

K. A. Metzler. *Tempora in altbabylonischen literarischen Texten* (AOAT 279). Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2002. XVII + 964 S.

A descriptive grammar of OB is an urgent desideratum of Assyriology, for this reason the book of K. A. Metzler (henceforward M.) is a welcome preliminary study towards such a grammar: any future research into OB verb will have to take into account the results of M.'s study.

Importantly, one cannot fail to notice the usefulness of “*Tempora in altbabylonischen literarischen Texten*” (henceforward TALT) as a didactic tool: some of the texts belonging to M.'s corpus are read in class on a daily basis—I think e.g. of CH, omina and OB Gilg—and teachers of OB have to struggle for a consistent and still not over-simplified and philologically faithful (and credible) exposition of what tenses¹ do in a given text. I believe that in years to come literary texts will be read in classroom with “the Metzler” because this work is the first attempt of a consistent linguistic analysis of verb tenses in part of the texts belonging to the TALT corpus.

In what follows, I will try to set forth M.'s views on the verb's grammatical semantics in the TALT corpus and offer observations. Wherever feasible, I will attempt a preliminary comparison of verb's grammatical semantics in the TALT corpus as emerging from M.'s study with that of OB letters, in so far as the latter is understood.

1. The corpus, the objectives, and the basic premises of TALT

The corpus studied in TALT includes “literary” texts of Assyriological nomenclature, i.e. laws and edicts, omina, narrative texts in prose and verse, literary dialogues, parables and proverbs, hymns, prayers, letters to and from gods, pseudepigraphic royal letters, and incantations (for more detailed description of the corpus, see TALT 11). Mathematical and philological texts, which from the Assyriological point of view also belong to scientific literature, are not included in the corpus of TALT.

¹ I use the term “tenses”—following M.—in a non-technical sense as a convenient way to refer to the four formal categories of the Akkadian verb, i.e. the Preterite, the Perfect, the Present, and the Stative.

Still, M. does not claim *expressis verbis* that the corpus of TALT includes just parts of whatever has ever been considered “literature” in Assyriology,² but rather says:

Unter “literarischen Texten” werden in dieser Studie diejenigen Texte verstanden, die sich durch eine besondere sprachliche Gestaltung auszeichnen oder innerhalb der Kulturen Mesopotamiens Eingang in die Tradition gefunden haben. Wenn die einzelnen Texte einer Gattung überwiegend eine besondere sprachliche Gestaltung erfahren haben oder überwiegend Eingang in die Tradition gefunden haben, so sind alle Texte der jeweiligen Gattung literarisch, auch wenn einzelne Texte der Gattung nicht im besonderen Maße sprachlich gestaltet sind oder Eingang in die Tradition gefunden haben (p. 6).

The “stream of the tradition” criterion (A. L. Oppenheim’s term) seems to be inherently non-controversial, while the criterion of a specific linguistic shape is both vague and useless—vague because it does not receive an exact definition in M.’s study, and useless because probably each ancient genre did have “eine besondere sprachliche Gestaltung”. Letters of Hammurapi or OB private contracts are not included in TALT corpus, although they possess blamelessly rigid and probably “specific” linguistic form and betray interesting traits from the point of view of verb use.

The bulk of TALT consists of six chapters (chh. 2 to 7):

2. Wissenschaftsliterarische Texte: omina, legal sentences, edicts, treaties, “Beschreibungen und Anweisungen” (under which heading culinary texts, medical prescriptions, rituals and other texts containing instructions are subsumed).

Observation: Cultic rituals are definitely underrepresented, e.g. rituals of Ištar published in Groneberg 1997 are not analyzed. Why?

3. Narrative Texte und Passagen, by far the largest chapter of the book. Wealth of philological insights and detailed discussions provide

² Cf. von Soden 1994, 203: “Literature is a narrower term than written material, and in the field of cuneiform therefore does not include the several hundred thousand letters and documents of all types. Within the area of literature in Babylonia and Assyria, the “scientific” writings, in the widest sense of the term, present the most comprehensive sector...”.

a very interesting reading; the text of this chapter sometimes approaches the format of a commentary. This seems completely justified because many texts analyzed in the TALT are notoriously difficult and no linguistic work on an exactly limited textual corpus should be undertaken before every effort is made to propose philologically cogent readings for each passage under consideration. For this reason I believe that it would be methodologically more sound to drop from the discussion verb forms whose readings depend on emendations (unless self-evident), paleographically disputed passages, and perhaps bilingual texts.

4. Hymnische Texte und Passagen.

5. Gebete und Briefe an Götter und von Göttern. The choice of sources for this chapter gives occasion for questions. Prayers—especially those written in verse—can be considered a separate genre, while human-divine correspondence in prose (as e.g. ARMT 26/1, 191–194, discussed in this chapter) is linguistically (and particularly in terms of verb use) not different from many samples of human-to-human written interaction as attested in OB letters. This granted, the inclusion of ARMT 26/1, 191–194 is doubly inconsistent, because in Mari prophetic letters, excluded from the TALT corpus, first-person divine speeches are in some cases attested no less unambiguously than in ARMT 26/1, 194, *pace* M. (11f., n. 46), who thinks that “mehrfach eine eindeutige Entscheidung, ob die Briefschreibenden die Götter in direkter Rede sprechen lassen oder selbst in direkter Rede sprechen und Aussagen der Götter indirekt anführen, nicht möglich scheint”. Cf., among numerous examples, RA 78, 9 l. 14ff., where the speech of Adad is introduced by *um-ma-a-mi* and the following self-designation: *u₂-ul a-na-ku-{u₂}-u₂ [dIM] be-el Ka-al-la-as-su₂ KI* “Am I not Adad, the lord of Kallassu ...?” Actually, how can a speaker’s words be introduced in a more unambiguous way?

6. Beschwörungen.

7. Eine Stadtklage und ein Dossier über ein Gespräch mit Ištar.

The reasons for treating these two texts together in a separate chapter are not clear to me. Perhaps it would be more sensible to discuss them together with other first-person speeches found in the corpus (in Ch. 5?).

My impression is that in TALT division lines between text groups are sometimes drawn according to aesthetic rather than linguistic crite-

ria, and this division may obscure the understanding of verb usage. Cross-linguistically, the most sharp contrast between speech types (i.e. the one formally marked in many and perhaps in most languages) is that between a first-person utterance addressed to an interlocutor and an utterance showing no surface marks of either the speaker or recipient of the message. Another distinction which may be a priori linguistically important is that between prose and verse: thus, in OB verse the word order do not follow prosaic rules.

I feel that an analysis of all first-person utterances of the TALT corpus in a single chapter (with appropriate subdivisions according to pragmatic criteria, the literary genre being perhaps the most important of them) would probably have given a perspective on the verb grammatical semantics somewhat different from that achieved by M., since the availability of the explicit first person speaker determines both the repertoire and semantic interpretation of verb forms to the extent that is difficult to overestimate.

One cannot but admire M.'s courage in undertaking the task. In many and perhaps in most languages, meanings of finite verb forms in written texts differ from those manifested in the spoken medium. In the simplest case, the written usage presupposes the oral one and builds on the latter while developing "metaphoric" interpretations restricted to certain types of written communication.³ The OB "epistolary Perfect" will be an obvious example of this practice.

Consequently, the use of verb forms in literature is difficult and perhaps impossible to describe "in its own right" only, without a prior understanding of what happens in the canonical situation of utterance. I feel that an implicit idea about "natural" functions of tenses underlies any attempt to deal with the verbal system of a dead language, especially one with rich and diversified sources. This is also true of studies of verb functions in literature, and I think M.'s study is no exception.

In this respect, the current state of research into OB is not quite satisfactory. It is assumed as a matter of fact that the closest approximation to spoken OB we can get is epistolary literature,⁴ but the verbal

³ In more complicated situations, written communication may have recourse to verb forms not used in contemporary oral speech, as it probably happened in Biblical Hebrew. Fortunately enough, this does not seem to have been the case with OB Akkadian.

⁴ Epistolary use is not in itself colloquial, but there is hope that the latter can be to a certain extent reconstructed from the former.

system of OB letters has not yet been fully described, possibly because a considerable part of the extant corpus is not available to most researchers and awaits publication.

This state of art has made M.'s task both difficult and challenging.

