these other occurrences as well. These are:

aš-ta-pa-ar (EA 74: 49 etc.); *aš-ta-pár* (EA 81: 22 etc.); *aš-tap-pár* (EA 88: 13 etc.); *aš-ta-pa-ru* (EA 89: 7 etc.).

As is the case with the forms of EA 134 cited above, the last two forms here are obviously Gtn formations, as they exhibit – the second one only indirectly – the doubling of *p*. The other forms may well represent defectively-spelled Gtn stems as well. The context of the first form is the following:

- (15) *a-nu-ma ki-a-ma aš-ta-pa-ar a-na É.GAL (50) ù ú-ul ti-iš-mu-na a-wa-tu-ia*
Now, thus I have been writing to the palace, but my words are not being heard.²⁸
(EA 74: 49-50)

The repetitive action in this example requires that we interpret it as a Gtn form. This is further suggested by the indicative form that follows. Further confirmation of this interpretation is given by comparison to similar contexts in other letters, where their spelling does indicate doubling, e.g.:

- (16) *i-nu-ma yi-iš-tap-pa-ra (10) LUGAL-ru a-na ia-ši*
As the king has been writing to me.
(EA 130: 9-10)

Like ex. 15 above, the following example too has a defective spelling of a doubled *p*. In this case, the doubling is suggested indirectly, i.e., by the fact that the following vowel is not deleted:

- (17) *a-nu-ma ki-[a-m]a yi-iš-ta-pa-ru²⁹ (21) L[Ú.GA]L [a-n]a ša-šu-nu ù (22) l[a-a]*
ti-iš-ma-na a-na ša-šu
Now, the magnate has been writing to them thus, but they would not listen.

²⁸Or the passive, see Youngblood 1961: 149; so also Rainey 1971: 91. Another occurrence of an apparent active form for the passive is *ti-íl-qé* (EA 69: 27). For the latter, Moran (1950a: 147 = 2003: 101; 1992: 139 n. 5) suggested reading *ti-ul₁₁-qí*, but there is no need for that, even if we still do not understand this use properly. A different interpretation is given by Youngblood (1961: 59).

²⁹Knudtzon's *tap* is a printing error (1915: 458). Cf. Schroeder 1915: #52; also Winckler 1896: 170.

(EA 103: 20-22)

There are, however, forms of *šapa:ru* that are spelled with a doubled *p*, yet cannot be interpreted as repetitive. This is the case in the following example, which opens a citation:

- (18) *ù an-nu-uš i-na-an-na* (30) *iš-tap-pa-ar* ^mIR-*a-ši-ir-ta a-na* ÉRIN.MEŠ
And now Abdiashirta has written to the troops:
(EA 74: 29-30)

It seems that the Canaanite scribes confused the Gtn with the *-t-* formation of *šapa:ru*. Hendiadys phrases like *aš-tap-pár aš-ta-ni* (e.g., EA 126: 53) may support the view that Gtn forms would not be understood as repetitives, since otherwise the additional *aštani* ‘I repeated’ would not be needed. The reason for this confusion may perhaps be found in their frequent use of the form *ištap(p)ar* in the opening formulae of some of Ribhaddi’s letters (e.g., EA 119: 1 and EA 121: 1 for spellings with and without doubling of the second radical).

This use of a *šapa:ru* Gtn form is rare in Akkadian correspondence. Aside this small group of Ribhaddi’s letters from El-Amarna, it is attested only in some conventional formulae in texts from Mari (Salonen 1967: 52). From its occurrences in Mari, which are outside the core of Old Babylonian and are attested from an earlier period, we may perhaps conclude that this use by Ribhaddi’s scribes was not their own idiosyncrasy. It may have been learned and adopted from an already existing source. The use of a Gtn form, which is the repetitive form *par excellence*, is not at all common in a letter’s address. It appears that these forms are conventional, formulaic, and hence not analyzable in terms of their original grammatical components. These forms were borrowed by NWS scribes as unanalyzable units within Canaanite-Akkadian. In other words, these forms were taken as the stem onto which person prefixes and modus morphemes should be attached.

The variation between the Byblos lects as far as *-t-* forms of *šapa:ru* are concerned may now be formulated. We have two variant stems for the *-t-* or Gtn forms of *šapa:ru* in Ribhaddi’s letters. One is *-štap(p)ar-*, the other *-ištap(p)ar-*. Depending on the lect, the 1SG prefixed verb can be formed according to either one of the following formations:

Lects having a *ø-* prefix in other 1SG forms unanimously use the base *-ištap(p)ar-*; therefore:

$\emptyset + ištap(p)ar \rightarrow ištap(p)ar$

Lects having an *a-* prefix in other 1SG forms can make use of either the base *-štap(p)ar-* or the base *-ištap(p)ar-*. Whenever the latter is used, there will not be an overt prefix for the 1SG, as is the case wherever a base having an initial vowel is used; therefore:

$a + ištap(p)ar \rightarrow ištap(p)ar$

but

$a + štap(p)ar \rightarrow aštap(p)ar$

5.2.2.3.3 *naša:ru*

Let us now have a look at some occurrences of the verb *naša:ru* ‘guard, watch’ in the Byblos corpus. Some letters attest 1SG forms of *naša:ru* with an initial *i*. For these, either of the following two stems may occur: *-inašsar-* or *-inaššir-*; e.g.,

i-na-ša-ru-na (EA 112: 10; EA 125: 12); ^ri¹-*na-ša-r[u]* (EA 122: 21; so Moran 1950a: 174 = 2003: 121; 1992: 202 n. 1); *i-na-ši-ru* (EA 119: 15).

