Some Methodological Requisites for the Study of the Amarna Jargon
Notes on the Essence of That Language
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The text as it is presented here is essentially the same version as submitted for publication in the proceedings of 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 this paper have been circulating and were occasionally referred to by some of my colleagues on various occasions (which I appreciate a lot!). Therefore, I felt it necessary to make the paper available to the public. The text presented below is a copy of the version I submitted for publication in 1987, only slightly edited and with some (very few) bibliographical additions.

This paper was revised in 2007; see
<http://www.tau.ac.il/~izreel/publications/CanAkkMethRequisites_2007.pdf>.

The first part of this paper (sections 1-4) has been thoroughly revised for publication in: *Language and Nature: Papers presented to John Huehnergard on the Occasion of His 60th Birthday*, ed. by Rebecca Hasselbach and Nảᶜama Pat-El, Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization, 67, Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2012, pp. 171-217.

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1 Introduction[1]

1.1 The Amarna letters are thus named after the site (in Egypt) in which they were discovered. These letters were sent to the Egyptian pharaohs Amenophis the third and his son Akhenaten at the beginning of the 14th century B.C. The senders were other kings, viz., kings of Babylonia, Assyria, Hatti and Mitanni, and minor princes and rulers of the Near East at that time. These letters were written in the cuneiform script, most of them in Akkadian, or what was thought by the scribes who wrote these letters to be Akkadian (I will elaborate on this issue later.) Akkadian, or what is now termed Peripheral Akkadian (henceforth: PA), served during the second millennium B.C. 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 city rulers of Canaan, which had been at that time under the sovereignty of Egypt. If we examine the letters as regards their linguistic structure, we shall realize that most of them were not written in the common PA dialect, but rather in a mixed language: Akkadian predominated in its semantic skeleton almost entirely, while the Canaanite language (whatever this might have been), the mother-tongue of the scribes, the writers of these letters, predominated in the domain of grammar. It influenced its syntax and its morphology, and affected the phonology and semantics. Here and there a purely Canaanite word would appear, written in the cuneiform syllabary, among the contents of the letter, to translate a particularly difficult Akkadian word or a (Sumerian) logogram, forming the well known glosses of the Amarna letters.

To spotlight 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 into two passages from the Amarna correspondence.

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[1] Thanks are due to Robert Wilson, Anson F. Rainey and Naphtali Kinberg, who commented on some of the issues presented in this paper. The whole responsibility for the ideas expressed is, of course, mine.

(1) $^{\text{m}}$*ḫa-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*
      DÙG.GA-*ta* (7) *ù ḫa-ad-ia-ku ma-gal ma-gal* (8) *ù* KUR-*ia ù* ŠEŠ.MEŠ-*ia* (9) LÚ.MEŠ.ÌR *ša*
      LUGAL EN-*ia* (10) *ù* LÚ.MEŠ.ÌR $^{\text{m}}$*tù-u-tù* EN-*ia* (11) *ḫa-du$_4$-nim* ⌈*ma-gal*⌉ *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* ⌈*d*.UTU$_x$(ERIM)-*ia*⌉ (16) *ù iš-tu a-ma-te*.⌈MEŠ⌉ $^{\text{m}}$*tù-u-tù* (17) EN-*ia la*
      a-pa-aṭ-ṭar
      Hatip 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 servants of Tutu, my
      lord, are very very glad when the breath of the king, my lord, came to me. From the words of
      my lord, my God, my Sun-God, and from the words of Tutu, my lord, I shall not part.
      (EA 164: 4-17)

(2)   *a-nu-ma* (23) ⌈*iṣ*⌉-*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 his servant: There is war from the mountain against me. So I
      built "*bani:ti*" one 'house', Manhati by name, to prepare for the *pdt*-troops of the king,
      my lord.
      (EA 292: 22-32)

The first passage is taken from EA 164, 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 EA 292, a letter of Ba'lushiptu, prince of the city of Gezer in southern Palestine.

For the differences note especially the use of the verbs. Both the forms of the verbs and the
Tense-Mood-Aspect systems of the two respective letters, are different. 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 (again: *illakam*), and uses the normal Akkadian present-future and stative formations.
The Gezer letter, on the other hand, has forms with initial *i* for the 1SG (*iṣṣuru*, l. 23), while the 3SG
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 its active meaning, both in attaching the suffix
verbal person morphemes to Akkadian stems (as in *raṣpa:ti*, l. 29), and by using pure Canaanite
patterns (here this is attested only in the gloss for *raṣpa:ti*, viz., *bani:ti*). Another important feature is
the use of the Canaanite verbal modi morphemes, as in *iṣṣuru* and *ištemu* (ll. 23 and 24 respectively),
reflecting the indicative ending, or *yilmad*, reflecting the jussive -ϕ suffix.

1.2 The state of the art

A hundred years have passed since the discovery of the Amarna letters in 1887, and considerable
research effort has been put into the language of these letters. The last decade of the 19th 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), still the standard edition in use today. 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 took some notice of the mixed nature of the
Canaano-Akkadian jargon in which the majority of the letters 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 was the first to see that the Canaanite modal system
was an inherent feature of the texts from Canaan (Moran 1950a; also 1951, 1960). The eighth decade
of the 20th century was the age of morphological study, mainly by Rainey (1971, 1973, 1975, 1976,
1978b; also 1970, 1978a), and the beginnings of holistic and detailed studies of several corpora

within the Canaanite domain or closely related corpora, written at Tel-Aviv University under Rainey's supervision (Nitzan 1973; Izre'el 1976, 1978, 1985; Finkel 1977; Rabiner 1981). The Mitanni corpus and Egyptian Akkadian were also given special treatments (Adler 1976; Cochavi Rainey 1988).

Considerable progress has been made, but there is much to be done. We still do not have a comprehensive grammar for the language of all the letters. It would seem that the reason for such a basic lack a century after these texts became known to the scholarly world is our misunderstanding of the true linguistic nature of this language.

It may be illuminating, in this connection, to quote the words of Moran, who — more than anyone else — has contributed to our understanding of the structure of this language. In the entry on the Amarna tablets in the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* from 1971, he wrote:

> 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.[2] This is especially true of the letters from Phoenicia and Palestine... (Moran 1971: 933)

Well, that is a good description as far as an "Akkadophile" is concerned. The language of the Canaanite scribes would indeed be regarded to be a barbarous Akkadian. With regard to the Canaanite, Moran says:

> From the glosses to Akkadian words, the non-Akkadian morphemes, the non-Akkadian use of morphemes common to the two languages, and the syntax in these letters, it is possible to reconstruct much of the Canaanite grammar in this period. (*loc. cit.*)

Another passage, written by Rainey, who has also devoted much time to the study of the Amarna language, may further illustrate the complexity of this view:

> A local Canaanite scribe, when writing to Egypt, might express himself in the W<est> S<emitic> modal system for 90 percent of his letter but still insert some purely M<iddle> B<abylonian> sentence that he had learned by rote in the schools (or that was furnished by him at the last minute by a fellow scribe). (Rainey 1978a: 3)

So the language of the Canaanite scribes is believed to be a degraded Akkadian, with many non-systematic or semi-systematic foreignisms. How one should overcome this problematic situation?

In his chapter on the El-Amarna tablets for *The Cambridge Ancient History*, Albright wrote:

> 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)

A century after the discovery of the Amarna tablets, it is high time that we asked ourselves: What does it mean to be "so familiar with all the letters that we know what to expect from their writers"?

It is with this question that I wish to deal in this paper. How, indeed, do we know what to expect from the Amarna Canaanite scribes? Is it enough to be familiar with all the letters? That certainly is an essential prerequisite, but it is by no means sufficient. By way of analogy, how do we know what to expect from ourselves or from our interlocutors when we speak in our own native tongue? Or, how do we know what to expect from a native speaker of French when we have a conversation with him in English, today's most common lingua franca? It is our intuitive, inherent and acquired

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[2] I find this comment quite perplexing. How can a speaker be ignorant of his own native speech?

knowledge of the language that dictates our expectations in both cases. In other words, it is our inherent recognition of its structure, i.e., its grammar and lexicon.

Indeed, there can be no other answer to the analogical question posited as regards the language of the Amarna Canaanite scribes. We shall know what to expect from these scribes only after studying carefully their writings and establishing the structural rules by which their language operates.

How such a target can be achieved?

1.3 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 dealing with the Canaanite Amarna corpus as a whole. Yet a serious obstacle immediately arises. Any studied subcorpus would reveal variation also within itself. Variation appears to be found everywhere throughout the Amarna correspondence, not only geographically-dependent, but also due to the tradition of each scribal school, sometimes as idiosyncrasies of a certain scribe, and even within one and the same letter.

It thus appears that variation is an inherent characteristic of the language of 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 innate structural component of this language. Our task is to formulate rules for its different manifestations within the letters.

