

Introduction

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THIS VOLUME CONTAINS PAPERS DELIVERED at the conference on Akkadian Historical Linguistics held at the University of Texas at Austin on April 21–22, 2018, in honor of John Huehnergard's retirement.¹ The concentration on Akkadian linguistics is intended to highlight John's contributions to the field since the early days of his academic career.

Akkadian, which is continuously attested in writing until the first century CE, is one of the longest-attested languages known. It therefore holds important contributions for our understanding of processes of language change in all categories of grammar, that is, phonology, morphology, syntax, and lexicon. Linguistic evidence is extensive not only in the chronological depth of Akkadian but also in its dialect variation. At any given period, several Akkadian dialects are attested in writing. These varieties consist both of dialects that are spoken in the Mesopotamian heartland, usually considered the “core” dialects, such as Babylonian and Assyrian, and dialects from areas where Akkadian was not usually the native but a learned language, commonly referred to as “peripheral” dialects, such as the Akkadian from Emar, Ugarit, Egypt, Anatolia, and the Levant. In addition, Akkadian has been in contact with numerous languages throughout its history, sometimes over prolonged periods of time, as in the case of Sumerian, and sometimes over shorter periods, as in the case of Kassite.² These instances of language contact offer important insights into processes of contact-induced changes and their impact on the history of the language in general. Speakers of Akkadian eventually shifted to Aramaic, giving us a window into the process of language shift.³ Akkadian thus offers a unique depth and wealth of sources and evidence for historical and comparative study.

1. Participants in the workshop were Sergey Loesov, Leonid Kogan, Paul-Alain Beaulieu, Jacob Jan de Ridder, Kathryn Slanski, Øyvind Bjøru, Ambjörn Sjörs, Michael Streck, Martin Worthington, Na'ama Pat-El, and John Huehnergard, who acted as a respondent. Loesov and Kogan joined the group via Skype.

2. Both Sumerian and Kassite are language isolates.

3. Beaulieu 2013.

The study of the Akkadian language from different, primarily synchronic, linguistic approaches has a long history in Assyriology and has resulted in numerous studies over the last few decades. Approaches used include discourse analysis,⁴ structuralist grammar,⁵ sociolinguistics,⁶ and the incorporation of other (contemporary) linguistic approaches.⁷ In addition, recent decades have seen the publication of grammars of various dialects, which treat different manifestations of Akkadian in detail,⁸ as well as a number of new textbooks, some of which are dedicated to less-studied dialects.⁹ Many of these publications would not have been possible without the steady stream of texts made accessible through traditional publications,¹⁰ as well as in a number of online searchable databanks.¹¹ These studies have greatly advanced our knowledge and understanding of Akkadian dialectology and grammar. Despite this overall productivity, however, studies dealing with Akkadian from a comparative and historical linguistic perspective are relatively rare. Although Wolfram von Soden already noted certain chronological developments and changes in the phonology, morphology, and syntax of Akkadian in his grammar,¹² these have seldom been studied in greater detail from a historical and comparative perspective.¹³ There is, for example, no comprehensive comparative or diachronic study of Akkadian and its various manifestations over its more than 2,500 years of attestation, nor do we have a clear idea of what Proto-Akkadian may have looked like. A more thorough study of Akkadian from a historical and comparative perspective is thus a great desideratum in order to fully understand the development and history of the language.

One of the leading scholars who engages in such a historical and comparative study of Akkadian is John Huehnergard, to whom this volume is dedicated. He is widely known for his *A Grammar of Akkadian*, possibly the most popular textbook of Akkadian in the English-speaking world, now in its third edition (Eisenbrauns, 2011). Throughout his career, John has worked assiduously on the linguistic profile of both “core,” or Mesopotamian, Akkadian and the peripheral varieties, ever since the very beginning of his career. His (partially unpublished) dissertation dealt with the peripheral Akkadian dialects of Carchemish