M. defines the objectives of TALT as follows:

Die vorliegende Studie beschränkt sich auf die Erörterung des Gebrauchs derjenigen vier Formkategorien des Verbs, welche von W. von Soden im *Grundriß der akkadischen Grammatik* «Präsens» (§ 78), «Präteritum» (§ 79), «Perfekt» (§ 80) und «Stativ» (§ 77) genannt und unter dem Begriff «“Tempora”» (§ 76) zusammengefaßt werden (p. 12).

M. later specifies this goal:

Im Mittelpunkt dieser Studie stehen nicht das Phänomen «Zeit» und die Art und Weise, wie die altbabylonischen literarischen Texte damit umgehen, sondern lediglich die genannten vier Formkategorien. Gegenstand der Studie ist hierbei die Gesamtheit der Gebrauchsweisen dieser Formkategorien, nicht lediglich diejenigen Bereiche ihrer Gebrauchsweisen oder Funktionen, welche im sprachwissenschaftlichen Sinne temporal im Sinne grammatikalisierte *Zeitbezüge* sind. Somit werden auch diejenigen Bereiche erörtert, in denen die Formkategorien zueinander in andersartigen Bezügen stehen. Die leitende Frage ist, *in welcher Weise diese Formkategorien verwendet werden, um Situationen in der Zeit zu verorten* (p. 19, italics added).

In my view, this task is difficult to reconcile with the structure of the book. The chapters dealing with individual genres (as outlined above) are mostly subdivided according to semantic notions “Vergangenheit”, “Gegenwart”, and “Zukunft”. The use of finite verb forms is then analyzed separately for each domain of the time axis, i.e. verb forms are viewed as exponents of these three functions.

This approach may be sometimes tantamount to begging the question. Such notions as “Vergangenheit”, “Gegenwart”, and “Zukunft” are not ‘given’ to us in literary texts of a language as dead as OB, what

is given to us are only the four morphological patterns generally called “tenses” or, for that matter, “Formkategorien”.

Positing “Vergangenheit”, “Gegenwart”, and “Zukunft” as primary data for his study, M. means primarily past, present and future relative to the figure of the *speaker* of respective texts. I feel that M. perhaps over-loads the notion of the speaker. Thus, he starts from the unproven premise that each linguistic utterance in his corpus presupposes the figure of the speaker:

Wesentliches Kriterium für die Einteilung der Texte in Textgattungen in dieser Studie ist die Frage, wer worüber den Text als Ganzes spricht unter der besonderen Fragestellung, in welchem Verhältnis das vom Sprecher im Text Besprochene zu der Zeit seines Sprechens steht (p. 25).

It is this assumption of a speaker as intrinsic part of each text that conditions a “natural” tripartite division of time axis vis-à-vis the respective speaker:

Da die Kontexte der in dieser Studie untersuchten Textgattungen zum einen sich im Hinblick auf das zeitliche Verhältnis der Figur des Sprechers zum Geschehen, über welches sie im Text spricht, in signifikanter Weise voneinander unterscheiden und zum anderen das Verständnis stark präjudizieren, werden die Gebrauchsweisen der Formkategorien nach Vergangenheit, Gegenwart und Zukunft differenziert jeweils gesondert für die einzelnen Textgattungen erörtert ... (p. 20f.).

In other words, an assumed temporal zero-point—the moment of speaking/writing or *Rezeptionszeit*⁵—forms for M. a self-evident ground for the division of all indicative verb forms in texts as belonging to one of the three temporal areas (or functions) Vergangenheit, Gegenwart and Zukunft.

Actually, *Rezeptionszeit* is the only zero-point alternative to the moment of speaking that M. discerns in his corpus.⁶

⁵ I.e. the time point at which a general legal norm or an omen is interpreted.

⁶ M. explains the use of the Preterite in *Koinzidenzfall* as a rhetoric device: an event taking place at the moment of speaking and through speaking (e.g. an act of exorcism) is presented by the speaker as a *fait accompli* (see e.g. p. 872). This means that performative preterites have the moment of speaking as their reference time.

But in the text, the presence of the speaker as reflected in the verb use (and this is M.'s starting point) cannot be just posited. The speaker may or may not be "in" the text, and he may be there in different degrees.

Let us look at the following English text:

An oak is a tree.
 A rose is a flower.
 A deer is an animal.
 A sparrow is a bird.
 Russia is our Fatherland.
 Death is Inevitable.⁷

The first four sentences do not offer any information on the speaker and, consequently, on his location in time vis-à-vis the described facts because respective identificatory sentences are interpreted as tenseless even in such a profoundly tensed language as English, cf. [?]*An oak was a tree*, ^{???}*An oak has been a tree*, etc. These sentences are devoid of any egocentric elements, in particular of subjective (or deictic) time. On the other hand, the descriptive sentence "Russia is our Fatherland" contains an egocentric element "our" introducing into the picture a speaker with a specific background and with his time. Both "*Russia has been our fatherland (so far)*" and "*Russia was our fatherland (but now we are U.S. citizens)*"⁸ are acceptable, though I suspect that the lexical meaning of "fatherland" in the latter two examples is not the same as in the former one. "Death is Inevitable" is less impersonal and tenseless than "Man is mortal", consequently the former utterance has "more" of a speaker than the latter.⁹

My major objection to M.'s theoretic premises is that the speaker and the tripartite division of the time axis stemming from him are not a natural property of any utterance, in particular of each and every text included in the TALT corpus. The speaker is to be assumed as a part of

⁷ Epigraph to Vladimir Nabokov's *Gift*, taken from P. Smirnovskiy's *Textbook of Russian Grammar* and translated by Nabokov.

⁸ I thank Olga Borovaya and David Epstein for discussing this English usage with me.

⁹ The fact that the predicate of all these sentences is the verb "to be" should not be over-estimated, compare "All the rivers run into the sea" with "PN is the President of GN".

the overall meaning of a given text if the latter has special features pointing to the speaker, or, put in the most general way: the speaker is a part of the respective text if the text includes “egocentric” linguistic signs pointing to the speech event or its participants.¹⁰

Egocentric (or “shifter”) inflectional verbal categories of OB include *person* in the strict sense of this term implying only first and second persons, i.e. the speaker and the addressee(s) as participants of the speech event; deictically used *tense* referring the narrated fact to the speech event; *mood* as grammaticalized expression of the speaker’s attitude towards a situation in terms of “modality”.

The *ventive* as primarily the grammaticalized expression of spatial verbal orientation (speaker-direction of the respective fact) also belongs here but, as is well known, in part of literary (in particular in narrative) texts it regularly has other than deictic uses. This happens because in written records egocentric categories (among them expressions of time) can be “relativized to text” (as C. J. Fillmore puts it), i.e. they develop derived meanings, and this of course has much to do with the problem of whether and to what degree the speaker is present in a given utterance.

Lexical egocentrics include personal pronouns, *hic* and *nunc* deictic adverbs (e.g. *annikīam* and *inanna*), demonstrative pronouns (*annûm* and *ullûm*), “particles” expressing subjective epistemic modality such as *assurri*, *minde*, *pīqat*, *tuša*, evaluative words (e.g. nouns and adjectives) that express subjective attitudes lexically.

If we consider the Codex of Hammurapi, the Laws of Eshnunna, the bulk of extispicy omīna, narrative portions of OB Gilg. and Atr., we cannot fail to notice the absence of most of the mentioned egocentrics from most of these texts. Thus, *annûm* “this” is not used in OB laws at all, anaphoric (i.e. text-deictic) pronouns appear instead, while *annûm* is widely used in OB letters, cf. in particular a frequent expression *epēšum annûm* “this behaviour” (e.g. AbB 4, 156:6⁷; 5, 245:13; 9, 4:4; 12, 166:4). Legal apodoses do not employ prohibitives but rather the indicative form *ul iparras*, thereby creating the impression that the lawmaker patterned the connection of protasis to apodoses on the model of “natural” (i.e. impersonal) cause-and-effect relationship

¹⁰ The term “egocentric linguistic signs” ultimately goes back to Bertrand Russell’s “egocentric particulars”, see Ch. 7 of his study *An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth*.

rather than on the normative “Sein-Sollen” (i.e. subjective because modal) model.

The verbal tense—the subject of M.’s study—might be one such egocentric element, but in TALT this is assumed rather than proven.

In practical terms, there is little doubt that typically “discourse” genres of the TALT corpus—hymns, prayers, incantations, but also dialogues and monologues in verse and prose—display speaker-oriented use of tenses. This is evident from the pragmatics of these genres, from the availability of first-person speaker (and sometimes second-person addressee) and other egocentric elements just mentioned. But as for laws and narratives, this problem has to be carefully studied in its own right. Finally, this question is especially acute for the understanding of tenses in generally valid utterances (M.’s “Allgemeingültigkeit”), see below § 3 of this review.