In my study of the Amarna letters from Gezer I hope to have shown that the language of these letters exhibits a relatively solid linguistic system, not just a barbarous unsystematic conglomeration of linguistic elements to be treated as a corrupted variety of Akkadian.[3] Yet a grammar of the whole Canaanite Amarna corpus must take into account all kinds of variants attested. What is needed, then, is a sort of polylectal grammar,[4] that will encompass all existing variants and comprise variation into the description of the structure of the language.

1.4 Theoretical background

Recent progress in general linguistics may prove useful to the study and understanding of the Amarna linguistic structure. The twentieth century has seen a most significant progress in general and theoretical linguistics. Structuralism brought with it the need to distinguish between synchronic and diachronic studies of language. This brought into light the vigorous necessity in defining and describing the systemic relationships between linguistic components. This 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). To 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).

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[3]In spite of the pejorative manner which is sometimes implied in using the term *jargon*, I found this term the most suitable to label the language of the Amarna letters. Following Albright (1966: 4), I have chosen this term mainly for its meaning of a language used by a specific class or trade, and also for its meaning as a mixed language (cf. also Hall 1966: xiv).

[4]That is, describing many "lects" as a single linguistic system. The term "lect" 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.

General linguistics has developed interest in various specific aspects of human linguistic behavior within the community and of the individual. These are, among others, sociolinguistics, dialectology, bilingualism, multilingualism, and other phenomena of linguistic contact.

We have also been provided with many descriptions of hitherto unstudied languages. We have come to know various types of languages, some of them products of mutual contact between different languages. We have come to know contact products similar to the Canaanite Amarna language, such as stem borrowing in Maltese (cf. already Izre'el 1978: 79-80 n262); the African language Mbugu (or Ma'a), which consists of Bantu grammar and a non-Bantu lexicon (Goodman 1971); the hybrid language of Persian Jews known as Lotera:'i, in which Hebrew and Aramaic lexemes are introduced into the grammatical frame of their Persian dialects (Yarshater 1977); and the Aleut dialect of the Copper Island in the far eastern part of the USSR (near Alaska), in which the Russian inflectional morphemes have been introduced into the verbal system, yet the morphology of the noun remained untouched (Menovshchikov 1968: 404-5), a case very similar to the Amarna Canaano-Akkadian jargon. 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.

Special focus has been given, more recently in particular, to linguistic phenomena which were previously considered marginal, such as pidgin and creole languages. A pidgin is a largely reduced language that arises on the lexical basis of a model language in a bilingual or a multilingual society, where there is no common language in any of the indigenous tongues. 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; Todd 1974; Mühlhäusler 1986). 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 already mentioned — it is this specific branch of the linguistic science that may prove central to our understanding of language contact phenomena in depth.

This, and other branches of linguistics mentioned above, may contribute a great deal to our possibilities of investigation into the jargon of the Amarna Canaanite scribes in order to achieve a better understanding of its structure. Being products of language contact, we may find many instances of parallel developments and similar features in pidgin and creole languages. Through them we can achieve a better understanding of various structural traits of the Amarna language, and be aware of hitherto unrecognized contact manifestations.

1.5 Let us now return to variation. We have mentioned above that variation plays a central role in our ability to understand in depth the structure of the Amarna language. Parallels to this linguistic situation may 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. Variation is also a characteristic feature of post-creole continua situations, where there has been a continuous mutual contact between the spoken indigenous creole and its model language.

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 mixed jargon and the (Peripheral) Akkadian model language that are written.

Being a written language is not a minor aspect of the Amarna language, and may explain many of its linguistic traits. However, although it may explain the origin of various components in this complicated linguistic structure, the *structuring* of the system is essentially the same as in spoken languages. It must be stressed: the formation of the Amarna jargon cannot be understood unless it were spoken in some way sometimes along its history. 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 in pre-Amarna periods. We shall later return to the possibilities opened for future research in this field. However, already at this point it

must be stressed that a contemporary underlying spoken reality for the language attested in the Amarna letters can also be shown to have existed, even if not as a native tongue or in use in everyday speech.

This point deserves some dilation, as it serves as a basis from which we can have a much better viewpoint over the language and thus makes an important starting point for the formation of a polylectal grammar for it.

2 The Amarna language had an underlying spoken reality

2.1 Being a written language of rote, the language of the Amarna Canaanite scribes manifests conventional scribal formulaic phrases of various kinds, and some adopted learned spellings. These are found also in the Akkadian correspondence elsewhere, 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 at all times (cf. Oppenheim 1964: chapter V, especially p. 276; also Knutson 1982).

Akkadianisms of this kind are to be found in the Amarna language mostly in the opening formulae and in some few other formulaic phrases. But there are many other Akkadianisms as well. I will later 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 that language. Such an investigation, when taken up, will prove, I believe, that the Amarna jargon could not have been an artificial inventive creation 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). It must have been a product of a natural linguistic development, attested in various linguistic communities elsewhere. By implication this might prove an underlying spoken reality for that language.

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

2.2 Phonetic or phonological features representing underlying spoken reality

2.2.1   /i/ —> E = [i] —> [e] (evidence from the Lebanese Baqa`)

Let us note first some spellings attested in letters from the Lebanese Baqa`, which are unusual elsewhere in Amarna, 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 (some of them) in form (cf. Knudtzon 1915: II: 1278 n1). In these letters we find only once the sign *I*: ⌈*i*⌉-*na* "in" (EA 179: 21).[5] 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. Thus *e-ba-ša-nu* "we are" (EA 274: 8 etc.); *e-din* (most probably for /*idin*/) "give!" (EA 179: 23); *e-na-ṣa-ar* "I guard" (EA 179: 26; for 1SG forms with initial *i* see below, #5.2); 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); also [*ni*]-*e-na-ṣa-ar-šu* "we guard it" (l. 6). The scribe of this letter felt it necessary that the full verbal stem be shown in script while adding the 1PL person prefix *ni-*, so he did not omit its initial *E* sign. This *E* sign has thus become 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 written 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 such spellings

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[5]The sign *I* is quite clear in Schroeder's copy (1915: #103). Knudtzon inserted it between square brackets in his transliteration (1915: 690).

as *ni-e-nu* "we" (EA 174: 8 etc.); *te-na-ṣa-ru* "they (will) guard" (EA 180: 8); *e-ba-aš-še* "he is" (EA 179: 15), with *e* at the beginning and *še*, not *ši*, at the end; and the like. These spellings, although not rare in themselves in Amarna or in other PA dialects, may account — in this context — for the same phenomenon.

Whereas all these forms would account for their actual pronunciation in the mouth of the Baqa` scribes, such forms as *ni-e-ta-lí* and [*ni*]-*e-na-ṣa-ru* may perhaps have originated in the hand of a scribe who did not use this language but in his writing, as we have already noted above. Otherwise we would expect him to omit the *E* sign, at least in the second form. However, similar plene spellings elsewhere would not necessarily be interpreted in the same manner. Let us see one example to illustrate the case.

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 same manner as was demanded by his learned linguistic system, and usually spelled them according to the conventional practice. From within many prefix-conjugation verbal forms, there is, however, one which deviates from the norm: *ti-e-te-pu-š*[*u-na*^?] "they have become" (EA 129: 88). The underlying Byblian phonology 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 too has all 3PL forms beginning just with a *TI* sign (e.g., *ti-pu-šu-na*, l. 8; cf. also the 3SGF *ti-pu-šu*, ll. 34, 44). That is why we should not interpret the exceptional spelling as an overt manifestation of an alleged underlying phonological system, as we did in the Baqa` letters, but on the contrary: as a pseudo-corrected form. 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 1986). 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 endeavors, 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 after similar phenomena. It must be noted that occurrences of pseudo-corrections in any written language would call for a conclusion of its having an underlying spoken reality (cf. Blau 1970; cf. also Blau 1961, introduction).

2.2.3   (Akkadian) /*a*/ —> [e]; (Amarna) [e] —> [i]

The differences in the 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 and other forms of predominating *e* formations of the Akkadian superstratum in some dialects of PA. In another paper (Izre'el 1986) I suggested a phonological intervention that served as one of the initializing forces to the admission of the Canaanite person prefixes to the Amarna verbal system. It may well be that we can explain by phonological factors certain features of the Amarna language, and this could serve as a proof for its being a spoken language, at least to some extent or at some point of its history.

In the above-mentioned paper I showed that in some older Amurru letters, *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 in the infinitive. The same applies to most of the Byblos letters; e.g., *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); etc. Hence it may well be that in Byblos too, and in other Canaanite sites as well, we should account for a different phonological structure not only of the NWS substrate dialects, but of the Amarna mixed language as well.