4. E.g., Khan 1988.

5. E.g., Cohen 2005, 2012.

6. E.g., Haayer 1986; Crisostomo 2015; Vita 2015.

7. E.g., Johnson 2005; Kouwenberg 2010; Schilling 2019.

8. See, e.g., Hämeen-Anttila 2000; Hilgert 2002; Hasselbach 2005; Müller 2010; Kouwenberg 2017; de Ridder 2018.

9. Tropper and Vita 2010; Streck 2014; Kouwenberg 2019.

10. For example, the Cornell University Studies in Assyriology and Sumerology (CUSAS).

11. For example, Open Richly Annotated Cuneiform Corpus (ORACC).

12. Von Soden 1995.

13. Some exceptions are Deutscher 2000; Cohen 2000.

and Ugarit, with the portion on the Akkadian of Ugarit published under the title *The Akkadian of Ugarit* (Eisenbrauns, 1989). In subsequent years, he devoted many studies to Akkadian phonology, morphology, and syntax. These works, which are too numerous to list in their entirety, include an article on the origin of the Akkadian precativ marker *l(V)-*,¹⁴ which is still an important contribution to the function and origin of precativ and jussive morphemes in Semitic. Another “classic” is John’s treatment of the structure and basic principles of the formation of verbless clauses in Akkadian, with special focus on word order.¹⁵ John’s interest in verbless predicates also led him to investigate the status of the stative or predicative verbal adjective of Akkadian. It is debated whether or not this construction constitutes a fully grammaticalized verbal form or a nominal clause. John argues that the form should be treated as a nominal rather than a verbal category,¹⁶ a conclusion that stirred an animated scholarly debate among notable linguists and Assyriologists and that is yet to be resolved.¹⁷

Although John’s interest has mainly been directed at morphology and phonology, he has made some important contributions to Akkadian lexicography. John has, for example, proposed South Semitic cognates to Akkadian words.¹⁸ His work on Semitic lexicography more generally was heavily informed by his work on Akkadian core and peripheral dialects.¹⁹

John is a unique figure among Assyriologists, a scholar who can comfortably draw on first-hand familiarity with many other languages to inform his linguistic discussion. His contribution to Hebrew linguistics is a case in point; primarily his understanding of the early Canaanite verbal system, which stems directly from his work on Akkadian.²⁰

John’s most pioneering work is his attempt, rare in the field of Akkadian linguistics, to identify Proto-Akkadian features, namely, features that are linguistic innovations in Akkadian, thus providing a clear linguistic rationale for the hypothesis that East Semitic is a distinct sub-branch of Semitic.²¹ The significance of this work cannot be overstated. Without a thorough reconstruction of East Semitic, work on Proto-Semitic is bound to remain tenuous, as John himself has noted.²² This important work, which has influenced and shaped our own research, is the impetus for the conference and this collection on the

14. Huehnergard 1983.

15. Huehnergard 1986.

16. Huehnergard 1987.

17. For example, Kouwenberg 2000; Loesov 2012; and Maksim Kalinin and Sergey Loesov in this volume.

18. Huehnergard 1991.

19. E.g., Huehnergard 1999, 2014.

20. Huehnergard 1988.

21. Huehnergard 2006.

22. Huehnergard 2002.

occasion of John's retirement from teaching (though, we are assured, not from research!).

The present volume represents a sample of the research on Akkadian historical linguistics that is currently being done in the field. The papers included, which go beyond those originally presented at the conference, are from renowned scholars in the field from the United States, Canada, Europe, and Russia who work on various aspects of Akkadian from a historical and comparative perspective. They cover a wide range of topics, including lexicon, morphology, word order, syntax, verbal semantics, and subgrouping. We are hopeful that beyond the sign of our deep appreciation for the "Master of Language," this volume will serve as an encouragement for young Assyriologists to engage in more linguistic work in Akkadian and Akkadian dialectology.

The volume is organized alphabetically.

Paul-Alain Beaulieu investigates the word order of *ša*-clauses in Late Babylonian during the Seleucid period, which marks the last-attested stage in the history of the Akkadian language. The sources for Akkadian at this time are primarily found in archival texts: legal transactions, administrative texts, letters, and letter-orders. The purpose of the study is to trace word order change from the traditional Akkadian SOV order to an Aramaic-influenced VSO order and to determine whether the Akkadian of this period could still reflect a spoken idiom. Beaulieu concludes that there is sufficient evidence to suggest that this dialect was a spoken natural language.

Øyvind Bjøru and Na'ama Pat-El reinvestigate the verbal endings marking subordination in Akkadian, particularly the Assyrian dialect, and the indicative in West Semitic (**-u* and **-ni/-na*). It has traditionally been assumed that the East and West Semitic morphemes are related, although the transition from subordinating morpheme to indicative marker remains problematic. Bjøru and Pat-El argue that the morpheme *-u* is indeed a shared morpheme of East and West Semitic that originally marked subordination, but that *-ni* (East Semitic) and *-na* (West Semitic) are not related and represent independent morphemes with separate functions.

