CHAPTER XII

THE SUFFIX CONJUGATION — MORPHOLOGY

At the beginning of Amarna research, scholars were struck by the unusual morphology of the suffix conjugation. The close resemblance to forms known from biblical Hebrew, mainly the 1st c.s. suffix -ti, indicated that WS influences were at work (Zimmern 1890a). After a century of study in the language of the EA tablets, it may be possible to summarize the accumulated evidence and present a more comprehensive picture of the suffix conjugation as it functions in the texts from Canaan. It should be remarked, incidentally, that even the Jerusalem (Nitzán 1973:56, §4.32) and the Tyrian (Finkle 1977:105-107) letters, which generally go their own way in the use of the prefix conjugation patterns, employ the WS suffix forms extensively, especially for past tense.

Knudtzon (1892), evidently followed by Bergsträsser (1929:11) and independently Moran (1950a:34-39), concluded that the suffix conjugation, both the Akkadian stative and the WS so-called "perfect," had developed from the nominal sentence. More recently, Buccellati has developed this theme with regard to the Akkadian suffix conjugation (1968). There has been of late some disagreement as to whether the suffix conjugation forms of Akkadian should be classed as verbs (Kraus 1984:10-13) or not (Huehnergard 1986, 1987). From the standpoint of surface morphology, the suffix conjugation forms do share certain features with the prefix conjugation, e.g. they can take the Akkadian positional subjunctive (marker of subordination) and the Akkadian ventive suffix. Although the suffix conjugation in Akkadian is generally applied to the verbal adjectives from the respective root and stems to express a stative for intransitive verbs or a passive of transitive verbs, there are some verbs whose suffix conjugation forms express transitive meaning (a large collection of examples was assembled by Rowton 1962). On the
other hand, the suffix conjugation was, perhaps as a later development, applied to nouns to express the permansive. Huehnergard (1987b:229-232) would now prefer to distinguish the two main classes of suffix forms: from the verbal adjective and from nouns, and transitives related to transitive verbs. The former, he would call "predicative forms" and include their clauses in the non-verbal category. For the latter, the transitives of the suffix conjugation, he would call "pseudo verbal." This proposal is attractive from a descriptive point of view. The term "stative," which is often applied to the suffix conjugation of Akkadian and also of Egyptian (e.g. Callendar 1975:22-23, §3.5.2.2), would best be reserved to verb classes and not to a conjugation pattern (Landsberger 1967:142 n. 15; cited by Huehnergard 1987b:229 n. 50 and Reiner 1970:292) but it has become so commonplace in discussion of the suffix forms that it can hardly be avoided today. The term "pseudo-verbal" for the suffix conjugation forms from transitive verbs in Akkadian has some justification but will be avoided here since it is not particularly relevant to the WS languages. At least one may note that the use of suffix forms from transitive verbs for transitive meaning demonstrates the potential of the suffix pattern, even in Akkadian where passive, permansive and stative meanings predominate. The truly verbal, transitive, function is realized more fully in the WS dialects. On the other hand, the traditional term, "perfect," applied to the suffix conjugation pattern in Hebrew, Arabic, Aramaic, Phoenician, etc., will be strictly avoided here because it is definitely a misnomer. The syntactic discussion (Ch. 14) that will follow the description of the morphological features in the Canaanite EA texts will demonstrate that there is nothing, inherent or developed, in the basic construction of the suffix conjugation to associate it with "completed action." The western tradition, beginning with Ewald (1831-33:II, 112) and fostered and made popular by Driver (1892:13-26), of supposing that the suffix conjugation was primarily expressing completed action is thoroughly misguided. For this reason the term "perfect" should be abandoned once and for all. It should be stricken from our grammar books.