2.2.4   Vowel deletion

Still in the domain of phonology, we have, so I believe, a strong proof for the spoken reality of the mixed language itself in some of manifestations in spelling. Let us look at two examples: (1) *ti-ir-bu* "you enter" (EA 102: 11, a letter from Byblos); (2) ⌈*ir*⌉-*bu-ni*(*m*) "they enter" (EA 127: 22), for /*irbu:ni*/ (cf. Ebeling 1910: 44; otherwise Ebeling in Knudtzon 1915: II: 1406). 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 form of standard Akkadian, where we have *te:rubu* ("you entered (subjunctive)"). The second form attests to the same feature, albeit in a letter that exhibits a different subdialect of the Byblos Canaano-Akkadian mixed language. Whether influenced by the phonetic rules of the local indigenous dialect or being an analogical formation within the jargon itself, such forms do prove that the latter was indeed a spoken reality. Otherwise, these forms could not have been created. These two forms would then appear in script always 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 (*i-ri-bu-nim*, EA 127: 19). The spelling of the latter form reflects the correct (Peripheral) Akkadian underlying phonology,[6] 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), the Canaanite Amarna language has been known to have energic forms (cf. also Moran 1950a: 53-56). Energic verbs have *-una* at the end of the word, 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 (Rainey 1975: 416). Thus the very common *i-pu-šu-na* "I should do" (e.g., EA 74: 63; Byblos) or *yi-iš-tap-ru-na* "he should send" (EA 121: 7; Byblos; the subject is "the king"), but *iš-ti-mu-uš-šu* (<— *ištemun+šu*) "I have indeed heard it" (EA 320: 20; Ashkelon) or *nu-ub-ba-lu-uš-šu* (<— *nubbalun+šu*) "we will indeed bring him" (EA 245: 7; Megiddo); also when the NWS enclitic particle *-mi* follows, e.g., *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 the written medium. The assimilation of *n* by the following first consonant of an *Akkadian* pronominal suffix, viz., *-šu*, proves the validity of this observation for a 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 that very same letter, where *ma-aḫ-ṣú-ú* (*for /maḫṣu:hu/*), comes as a gloss to translate Akkadian *da-ku-šu* "they killed him" (EA 245: 14) .

2.3 Morphological, morphophonological and morphosyntactic features representing underlying spoken reality

Creativity is very difficult to understand within an inherited, fixed, solely written system of correspondence. The following examples are instances of creativity, which must have occurred in a living, flexible language, representing unconscious processes within an underlying spoken reality. #2.3.1 mentions briefly lines of development in linguistic form. In #2.3.2 we shall see the creation of a new verb out of a borrowed Akkadian unit taken as a stem in the borrowing language, even if in the donor language it was an adverbial complex. In #2.3.3 we shall see examples of verb formation, where simplification dictates the attachment of the person prefixes in what may be called a morphophonemic routine. In #2.3.4 we shall see an illustration for the creation of new, simpler, precative forms, which were different from their counterparts in either Babylonian or Assyrian. In #2.3.5 we shall deal with the contraction of final vocalic sequence in *tertiae infirmae* verbs.

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[6]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 PA dialects (Hallo and Tadmor ⌈1977: 9).

2.3.1   Lines of development

Not only arguments from the phonological system can be raised in order to account for a spoken background at the evolvement of this mixed language. As I have shown elsewhere (Izre'el 1984), we may induce morphological and morphosyntactic features from various Amarna letters to account for a gradual development of the mixed nature of this jargon. In that case, it was the perception of the *-nim* allomorph of the Akkadian ventive ending as a part of the plural morpheme of the 2PL and 3PL inflection of the verb. This must have been one of the initial steps in the transference of the NWS modal system into this branch of PA. It must be emphasized, though, that "gradual" does not necessarily have to be understood in chronological terms, as I shall indicate later (#7.2). In any case, these facts may show that a convention of an ad hoc written system is not the case, and a spoken reality must be accounted for the development and expanse of the Amarna jargon.

2.3.2   Unconscious creation of new verbal stems

Let us now discuss some forms which 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 which can be interpreted either as a *qal* form of the *yaqtil* pattern or as a *hifil* form.[7] 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 inseparable unit to serve as the lexical morpheme in the verb formation of the Amarna jargon (Izre'el 1978: Excursus B; see further Izre'el 1998: 30-32). In this case, the borrowed lexical morpheme is the adverbial form *arḫiš*, which in the source language, viz., Akkadian, in itself consists of the lexical stem /arḫ/ and the adverbial ending /iš/. Such formations are not being made deliberately or consciously, as the following parallels from another language of contact will show.

Modern Hebrew, nowadays being spoken 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 applying them as if they were a root morpheme into the *piel* pattern, which is the denominative verbal derivation *par excellence*. Thus we have, e.g., *tilfen* "he telephoned" (< *telephone*); *nitrel* "he neutralized" (<*neutral*); *hitpancher* "it failed" (< *pancher* "flat tire" <English *puncture*); and many others. There are, however, some very few borrowed verbal lexemes which have adopted not the *piel* pattern but the *hifil* one. These are verbs like *hišvic* "he showed pride" (<Yiddish *švic* "sweat"; cf. *švic*er "dandy"); *hišpric* "he sprinkled" (<Yiddish *špric* "a jet of water"); and *hiflik* "he slapped" (<English *flick*) (cf. Ornan 1983: 29). All three verbs were formed according to their original pattern in the source language. They are used exclusively in informal speech or slang, which supports the view that they are popular, unconscious creations. This is exactly the case with Amarna *yarḫiša*, constructed with this pattern in order to preserve its original stem.

2.3.3   Creative prefix-conjugation verbal forms

Let us now observe two other instances of verb formation that illuminate another morphological aspect, viz., adjoining 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). These are genuine, independent creations 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 inflectional

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

morphemes and the modi morphemes (wherever 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''u:*/.

2.3.4   Creative 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 PA (cf. Izre'el 1985: 148-9; 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*. The Tyre formations are, hence, independent creations of this dialect. These were made of the linguistic materials of Akkadian and without any triggering from the substrate language. For this type of construction one may also assume an underlying spoken reality.

2.3.5   Vowel contraction in the boundary between stem and modal morphemes

The last feature I would like to discuss for this matter is the common formation of the modal system of *tertiae infirmae* verbs. These verbs exhibit the tripartite morphosyntactic distinction between the indicative (*yqtlu*), the short volitive (*yqtlø*) and the long volitive (*yqtla*) by adding the respective Canaanite modi 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 1998: 36-38). However, since the last phoneme in *tertiae infirmae* verbal stems is vocalic, 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-ìl-qú* "he takes" (EA 71: 18);
> *yilqe* (<— *y+ilqe+ø*) for the short volitive, as in *yi-ìl-qé* "may he take" (EA 116: 36);
> *yilqa* (<— *y+ilqe+a*) for the long volitive, as in *yi-ìl-qa* "may he take" (EA 71: 30).

All three forms are from Byblos, but are widespread throughout the Amarna correspondence from Canaanite. 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 too account for an underlying spoken reality. Similar phenomena are attested elsewhere in contact situations in spoken languages. Such is the case, e.g., with Israeli Hebrew words borrowed into the Russian speech of new immigrants from the Soviet Union. For example, the Hebrew loanword *takhana* "station", when coming in the prepositional case, changes its last vowel into *e*. The resulting form is *takhane*, as in the phrase *na takhane* "in the station.[8] It is hard to see such contractions occurring in a language that is not spoken at all. On the other hand, uncontracted forms, which do occur here and there in the Amarna letters, may by no means serve as a counter-argument, as is proved by such English absorbed formations as *soloist*.

2.4 In my first substantive contribution to the study of the Amarna language (Izre'el 1978 on the Gezer letters, already mentioned above), I wondered about its *Sitz im Leben*. As doubts had been raised concerning the underlying spoken reality of the Amarna jargon (Rainey 1975: 423-4; see above, #2.1), I could not, at that stage of research, give a definite answer to this question. I suggested that the Amarna jargon, 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).

Much further investigation to this point is still needed, of course. Yet I hope that the arguments brought above show that the Amarna language did have important spoken aspects. Some of the

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[8] I thank Baruch Podolsky for this information.

features would prove that at some point of its history, essentially during the time of its formation as a mixed language, this language was spoken. Other features lead to the inevitable conclusion that the Amarna language 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? Were it just the scribes themselves,[9] or can we account for a larger cycle of speakers, such as messengers, ambassadors, high officials, clerks and the like? (Cf. Labat 1962; Nougayrol 1962, 1975; Oppenheim 1965).

The conclusion that this jargon 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 within its various dialects, subdialects and idiolects. Thus it may be compared to other such attested phenomena elsewhere.

A short sociolinguistic account is now in order.