2. Grammaticalization of time in the TALT corpus

As follows from numerous discussions and in particular from Chapter 8 (Schlußbetrachtung), M. believes that OB possessed relative rather than absolute tenses,¹¹ basically agreeing in this respect with M. P. Streck (see especially Streck 1995 and Streck 1999).¹²

M.’s analysis of verbal tense (and the conceptual frame of his study in general) is seriously marred by his failure to set apart narrative and non-narrative use of the verb, although linguistically speaking both uses belong to different realms.

This criticism is only partly related to the observations on the speaker that have been just presented to the reader, since linguistically Ich-Erzählungen more often belong with third-person narratives than with “discourse” speech types.

It is out of question to explore this problem in a review article. I refer the reader to my paper on the OB *iptaras* in the current volume of *B&B* (Loesov 2004:107ff. *et passim*, with literature). Here I will allow

¹¹ M. generalizes of course only about texts of the TALT corpus, but since this corpus includes documents of almost all genres attested in OB written sources (some letters are included, the only important omission are private contracts), I hope I do not err against M.’s ideas too much when I speak here about OB as such.

¹² Most saliently, K. A. Metzler parts company with M. P. Streck by rejecting the latter’s two-reference-points theory of *iptaras* and by acknowledging the verbal nature of the Stative. In my view, M. is right in both cases.

myself to adduce two quotations from the study of the late American typologist and Romanist Suzanne Fleischman *Tense and Narrativity* (based on Romance and English) which I believe are highly relevant for the present discussion; the first quotation represents a textbook truth.¹³

“It has often been observed that tense usage in narrative is anomalous with respect to a language’s normal use of tenses—that the relationships between time and tense in narrative are not the same as those obtaining in ordinary language. Attempts have been made, notably by Emile Benveniste (1959) and Harald Weinrich (1973), to explain the tenses of narrative not as anomalous but as regular within a special tense system that operates alongside that of nonnarrative language. [...] It is also the case that certain (non Indo-European) languages have grammatical morphology, including tense-aspect, that is exclusive to narrative” (p. 3f.).¹⁴

“Narratives are intrinsically structured with two time frames: the time of the telling of the story and the time during which the events of the story are assumed to have taken place. I refer to these respectively as *speaker-now* and *story-now*. Each of these time frames has a set of tense-aspect categories normally associated with it—the tenses of communication and narration respectively, actualized via different forms in different languages. [...] This is not to say that the speaker-based tenses are excluded from narration. [...] When their reference is to story-now, their contribution to the discourse is always something other than temporal location.¹⁵ [...] A major goal of effective story-telling, I submit, is to mask the inherent retrospectivity of narration; and among the principal linguistic tools for accomplishing this task are tense and aspect” (Fleischman 1990: 129–131).

¹³ I feel that the position of S. Fleischman on tenses in narrative is “moderate” in comparison to those of Östen Dahl (a typological study based on a representative sample of languages) and Elena Paducheva (a student of Russian verbal aspect and tense), both discussed in Loesov 2004: the latter two scholars tend to completely exclude the moment of speaking from the temporal interpretation of verb forms in narrative.

¹⁴ In Semitic, exclusively narrative (literary) verbal forms emerged as a side effect of *qatala* replacing *yaqtul* qua the only conversational verb form of “simple past”. Cf. *wyqtl* in BH, Moabite, and Early Aramaic, as well as in ESA; cf. also the Ugaritic indicative “short” *yqtl*, which according to Tropper 2000:696 is attested with certainty only in narrative poetry. For this reason, OB does not have exclusive narrative morphology.

¹⁵ S. Fleischman means first of all the PRESENT.

What I call in Loesov 2004 “deictic and narrative registers of interpretation” of verb forms, S. Fleischman calls “tenses of the communication mode and narrative mode” (p. 136). I think—*pace* Fleischman¹⁶—that in certain cases “the inherent retrospectivity of narration” can be so successfully hidden that the speaker’s vantage point (“speaker-now”) finds minimal formal expression in the text and this expression is perhaps other than the grammatical semantics of verb forms. As has been just mentioned in a footnote, OB has no narrative morphology, but it can be claimed that the linguistic meaning of narrative *iprus* is different from that of speaker-oriented (or deictic) *iprus*: the latter—as we will see presently—is basically retrospective, i.e. denotes facts in the speaker’s past, while the temporal meaning of the former is built by its retrospective and prospective relationships to its left-hand and right-hand (mostly preterital) neighbors in the verbal narrative chain. Comrie 1985, followed by Fleischman 1990 (see especially p. 23f.), believes that the narrative use of the PRETERITE is but a contextual implicature of its basic meaning, i.e. of past time reference plus perfective aspect. I disagree with this interpretation since I feel it is more historic than synchronous. The narrative is not just a “context” the way e.g. a specific type of subordinate clause is a context but rather a mode of language’s existence.

At this philosophic pitch, we will now turn to M.’s vision of verb functions in OB.

The Preterite

M. comes to the conclusion that the Preterite in OB denotes anteriority (p. 873) relative to (1) the moment of speaking and to a reference point (2) in the future or (3) in the past.

I have no objections against (1).

M. claims to have found three examples of the Preterite denoting future anteriority in divinational and legal apodoses. The first of them (YOS 10, 36, I 37) may express a fact prior to the moment of observation (M. 184 also grants this possibility), the second is *iš-tu DUMU.MEŠ-ša ur₂-ta-ab-bu-u₂* “after she has raised her children” (CH § 137); it is a perfect because the Preterite is not used in future time *ištu*-clauses (M. 185 n.703 notes that a perfect “ist allerding’s nicht

¹⁶ Actually, she insists that “every text has a speaker” (Fleischman 1990:127).

auszuschließen”); the third one is *i-na mi-im-ma ša a-na DUMU.MEŠ-ša in-na-ad-nu* (again CH § 137): a pre-present interpretation “from what has been given” (with numerous translations) is possible and perhaps better than “from what is to be given” (the former interpretation is not completely excluded by M., see p. 185).

The only M.’s example of a possible preterite in the apodosis of a king’s edict is actually a perfect *iš-tu u₂-te-eb-bi-bu* “nachdem er sich gereinigt haben wird” (A-§ B, IV 1–5, § 11, M. 268).¹⁷ Defending the Preterite as a possible reading in this context, M. 268 observes that “ein isoliertes Präteritum weniger der Erklärung bedarf als ein Perfekt”. M.’s general approach to the Perfect is to my mind erroneous (see below), still—independently of M’s vision—the Perfect within future temporal clauses is probably always “isolated”, i.e. it is not coordinated with a previous preterite in the same clause. The inability to explain a fact by a theory is no reason to doubt the fact. The Preterite in *lāma*-clauses of incantations (two examples on p. 858) does not denote anteriority relative to a future reference point but rather future posteriority because the predicates of respective main clauses are imperatives. Cf. one of the examples:

[§]i-i ... [l]a-ma ik-šu-du-ka ...

Come out (: a disease) before (the weapon of a god) reaches you! YOS 11, 14, Rs. 5.

The speaker wants the main clause fact (denoted by an imperative) to happen before that of the temporal clause. Besides, the temporal clause itself (against M.’s classification of this case as anteriority relative to a future reference point) provides a reference point for the main clause, as is usually the case with future time temporal clauses in OB. Last not least, here the meaning of the Preterite is conditioned by the syntactic pattern of a *lāma*-clause (GAG § 173k–l). Same of course applies to *adi* ... *lā* future-time temporal clauses with preterites in OB.

In languages that encode time relationships by verbal tense, relative tense without absolute tense (or, in R. Jakobson’s more convenient terms, *taxis* without *tense*) is a rare phenomenon. In the average case, *taxis* forms obtain in non-finite constructions and subordinate clauses. Therefore to prove that a language has *taxis* but no deictic tense one has to produce comparable (and, if possible, minimally “loaded” in terms of syntax and pragmatics) utterances in which a given verb form

¹⁷ Correct «reziprokes ‘sich reinigen’» to “reflexives”.

is interpreted relative to the moment of speaking *or* to some other reference point provided by the context. If we disregard—with M.—this pattern criterion, we will end up claiming that both English simple present and present perfect are relative tenses e.g. on the force of utterances like “finish it before I come” or “I will return your book when I have read it”, or that English simple past has the meaning of deictic present on the force of “It’s time you went to bed now”.