The cited forms are the only 1SG forms in EA 112, and also (besides the ambiguous *i:pušu*) in EA 125. Yet EA 119 and EA 122 have other 1SG with the prefix *a-*. It thus seems that it is this specific

verb that yields this difference. This verb, so common in the Amarna correspondence, illustrates the problematics of the *G iparras* formation in Akkadian in the eyes of the NWS scribes, who tended to confuse G and D formations. The reason is clear: in NWS, the doubling of the second root-radical was an indication only of the D stem, and was not used as an aspectual marker, as was the case in Akkadian. This is also why free variation exists between the vowels *i* and *a* that follow the second root radical (see, e.g., EA 112: 10-18 for both bases). Occurrences of the verb under discussion, viz., *naša:ru*, with an initial *u*, typical of the D stem, prove the validity of this thesis (e.g., *ú-na-šár*, EA 327: 5, a letter from southern Canaan; cf. the G infinitive in line 3 of the same letter; for a detailed study of this issue see Rainey 1975: 404-419; 1996: II: 133-6).

To conclude, the stem used in the cited forms of *naša:ru* is *-inašš{a,i}r-*, the third vowel fluctuating between *a* and *i*. Its first segment is *i*, thus inhibiting the annexation of the prefix *a-* to the stem. The rules governing the forms cited can be formulated as follows:

$$a+inaššar+u(na) \rightarrow inaššaru(na)$$

$$a+inaššir+u \rightarrow inašširu$$

In other Byblos lects, the prefix *a-* is manifest, e.g., *a-na-ša-ra* (EA 117: 73). The rule governing this form is to be posited as

$$a+naššar+a \rightarrow anaššara$$

5.2.2.3.4 Other verbs

There are a few other verbs that show similar tendencies, but these are limited to some minor lects and do not reflect widespread tendencies, in contradistinction to the verbs dealt with above. These are

i-wa-ši-ir ‘I sent’ (EA 137: 8); *i-ka-ša-da-am* ‘I conquer’ (EA 362: 34); *i-ba-ú* ‘I seek’ (EA 362: 58).

iwaššir and *iba?u* would be D forms in standard Akkadian, whereas *ikaššadam* exhibits the same phenomenon that we have seen with *naša:ru*. The ending *-am* shows that the scribe sought a standard Akkadian formation (cf. above, §3.2.4), yet he failed in applying an *a-* prefix to the stem. For him, the stem was *-ikaššad-*, not *-kaššad-* as in standard Akkadian. In Canaano-Akkadian, a stem beginning with a vowel such as this would have inhibited the annexation of the prefix *a-*.³⁰ In other verbs of the same lect (EA 362), the *a-* prefix is overt: *aš-pu-ur* (l. 18); *aš-pu-ru* (l. 52). These forms were in agreement with common *qal* formations in the scribe’s NWS mother tongue, so that there was no difficulty for him to produce them.

It is interesting to note that this same scribe did not inflect the verb *naša:ru* along the same principles he employed for *kaša:du*. Using the standard Akkadian stem *-naššar-*, he did apply the prefix *a-* to the verb: *a-na-aš-ša-a[r]*³¹ (l. 31).

The morphological structure of each lexeme is different in each case. For each lect, there may exist a different distribution of lexemes for each morphological category. Indeed, EA 362 constitutes a unique lect within the Byblos corpus, and it must have been written by a scribe other than any of the Byblos scribes whose letters have survived. This can be seen from its opening formula with the form

³⁰A similar rule is observed in standard Akkadian for stems beginning with *u*, viz., *prae waw* verbs and verbs of the D and Š stem-groups (Izre’el 1991b: 43-46).

³¹Rainey (1978a: 20) suggested also the possibility of reading *r[u]* for the last sign, to denote the indicative. The cuneiform does not allow this reading (collated; so also Thureau-Dangin 1922: 102).

qi-bi-mi ‘say!’ (l. 2), as well as from various unique forms such as *da-na-nu-um* ‘we are strong’ spelled with an additional UM sign (l. 27).³²

5.2.3 Rules and grouping

I have analyzed in detail various structures of 1SG verbal forms in the Byblos corpus. There are two lect-dependent variants of the 1SG prefix, viz., *a-* and \emptyset -. The outputs of many 1SG forms have an initial *i*. In the majority of cases this *i* must be interpreted as part of the stem rather than as the person prefix. For each lect within the corpus, one of these variants applies. Whenever an *a-* prefix appears throughout a letter, any 1SG verbal form beginning with an *i* should be interpreted as if this vowel is the initial segment of the stem, and not as if it were the person prefix. In any such case, the underlying prefix is *a-*, as in the other 1SG forms in the same letter, and a rule deleting this *a-* should be formulated. Whenever all verbal forms in a letter have the vowel *i* preceding the first consonant of their stem, this *i* may be interpreted as part of the stem. The prefixes would be regarded as consonantal, as in NWS or in Amarna letters from the majority of the Canaanite sites. The underlying 1SG person prefix would hence not be *a-* but \emptyset - (for *ʔ*).