3 What did the Canaanite Scribes Think of Their Language?

3.1 The language written by the Canaanite scribes, like any other linguistic system, served as a means of communication between the Canaanite and the Egyptian scribes (and officials?) of that time. The Canaanite scribes could perfectly well understand the letters sent to their rulers on behalf of the Egyptian pharaoh. These were written in Egyptian Akkadian, a close variety of the northwestern Akkadian lingua franca of that time (Cohavi-Rainey 1987). The Egyptian scribes who received letters from Canaan could, on their part, understand the mixed jargon of these letters (cf. Rainey 1975: 424, though with different conclusions than the ones proposed here).

Yet there was a significant difference between the language of these parties (pace Nougayrol 1975: 9). 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 affinities 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 of these languages had an Egyptian scribe encounter his fellow Canaanite scribe in face to face interaction. I also suspect that previous training was needed on either side in order to understand each the language of the other, even in writing. We shall return to this question in a while.

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 It must be noted: the Canaanite scribes thought of their language of correspondence as a dialect of Akkadian. This can be shown in different ways, of which the most conspicuous manifestations are the use of Akkadian opening formulae, the perception of Canaanite glosses as foreign words, the use of genuine and pure Akkadian formations within the letters, and the occurrence of Akkadian-like pseudo-corrections, apart from the semantic lexical basis of that language and the bulk of its Akkadian nominal domain. To these factors one may further mention the important psychological factor of their using the Akkadian script.[10]

3.2.1 Opening formulae

The Canaanite scribes used similar 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:

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[9]Robert 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.

[10]I thank Gideon Goldenberg for this observation.

a-na LUGAL-*ri* EN-*ia* ᵈUTU-*ia* (2) *qí-bí-ma* (3) *um-ma* ᵐ*ri-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: Thus Ribhaddi your servant: At the feet of my lord, my Sun-God, 7 times (and) 7 times I fall.

(EA 104: 1-5, Byblos)

The training of the Canaanite scribes had indeed been laid on the basis of the usual practice used in Mesopotamian scribal schools (cf. above, #2.1; for opening formulae in general see Salonen 1967; cf. also Knutson 1982).

3.2.2 Glosses

The Canaanite scribes regarded the Canaanite glosses as foreign words. These glosses, and not the so-called "Akkadianisms", were, in most cases, marked by a *Glossenkeil* (cf. Artzi 1963). Most instructive is the gloss *na-aš-ša-a* in the following passage:

li-il-ma-ad LUGAL-*ru* EN-⌈*i*⌉*a* (12) *i-nu-ma* LÚ.SA.GAZ ⌈*ša*⌉ (13) *yi-na-aš-ši* \ *na-aš-ša-a* (14) *i-na* KUR.KI.ḪÁ *na-da-an* (15) DINGIR-*lu₄ša* LUGAL-*ri* EN-*ia* ⌈*a*⌉-*na* *i*⌈*a*⌉-*ši* (16) *ù i-du-uk-šu*

May the king, my lord, be informed that the Apiru man who had become elevated "*našša'a*" in the lands, the god of the king, my lord, gave (him) over to me and I killed him.

(EA 366: 12-15, Southern Palestine)

The gloss *na-aš-ša-a* translates *yi-na-aš-ši*, a verbal form typical of the language of the Canaanite Amarna letters. It has NWS formatives for person (*y-*) and mood (*-ø*), and these are annexed to a stem taken from Akkadian, viz, */inašši/* (<*i+našši*; cf. the discussion in #5.2 below). This demonstrates that although the lexeme (i.e., the root and its meaning) was essentially the same, the scribe had been aware of the *grammatical* difference between the two languages, his NWS tongue and the language he used in writing this letter, which he regarded as Akkadian.

3.2.3 Akkadianisms

Akkadianisms are pure Akkadian (usually PA) forms appearing within the flow of a text written in the mixed language. Akkadianisms may thus account for 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 can be used elsewhere in perfectly fitting contexts. Such are frequent standard imperative, and especially precative forms of the verb, the latter category being utterly foreign to NWS dialects. Such are also a plethora of other verbal forms. One example is *i-na-kar₅-mi* "he has become an enemy" in a letter of Ribhaddi, the ruler of Byblos (EA 137: 7),[11] whereas 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-aṣ-ni* "he despised me" (l. 23); and many others.[12]

Another example is *ul-te-bi-la* "he has sent", in a letter of Milkilu, ruler of Gezer (EA 267: 9). Although being taken over from a letter from 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; cf. also below, #6.2). There is one other 3SGM form in this letter, which does have the preformative *y-*: ⌈*yi*⌉-*i-de₉* "may he know (l. 15).

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[11]This 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 Byblian scribe may have accompanied Ribhaddi in his journey. Further research may yield more solid conclusions.

[12]Knudtzon'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).

Our last example includes the form *eltenemme*, used side by side with *ištemu*. Both forms, the first Akkadian and the second "Amarnaic", have the same semantic and grammatical meaning, and both are found in similar contexts in one and the same letter:

> *u a-n[u]-⌈ma⌉ [é]⌈l-te₉-né⌉-m[é] (24) a-na a-w[a]-⌈ti₇⌉[.ME]Š L[UGAL] EN-ia (25) ⌈u⌉ iš-⌈te₉⌉-mu [a-na(?)] a-wa-ti₇.MEŠ (26) ⌈m⌉ma-⌈ia⌉ [LÚ].M[AŠ]KÍM L[UG]AL (27) EN-ia ᵈ[UTU] iš-tu (28) AN ša₁₀-me DU[MU ᵈ]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, a letter of Yapa'u of Gezer; see Rainey 1971: 97-98; Izre'el 1978: 40, 58)

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 same Gezer letter mentioned just above (EA 300). The context is as follows:

> *tu-šu-ru-ba-ni (19) a-na URU.DIDLI.KI-ni-ia (20) u ⌈lu-ú⌉ i-ru-da-am (21) LUGAL EN-ia ki-ma ša (22) A.A.-ia u t[á-p]á-ti-[ia]*
> [May you] (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; cf. Izre'el 1978: 82 n278[b]).

The meaning of the Akkadian verb *ara:du* is "to descend". Being a verb of motion, it may be used in standard Akkadian with the ventive ending. In the Amarna language, 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 which requires a (NWS) volitive form of the verb, since it follows another volitive verb (cf. Moran 1950a: 81-88). Therefore, either the long or the short volitive is expected, since regarding their volitive force, *yqtlø* and *yqtla* are essentially the same (cf. Moran 1950a: 105). The scribe of this letter chose the long volitive not by chance, but since he sought to make use of a "good" Akkadian form. He, however, 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 n278(b)). Such pseudo-corrections could not have appeared unless the scribes were not aware 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 (but cf. Izre'el 1985: #1.9 = Izre'el 1991a: I: #1.7).

3.2.5   In a way, then, the term "Akkadianisms", used by some Amarna scholars (e.g., Rainey 1975: 420) and by myself (here, as well as in Izre'el 1978: #7.2.1), may be misleading, as it may account for an alleged fact that the scribes themselves looked upon such forms as foreign to their linguistic system. Yet, as for the scribes themselves, they were writing in a language that they believed to be Akkadian.

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

4   The Amarna Language as a Single Linguistic System and the question of Variation

4.1 The sociolinguistic situation was one and the same for each scribe and, especially, for each instance a scribe used the language. The Canaanite scribe was almost always writing on behalf of a local vassal ruler, who had always been inferior in rank comparing to the addressee, be it the pharaoh himself or one of the Egyptian officials.

In comparing the language of each of the Canaanite scribes to the language of the Egyptian scribes, we would think of distinguishing between two different linguistic systems in most cases. In a few letters there will be minor differences, to be regarded as different variants of the same language; in others (as a matter of fact 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 his 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 PA system is not a question that can be solved with our present data. In any case, the jargon they were using was an accepted linguistic system among the chancellery officials of Canaan.

A continuum of variants used by one and the same scribe in various diglossic communities is probably not the case here (for a suggestion to thus treat the Arabic diglossia see Hary 1986). However, when taking the Canaanite Amarna language 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 a continuous 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, which is now being the target language, is found at the other extreme. This linguistic situation is generally termed "post creole continuum".

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 parts within each situation. As such, this approach accounts for on linguistic system, in which variation follows specific and sequential rules. Such rules may be either obligatory or optional, and regulated by linguistic and by extralinguistic (usually sociolinguistic) factors.

It is this latter method that has been preferred and adopted by dialectologists, 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 1980: chapter 9).