In Ch. 5, “Prayers and letters to gods and from gods”, M. has found one possible example of a preterite denoting *Vorzeitigkeit* in der Zukunft (p. 799f.), but this interpretation is not (as granted by M.) compelling:

e-em ma-tim ša qa-at-ka ik-šu-du

Wo immer das Land, das deine Hand ergriffen haben wird²
(oder: hat³)...

MARI 5 (1987) 259, 19f., translation as in M. 799.

M. lists one example of a doubtless preterite *ta-at-bu-ku* in a temporal *kīma*-clause of a culinary text (YOS 11, 27:41–42) as against four examples of perfects in the same syntactic environment, also in culinary texts (p. 285f.). This preterite is quite aberrant, since culinary recipes are temporalized (with M.) in the speaker’s future. GAG § 171h states (I believe, correctly): “Ist die Handlung des übg. S[atzes] eine zukünftige, so findet sich im Temp.-S. das Prt. nur, wenn die Handlung des Temp.-S. eine eindeutig vergangene ist”, i.e. the Preterite is used in the rare case when the temporal clause fact precedes the present moment and the main clause fact follows it. Since this example seems to be a hapax in the whole of OB, it is probably better to leave it unexplained rather than to posit here (*contra* M. and at variance with other recipes) a pre-present interpretation. Being a hapax, it is hardly suited to serve as a piece of proof for a general linguistic truth.

*it-ti UZU ša ta-aḥ-ru-ṣu₂ ... mit Fleisch, das du transchierst
haben wirst. YOS 11, 27, 16, translation as in M. 285.*

This is the second (and the last) example of a future time preterite M. claims to have found in recipes. In this case, *lectio facillior* (a philological principle otherwise recognized by M.) is the pre-present interpretation: the cook does the cutting of the meat before the zero-point.

The last three examples of the alleged Preterite with future reference are in reported speech of narrative texts.

tu-ut-te-er Gilg Y 246 obtains in a broken left-hand context, its interpretation is disputed in the scholarship, but it stands to reason that *tu-ut-te-er* might well be a D perfect. Andrew George comments: “The broken word might be the object of transitive *tuttēr*”.¹⁸

a-ta-a'-da-kum-ma (RA 45 [1951] 183, 36) is difficult, according to M. 693 it may be both perf. G and pret. Gt of either *na'ādum* I “aufpassen, sich kümmern” or *nādum/na'ādum* II “rühmen, preisen”, so it will hardly yield much for the subject under scrutiny.

u₃ na-ḫi i-iš a-wi-lum ša ur-ra-am in-nam-ra i-na ša-pa-ri-im

Und wohlauf wird der Mann sein, der morgen beim Schicken sichtbar geworden sein wird. RA 45 (1951) 182, 24f., translation as in M. 692.

This one is an elegant (and the only available) example of a preterite with future time reference in a relative clause, but it does not denote anteriority relative to a future reference point, as M. would have it. The deictic temporal adverb *urram* “tomorrow” makes this preterite refer to the moment of speaking.

Thus we are left with no sure examples (except for *kīma ... ta-at-buku* discussed above) of the Preterite denoting anteriority relative to a future reference point.¹⁹

As to the anteriority relative to a reference point in the past, the Preterite denotes it (according to M. 873f.) in relative and temporal clauses in particular in legal and divinational texts,²⁰ while the reference point is always located relative to the zero-time, as e.g. in CH § 125, quoted in M. 231:

... be-el E₂ ša i-gu-ma mi-im-ma ša a-na ma-ša-a-ru-tim id-di-nu-šum-ma u₂-ḫi al-li-qu₂ u₂-ša-lam-ma ...

... the householder who was careless and allowed to be lost that which (the owner of the property) had given him will make restitution and ...

¹⁸ I quote from an unpublished manuscript of his commentary to the OB Gilg., George 2003 is inaccessible to me.

¹⁹ Actually I have found one such example within the TALT corpus in a relative clause of UET 6, 414:1–2, see below § 3. On an *adi ... lā* future-time temporal clause with the Preterite in the TALT corpus, see below.

²⁰ I exclude narratives from this survey because, for the reasons just given, their evidence for how a language grammaticalizes time has to be studied separately.

If we add to the picture the use of the Preterite as “epistolary past” in relative clauses of OB letters,²¹ we will get a fairly complete list of patterns in which the non-negated Preterite appears in OB non-narrative texts. It goes beyond the scope of a review-article to attempt a thorough linguistic thinking-through of this picture, but from the above it is already clear that the main-clause Preterite is (1) restricted to the left-hand stretch of the time axis and (2) bound to T₀ (zero-time). The Preterite has future reference in *adi ... lā* and *lāma* temporal clauses.²² The Preterite has pluperfect meaning in subordinate clauses whose main clauses are temporalized in the speaker’s past. Given this evidence, I would hesitate to label the Preterite a relative tense without further ado, if only because of clear pattern distribution of deictic and taxis uses.

The Perfect

In most general terms, M. comes to the conclusion that the Perfect—like the Preterite with which it has much in common—is a relative tense denoting the same three types of anteriority:

Das Perfekt dient in altbabylonischen literarischen Texten zur Bezeichnung relativer Vorzeitigkeit gegenüber der Gegenwart, in der Zukunft und vermutlich auch in der Vergangenheit. Sofern sich der Gebrauch des Perfekts von dem des Präteritums differenzieren läßt, hat das Perfekt die Bedeutung des Präteritums zuzüglich einer zusätzlichen Nuance. Unter hypothetischem Verzicht auf diese besondere Nuance ließe sich das Perfekt durch das Präteritum ersetzen (p. 875).

More specifically, in non-narrative contexts, M. (p. 875 ff) recognizes two functions of the Perfect:

(1) Perfekt des Fortschreitens—or consecutive Pf.—with past reference. In M.’s view it is the only “regular” (i.e. explainable by his theory) use of the Perfect outside of narrative but amply attested also in

²¹ This usage matches the epistolary Perfect in main clauses. See Loesov 2004:xx for a discussion.

²² *adi ... lā* temporal clauses do not feature in M.’s discussion of the Preterite with future time reference. I do not discuss preterites in temporal clauses within narratives (according to M., they denote either contemporaneity or anteriority relative to the respective main clause fact).

the latter; simply stated, for M. the consecutive sense is in most cases the semantic plus (“zusätzliche Nuance”) of the Perfect as over against the Preterite, whose basic sense is anteriority. In other words, M.’s regular Perfect is “anteriority” + “consecution”.

(2) non-consecutive Perfect, that is attested in most genres of the TALT corpus; M. epitomizes this usage as “Unklarer Gebrauch des Perfekts” (p. 878f.).

On my part (Loesov 2004:171), I have outlined the basic meaning of the Perfect as follows: “The Perfect denotes (1) a past fact (2) possessing a resultative component (3) that is temporalized at the moment of observation coinciding with the coding time”, i.e. I think that the temporal *iptaras* essentially meets the requirements of the PERFECT as a category of the universal grammar.

Regardless of any theoretical premises, OB has (*pace* M.) at least three contexts in which the non-negated Perfect cannot be replaced by the Preterite: main “epistolary past” clauses, *šumma*-clauses with future reference, temporal clauses with future reference introduced by *inūma*, *ištu*, and *kīma*.

I believe that *iptaras* does not display consecutive sense in any of its uses, in particular not in legal protases. Consecution is successfully encoded by the iconic sequence of verbal predicates (Fleischman 1990:131ff.) and needs no morphological support. The relative postposition of *iptaras* in linear sequence of verbs that permanently leads Assyriologists into temptation is accounted for not by *consecutio temporum* but rather by the “break” in terms of interpretation register (Loesov 2004:152–153), i.e. by the shift from the narrative to deictic register, wherein *iptaras* with its PERFECT sense has its proper place. This approach will explain the postposition of *iptaras* in most speech genres of OB, i.e. both in letters and in the TALT corpus, so M.’s consecutive reading is not compulsory but can be countered with an alternative one. My theory is of course not valid for post-positioned *iptaras* in epic (and epistolary) narratives, for which I suggest a different explanation (Loesov 2004:117ff.), essentially in terms of literary technique. Same kind of explanation seems to be appropriate for M.’s “Perfekt der Retrospektive und des Hintergrunds” (p. 877f.) in narrative texts, on which I will dwell no longer. I have only to indicate a logical gap in M.’s arrangement: he makes no attempt to deduce the “retrospective and background” reading from the consecutive one, still he does not count it as “unclear use”. Why?

