CHAPTER TEN

OVERVIEW AND IMPLICATIONS

A. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

As stated in chapter 1, one of the presuppositions of this study is that languages develop not as a series of static synchronic situations with neatly balanced temporal/aspectual oppositions, but in a dynamic process of gradual incremental change. The phenomena of layering and persistence suggests that at any given synchronic moment there may be unbalanced oppositions (e.g., one verbal construction expresses tense while another expresses aspect), and not only can one form have multiple functions, but more than one form can express the same function. Recent research in grammaticalization suggests that these overlapping layers and multiple persistent functions can help us to locate verbal forms along their path of diachronic development. In this chapter, I would like to first give an overview of the verbal system as a whole, then list some ways in which grammaticalization phenomena are illustrated in the corpus, and finally discuss briefly some implications for the prominence it gives to tense and aspect.

B. OVERVIEW

Previous chapters discussed specific verbal expressions in the Aramaic of Daniel and their attested functions. In what follows, I will summarize the attested functions and the verbal forms that express them. Since many examples were given in previous chapters, I will refrain from citing examples here.

1. Anterior/Resultative

The anterior/resultative function was discussed in chapter 2. It is common knowledge among Semitists that the West Semitic suffix conjugation developed from an early Semitic verbal adjective, at first expressing a resultative function and eventually becoming a past tense. In the Aramaic of Daniel, the suffix conjugation verb retains some of its residual expression of the anterior/resultative, though it is developing
into a simple past. Meanwhile, the passive participle/verbal adjective is in the process of developing into a resultative participle (see chapter 4). In later Aramaic, the passive participle will become more consistently a resultative construction, and in Neo-Aramaic it will form the base of the new past tense. Furthermore, as explained in chapter 5, the combination of the verb החל and the passive participle has not yet grammaticalized into a complex verb phrase, since, not only is the ordering of the elements semantically inconsequential, but also, and more importantly, the combination ofחל with the passive participle appears to be morphosyntactically equivalent toחל with other adjectives.

2. Simple Past vs. Past Perfective

The simple past and the past perfective were discussed in chapter 2. Since perfectives usually serve as the main verb in past time narration, the distinction between simple past and past perfective is very slight. One difference is that, since the simple past is aspectually neutral, it can express the past time even for situations viewed as imperfective (Bybee, Perkins, and Pagliuca 1994:84). Another difference is that perfectives of stative predicates denote present states rather than past states (92).

In chapter 2, it was argued that, although the suffix conjugation is not yet a preterite, i.e., it is not yet restricted to the expression of the past tense, it is developing from an anterior/resultative into a simple past. In fact, the expression of the simple past is the most common function of the suffix conjugation. Furthermore, in chapter 3, it was argued that the active participle does not normally express the simple past, but can be so employed in formulaic expressions that introduce direct speech.

In this section, I want to briefly discuss some broader cross-linguistic typological trends and their possible implications. Aspectual and tense oppositions in languages typically have a tripartite pattern (see Dahl 1985 and Bybee and Dahl 1989:85-89). That is, the basic distinction is between perfective and imperfective. Perfectives generally, though not exclusively, refer to the past, whereas imperfectives are often distinguished for past and non-past. This could be illustrated as follows: