CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE SYNTAX OF VERBS

15.1. THE FUNCTION OF THE VERBAL FORMS DERIVED FROM THE PRESENT BASE

The verbal forms are categorized here according to their structure. The stem I root *qtl* ‘to kill’ is used to illustrate these. The forms derived from this root given below will be used as general labels to designate all variations and inflections of forms that fall within the category. The label ‘*qatfl* form’, for example, will be used to designate all verb forms that consist of the present base without prefixed or suffixed particles, including not only stem I verbs with strong consonants, such as *garš* ‘He pulls’, *garx* ‘He shouts’, etc., but also stem II, stem III and quadriliteral verbs as well as all weak and irregular verbs, e.g. *mšador* ‘He sends’, *maplx* ‘He uses’, *mkankš* ‘He drags’, *qaym* ‘He rises’, *xaze* ‘He sees’, *mšare* ‘He begins’, *maše* ‘He brings down’, *mšawše* ‘He twitters’, etc.

When discussing the function of forms derived from the present base *qatfl*, a distinction must be made between verbs with an initial laryngal */s* and verbs with an initial strong radical. The reason for this is that the distribution of preverbal particles such as */i-* and */bod-* on initial */s* verbs is different from their distribution on verbs with a strong initial radical. Initial */s* verbs are in general consistent and conservative in their use of the particles whereas in verbs with initial strong consonants the particles are frequently elided. The divergent distribution of the prefixed particles in the two groups of verbs has arisen from differences in phonetic structure rather than any semantic distinction. The crucial difference, it would seem, is that in initial */s* verbs the particle normally replaces the */s* and becomes the onset of the first syllable of the word, e.g. */i+azol>* */y-azol* ‘He goes’, */bod+azol>* */ţ-azol* ‘He will go’. Since the particle is the onset of the syllable, it is protected from elision. Another factor is that the number of syllables in the form has not been increased. When the particles are attached to a verb with an initial strong consonant, on the other hand, they constitute a separate syllable, adding to the morphological weight of the form. In this environment they have become more vulnerable to elision. In the description of the function of forms derived
from the present base, therefore, these two groups of verbs will be treated separately. Initial /-/ verbs will be designated as group A and other verbs as group B. Since group A is the more conservative one with regard to the preverbal particles, the main classification of functions will be based on the distribution of the particles in verbal forms from this group.

15.1.1. qaṭal

The form qaṭal has a wide range of functions. These include the expression of both realis and irrealis. It can be regarded as the default, unmarked form in relation to the forms with prefixed particles such ‘i-qaṭal and bod-qaṭal, which have more specific functions.

15.1.1.1. Narrative Present (Realis)

One realis function of the qaṭal form is to denote foreground events in a narrative. These express a perfective aspect and present the actions as punctual events with their deictic temporal centre in the present. They should not be interpreted as expressing imperfective progressive aspect, which is a function that is in principle not expressed by the qaṭal form.

Examples from groups A and B:

1. šālyā, ‘ap-xa-xīta ‘axlāla. ‘She goes down and eats also another one.’ (A18:21)
2. ‘u-áyya zinjīr ‘āwwa ‘ānma warīdīt qādāl, kaxāla ‘u-nāpāl. ‘The chain goes into the veins of his neck and cuts them. He falls down.’ (A26:81)
3. ‘āwwa biye bo-b-sūsīl ‘āwēr gu-xa-gippa. ‘He together with his horse enters a cave.’ (A28:3)
4. ‘āzāl, ‘āzāl, ‘u-mate, māte l-caḍrot bābē dīye. ‘He goes, goes and goes and arrives, arrives at the tent of his father.’ (A28:33)
5. yātu l-xāst dawērā, ‘āp-‘aw ‘āzāl. ‘azāl di-di-di tāpēlē xālē dīye gu-d-ay-maṭa. ‘He sits on the back of a mule and he also sets off. He goes along and catches up with his uncle in that village.’ (A28:11)
6. mān-lībē dīye qūda, dēre xīla, naqālē ‘o-sūyyāxa. ‘u-‘adb ‘aqīlāl xā-‘aqārt bōṭma. ‘aqīlāl ‘u-xaṭīla taqān. ‘Out of his fervour, he applies force and pulls the tether apart. He goes and takes the stock of a terebinth tree. He takes it and breaks off the branches.’ (A28:20)
7. ‘asqī, ‘ina xaxēla ‘āwwa pōxta. ‘They go up and find the open grave.’ (A25:91)