Whenever there is a stem with an initial *i*, this vowel inhibits an overt manifestation of the prefix *a-*. In most cases, the *a* is deleted. In some cases (*primae e* verbs), the vowel *a* may change together with the initial vowel of the stem. The rules governing the variation can be summarized as follows:

1. 1SG $\rightarrow \{a\}$
or
1SG $\rightarrow \{\emptyset\}$ (lect dependent)
2. $a \rightarrow \text{null}/_i$
3. $a \rightarrow i/_e_{\text{stem}}$
 $i + e_{\text{stem}} \rightarrow i:$

It is now possible to divide the Byblos corpus into two groups according to the type of the 1SG verbal prefix. Some of the letters (about half of them) are left out of this partition, either because there are no 1SG forms in them or because all occurring 1SG forms are ambiguous with regard to their prefix. The other half may have either an *a-* prefix (which in some of the attested forms may not be overt) or a \emptyset - prefix. The *a-* group includes EA 74, 75, 81, 82, 83, 85, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 105, 107, 108, 109, 114, 116, 117, 118, 119, 121, 122, 126, 127, 132, 135, 137, 138, 362, and perhaps also EA 86. The \emptyset - group includes EA 94, 123, ZA 86, and perhaps also EA 106. However, as ambiguity of 1SG forms shows wherever a verbal stem opens with either the vowel *u* (as in standard Akkadian) or the vowel *i*, it may well be that some other letters should be attributed to the second group.

5.3 Code switching

There remains, however, one letter that could not be attributed to either one of these groups by using the same methodology. This is EA 136, which was written by a scribe who, sometime during his career, may have absorbed some northern influence into his chancellery language. How can we detect such a personal history?

This is indicated, *inter alia*, by forms like the Middle Assyrian nominal form *e-pu-uš* ‘making’ (l. 32; CAD: E: 191) and the northern Peripheral Akkadian particle *in-du-um* ‘when’ (l. 24; cf. AHw: 1420b s.v. *undu*). Middle Assyrian forms are typical of northern Peripheral Akkadian (von Soden 1979; Huehnergard 1989: 276-80; Izre’el 1991a: I: §6.1). On the whole, however, the language of

³²Moran suggests relating EA 362 to EA 126, EA 129 and EA 137 (Moran 1992: 206; cf. Izre’el 1995b: 140-1).

this scribe exhibits typical NWS traits that are common in the Amarna correspondence, so that his primary cuneiform education must have been local. This is precisely the opposite case from the Jerusalem scribe for whom Moran (1975a = 2003: #17) has most convincingly shown that he had received his cuneiform education in the north, as his language exhibits mostly linguistic traits found in Syrian letters, and his letters exhibit traditional Canaanite-Akkadian formations only occasionally.

As for the 1SG prefix-conjugation verbal forms, apart from the *e-* initial form *e-ma-e* ‘I have rebuffed’ (l. 14), there appears the typical Amarna shift of *e>i* in *i-pu-ša¹(MA)-am* ‘I do’ (l. 28) and probably also in *iš-me* ‘I heard’ (l. 15).³³ Two other 1SG forms are *im-lu-uk* ‘I considered’ (l. 26) and *iš-ta-ni* ‘I repeated’ (l. 17). These forms should be interpreted as having a \emptyset - prefix when compared with other forms of the paradigm such as *yi-im-lu-uk* ‘may he consider’ (ll. 36, 40). Cf. also in other letters *aš-ta-ni* (e.g., EA 137: 5). Another 1SG form is *ú-qa-mu* ‘I expect’ (l. 38), which is ambiguous with respect to the person prefix in both standard Akkadian and Canaanite-Akkadian. Therefore, we may interpret this form as having a \emptyset - prefix as well. There is, however, also one standard Akkadian form among the 1SG verbs in this text: *a-tu-ur* ‘I returned’ (l. 33).

With this verb, a switch into standard Akkadian is indeed made. Moreover, this standard Akkadian form does not come by itself. The following verb also constitutes an exception, as it is the only 3SGM form in this letter that lacks the prefix *y-*: *id-du-ul³⁴* ‘it was closed’ (l. 34).³⁵ These two standard Akkadian verbal forms appear in successive clauses that follow the Middle Assyrian nominal form *e-pu-uš* ‘making’ (l. 32) cited above. The scribe may have been acquainted with the common Canaanite-Akkadian forms for ‘making,’ viz., *epe:šu* or *ipšu* (Ebeling in Knudtzon 1915: II: 1403, 1405). Nevertheless, he chose to use in this case a form which he had come to learn in his visit to the north, viz., *epu:š*. This word has now become a trigger for switching into standard Akkadian.³⁶

It is interesting to note that the switch did not affect the syntactic level (and phraseology), yet it did act upon morphology. All following forms, beside *atu:r* and *iddul*, are morphologically identical with their standard Akkadian counterparts,³⁷ as is usually the case with non-verbal forms in Canaanite-Akkadian. The outcome is as follows:

(19) *ù al-ka-ti* (31) *a-na É-šu aš-šum* (32) *e-pu-uš DÙG.GA bi-ri<-ni/u>* (33) *ù a-na-ku a-tu-ur a-na É-ia* (34) *ù id-du-ul É iš-tu* (35) *pa-ni-ia*

So I went to his house to establish amity between <us>, and I returned to my house, but the house was closed for me.

(EA 136: 30-35; the string affected by the switching is underlined)

We may now conclude that EA 136 should be attributed to that group of letters in which the 1SG prefix of the verb agrees with the one attested in southern letters, i.e., it regularly shows the prefix \emptyset -.

³³This reading is to be preferred to a hypothetical one *eš₁₅-me*, since this form should be compared with *yi-iš-me* on l. 6 of the same letter.

³⁴Occurrences of this stem with *u* are restricted to the Amarna correspondence (*CAD*: E: 25b; cf. note 35).

³⁵There seems to be a general tendency in Canaanite-Akkadian to inflect verbs of the N stem in the suffix conjugation. The pattern used in these cases is usually the standard Akkadian 3SGM verbal form, i.e., with an initial *i* (cf. Rainey 1973: 250-4, 1996: II: 333-7 for N forms of *epe:šu*; Izre’el 1978: 44-5 for *ipattaru:*, 1998a: 30-1). Had this been the case in our letter as well, we should have analyzed *iddul* as */iddul/+ø*, i.e., as having the \emptyset suffix of the 3SGM (for *iddul* as an N form see *CAD*: E: 26b). However, of the three forms of *ede:lu* in Amarna this is the only one inflected according to the standard Akkadian norm. The other two are *yi-du-ul* (EA 197: 9, Damascus); *nu-ú-du-lu* (EA 100: 39, Iqata). Moran (1992: 217 n. 6) prefers an active meaning for this form.

³⁶For code switching and triggering, see Clyne 1967, especially chapter 5. See also Auer 1984, 1995, 1999.

³⁷I am unable to tell whether the restored pronominal suffix in *bi-ri-* should be restored as Canaanite and Canaanite-Akkadian *-nu* or as Akkadian *-ni* (as in l. 13 of this letter). It would be nice to have *-ni* here, in accordance with the suggested code-switching rule.

The exceptional form, viz., *atu:r*, is a result of code switching. This is a special feature of this scribe, which may have originated from an exceptional educational background.

5.4 Conclusion

In this section I have tried to describe in detail one feature of the Canaano-Akkadian dialect of Byblos and to show the major types of triggers that operate on the formation of variants within the linguistic system of this dialect. We should remember that the task of describing a continuum of variants is a very complex one, since it involves thousands of linguistic features in massive interplay within the linguistic system of both the community and the individual. In the next section, I will touch briefly upon possible relationships between individual elements within a single system and the implications thereof.

6 Implications for the continuum theory

6.1 Synchrony and diachrony

I have dealt in detail with one morpheme in the language of the Canaanite scribes from Byblos. After establishing rules for the apparently exceptional forms, we may posit two variants for the 1SG person prefix: *a-* and *ø-* (for *ʔ-*). I have formulated some prerequisites and rules for the exceptional forms. These rules do not act equally in all lects (or in all texts). Some of the stipulations may be extralinguistic. This is notably the case with EA 136, where the special background of its scribe may account for exceptional forms. Occurrences of this morpheme have been sought both vertically, i.e., throughout the text, and horizontally, i.e., checking similar occurrences in other texts of the same subcorpus and sometimes even throughout the whole Amarna correspondence.

This was carried out in the framework of investigating the synchronic details of the language. I have also touched upon some diachronic aspects, especially in my endeavor to determine the requirements for the appearance of exceptional forms and to formulate operative rules for their generation. It is necessary to stress this point, since sometimes only an investigation into the origin of one form or another can explain its occurrence. This is especially true when trying to detect borrowing in general, and the borrowing of stems in particular. Of course, borrowing is a historical event. Otherwise it would seem that the formulation of rules for the exceptional forms and the categorical distribution of lexemes upon which such rules operate are ad hoc or artificial. The resulting rules must, however, reflect only the synchronic state of the language.

6.2 Similar forms, different structures

Returning to the output of the various 1SG forms, the variation is between forms beginning with *a* and those beginning with *i*. The question that we are faced with when trying to determine the inner structure of the respective forms is where the morpheme boundary is. Forms such as *i:puš* ‘I made’ (standard Akkadian *e:puš*), *išme* ‘I heard’ (standard Akkadian *ešme*) or *i:de* ‘I know’ (=standard Akkadian), as well as forms like *izziz* ‘I stand’ (standard Akkadian *azziz*), *ištapar* ‘I have written’ (standard Akkadian *aštapar*) or *inaššaru* ‘I guard’ (standard Akkadian *anaššaru*), may be found in letters of either of the two groups. The underlying 1SG morpheme, whether *a-* or *ø-*, is not overtly expressed in these forms. In other words, the surface structure of verbs with either of these two variant prefixes may be similar or identical.³⁸

³⁸Robert Wilson (p. c.; cf. Gumperz and Wilson 1971) noted a similar morphological interference that was hard for him to account for in the contact languages of the Kupwad village in India. The future formation of the verb in standard Urdu is marked by the sequence

{stem+person/number+g+gender/number}.

The other three languages spoken in that village have a future formation marked by a sequence of only three morphemes, viz.,

{stem+future-marker+person/number/gender (only in the 3SG)}.

For some lects, when compared with other closely related lects, we are faced with minimal overt variation. As mentioned, many of the Byblos texts are ambiguous with respect to the underlying form of the 1SG verbal prefix. In other cases, a certain text may attest several 1SG forms, all of them but one having an initial *i*, yet it should be grouped with the *a*-prefix texts. Another text, with a similar distribution of forms, may be ascribed to the \emptyset - group, the *a*- form being triggered by a linguistic or an extralinguistic trigger. Yet another text might attest forms with an initial *i* or *a* for the same or similar forms. This is probably the case with EA 90 (although the evidence is fragmentary), where we have both *aš-t[a-pár]* and *iš-t[a-pár]* (see above, §5.2.2.3.2). This text seems to fluctuate between the forms of a specific lexeme, a phenomenon which very rarely occurs.

There is high percentage of common forms, significant fluctuation between forms, and a high degree of variation among the various lects of the Byblos corpus, which is a relatively homogeneous group of texts. It thus seems better to describe the entirety of lects not as two (or more) different linguistic systems, but rather as a single system with variation. Given that all other person prefixes of the verb are identical in two given lects, so that the only difference between their respective verbal systems is the difference in the prefix of the 1SG, and given that many of the 1SG forms have an identical or similar overt forms in these two lects, then there is no point in postulating two distinct systems for these lects.

The deeper we get into our investigation of the various grammatical features and their variation, the clearer the picture will become. Therefore, I hereby call for further investigation into these matters, using the suggested methodology.

6.3 Interrelationships between individual linguistic features

A most important area of investigation is the interrelations between linguistic features within a single system. Linguistic continua may be described by a scale comprising all possible isolects (i.e., varieties with just a single feature distinguishing between them). Such a scale should cover all ranges of variation within the described language. It has been suggested that this scale should reflect gradual change in implicational terms, i.e., that each successive change along this scale would be implied by the preceding one (DeCamp 1971; Petyt 1980: 187-194; Rickford 2002: 161 n. 6).

Whether or not implicational scales would prove helpful in a description of the Amarna continuum is still to be sought. At this stage of research, it is important to note that we should pay close attention to any differences in the observed feature between closely related lects, and watch for implications for other features of the respective lects.

As regards our small illustrative investigation, it is interesting to check the relative status of the 1SG prefix against the 3SGM one. There is a plethora of possible factors that may determine the output of any single 3SGM form; however, this is not the place to delve into this investigation. For our needs, it will suffice to note that forms of the 3SGM may begin with either the vowel *i* or the consonant *y* (spelled by the syllabogram PI).

Now, in those lects where the 3SGM prefix is exclusively *i*-, it usually implies that the 1SG prefix will be *a*- (this is, of course, similar to what we find in standard Akkadian). The evidence from the

Kupwad Urdu has taken the person/number morpheme of the 3PL together with the following *g* found in the standard Urdu formation to be used as an invariable future marker, viz., *-eng-*. It now lines up with the other Kupwad languages. The 3PL verbal forms are, however, identical in both standard Urdu and Kupwad Urdu, even if their underlying morphology is different. Cf.

Standard Urdu {*ja+en+g+e*} vs. Kupwad Urdu {*ja+eng+e*} ‘they (m) will go’

Standard Urdu {*ja+en+g+i*} vs. Kupwad Urdu {*ja+eng+i*} ‘they (f) will go’.

Indeed, similar or identical outputs of different underlying formations in contact languages are an important factor in making mutual interference possible (Weinreich 1953: §§2.11-2.12, 2.32-2.34).

Byblos corpus is too scanty to draw any solid conclusions regarding this issue, as most of the Byblos letters have *y-* in their system. Still, this is precisely what we find in the Jerusalem letters, as well as in some letters from Tyre. Both dialects have *i-* for the 3SGM, so that the 1SG prefix is *a-*.

However, in two of the Tyre letters the situation is different. EA 155 attests six 1SG prefix-conjugation forms, all six starting with the vowel *i* (once: *e*):

id-din ‘I gave’ (l. 27); *i-te-r[u-ub]* ‘I entered’ (l. 31); *e-lé-ú* ‘I can’ (l. 34); *i-mur* ‘I saw’ (l. 35); *i-pu-uš* ‘I(?) shall do’ (l. 45); *i-la-ak* ‘I am going’ (l. 69).

It must be noted that all forms are of weak verbs, so that any solid conclusions concerning the underlying prefix are excluded. EA 147 has (apart from the formulaic *am-quit* ‘I fall (lit. fell)’ in the opening formula, l. 3):

i-za-kar₄ ‘I remember’ (l. 23); *iš-me* ‘I heard’ (ll. 30, 34); *ú-bal* ‘I am carrying’ (l. 40); *iq-bi* ‘I said’ (l. 57); *i-mur* ‘I saw’ (l. 59); *a-na-an-šur* ‘I guard’ (l. 61); *iš-pu-ur* ‘I sent’ (l. 70).