Now M.'s summing-up discussion of the "Unklare[n] Gebrauch[s] des Perfekts" (p. 878f.) concentrates primarily on the Perfect in temporal clauses with future reference²³ and on the epistolary Perfect. I explain the latter as the deictic transfer of the Perfect's focal (or prototypical) sense to the addressee. Hereby I account for the non-use of the Preterite of addressee-directional verbs with this force (Loesov 2004:130), while M.—being a loyal believer in the consecutive sense of the Perfect as the primary one—is forced to confess: "Einstweilen vermag ich die auffallend häufige Verwendung des Perfekts in diesem Kontext (= in the context of "epistolary past") nicht zu erklären" (p. 879).

In the following paragraphs I will try to show that the deictic (roughly speaking, "present perfect") interpretation of the primary meaning of *iptaras* helps clarify other instances of M.'s "unclear use" too, thereby verifying my suggestion and falsifying the view of *iptaras* as a relative tense, since *apud* M. the relative tense hypothesis has much to do with his cases of "unclear use".

The Perfect denotes "Vorzeitigkeit in der Zukunft" in temporal clauses introduced by *inūma*, *īštu*, and *kīma*. I would suggest here—building on my previous analysis of *iptaras* in temporal clauses (Loesov 2004:134ff.)—that the *future perfect* (i.e. taxis) reading of *iptaras* in temporal clauses is its secondary meaning preserving *mutatis mutandis* the basic structure of *iptaras* in its primary meaning as distinguishing the fact time (past) and the result time at which the past fact is observed. Importantly, the non-use of *iptaras* as *past perfect* in subordinate clauses (in particular in past time temporal clauses) is explained by its essential nature of deictic tense. Continuing this line of reasoning, I would like to notice that this taxis use of *iptaras* as future perfect that establishes an additional reference point for the main clause future fact corresponds to the non-distinction of present and future in OB verbal morphology: both temporal domains can be denoted by *iparras*.

* * *

²³ M. 878 writes: "Das Perfect dient ebenso wie das Präteritum zur Bezeichnung relativer Vorzeitigkeit in der Zukunft". The statement on the Preterite is, as we have seen, pretty much incorrect for the TALT corpus, while the "futural" use of the Perfect in the TALT corpus turns out to be restricted to temporal clauses.

These observations will help us clarify the temporal location of Mari rituals, whose perfects M. also counts among “unclear usage”.

M. divides what he calls “Beschreibungen” into two groups: “Gestaltung des Beschriebenen als Zukunft im Hauptsatz” and “Gestaltung des Beschriebenen als Gegenwart im Hauptsatz”. He relegates the Mari rituals (with much hesitation, see p. 279) to the second group:

Sie (sc. Mari rituals—*S. L.*) schildern, was jedesmal geschieht, wenn das Ritual durchgeführt wird, das für den Erhalt der Ordnung notwendig ist (p. 279).

I do not quite understand how it comes that in Mari rituals the coding time coincides with the decoding time (“fallen hier Sprech- und Leszeit zusammen”, p. 293). I think that the actual use of finite verb forms in Mari rituals makes it quite clear that the ritual descriptions are temporalized in the future vis-à-vis both the speaker and eventual recipients of instructions, and this is in fact the alternative explanation envisaged by M.— the rituals are temporalized in the future of priests responsible for their performance. Let us look at the following example, as quoted and translated by M. on p. 296:

re-eš UZU *a-na* ^dUTU *u₂-te-me-ed* // *a-di a-na* ^dUTU *la* *u₂-te-em-mi₃-du* *ki-is-pu-um* *u₂-ul ik-ka-sa₃(A)-ap* // *iš-tu a-na* ^dUTU *u₂-te-mi₃-du* *ki-is-pu-[[x x]]-um a-na* [[30?]] LUGAL-*ki-in* [[x]] *na-ra-am-30* LU₂ *ḥa-na* MEŠ *ia-ra-dí* *u₃ a-na šu-ut nu-um-ḥe-e* *u₃* DILI.Ḥ[I.A] *ki-is-pu-um an-nu-u₂-[um]* *ik-ka-sa₃-[ap]*

Das Beste des Fleisches wird Šamaš präsentiert. Solange es Šamaš nicht präsentiert worden ist, wird das *kispum* nicht geopfert. Nachdem es Šamaš präsentiert worden ist, wird das *kispum* für Sargon, Narām-Sîn, die Ḥanäer von Jaradum und für die von Nunḥum und andere, (wird) dieses *kispum* geopfert.

J.-M. Durand/M. Guichard, FS Barrelet, S. 67.69, i 13–24.

M. understands bold-typed forms as pre-present preterites and puts them under the heading “Vergangenheit Präteritum”, i.e. locates them “to the left” of the zero-point. I have provided sentence-dividers (//) and underlined the temporal conjunctions and the predicates of the independent and main clauses, all of which M. interprets, judging by his translation, as presents.

The verb form in the temporal clause a-di a-na ^dUTU la u₂-te-em-ME-du may be both present and preterite (GAG § 173h), since their semantic difference in this context is not yet clear. Temporal clauses introduced by *adi ... lā* usually have *future* rather than pre-present reference (so at least in all the examples I have found in AbB and ARM), therefore the very appearance of an *adi ... lā* clause suggests that the respective utterance is most probably temporalized in the writer's future.

In the temporal clause iš-tu a-na ^dUTU u₂-te-ME-du, the verb may be either a present Dt *ūtemmed* or (more likely, see presently) morphological preterite *ūtemmid* used with the force of the Perfect. If the verb is to be understood as *ūtemmid*, its surface preterital form is due to the virtual incompatibility of derivational and temporal *t*-infixes. On this reading, the only infixed *-t-* performs double duty and the verb is syntactically a future-time perfect.

In fact, M.'s observations on the use of the Perfect in Mari rituals suggest that the reading of u₂-te-ME-du as a syntactic perfect is much more likely than that of a present. M. has listed in Mari rituals only two preterites just discussed and six perfects (p. 296f.), all of them in discourse *ištu-* and *inūma-* clauses.²⁴ His comment on these texts is both "dogmatic" (presupposing consecution as the norm) and contrary to well-known facts (Pret. is not used in this context at all):²⁵

In keinem Fall bezeichnen die Perfekta ein Fortschreiten gegenüber vorangehenden Verbalformen oder sind in einer anderen für Perfekta typischen Gebrauchsweise verwendet. Eine Differenz zwischen Präteritum und Perfekt vermag ich nicht festzustellen (p. 296).

I hope to have shown that, *pace* M., actually these *iptaras* forms "sind in einer ... für Perfekta typischen Gebrauchsweise verwendet".

* * *

Numerous perfects not preceded by preterites in protases of omina and legal norms (see M. 878 n. 44 for references) also represent an "unclear use" for M. They are most easily explained on the assumption of prototypical "present perfect" meaning of temporal *iptaras* coupled with

²⁴ Actually, *inūma* is used only once.

²⁵ For an exceptional preterite *ta-at-bu-ku* in YOS 11, 27:41–42, see above.

M.'s insightful vision of both text types as having the moment of interpretation ("Rezeptionszeit") as the zero-point (Loesov 2004:150, with discussion of M.'s "Rezeptionszeit").

Three assumed non-sequential perfects found by M. in divinational and legal apodoses (p. 878 n. 44) are statistically insignificant, so I will not try to explain them on the basis of the alternative theory.

As to the texts where M. finds unclear perfects in the context of "Vergangenheit in narrativen Texten und Passagen" (p. 878 n. 44, on p. 489 same usage is referred to as "ta-infigierte Verbalformen in unsicherem und fragmentarischem Kontext", actually there are three such non-broken forms), at least one verb form is quite clear, i.e. explainable without tour de force of any kind:

šum-ma am-ta-qu₂-ut šu-mi lu-uš-zi-iz

If I fall, I shall establish my name. Gilg. Y. 148.

amtaqut is used here the way the Perfect is sometimes used in future reference *šumma*-clauses of OB letters (Loesov 2004:145).

As for the alleged occasional use of the Perfect as performative/Koinzidenzfall (p. 818ff.), it is well known that language can employ verb forms with diverse temporal and modal basic meanings for the expression of this illocutionary force,²⁶ consequently M.'s *non liquet* again sounds rather dogmatic.

The Present

According to M., the Present in the TALT corpus is—like the Preterite and the Perfect—a relative tense and has both indicative and non-indicative readings.