Rebecca Hasselbach-Andee revisits the question of whether Eblaite, the only other member of East Semitic besides Akkadian, is to be considered an Akkadian dialect or an independent language of East Semitic, a question that is still unresolved despite decades of debate. In her article, she proposes a more nuanced approach to the question that considers the presence of innovations and retentions throughout the grammar of Eblaite. As a test case, she investigates the forms of the pronominal system in order to determine which features of Eblaite are common East Semitic, which are shared innovations with Akkadian, and which represent unique Eblaite features—the latter being either retentions or innovations.

Bert Kouwenberg looks at cognate objects in Akkadian, namely, constructions in which the verb and its direct object are derived from the same root (as in English “to sing a song” and similar constructions). Kouwenberg catalogues different constructions based on the derivational pattern of the object and the syntax of the entire construction. He further identifies different types of functions for cognate object constructions, such as empty verb cognate objects, modifying cognate objects, periphrastic cognate objects, and cognate objects that express indefinite or generic constituents. Empty verb cognate objects are the most frequent type and form a purely lexical category since they have no identifiable semantic or syntactic function, contrary to the other three types.

Maksim Kalinin and Sergey Loesov’s contribution studies the expression of tense and voice in Neo-Assyrian, based on a model they developed. The authors argue that the grammatical reading of a given verb form results from the interaction of the lexical meaning of individual verbs with the grammatical semantics of the morphological form used. They analyze all the relevant verbs in a set corpus and consequently identify five verbal classes related to the values of dynamicity and transitivity in Neo-Assyrian.

Jacob Jan de Ridder investigates the morphology and distribution of nominal patterns underlying numerals as they appear in Akkadian and/or might be reconstructed to Proto-Semitic. Importantly, cardinal numerals can be regarded as a special type of primary noun, since they are not derived from any other, more basic substantive or verbal root. For this reason, it is clear that their patterns do not carry any associated function or semantics. Other types of numerals, however, have patterns that reflect their function. De Ridder examines the formation of cardinals, ordinals, fractions, collective numbers, distributives, and adverbs, such as multiplicatives. Some of the conclusions of the paper have relevance to the dialectal divide in Akkadian.

Ambjörn Sjörs examines the use of the subordinate marker in Akkadian oaths. Nonnegative oath constructions in Akkadian show a great deal of variation where the predicate may or may not take *lū* and may or may not be marked by the subordinate marker *-u*. Sjörs argues that oaths marked with the subordinate marker are independent content clauses and that the independent use of content clauses in oaths is the result of interference with nominalized clauses in Sumerian. He concludes that the use of the subordinate marker in Akkadian oaths is not original but rather a calque of similar constructions with /²a/ in Sumerian.

Michael P. Streck presents new results of his project *Supplement to the Akkadian Dictionaries*, which aims to update the two existing dictionaries, the *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch* by Wolfram von Soden and the *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary*. During the last decades, countless new Akkadian texts from all periods, regions and genres have been published. These texts provide an abundance of

entirely new words and important new references for words already known. They further expand our knowledge of Akkadian lexicography and, in some cases, of morphology. The article presents examples of these new lexemes and references.

Juan Pablo Vita provides a detailed grammatical description of the Akkadian used by the king(dom) of Beirut during the Amarna period (fourteenth century BCE), as reflected in the letters sent from this kingdom to the pharaoh of Egypt, and letters found at the city of Ugarit from the thirteenth century BCE. He investigates the orthography, phonology, morphology, and syntax of this corpus, with special focus on diachronic changes. Vita notes that the Akkadian from Beirut as attested at Ugarit underwent a major evolution from the Canaanite-Akkadian of the fourteenth century BCE as evidenced in the letters from el-Amarna. Vita notes that a detailed study of other coastal localities will allow a broader analysis that will help to contextualize the Akkadian used in the Levant during this period.

We take this opportunity to thank the participants of the workshop and the contributors to this volume for their patience and kind engagement with us and each other. We are grateful for the opportunity to work with them. We also thank the office of the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts at the University of Texas, Austin, for their generous support. Oda Myran Winsnes provided much-appreciated editorial support. Finally, we are grateful for Jim Eisenbraun and the editors of *Explorations in Ancient Near Eastern Civilizations* for accepting this volume for publication and for editorial assistance.

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