Thus, there is only one verbal form in this letter, viz., *ananšur*, that overtly has the prefix *a-*.

According to the procedure used for investigating the Byblos corpus, we should either formulate a rule determining the appearance of the *a-* prefix in this single form, or — to match the findings in the rest of the Tyre letters — try to formulate rules determining the appearance of verbal forms that lack this overt *a-* prefix. In other words, we must determine whether the systemic morpheme of the 1SG is *ø-* or *a-*. I will not get into this investigation here, and it should be taken up in future research. One way or another, the output of the various forms is essentially the same. The importance of such an investigation will show up when trying to determine the relationship between lects and their relative position within the continuum.

I believe that no sharp distinction can be made between the receptive and the active registers of the diglossic Canaanite scribe when we look not at the extreme points but at the whole corpus. This will be shown after the completion of a thorough analysis of all grammatical features throughout the entire lectal continuum of the Amarna correspondence. In terms of the community, we are likely to find a continuum in which implicational or other similarly-designed scales will show gradual changes between its two extremes. I believe that such texts as the Jerusalem letters and those of Tyre, among others, together with some few of the Byblos letters (EA 84, EA 87 and EA 127), will be located at a point closer to the Egyptian Akkadian extreme. The letters from Amurru and its neighboring cities will also be located still closer to Peripheral Akkadian, with the older Abdi-Ashirta letters tangential to the Canaanite ones (Izre’el 1991a). Letters from other areas of Canaan will be located closer to or at the opposite extreme, with Gath (EA 63-65, 278-284, 366) perhaps as their uttermost point of reference.

7 Concluding remarks

7.1 Variation, grammar and interpretation

Lastly, I would like to deal with a question that would seem unnecessary, even ridiculous, to some, yet of utmost importance to others. Let me put this question rather bluntly: What is it good for? Why do we need such large-scale and deep theoretical research on Canaanite-Akkadian?

To answer this question, let us first have a look at one passage from the Byblos corpus. In EA 118, Ribhaddi asks the pharaoh to send him guardsmen. Ribhaddi assures the pharaoh that he is a loyal servant who — unlike others — would not leave the king in spite of all difficulties. The *hupšu*

people have left, since they had no provisions, and Sidon and Beirut do not belong to the pharaoh anymore. ‘Send a commissioner to take (them),’ cries Ribhaddi, and adds:

(20) *ú-ul(+DÍŠ) i-te₉-zi-ib URU >IGI<* (35) *ù i-pa-tá-ra* (36) *a-na mu-ḫi-ka*
(EA 118: 34-36)

Knudtzon analyzed the first verb (*i-te₉-zi-ib*) as 3SGM and related the first sentence to the preceding one. The second verb (*i-pa-tá-ra*) was taken by him to be a 3PLF form (reading *ipaṭṭara*:, in accordance with standard Akkadian grammar). The subject was understood as the cities (feminine in letters from Canaan) mentioned before. Knudtzon translated thus:

(Sende einen Vorsteher, welcher sie nimmt) (und) nich *l* Stadt übrig läßt! Oder sie werden abtrünnig gegen dich. (Knudtzon 1915: I: 515)

However, analysis of the other verbal forms in this text in particular, and in the whole corpus of the Byblos letters in general (together with other considerations³⁹), would not permit such a rendering. In accordance with our analysis above (§5.2), the first verb, *i:tezib*, must be regarded as 1SG (cf. standard Akkadian *e:tezib*). The same applies to the second verb, *ipaṭṭara* (with a short *a!*).⁴⁰ There is one other 1SG verb attested in this letter, yet it has an overt *a-* prefix: *aš-ta-pa-ru* ‘I have been sending’ (l. 9). The initial *i* of *ipaṭṭara* must hence be explained.

A survey of all forms of *paṭa:ru* in the Amarna correspondence will reveal that in the prefix conjugation, the usual pattern of this verb is *iparras*. The Akkadian *iparras* pattern tends, in various cases, to inhibit the addition of the NWS prefix *y-* of the 3SGM,⁴¹ so that the original Akkadian 3SGM form, *ipaṭṭar*, is now admitted into the mixed language as the stem. As such, it is used also for other persons, as is the case with the 1SG form in our letter. The form *ipaṭṭara* of EA 118 should therefore be analyzed as follows:

a+ ipaṭṭara → *ipaṭṭara*

That is, the prefix *a-* is deleted when preceding the stem, which opens with the vowel *i*. This, indeed, is the common rule for many other 1SG forms, as we have seen above (§5.2). For this lexeme, the same procedure occurs also in EA 126: 47, also from Byblos (cf. Rainey 1978a: 86). Interestingly enough, it is also found in two occurrences outside the Canaanite linguistic area: in EA 52: 46 from Qatna and in EA 56: 11, probably also from Qatna (Klengel 1965-70: II: 109; Moran 1992: 129 n. 1). (Cf. also EA 197: 19, a letter from Damascus, where most of the other 1SG verbal forms fit the pattern as well.) As is the case with *naša:ru*, this formation is the result of the confusion between the D and G stems of Akkadian (§5.2.2.3.3). This is suggested by the 2SGM form *ti-pa-ti-ir*, attested in another letter from Byblos (EA 138:11). In that form, the vowel *i* follows the second root-radical instead of the more common *a*. This *i*, however, does not indicate the preterite as it does in standard Akkadian, and this form is to be translated ‘you are leaving.’

³⁹(a) The vertical wedge found just following the sign UL should not be read as the numeral ‘1.’ Rather it is a part of the sign UL itself. Similar forms of signs with an additional vertical wedge are found elsewhere in Amarna (Moran 1975b: 157 n. 1 = 2003: 286 n. 35).

(b) The IGI sign at the end of l. 34 has been interpreted by Knudtzon as a phonetic complement of the Sumerogram URU that precedes. He read it *lim*. However, the genitive case would fit neither Knudtzon’s translation nor any other possible interpretation of this clause. This sign is best understood as the beginning of an Û sign which the scribe had started. He then realized he should have written it at the beginning of the next line, yet he did not erase the wedges already inscribed at the end of l. 34. Such double writings are not at all rare in the Amarna letters, notably including the sign Û (e.g., EA 170: 21-22, Amurru).

⁴⁰So also Rainey 1978a: 86 s.v. *paṭa:ru*. For an interpretation of both verbs in the 1SG see already Winckler 1896: 199. See further note 42 below.

⁴¹Cf., one of many instances, *i-na-kar₅-mi* (EA 137: 17), where all other 3SGM forms do have an initial *y-* (see above, §3.2.3).

Let us now return to EA 118. Our detailed grammatical analysis yields the following translation and interpretation:

I have not left the city — so how could I desert you?

Ribhaddi thus assures the pharaoh of his loyalty. This is done by his confirmation that he has not left the city in spite of all difficulties. This is, indeed, a theme that is reiterated time and again in Ribhaddi's letters (cf. Moran 1985). It is also found in this very same letter (ll. 39-41; cf. ll. 15-17).⁴²

This example shows what a detailed grammatical analysis of the Amarna letters and the study of variation is good for in the domain of philology and interpretation of texts. In his chapter on the El-Amarna tablets for *The Cambridge Ancient History*, Albright writes:

Because of the nature of this jargon, it is not enough for the would-be interpreter to know Akkadian; he must also be a specialist in Hebrew and Ugaritic, and above all he must be so familiar with all the letters that he knows what to expect from their writers. (Albright 1966: 4)

It is not enough to be familiar with all the letters in order to achieve this goal. As I believe the discussions above have illustrated, we will need much more than just that. A detailed grammatical analysis of any of the subcorpora involved has already proved its necessity for a sound and correct interpretation. Among other works, our understanding of the history of Amurru in the Amarna age has been dramatically changed due to the correct understanding of a single grammatical form, in fact one single morpheme (Izre'el and Singer 1990: §3.2.2; Singer in Izre'el 1991a: II: 151).

I hope to have shown that variation is one of the basic characteristics of Canaano-Akkadian, one that actually shapes its system. Therefore, it must play an important role in our description of its grammar.

7.2 Synchrony and diachrony

At this juncture, let us return for a moment to post-creole continua, i.e., those linguistic areas in which the creole has remained in close contact with its model language and has kept being influenced by it. It has been claimed for such linguistic situations that variation is the synchronic manifestation of the diachronic development of the language. This insight may apply to any other linguistic continuum as well, be it a geographical dialect continuum, a sociolectal continuum, etc. (Bailey 1973; Bickerton 1975; Petyt 1980: 185-197; Rickford 1987: 35-8; Fasold 1990: ch. 8; Labov 1994: ch. 1).

In my study of the ventive morpheme in the Akkadian texts of Amurru (Izre'el 1984; see §2.3.1 above), I discussed a diachronic aspect of the development of Canaano-Akkadian. I have shown that a new plural morpheme, i.e. *-u:ni(m)*, has been formed by blending the standard Akkadian plural morpheme *-u:* and the allomorph *-ni(m)* of the ventive. This, so I claimed, was a stage in the introduction of the NWS modus morpheme into Canaano-Akkadian. I have also suggested, that 'the various linguistic systems reflected by the various corpora are in fact those linguistic systems of different phases of linguistic development retained by scribes in diverse peripheral schools' (Izre'el 1984: 92).

This insight may now be better understood in the framework of continuum research, where we see variation as an inherent feature of language. In standard Peripheral Akkadian, the ventive ending is

⁴²Moran (1992: 196 with n. 3), leaning on the formula *a:la eze:bu – pa:ta:ru* in the Byblos letters, suggests 'lest I abandon the city and go off to you.' My translation takes into consideration the modal form of the second verb in contrast with *pa:ta:ti* in other occurrences of this lexeme sequence.

operative, very much as in standard Mesopotamian Akkadian. For example, in Ugarit Akkadian the ventive is used throughout in both its allomorphs; still, there are four cases where the morph *-ni(m)* is used without the morph *-u:* to indicate the plural (Huehnergard 1989: 166).⁴³ In Amurru Akkadian and in some related lects, the morph *-ni(m)* has lost its ventive force, as explained above, whereas in Canaano-Akkadian, with some exceptions, the morph *-na* is used to mark the imperfective (=indicative) (Izre'el 1998a: 25, 36). Synchronic variation thus exhibits the various stages on the way to the formation of the basilect extreme of this continuum (i.e., the lect most remote from the model language). In our case it is the mixed language of the Canaanite scribes, which we have termed Canaano-Akkadian.