Indicative readings include "relative contemporaneity and posteriority" and "plurality in the past" (p. 886).

The former one is more frequent and admittedly more important for synchronic description of the OB verb. As it turns out, "[d]as Präsens bezeichnet als Tempus relativer Gleichzeitigkeit, sofern der Bezugspunkt die Gegenwart der Sprecher ist, die Gegenwart. Nur sehr selten bezeichnet es eine relative Gleichzeitigkeit in der Vergangenheit. Eine relative Gleichzeitigkeit in der Zukunft ist nicht nachweisbar" (p. 887). "Indicative posteriority" is attested (with the exception of two *lāma*-

²⁶ Doing so, language exploits respective basic meanings, cf. "I invite you" with "I would like to invite you".

clauses in CH protases which are explained on the basis of the pattern) only relative to the moment of speaking (p. 887), i.e. it can simply be called “future”.

As for M.’s “plurality in the past”, it happens to be attested mostly in narrative texts.

M. might be right in his issue with Streck 1995a in assigning pluralic readings to the indicative Present in most of the narrative contexts in which it occurs, but some of M.’s pluralic readings for CH and divinational protases are in my view doubtful, cf. especially *la is-sa₃-qar₂* “has not identified (the owner)” as the only predicate of CH § 18 protasis: the alleged Gt present (p. 149) rather than perfect *lā issaqar* is hardly likely in view of negated perfects appearing in the same syntactic slot in CH, while M.’s parallel with Gt of *sqr* introducing reported speech in narrative texts is less convincing.

M. sees the semantic shift “relative non-anteriority” > “plurality in the past” as non-trivial:

Daß eine Formkategorie des Verbs, welche temporal relative Gleich- und Nachzeitigkeit bezeichnet, auch verwendet werden kann, um in der Vergangenheit Nuancen zum Ausdruck zu bringen, die hier unter dem Begriff «Pluralität» zusammengefaßt sind, ohne Berücksichtigung einer Gleich-, Vor- oder Nachzeitigkeit, mag befremdlich anmuten (p. 889).

M. tentatively explains this use historically in terms of Kouwenberg’s iconic relationship between gemination and plurality, i.e. as a fossilized rest of the assumed primitive meaning of *iparras* (p. 889f.). This explanation is unnecessary—independently of the validity of Kouwenberg’s claim. I would counter M.’s uneasiness about this function of *iparras* with the words of S. Fleischman quoted above: when the speaker-based tenses refer to story-now, “their contribution to the discourse is always something other than temporal location.” One can safely hypothesize that this narrative function of *iparras* evolved secondarily out of its primary temporal meaning: for a verb form regularly used in the deictic register, this development is typologically quite probable.

A preliminary approach to the values of iptaras, iprus and iparras

Unlike orthodox followers of linguistic structuralism—but probably with M.²⁷—I believe that a single absolute tense in a verbal system in no *contradictio in adjecto*. Let us take B. Comrie’s well-known definition of absolute vs. relative tense:

“The difference between absolute and relative tense is not that between the present moment versus some other point in time as reference point, but rather between a form whose meaning *specifies* the present moment as reference point and a form whose meaning does not specify that the present moment *must* be its reference point. Relative tenses thus have the present moment as one of their possible reference points, but this is a problem of interpretation rather than of meaning”²⁸ (Comrie 1985:58, italics added).²⁹

As we have seen, this kind of discussion demands that we leave for a while the verb subsystem of narration out of consideration and concentrate on speech genres that more or less approximate the canonical situation of utterance. This granted, at least the OB Perfect does contain the retrospective point of observation (encoding- or decoding-time) as part of its meaning in all its main clause uses as outlined above and in Loesov 2004, while its use in temporal clauses (and in *šumma*-clauses of OB letters) can be shown to derive from its primary meaning. Thus, OB possesses at least one absolute tense.

The main clause Preterite also depends on the coding time for its temporalization (see above and Loesov 2004:110). Roughly speaking,

²⁷ «Ebenso läßt es dieser “Raster” zu, daß beispielweise ... ein Bezugssystem aus einem Tempus und zwei Aspekten vorliegt» (p. 20).

²⁸ I feel this definition is too rigid, which is due to Comrie’s uncompromising “context-free” approach to defining the basic meaning of a tense form, cf. “the definition of tense is independent of context” (p. 27). Thus e.g. his view of Russian finite verb as having only absolute tenses (p. 67) is clearly incompatible with the above definition. Actually Russian seems to be less “absolutely tensed” than OB. E.g. Modern Russian regularly uses its only present tense to render simultaneity of an object clause fact with a moment of observation obtaining in the speaker’s past: *Ya videl, čto on bežit*, “I saw him running”, lit. “I saw that he runs”, while OB does not use its Present to denote relative simultaneity in this context; it will rather use the Preterite or the Stative depending on the semantic type of the respective verbal predicate.

²⁹ I introduce here and elsewhere opinions expressed in Comrie 1985 because to my knowledge it is still the most recent linguistic textbook completely dedicated to tense and because it is very popular among Assyriologists.

the relationship of both tenses in non-narrative main clauses is that of English present perfect and simple past.³⁰

As for the Present, according to M. its most frequent use in the TALT corpus is simultaneity and posteriority (i.e. non-anteriority) relative to the moment of speaking.³¹ Relative simultaneity in the future “ist nicht nachweisbar” (p. 887). Contemporaneity with a past reference point (and this would be the brand of the relative use of the Present if it were regularly expressed in any syntactic pattern) is very poorly attested (M. 887 with n. 103).

Eva von Dassow observes that “absolute tense ... view of the Akkadian verb system has apparently never been propounded” (von Dassow 2002:537)³² and she is probably right, still a preliminary attempt to compare verb use in the TALT corpus with that of OB letters suggests that at least in main clauses speaker-oriented uses greatly overshadow those having alternative reference points.

Comrie’s radically “context-independent meaning” (Comrie 1985:26) is difficult to accept as it stands, especially since he says at the same breath: “[I]t is possible for a given tense to have more than one meaning, in which case some of the meanings may be more basic than others; it is also possible that a tense will receive particular interpretations in particular contexts, but these are always explainable in terms of the interaction of context-independent meaning and context, and do not therefore form part of the meaning of the tense category in question” (ibid.). A most natural exegesis of this statement is as follows: on high, Language itself (Saussurian *langue*) can encode by purely morphological means several meanings to one tense form and create their hierarchy; nearer to earth contextual interpretations are engendered.

³⁰ For my view of the situation obtaining in legal protases, see “Excursus III: The verbal tenses in OB laws” in Loesov 2004.

³¹ M. does not indulge much in the talk about “basic” or “primary” meanings but he seems to start from the widespread premise that relative non-anteriority is in fact synchronically speaking the basic meaning of OB *iparras*, cf. his observation on the origin of “plurality in the past” in connection with Kouwenberg’s theory of iconic sources of gemination which he cautiously approves: “Zumindest besteht keine Notwendigkeit, die Pluralität aus der relativen Gleich- und Nachzeitigkeit herzuleiten” (p. 890).

³² In the quoted review article of Streck 1995, she supports M. P. Streck’s relative tense option for both LB and OB. One gets the impression that Akkadian linguistics is haunted by memories of current interpretations of Classical Arabic verb system.

This is difficult to accept, though I would be ready to believe in one and only one Platonic meaning reflected and transformed in a number of pattern-dependent interpretations (= derived meanings). The question is of course “How do we come to know this Meaning?”—One way to do it is to sift contexts looking for those that are semantically minimal and syntactically less bound and to see whether meanings obtaining in more “complex” contexts are derivable from an assumed basic meaning allegedly found in “simple” contexts.³³ And it seems that for the three Akkadian tenses discussed so far this most neutral context is main clause having the present moment as reference point.³⁴ Thus, in the absence of time adverbials (which constitute a “strong” kind of context) *iparras* forms are most naturally interpreted as non-past.

The position of N. J. C. Kouwenberg³⁵—couched in different terms—seems to be close to what I suggest here:

“In my view, *iparras* basically expresses that the action is not yet finished at a given moment, i.e., is either still continuing or has not yet begun. This moment is usually the moment of speech, but it may also be a moment in the past, *if the context contains sufficient clues to indicate this...* It seems to me that the traditional term present or present-future is better than durative, even if it ignores the use of *iparras* for past reference (*which is marginal and conditioned by the context, anyhow*), and that the best term to cover the use of *iparras* is imperfective” (italics added; in a footnote K. refers to OB letters where *iparras* is attested in the context of *panānum* “formerly”).