Two main objections were raised against postulating more than one system. One is in the domain of the community. Here it would require either attributing each idiolect with its own different specific 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 in 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. Therefore, I would like to suggest the second approach for their study. I suggest to treat the Amarna language as one linguistic system consisting of lectal varieties stretching between the extreme of the clear cases of the mixed jargon of the southern Canaanite letters, and the opposite extreme of standard PA as used by the Egyptian scribes or by some northern scribes. This methodology will not only help us in our endeavor to understand the essence and the spirit of this language as was perceived by the scribes themselves, but will also serve us better in fitting all the Akkadianisms into their proper context within that language. It must be stressed: This language, with all its variants, did serve as an accepted, most probably learned, means of communication, so that a basic structural system which was relatively solid it must have had. 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 in a single letter, numerous as they may be, and also for the (though rare) cases of apparent code-switching, as has

been suggested for some complex cases of variation in other sociolinguistic settings (e.g., Labov 1971). Akkadianisms which regularly appear in the flow of the text should be described according to the rules which dominate them. If some of the Akkadianisms are to be proven hazardous, or when an irregular code-switching occurs, these should be taken as calques or as formulaic inserts borrowed from a different linguistic system.

I, however, believe that a great majority of Akkadianisms would prove to be structurally determined. That is, occurrences of forms which are closely related to, or identical with the respective forms of standard Akkadian, can be determined and anticipated by rules.

4.2 Prima facie, two kinds of variation may be observes in the Amarna language: qualitative and quantitative.

The qualitative kind is variation within the system. This kind of variation is a feature of the *langue*. Its manifestations can be observed mainly as dialectal or idiolectal peculiarities. The constraints for such variants are usually text-dependent. There are, however, some few instances in which this kind of variation is 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 Amarna language student to find out whether these switches are structural, and if they are — to describe the constraints under which they tend to appear in each case. Such constraints may be either linguistic or extralinguistic, obligatory or optional. I shall later (#5.2) analyze in detail one specific feature in the Byblos letters in order 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 the mentioned kinds of constraints.

4.2.1   Linguistic constraints

One linguistic constraint that may induce an apparent deviation from the system is, e.g., the surfacing of an Akkadian prefixed stative verbal form of *idû* "to know", an exceptional formation also within the standard Akkadian structure. 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; see also Rainey 1973: 244-7). For example, in EA 100 (a letter from the city of Irqata), the scribe wrote:

> *i-de lìb-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 semantic constraint, which inhibits verbal forms from *idû* to be capable of admitting the *y-* prefix of the 3SGM.

4.2.2   Extralinguistic constraints

Several southern Canaanite scribes, when presenting the words of the pharaoh to their ruler and citing them, or when referring to the pharaoh's words even without an actual citation, use verbal forms closer to the Akkadian standard than in the rest of the letter. Examples:

> *a-wa-at ul-te-bi-la* LUGAL
> The word that the king has sent
> (EA 267: 9-10; Milkilu of Gezer)

> *a-wa-at iq-ba-bi* LUGAL
> The word that the king has said
> (EA 275: 9-10; Ya'zibhadda, of an unknown city in southern Palestine)

a-wa-at iš-tap-pár LUGAL
The word that the king has sent
(EA 276: 9-10; same ruler as EA 275 above)

*a-wa-ti₇.*MEŠ˺ *ša iš-pu-ur* LUGAL
The words that the king sent
(EA 292: 18-19; Ba'lu$ipti of Gezer)

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

Note that all other verbs in the respective texts, as well as the system itself, is of the mixed nature of the southern lects. This extralinguistic constraint 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:

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 present-future pattern (*iqabbi*; note the absence of the subjunctive, typical of these texts) that his fellow scribe used.

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.

4.2.3   Another point that deserves notice is that when we deal with citations from the pharaoh's letters, we are dealing with a written language *par excellence*, so that it is the written aspect of this language that is at play here. In citations from the pharaoh's letters we are in the interplay between two registers of the written language. Yet in all the examples cited above we are dealing with the interplay of forms within the active register itself. In other words, it is within the system of the language that the scribes were actually writing that these variants occur, and not — as it might prima facie appear — switches towards another system or another register.

4.2.4   One other point that deserve notice is the question of the integrity of such forms within the system. It stands to reason that it is only under well determined constraints that Akkadianized forms may appear, so that whenever the need for the same underlying meaning (*signifié*) would show up, another form would surface. This is, perhaps, the case in EA 106 from Byblos. In a pseudo-citation from the king's words there appears the form *ištapru* "he keeps sending", which lacks the *y-* prefix:

ù ki-i i-qa-bu LUGAL *a-na mi-nim iš-tap-r*[*u*] (31) ᵐ*ri-ib-d.*IŠKUR ṭ*up-pa a-na ma-ḫar be-li-š*[*u*]
Concerning (that) what the king has said: "Why does Ribhaddi keep sending a tablet to his lord?"
(EA 106: 30-31)

(Note also that the verb presenting the citation, *iqabbu*.) In another place in this letter the same verb appears, yet in this other occurrence it does have the prefix *y-*:

šá-ni-tam a-na mi-nim (14) *yi-iš-tap-ru* ᵐ*ri-ib-d.*IŠKUR *ki-na-an-na-ma* (15) ṭ*up-pa a-na* É.GAL
Further: Why does Ribhaddi keep sending thus a tablet to the palace?
(EA 106: 13-15)

Note that the meaning is the same, yet the extralinguistic setting is different in that in the latter occurrence there is no explicit reference to the pharaoh's words. This is why a non-Akkadianized form is surfaced.

4.2.5   Some letters may attract a certain extralinguistic constraint along the entire letter. This is the case, for example, in another letter from Byblos, EA 81. Here the form *iq-bi* "he said" for the 3SGM is attested without the *y-* (l. 11). This formation is probably triggered by the appearance of the same form in the common opening formula, which (although fragmentary) is attested at the beginning of this letter as well:

> [ᵐ*ri-ib-d*.IŠKUR *iq-b*]*i a-na* EN-[*šu*]
> 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 semantic, hence purely linguistic constraint. We might formulate a rule that inhibits the annexation of the *y-* prefix in 3SGM forms of *qabû*, as was the case with *idû* in an example given above. These questions need, however, much further research.

4.3 All the examples above were aimed at illustrating the qualitative kind of variation. The second kind of variation is quantitative. That is, whether a large number of variant forms occur within a specific subcorpus or within a specific text, or whether a certain text manifests consistent diversion in one or more linguistic traits from the overall system or from texts of the same subcorpus. We might also ask ourselves whether a large number of upward switches (i.e., switches towards the superstratum) is observable in a single text or in a specific subcorpus from within the whole.

We shall later see that — in terms of performance — the distinction just made between qualitative and quantitative kinds of variation will prove to be two aspects of the same phenomenon. The quantitative kind would prove to be just a different aspect of variation of the qualitative kind.

5   An illustration: The Byblian 1SG person morpheme of the prefix-conjugation verb

5.1 To illustrate the methodological approach I propose, 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 (in fact, all but two) where sent on behalf of a single ruler, Ribhaddi. The Byblos corpus might therefore be expected to represent a relatively unified linguistic system. With regard to syntax and morphosyntax this is generally so. That is why Moran could discover in his doctoral dissertation (1950a) the systematic use in these letters of the NWS modi morphemes, and thus opened a new era in the research and understanding of the language of the Canaanite Amarna tablets. Yet 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 in 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 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. This is, indeed, the case with the Canaano-Akkadian Amarna language in general, the Byblos letters included (Moran 1950a; 1950b; 1951; 1953; 1960). In contrast, morphology, of all linguistic domains, is the most resistible to change. This is why, when there is strong linguistic interference between two languages, much of the original morphology may be resistant to change, and if change occurs, it is in morphology that we can observe the most significant variation. That is why I have chosen to deal here with a morphological trait.

5.2 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*. This apparent surface-structure variation can be formulated as follows:

    a+stem ~ *i*+stem

That is, the 1SG prefix appears to be either *a-* or *i-*. Speaking in terms of the "community", i.e., the whole corpus under investigation, we see that most of Ribhaddi's 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. Such an initial *i* in the 1SG is not at all rare in the Amarna correspondence, especially in letters from the south.[13] As is the case with such southern 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 a 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 ʾ- for the 1SG (not reflected in the orthography and symbolized as *ϕ-*), *t-* for the 2SG, 2PL, 3SGF and 3PL, *y-* for the 3SGM and *n-* for the 1PL (cf. Izre'el 1978: #5.1.2.). [14] This verb 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 (cf. Izre'el 1978: #5.2.1 and Excursus B).

Similar verb inflection is a feature of a few of Ribhaddi's letters as well. One of these letters is EA 94, where we find, e.g., the 1SG form [*i*]*q-bu* "I say" (l. 7) vs. the 3SGM *yi-iq-bi* "he said" (l. 74) or the 3PL *ti₇-iq-bu-na* "they say" (l 14). A morphemic analysis of these three forms yields

    {*ϕ+iqbi+u*}   for the 1SG
    {*y+iqbi+ϕ*}   for the 3SGM
    {*t+iqbi+u:na*}   for the 3PL

Another letter of Ribhaddi which clearly exhibits the same system is EA 123. EA 106 is perhaps also to be grouped with these two. It may well be that other letters of Ribhaddi also belong to this group, but lack of 1SG forms or ambiguous evidence make it impossible for us to draw any further conclusions regarding this matter. We shall return to this question further below.