7.3 Towards sociolinguistics

The diachronic aspect reflected by linguistic variation raises another very interesting and most important question. That is the sociolinguistic aspect of the formation of Canaano-Akkadian.

We have some evidence for Akkadian writing in Palestine both prior to and contemporary with the Amarna period (Horowitz, Oshima and Sanders 2002). From the Middle Babylonian period, a Gilgamesh fragment is known from Megiddo (Goetze and Levy 1959; George 2003: 339-347), suggesting learning at that site.⁴⁴ From the same period, i.e., roughly the Amarna period, we know of a private letter found at Shechem, and in which there is evidence for cuneiform learning of the inhabitants of Shechem (Böhl 1974; Demsky 1990). This letter was written in standard Peripheral Akkadian, not in Canaano-Akkadian, as were the Amarna letters from that site (cf. Rabiner 1981). These finds and others, roughly contemporary of the Amarna period, add to the finds of older cuneiform materials from that area, e.g., Byblos (Edzard 1985:249 and 256 nn. 9-10; van der Toorn 2000: 98). Apart from such finds, Canaanite sites are mentioned in cuneiform tablets from outside Canaan and Mesopotamia itself, as well as from times before the Amarna periods (e.g., Aharoni 1967: 87; Rainey and Notely 2006: Chapter 5.). All these data raise the question of the connections between Palestine and Syria and the Mesopotamian cultures and political powers before the Amarna period (cf. Labat 1962: 26-7; Tadmor 1977: 101-2; Edzard 1985: 252-5).

I believe that a thorough investigation into the formation of the mixed Canaano-Akkadian language of the Canaanite Amarna scribes may help to resolve this enigma. Some clues may be found in searching for the origins of specific linguistic features, e.g., in locating various pure Assyrian linguistic traits in a single subcorpus or throughout the whole Amarna corpus (cf. above, §5.3). For such an investigation, the study of variation is of extreme importance, since variation, as we have already mentioned, may prove to be but another aspect of diachronic development. Therefore, we must investigate the synchronic aspects of Canaano-Akkadian not just for its own sake, but also for the sake of understanding its line of development; in other words, to search for an answer to the question of how this language evolved. I believe that through the study of variation we shall find an answer to this question, not only with regard to the purely linguistic components, but also to its sociolinguistic ones.

Many years ago, a call for research into the sociolinguistic aspects of Canaano-Akkadian was raised by Oppenheim. With a slight emendation of the time-span mentioned, this call may now be raised again:

Although these letters have been known for more than half a century and have been the topic of a number of scholarly investigations, much more is to be learned of their style, the provenience and literacy of the scribes and scribal schools (to teach

⁴³Out of six plural forms with *-ni(m)*, the date of only one text is known, which is later than the Amarna period.

⁴⁴Even if the clay on which this Gilgamesh piece was written was not local (cf. George, *loc. cit.*).

Akkadian to foreigners) that flourished all over the Near East at that period, and the linguistic features of their several vernaculars. (Oppenheim 1964: 278-9)

Some studies of scribal education in Palestine have been conducted since then (van der Toorn 2000:105-8 with previous references). It is the integration of purely linguistic investigation and analysis into the study of extralinguistic features done hitherto that I call for here.

To illustrate what kind of questions we may ask when dealing with the linguistic material of the Amarna letters, let us note the following, out of many similar questions that can be asked:

1. Since there is an observable tendency of Canaanite-Akkadian to make use of a single borrowed verbal stem into their system, one may ask why was it precisely that stem of a specific verb that had been borrowed and adopted.; e.g., why for *daga:lu* 'look' it is the *idaggal* stem, while for *šapa:ru* 'write, send' it is mostly *išpur*, the stem used for the preterite in standard Akkadian.
2. Why does the Jerusalem scribe, while adding a special address to his fellow Egyptian scribe (EA 287: 64-70), write in a different register that is closer in its linguistic character to the Canaanite substratum than the rest of the letter?
3. What can we learn from a comparison between the language of the Megiddo letters with that of letters from other cities in its vicinity (cf. Rabiner 1981: section VII), in the context of our knowledge of the finding of a Gilgamesh fragment in that site?⁴⁵
4. Why is the letter found at Shechem so different in its language from the Shechem letters found in Amarna?

Of course, I have no answers yet for these and many more questions that may arise, since there is still a long way ahead of us until a thorough and deep understanding of the Amarna linguistic continuum is achieved. Such a study is not only far beyond the scope of the present paper, but also far ahead of us. We are now only at the beginning of the investigation into the deep and subtle details of lectal variation in Canaanite-Akkadian. Still, having at hand the linguistic knowledge accumulated since the discovery of the Amarna corpus, we are now in a better position than before to study variation and its implications. As for me, I sincerely hope to have laid another small paving stone in the long and complicated way towards the achievement of this goal, namely, a real understanding of the nature of Canaanite-Akkadian.

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⁴⁵ Some remarks regarding this issue have been offered in Izre'el 2003: 91.

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