I would suggest—in a most preliminary fashion—that synchronically in OB the primary meaning of *iparras* is non-anteriority relative to the moment of speaking, and within this scope posteriority is more prominent than contemporaneity (with GAG § 78d). The fact that *iparras* is not well suited for denoting telic facts taking place at the moment of speaking is important,³⁶ since “strict” contemporaneity with the zero-time is the deictic heart of the cross-linguistic PRESENT. As a

³³ In certain cases, this synchronic procedure will fail or force us to posit homonyms. We can hardly derive the indicative sense of the Arabic *lam yaktub* from the basic injunctive meaning of *yaktub*.

³⁴ It is repeatedly stated within many trends of linguistics that tense and mood (but not aspect), being predicative categories, are properties of sentence rather than just those of verb form.

³⁵ Kouwenberg 1998:815f.

³⁶ Loesov 2004, see especially what kind of verbs employed in the present-time Present are collocated with *inanna* “now”.

pendant to this evidence, verbs denoting atelic processes are eagerly used in the context of both the present-time *iparras* and the Stative, in particular collocated with *inanna* pointing to the moment of speaking (see examples in Loesov 2004:91ff.). On the contrary, *iparras* is used for future reference without semantic restrictions. Probably it is this latter use that gave rise to the Prohibitive *lā iparras*³⁷ and non-indicative (i.e. modal) readings of *iparras* analyzed by M. for the TALT corpus (most of them in narratives).

As for *iparras* with assumed past reference, it is largely restricted to narratives, and it turns out that in the narrative register its aspectual senses are by far more prominent than the meaning of relative contemporaneity: actually, the narrative *iparras* does often serve to convey the progress of the story and to express *additionally* aspectual nuances (for examples see M. 496ff.). This is true both of literature (M.'s "plurality in the past")³⁸ and letters,³⁹ while the present-time imperfectivity of *iparras* simply follows from its temporal sense: verb forms combining the values of present tense and perfective aspect are rare and semantically unstable.⁴⁰ This will entail that the temporal meaning of *iparras* (non-anteriority relative to T₀) and its aspectual readings are in complementary distribution depending on the register of interpretation both in the TALT corpus and OB letters.

If this is true, the chances of *iparras* to be a prototypically deictic verb form are enhanced.

The way *iparras* is used in OB partly reminds "old PRESENTS" that develop future and modal meanings (as described for genetically unrelated languages in Haspelmath 1998). In OB, the weakening of the "deictic middle part" of *iparras* looses free its future/modal and aspectual senses. In Semitic, this development is paralleled by Biblical Hebrew: in prose dialogues the Imperfect *yiqōl* is used with indicative present-time force only in the context of questions and negations, oth-

³⁷ Note that the Prohibitive is well attested in OB letters, while the Vetitive is not: it appears mostly in literature, often with the same force as the Prohibitive of letters (i.e. to render negative command), see e.g. OB Atr.

³⁸ "Aspect" in its widest sense of internal structure of a situation (minus location relative to a reference time) will also cover M.'s plurality.

³⁹ See the examples referred to in Kouwenberg 1998; *iparras* forms in question appear within narrative portions of letters.

⁴⁰ This combination seems to be attested in Old Russian, although the interpretation of respective facts is disputed.

erwise it is replaced by the active participle *qā'ēl* as a “new present”, while the Imperfect is freely used in dialogues for future references and with modal meanings.

The Stative

M. supports Kouwenberg’s view of the Stative as verb form as opposed to the widespread trend in Akkadian linguistics of last decades to consider it nominal sentence (predicative construction/Prädikativkonstruktion, etc.), this latter opinion was expressed in particular by G. Buccellati, J. Huehnergard, J. Tropper, B. Kienast, and M. P. Streck.

Kouwenberg’s synchronous interpretation is so irresistibly convincing and illuminating that now it is even difficult to follow the reasons of the scholars who viewed the OB Stative as a kind of nominal predication.⁴¹

My only reservation will be about the path of grammaticalization suggested by Kouwenberg:

“The stative of adjectives ... is likely to represent the most basic type of stative... The historical nucleus of the stative is to be found in the adjective, where it arose as a means of making a morphological distinction between attributive and predicative use” (Kouwenberg 2000:58, 56).

Since (1) grammatical descriptions know transitive use of “Old perfective” in Old Egyptian, (2) the Stative of atelic verbs is rare (GAG § 77f., with examples); (3) “V[erbal]A[djective]s of high transitivity verbs ... are found more often than VAs of low transitivity verbs” (Kouwenberg 2000:64, with examples and discussion) and e.g. verbal adjectives of *wā'ûm* and *tebûm* do not seem to be attested,⁴² (4) predicative adjectives are attested in the nominative, sometimes in contexts indistinguishable from those in which statives of adjectives are used (Kouwenberg 2000:36, with examples), it is likely that the direction of grammaticalization (at whatever stage of a proto-language) was just the opposite of that suggested by Kouwenberg: transitive verbs formed a resultative adjective that was subsequently verbalized via development out of nominal sentence whose exact course is still unclear (Diem

⁴¹ “Konjugiertes Nomen” of W. von Soden and O. Rössler does not look satisfactory either.

⁴² This will be parallel to the virtual absence of non-lexicalized “past participles” of intransitive verbs in many Romance and Germanic languages.

1997),⁴³ and only at a later stage non-transitive verbs, adjectives and ultimately certain nouns followed the lead, most probably in this order. If this suggestion is plausible, the Stative is in its origin a prototypically verbal category with the basic meaning of resultative. Again, Kouwenberg's "primary adjectives" are not numerous and lack resultative semantics, while the resultative VA is a productive member of the transitive verb paradigm, so it is less likely that the former were able to trigger the development than otherwise.

It is probably misunderstanding of the linguistic nature of the Stative in recent scholarship that has conditioned insufficient attention to its meaning. The fact that Streck 1995—a very carefully and systematically organized monograph—has no special paragraph on the Funktionsanalyse of *paris* (unlike on functions of other verb forms) but rather tends to compare the Stative to the authentic verbless sentence (to the point of their synchronic identification) is very eloquent. Rowton 1962 is still the best documented study of semantics (or "use") of the Stative (OB and literary SB texts, with additions from OA).

Now what are temporal properties of the Stative? M. has come to the conclusion that in the TALT corpus the Stative serves "in erster Linie zur Bezeichnung statischer Situationen in Vergangenheit, Gegenwart und Zukunft. [...] Der Stativ wird zumeist passiv und aktiv-intransitiv verwendet. Daneben ist in weit geringerem Umfang auch die aktiv-transitive Verwendung bezeugt; hierbei ist der Stativ nicht zur Bezeichnung aktiv-transitiver zukünftiger Situationen bezeugt. Gelegentlich dient der Stativ zur Bezeichnung dynamischer Situationen; hierbei ist der Stativ nur aktiv-transitiv und nur zur Bezeichnung der Vergangenheit bezeugt. [...] [I]st der Stativ ... «eigentlich» kein Tempus bzw. bestenfalls omnitemporal" (p. 892f.).

M. comes to the atemporal view of the Stative in particular through the following reasoning:

"Da der Stativ in Vergangenheit, Gegenwart und Zukunft gleichermaßen zur Bezeichnung statischer Sachverhalte verwendet wird, ist er *nicht im Hinblick auf absolute Zeitstufen spezifiziert* und somit *kein absolutes Tempus*. Da der Stativ Vorzeitigkeit, Gleichzeitigkeit und Nachzeitigkeit *gegenüber der Gegenwart* bezeichnet, ist er *nicht im*

⁴³ This would entail that "the most basic type of stative" is that of high transitivity verbs, its meaning would have been predominantly passive: "BE broken".

Hinblick auf relative Zeitbezüge spezifiziert und ist somit auch kein relatives Tempus (p. 893, italics added).

Obviously, this judgment partly depends on M.'s general view of the OB verb⁴⁴ as encoding taxis rather than tense.

It is very impressive that M.'s analysis is three- or even four-dimensional: he considers temporal relationships (in terms of both tense and taxis), diathetic values and semantic properties of respective verbs. It would be worthwhile to carry this insight through for the whole of OB, consistently taking into account the fifth dimension—that of speech type or speech genre (*apud* M., this approach is of course conditioned by the very structure of his study).