The linguistic variation in the "community" may now be reformulated as follows:

    a+stem ~ *ϕ*+stem

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

5.2.1   *Primae aleph*   verbs of the *e*-class

There are, however, 1SG forms with initial *i* also in letters that regularly have an *a-* prefix for this verbal category. Most of these 1SG forms are *primae aleph* verbs of the *e*-class or other verbs with predominant *e*. These, I have already mentioned above (#2.2.3), have almost always *i* instead of the expected *e*. In this connection, the verbs *i-pu-šu-na* "I should do" and *i-le-ú* "I can" have been cited.

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[13]For the notions "north" and "south" in this context see Moran 1975a: 158 n5.

[14]That the vowel following the consonantal prefix indeed belongs to the stem in West Semitic 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. Scharmm's formulation for the verb morphology can easily be adapted to other West Semitic tongues; cf. also Izre'el 1991b: 37-8.

Another example is *i-zi-bu* "I will leave" (EA 137: 47); and there are many other such forms. The shift from *e* to *i* is further manifested in other forms that originally had *e* as their first phone, such as the infinitive *i-re-ba* (<—*ere:ba*) "to enter" (EA 138: 58 etc.). Hence we might think of a phonological explanation for the appearance of *i* here, as I have tried to argue for a similar phenomenon found in texts from Amurru (Izre'el 1986). In any case, 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 phone. Phonological rules may determine the assimilation of the prefix vowel *a*- as follows:

   a+Epuš —> e:puš
   e:puš —> i:puš

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

   a+i:puš —> i:puš
 or
   ø+i:puš —> i:puš

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.

As far as the extant data permit at this stage of research, I suggest that contemporarily, i.e., for the Amarna period itself, we postulate morphophonological rules to account for these formations. More minute rules will be given in #5.2.4

5.2.2   Other verbs with predominant *e*

There is also one certain occurrence of a 1SG *prima aleph* verb of the *a*- class with an initial *i* in Byblos: *i-ti-lik* "I went" (EA 114: 28). As this form (attested elsewhere only in PA; see Izre'el 1985: 160 = 1991a: I: 155 for *i-te-lik*) exhibits vowel harmony, or assimilation, towards *i*, it might be explained by the same phonological trait postulated above. It must be noted, though, that *primae aleph* verbs of the *a*- class, as well as other weak verbs, tend to surface an *i* 1SG prefix in Amurru too (Izre'el 1985: 137 = 1991a: I: 133; 1986), so that here too morphophonological rules similar to those posited above should be preferred over purely phonological ones.

Its being a verbal form with infixed *-t-* may also be the reason for its attraction of an initial *i*. In that case too 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" (#5.2.3.2). 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.

5.2.3   Some other verbs; semantic and other linguistic constraints

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 there can be no case for a phonological rule. Let us have a close look at these formations.

5.2.3.1 *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; energic). 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 and EA 123 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 the Amarna correspondence 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).

The last two forms prove that the initial vowel, viz., *i*, is indeed a part of the stem in the Amarna language. The suffixed person morpheme is attached to the stem, which is /*izziz*/ or /*izziz*(*z*)*a:*/ respectively.[15] It is to this stem that the person prefixes are attached; thus *y+izziz* for the 3SGM; *ø+izziz* for the 1SG; etc. The 3SGM Akkadian form, which consisted of the person prefix *i-* and the stem /*zziz*/, was borrowed into the Amarna jargon 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, as is the case with other lects, as in EA 94 and EA 123. *izuzzu* is a highly irregular verb, and it is one of the prefixed statives of Akkadian. That is 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 the mixed language. The same tendency, which is a general tendency in many Canaanite letters and in EA 94 and EA 123 of Byblos, may hence prove valid also to that specific lexeme elsewhere. The vocalic initial phoneme of its stem inhibits the adjoining of the *a-* prefix of the 1SG person. The constraint for the use of the stem /*izziz*/ is, by all means, a semantic constraint. The morphophonemic rules which it attracts may be compared to similar or identical rules which the verb *idû* entails (cf. #4.2.1 above; also Rainey 1973: 242-250). The use of this stem is therefore established and well set into the linguistic system. Therefore, it should not be dismissed from the linguistic description, neither should it be referred to as an exception. It must be regarded as an integral part of the system together with any entailed rules.

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

> (a) *a+izziz —> izziz*
> (b) *ø+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, or in other Canaanite sites, where the prefix is *ø-*.

5.2.3.2 *-t-* forms of *šapa:ru*

The same semantic constraint, which shows in the tendency to have an initial *i* in the 1SG, is 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*(EŠ)-*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: 30; cf. above). Cf. also *eš-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 have an overt person morpheme. Its initial *i* must be interpreted as a part of the stem. It was thus borrowed from Akkadian, together with 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, restricted to 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

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[15]There is one hybrid form which includes both a prefix and a suffix, viz., *ta-$ap-pár-ta* "you wrote" (EA 102: 10). This form makes an exception, and must be regarded as a *lapsus calami* (cf. also Rainey 1973: 257-8 n110).

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-written Gtn stems as well. Compare, e.g., the following:

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

> *a-nu-ma ki-a-ma aš-ta-pa-ar a-na* É.GAL (50) *ù ú-ul ti-ìš-mu-na a-wa-tu-ia*
> Now, thus I have been writing to the palace, but my words are not being heard[16]
> (EA 74: 49-50).

That in the second sentence an iterative, hence a Gtn form is implied, is confirmed both by the contents and by the indicative form which follows. Further confirmation to this interpretation is given by comparison to parallels in other letters; e.g.:

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

Note also the second sentence, where the verb is spelled without an indication of the doubling of the second radical, yet with the following vowel non-deleted, which implies such doubling:

> *a-nu-ma ki-[a-m]a yi-ìš-ta-pa-ru*[17] (21) L[Ú.GA]L [*a-n*]*a ša-šu-nu ù* (22) *l*[*a-a*]
> *ti-ìš-ma-na a-na ša-šu*
> Now, the official has been writing to them thus, but they (dual) would not listen
> (EA 103: 20-22).

The first occurrence of EA 74 cited above, although spelled as to indicate a Gtn iterative form, can hardly bear the iterative meaning which this formation usually indicates. 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 iteratives, 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. It is found either in a small group of Ribhaddi's letters from El-Amarna and in some conventional formulae in texts from Mari (Salonen 1967: 52). From its occurrences in Mari, being out of the core of Old Babylonian and attested from an earlier period, we may perhaps conclude that this use by Ribhaddi's scribes was not their own idiosyncrasy. It may had been learned and adopted from an already existing source. The use of a Gtn form, which is the iterative form *par excellence*, is not at all common or understandable 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 to be used as inseparable units within the Canaano-Akkadian jargon. In other words, these forms were taken as the stem to which person prefixes and modi morphemes should be attached.

The variation between the Byblian lects as far as these *-t-* forms of *šapa:ru* are concerned may now be formulated. In effect, we have two variant stems for the *-t-* or Gtn forms of *šapa:ru* in Ribhaddi's

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[16]or the passive see Youngblood 1961: 149; so also Rainey 1971: 91. Another occurrence of an apparent active form for the passive is *ti-il-qé* (EA 69: 27). Moran (1950a: 147) suggested to read *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).

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

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 of the following formations:

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

$$ø+ištap(p)ar \longrightarrow ištap(p)ar$$

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:

$$a+ištap(p)ar \longrightarrow ištap(p)ar$$
  but
$$a+štap(p)ar \longrightarrow aštap(p)ar$$

5.2.3.3 *naṣa:ru*

Let us now have a look at some occurrences of the verb *naṣa:ru* "guard, watch" in the Ribhaddi corpus. Some letters attest 1SG forms of *naṣa:ru* with an initial *i*. For these, either of the following two stems may occur: */inaṣṣar/* or */inaṣṣir/*; e.g., *i-na-ṣa-ru-na* (EA 112: 10; EA 125: 12); ⌈*i*⌉*-na-ṣa-r*[*u* (EA 122: 21; so Moran 1950a: 174); *i-na-ṣí-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 which attest 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 present-future formation in Akkadian in the eyes of the NWS scribes, who tended to confuse between G and D formations. The reason is clear: In NWS the doubling of the second root-radical had been an indication of only the D stem, and was not used as a tense or aspect marker as was the case in Akkadian. This is also why free variation occurs between the vowels *i* and *a* which follow the second root radical (see, e.g., EA 112: 10-18 for both bases). The vowel *a* was used in the Akkadian formation in forms closely related in meaning to the cognate NWS *piel* (D) forms, which had the vowel *i* instead. Formations of this specific verb with an initial *u*, typical of the D stem, prove the validity of this thesis (e.g., *ú-na-ṣár*, EA 327: 5, a letter from southern Palestine; cf. the G infinitive in line 3 of the same letter; for a detailed study of this issue see Rainey 1975: 404-419).

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

$$a+inaṣṣar+u(na) \longrightarrow inaṣṣaru(na)$$
$$a+inaṣṣir+u \longrightarrow inaṣṣiru$$

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

$$a+naṣṣar+a \longrightarrow anaṣṣara$$

5.2.3.4 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 as is the case with *naṣa:ru* or the other 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 as we have seen with *naṣa:ru*. The ending *-am* shows that the scribe sought for a good Akkadian formation, yet he failed in applying an *a-* prefix to the stem. For him, the stem was */ikaššad/*, not */kaššad/*, as it is in standard Akkadian. In the Amarna language a stem beginning with a vowel such as this would inhibit the annexation of the prefix *a-*. As a matter of fact, a similar rule applies for stems beginning with *u* in standard Akkadian (Izre'el 1991b: 43-46). In

other verbs in 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 *naṣa:ru* along the same principles that he used for *kaša:du*. Using the correct Akkadian stem /*naṣṣar*/, he did apply the prefix *a-* to the verb: *a-na-aṣ-ṣa-a*[*r*][18] (l. 31).

The categorization of each lexeme is different in each case. For each lect there may exist a different distribution of lexemes for each category. Indeed, EA 362 makes 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 *qí-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).[19]

5.2.4   Rules and grouping

We have analyzed in detail various formations of the 1SG verbal inflection in the Ribhaddi corpus. We have seen that there are two lect-dependent variants of the 1SG prefix, viz., *a-* and *ϕ-*. The output of many 1SG forms have an initial *i*. In the majority of cases this *i* must be interpreted as a part of the stem rather than as the person prefix. For each lect within the corpus, one of these variants should apply. 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 phoneme of the stem, and not as if it were the person prefix. In any such case, the underlying prefix should be *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 the their stem, this *i* may be interpreted as a part of the stem. The prefixes would be regarded as consonantal, as in NWS or in southern Canaanite Amarna letters. The underlying 1SG person prefix would hence not be *a-* but *ϕ-* (for *ʾ-*).

Whenever there is a stem with an initial *i*, this vowel inhibits an overt manifestation of the timbre *a*. In most cases, this *a* is deleted, as is the case with *u*-initial stems in standard Akkadian (*primae waw* verbs and verbs of the D and Š stem-groups; see Izre'el 1991b: 43-46). In some cases (*primae aleph* verbs of the *e*-class), the vowel *a* may be contracted with the initial vowel of the stem. The rules governing the variation may be summarized as follows:

1. $1SG \longrightarrow \{a, \phi\}$ (lect dependent)

2. $a + \text{stem} \longrightarrow \text{null} /\_i$

3. $a + \text{stem} \longrightarrow i /\_E_{\text{stem}}$

   $i + E_{\text{stem}} \longrightarrow i{:}$

It is now possible to divide the whole corpus of Ribhaddi's letters into two categorical groups according to the quality of the prefix for the 1SG person. Some of the letters (as a matter of fact, about half of them) will stay out of this partition, either because there are no 1SG forms in them or because all the occurring 1SG forms in these letters are ambiguous as regards their prefix. The rest of the letters may have either an *a-* prefix (which in some of the attested forms may not be overt) or a *ϕ-* prefix. The first group (*a-* prefix) includes EA letters 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

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[18]Rainey (1978a: 20) suggested also the possibility of reading *r*[*u*] for the last sign, to denote the indicative. This is impossible according to Thureau-Dangin's copy (1922: 102). The use of a present-future stem may — in some Amarna lects — be an ordered substitute for the indicative formation.

[19]W. L. Moran (p. c.) suggests to relate EA 362 with EA 126, EA 129 and EA 137. (See now Moran 1992: 206; cf. Izre'el 1995: 140-1.)

perhaps also EA 86. The second group (∅- prefix) includes EA 94, 123, and perhaps also EA 106. However, as ambiguity of 1SG forms shows wherever a verbal stem opens with either the vowel *u* or — in the Amarna language in particular — 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 by forms such as the Middle Assyrian nominal form *e-pu-uš* "making" (l. 32; CAD: E: 191) and the northern PA particle *in-du-um* "when" (l. 24; cf. AHw: 1420b s.v. *undu*). Cf. also *ú-qa-mu* "I expect" (l. 38), and some other forms. Middle Assyrian forms are typical of northern PA. On the whole, however, the language of this scribe exhibits typical West Semitic 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 has most convincingly shown (1975b) that he had received his cuneiform education in the north, as his language exhibits mostly linguistic affinities found in Syrian letters, and only occasionally his letters exhibit traditional Canaano-Akkadian formations.

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-ša!*(MA)-*am* "I do" (l. 28) and probably also in *iš-me* "I heard" (l. 15).[20] 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 ∅- 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 the already mentioned *ú-qa-mu* "I expect" (l. 38), which is ambiguous as regards the person prefix both in standard Akkadian and in the Amarna jargon. Therefore we may interpret this form as having a ∅- 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, it does not come by itself. The following verb too makes an exception, as it is the only 3SGM form in this letter that lacks the prefix *y-*: *id-du-ul*[21] "it was closed" (l. 34).[22] These two standard Akkadian verbal forms come in successive clauses which follow the Middle Assyrian nominal form already cited *e-pu-uš* "making" (l. 32). The scribe may have been acquainted with the common Amarna 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 the trigger word for switching into standard Akkadian.[23] It is interesting to note that the switch did not act upon the syntax, yet it did affect the morphological level. All the other forms that follow,

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[20]This reading is to be preferred over a hypothetical one *e$15-me*, since this form should be compared with *yi-i$-me* on l. 6 of the same letter.

[21]Occurrence of this stem with an *u* are restricted to the Amarna correspondence (Ebeling in Knudtzon 1915: 1399; CAD: E: 25b).

[22]There seems to be a general tendency in Amarna 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 for *ne:pu$u*; Izre'el 1978: 44-5 for *ipaµµaru:*). Had this been the case also in our letter, we should have analyzed *iddul* as /*iddul*/+∅, i.e., as having the -∅ 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 norms. The other two are *yi-du-ul* (EA 197: 9, Damascus); *nu-ú-du-lu* (EA 100: 39, Irqata).

[23]For code switching and triggering see Clyne 1967, especially chapter 5.

beside *atur* and *iddul*, are also morphologically identical with their standard Akkadian counterparts, as is usually the case with non-verbal forms in Amarna. The outcome is as follows:

> *ù al-ka-ti* (31) *a-na* É-*šu aš-šum* (32) *e-pu-uš* DÙG.GA *bi-ri<-nu>* (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 sequence 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 what we may perhaps term "the southern dialect", i.e., it shows regularly the prefix *ø-*. The exceptional form, viz., *atur*, is a result of code switching. This is a special feature of this scribe, which no doubt originates from an exceptional background.

5.4 In the discussion above I have tried to describe the major types of constraints that may be active in the surfacing of variant linguistic forms within the context of a letter. We should remember that the task of describing a continuum of variants is a very complex one, since it concurs thousands of linguistic features in an enormous 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 their implication thereof.

6   Implications for the continuum theory

6.1 We have dealt in detail with one morpheme in the language of the Canaanite scribes from Byblos. We have seen that after establishing rules for the apparently exceptional forms, we may account for two variants for the 1SG person prefix: *a-* and *ø-* (for *ʾ-*). We have formulated some prerequisites and rules for the exceptional forms. We have seen that these rules do not act equally on all lects (or in all texts). Some of the stipulations may be extralinguistic, as is the case with EA 136, where the special background of its scribe is to be accounted for the exceptional form(s). We have checked occurrence of this morpheme 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 done within the scope of our investigation into the synchronic details of the language. We have also touched upon some diachronic aspects, especially in our endeavor to determine the requirements for the appearance of exceptional forms and in order to formulate operative rules for their generation. It is necessary to stress this point, since sometimes only diachronic 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 borrowing of stems in particular. After all, borrowing is a historical event per se. Otherwise it would seem that our formulation of rules for the exceptional forms, and the categorical distribution of lexemes upon which such rules operate, are ad hoc or artificial. Still, the resulting rules must reflect, of course, only the synchronic state of the language.

Returning to the output of the various 1SG forms, variation is between forms beginning with *a* and forms beginning with *i*. It is the question where the morpheme boundary is that we are faced with when trying to determine the inner structure of the respective forms. 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 *inaṣṣaru* "I guard" (standard Akkadian *anaṣṣaru*), may be found in letters of either of the two groups. The underlying person 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.[24]

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[24]Robert Wilson (p. c.; cf. Gumperz and Wilson 1971) noted a similar morphological interference which was hard for him to detect 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.,

For some lects we are faced with minimal overt variation when compared with other closely related lects. We have noted that many of the Byblos texts are ambiguous as regards the underlying form of the 1SG verbal prefix. In other cases, a certain text may attest several 1SG forms, all of them but one have 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 *ø*- group. 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, #5.2.3.2). This text seems to fluctuate between the forms of a specific lexeme, a phenomenon which very rarely occurs.

There is a 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 prefixes are identical in two given lects, so that the only difference between them 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 drawing two distinct systems for them.

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

6.2 A most important area of investigation is the interrelations between the features within a single system. Linguistic continua may be described by a scale consisting all possible isolects (i.e., varieties with just a single feature differing between them). Such a scale should cover all range 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; see also Petyt 1980: 190ff.).

Whether or not such implicational scales would prove helpful in a description of the Amarna continuum is still to be sought. At this stage of research, and for our small illustrative investigation in particular, it is important to note that we should pay close attention to any difference between each lect, and ask ourselves whether or not this difference bears any implication on any other change in the system of this closely related lects.

To illustrate this issue within our investigation here, it would be important 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, yet this is not the place to delve into this investigation. To 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 be *a-* (this is, of course, similar to what we find in standard Akkadian). The evidence from the 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-*.

In two of the Tyre letters the situation is, however, different. EA 155 attests six 1SG prefix-conjugation forms, all six open with the vowel *i* (or, once, *e*): *id-din* "I gave" (l. 27);

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

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 (notice *e-lé-ú* with an *E* sign), so that any solid conclusions concerning the underlying prefix are excluded. EA 147 has (apart from the formulaic *am-qut* "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-ṣur* "I guard" (l. 61); *iš-pu-ur* "I sent" (l. 70). Thus, there is only one verbal form in this letter, viz., *anaṇṣur*, that overtly has the prefix *a-*.

According to the procedure used in investigating the Byblos corpus, we should either formulate a rule determining the appearance of the *a-* prefix in this single form, or — to match with 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 form of the 1SG is *ø-* or *a-*. I will not get into this investigation here, and it should be taken up in a 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 place in the continuum.

6.3 I have hinted above (#4.3) that the distinction between qualitative and quantitative variation may prove to be two aspects of the same phenomenon when looking at the surface structure of underlying forms. The cases cited above illustrate this point. Since the surface structure of each of these two underlying variant morphemes may be the same, and since it is only either one of these two variants that play part in any of the lects under investigation, it may well happen that a text using one of these variant prefixes would appear to be using the other. The interplay between forms of the two systems, whether qualitative or quantitative, makes no difference in terms of variation as regards the surface structure.

I further believe that no sharp distinction can be made between the receptive and the active registers of the diglossic Canaanite scribe. 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 to come upon a continuum in which implicational or other similarly-designed scales would show gradual changes between its two extremes. I believe that such texts as the Jerusalem letters, those of Tyre and those of Amurru, 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. Letters from southern areas of Canaan will be located closer to or at the opposite extreme.

7   Concluding remarks

7.1 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 a large-scale and deep theoretical research of the Amarna language?

To answer this question, let us first have a look at one passage of 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 *ḫupšu* 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:

> *ú-ul*(+DIŠ) *i-te₉-zi-ib* URU >IGI< (35) *ù i-pa-ṭá-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-ṭá-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 1(?) 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 considerations[25]), 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, *ipaṭṭra* (with a short *a*!) (so also Rainey 1978a: 86 s.v. *paṭa:ru*; for an interpretation of both verbs in the 1SG see already Winckler 1896: 199). 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 *ipaṭṭra* must hence be explained.

A survey of all forms of *paṭa:ru* i the Amarna correspondence will reveal that in the prefix conjugation the usual pattern of this verb is the Akkadian present-future one. The Akkadian present-future stem tends, in various cases, to inhibit the addition of the NWS prefix *y-* of the 3SGM,[26] so that the original Akkadian 3SGM form is now admitted into the mixed language to serve there 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 *ipaṭṭra* of EA 118 should therefore be analyzed as follows:

a+ ipaṭṭra —> ipaṭṭra

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 from Qatna too (see Klengel 1969: 109). (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 *naṣa:ru* (see #5.2.3.3 above), this formation is the result of the confusion between the D and G stems of Akkadian. This is proved by the 2SGM form *ti-pa-ṭì-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".

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 which 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).

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. At the beginning of the paper I asked how would we know what to expect from the Amarna scribes and whether it would be enough to be familiar with all the letters in order to achieve that goal. As I believe the discussions above have illustrated, we will need much more than just that.

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[25](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 n1).
(b) The *IGI* sign at the end of l. 34 has been interpreted by Knudtzon as a phonetic complement of the Sumerogram URU which precedes. He read it *lim*. However, the genitive case would not fit neither Knudtzon's translation nor any other possible interpretation of this clause. This sign is best understood as the beginning of an *Ù* sign which the scribe had started. He then realized he should have better write 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 *Ù* (e.g., EA 170: 21-22, Amurru).

[26]Cf., 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).

Yet a lot more than a basis for the solid interpretation of the texts can be gained. I hope to have shown that variation is one of the basic characteristics of the Canaano-Akkadian mixed language, which actually forms the shape of its system. Therefore, it must play an important role in our ability to describe its grammar.

7.2 At this juncture, let us return for a moment to post creole continua, viz., those linguistic areas in which the newly created creole has remained in close contact with its model language and 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 perception may imply for any other linguistic continuum as well, be it a geographical dialect continuum, a sociolectal continuum, and practically to any other linguistic community (see, e.g., Bailey 1973; Bickerton 1975; also Petyt 1980: 185-197).

In my study of the ventive morpheme in the Akkadian texts of Amurru (Izre'el 1984; cf. already #2.3.1 above), I discussed a diachronic aspect of the development of the Amarna mixed language. 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 modi morpheme into the Amarna language. 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 a continuum research, where we see variation as an innate feature of language. It thus exhibits the various stages on the way to the formation of the basilect extreme of this continuum (i.e., the most remote from the model language). In our case it is the mixed language of the southern Canaanite scribes.

7.3 The diachronic aspect reflected by this linguistic variation raises another extremely interesting and most important question. That is the sociolinguistic aspect of the formation of this mixed language.

We have some evidence for Akkadian writing in Palestine prior to the Amarna period in a few documents such as the lawsuit from Hazor (Hallo and Tadmor 1977). Of the Middle Babylonian period, a Gilgamesh fragment is known from Megiddo (Goetze and Levy 1959). From the same period, i.e. roughly the Amarna period, we know of a private letter which was found at Shechem, and in which there is evidence for cuneiform learning of Shechemite inhabitants (Böhl 1974 with references). This letter was written in standard PA, not in the mixed language attested in the Amarna letters from that site (cf. Rabiner 1981). These and other cuneiform material from that area (for which cf. Edzard 1985), as well as very old cuneiform materials from other sites like Byblos (Edzard 1985:249 and 256 nn9-10), and mentioning of Palestinian sites in other places, 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 after the origins of specific linguistic features, e.g. in locating various pure Assyrian linguistic traits in a single subcorpus (cf. Moran 1975) or throughout the whole Amarna corpus (cf. Izre'el 1985: #6.1 = Izre'el 1991a: #6.1). 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.

It has been claimed that linguistic change within creole continua in a relatively short time, and even in synchronic levels, is much deeper and large-scaled than in any other language change which follows "normal" lines of development (see, e.g., Bickerton 1975, especially chapter 5). If so, then by implication we should investigate the synchronic aspects of the Amarna language not just for its sake, but also for the sake of understanding its line of development; in other words, to search for an answer to the question how this language was evolved. Indeed, I believe that through linguistic

analysis we shall find an answer to this question, not only with regard to the purely linguistic components, but also to its sociolinguistic ones.

More than twenty years ago, a call for research into the sociolinguistic aspects of the Amarna language 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 (to be emended now to "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 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)

It is the integration of purely linguistic investigation and analyses into the study of extralinguistic features done hitherto that I call here for.

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

> 1. Since there is an observable tendency of the Amarna language 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 present-future stem, while for *šapa:ru* "write, send" it is mostly 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 which is closer in its linguistic affinities 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: chapter 7), in the context of our knowledge of the finding of a Gilgamesh fragment in that site?

> 4. Why is the letter found at Shechem (cf. above) so different in its language from the Shechem letters found in Amarna?

I, of course, have no answers yet for these and many more questions that I may have, 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 the various lects of the Amarna language and the relationship between them. As for me, I sincerely hope to have paved another small paving stone in the long and complicated way towards the achievement of this goal, namely the real understanding of the nature of the Amarna jargon, and the establishment of its grammar.

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