Future time readings of the Stative described by M.—although they are not very prominent—supply a crucial piece of evidence in support of his claim that the Stative is atemporal. With much hesitation, I have to join this verdict provisionally. M. himself sagaciously warns that the Stative is a verb form “deren temporale Ansätze in den altbabylonischen literarischen Texten bemerkbar sind” (p. 893, same applies in his opinion to OB letters, n.145 *ibid*, and cf. his thoughts on the subject on p. 895).

M. shows much interest in the eventual use of the Stative to describe *dynamic* situations. He has produced a half-dozen of cases where dynamic reading of the Stative seems to him contextually justified. For some of these examples, dynamic reading is to my mind quite convincing, cf. a narrative text quoted on p. 639.

M. thinks that the most widespread use of the Stative in all the written records of Akkadian is that of “statischer Gegenwart” (p. 895) and he is probably right. This is corroborated by the fact (or at least by my observations) that in OB letters the temporalization of the Stative—barring strong contextual indications to the contrary—depends on the coding time, the default meaning being coincidence (stative or resultative) with the latter, while future time stative also needs strong contextual clues, as in the following example:

iš-tu i-na-an-na U₄.6.KAM ... lu-up-pu-ta-a-ku

⁴⁴ I remind the reader that this generalization is justified since almost all genres are represented in the TALT corpus.

I will be delayed (here) ... for five days from now on.
Goetze 1958: 1:37–39.

Thus, the Stative seems to be used in letters—wherever admissible in terms of lexical semantics and diathesis—as a kind of “new present”, while *iparras* is more at home in the future, but probably neither of these uses is grammaticalized.

3. “Marginal” uses of tenses in the TALT corpus

I believe that certain special uses to which our textbooks and reference grammars pay little attention—such as what is considered gnomic use in Mayer 1992, verb forms employed to render the performative sense and “epistolary past”—may be of great importance for the description of verbal system because it is in “extreme circumstances” where a verb form may sometimes reveal traits of its inherent semantics in a striking way. Thus (with Loesov 2004) the use of *iptaras* to the detriment of *iprus* as the “epistolary past” proves that the basic meaning of *iptaras* is that of the PERFECT. By the same token, this use proves that *iptaras* (against what is often claimed, in particular by M.) is not a consecutive tense.

In what follows I will discuss M.’s understanding of two more instances of what I label “extreme conditions use”.

Performative utterances in the TALT corpus

Performativity as an illocutionary force⁴⁵ is not to my knowledge morphologically encoded in languages of the world, still it has to be somehow expressed and is often expressed by different verb forms within the same language.⁴⁶ J. L. Austin’s term “performative utterance” stresses the pragmatic (quasi-legal) aspect of this phenomenon, while

⁴⁵ In the theory of speech acts, I stay with the classical terminology of Austin 1962 since much of what has been done since in the field of the speech acts theory by logicians is essentially exegesis of this insightful study.

⁴⁶ As Koschmieder 1965:33f. puts it, “der Koinzidenzfall = 1. Person sg. des Auslösungsmodus (?) ist eine logische Denkkategorie des Bezeichneten, für die ... eine grammatische Kategorie des Verbums—sie könnte etwa der ‘Effectivus’ heißen—fehlt. Es werden daher im Leerlauf andere Kategorien eingesetzt, am meisten das Präsens, weil der Koinzidenzfall mit dem Darstellungspräsens die Gegenwartszeitstufe gemein hat.”

Erwin Koschmieder's term "Koinzidenzfall" aims at its aspectual properties.⁴⁷

M. identifies Koinzidenzfälle (KF[e]) mostly in incantations (p. 810f., 815–36), but also in prayers (p. 771), narrative texts (p. 341–4, 481–3), possibly in a royal edict (p. 263f.), and at least once in a legal norm of CH (p. 109f.).

Linguistically, M. tends to oppose (not always consistently, see p. 835) performatives and KFe by assigning them different definitions:

Performative Sprechakte und Koinzidenzfälle sind voneinander zu unterscheiden. In performativen Sprechakten wird mittels Wörtern gehandelt, *in Koinzidenzfällen koinzidieren Handlung mittels Worten und Bericht über die Handlung*. In diesem Sinne ist beispielweise eine Abracadabra-Beschwörungsformel performativ, insofern das Sprechen derselben einen Krankheitsdämon ... zu bezwingen vermag. Ein Koinzidenzfall liegt jedoch nur dann vor, wenn dieses Bezwingen selbst in der Sprache thematisiert wird, etwa mittels "Hiermit beschwöre ich dich (p. 341, italics added).

This distinction (not very clear and, to my knowledge, without precedent in linguistics),⁴⁸ as well as M.'s whole approach to performatives/KFe seems to be designed in the first line to explain the verb use in incantations. In M.'s view, incantations belong in the magical Weltbild:

Texte, in denen sich die Sprecher eher bittend an die Götter wenden, werden hier als "Gebete", Texte, in denen sie sich eher (be)zwingend an die Götter wenden, werden hier als "Beschwörungen" verstanden (p. 760).

Mittels Beschwörungen zwingt man Beschworene, seien dies nun Naturgewalten, Gegenstände der Natur oder auch Götter, einen Zusammenhang innerhalb der Welt, der von ihnen nicht beherrschbar ist, zu beachten und zu befolgen (p. 807).

⁴⁷ E. Koschmieder employs Karl Bühler's term "Auslösung" ("releasing", "triggering") to refer to the pragmatics of Koinzidenzfall.

⁴⁸ In particular, on M.'s definition, any utterance with the force of imperative would be "performativer Sprechakt".

This theological (or hermeneutic) premise allows M. to make KF embrace all kinds of utterances wherein he sees (better: in his opinion, the ancients saw) magically compelling force at work and lift Koschmieder's restriction of KF to 1st person sg of *verba dicendi* or their contextual equivalents (same restriction was suggested by Austin).

Here are two examples of M.'s "non-canonical" KF:

u₂-ta-mi-ki ma-mi-it e₂-a u₂ ta-at-ta-la-ki

Hiermit beschwöre ich dich (:Lamaštum) mit dem Eid Eas; und *hiermit* gehst du fort. BIN 2, 72:20–21; p. 835 (the Present).

u₂-ul ta-aḥ-ḥa-za-an-ni

Du wirst mich nicht heiraten. CH § 142; p. 109 (the Present).

M. 110 suggests that *u₂-ul ta-aḥ-ḥa-za-an-ni* is "Ausspruch im Sinne eines performativen Sprechakts" (these "im Sinne..."-words reappear on p. 872 in the summing-up discussion of KF, so I understand that the quoted utterance is for M. a real KF). This utterance may have been 'die Form ..., mittels der die Ablehnung [der Ehe] zur Geltung und offiziellen Gültigkeit kommt' (p. 110), but it is not a KF even according to M.'s broad criteria just outlined.

M. counts most *precatives* in incantations among KFe, with the following comment:

"In prekativen Verbalformen, die ... nicht explizit sprachliche Handlungen thematisieren, liegen Koinzidenzfälle m.E. nur bei Handlungen des Beschwörenden zweifelsfrei vor" (p. 831).

An example:

ki-ma ti-tu-ri [l]u-ba e-li-[š]u

Wie über eine Brücke will ich *hiermit* über ihn (:Zorn) hinweggehen. UET 6, 399:13–14; p. 831.

Precatives create, in M.'s opinion, "nachzeitige Rhetorik der Koinzidenz" whereby "bricht das Akkadische die Koinzidenz zwischen Handlung und Sprechen über die Handlung dergestalt auf, daß die Handlung als gewünscht und noch in der Zukunft in Aussicht stehend dargestellt wird" (p. 829).

Precatives of *verba dicendi* (attested in the incantations of the TALT corpus) and their contextual equivalents may of course be used with the

performative force,⁴⁹ but the assumed KF use of verbs that do not represent “sprachliche Handlungen” totally depends on our exegetical assumptions about the operation of magical worldview and can hardly be proven.

One gets the impression that M.’s vision of KF is perhaps too broad. Thus, in the secular context of UET 6, 414:1–2 (“At the Cleaner’s”), the reading of a precative as KF is hardly justified, *pace* M.

al-kam LU₂ AZLAG₂ lu-wa-’i₃-ir-ka-a-^lma^l *SU-ba-ti zu-^luk^l-ki*
 ša u₂-wa-^li₃-ru^l-ka *la ta-na-ad-di-i-ma*

(Kunde:) “Komm, Wäscher, ich will dir *hiermit* auftragen:
 Reinige mein Gewand! Was ich dir *hiermit* auftrage, sollst
 du nicht unbeachtet lassen” (p. 342).

M. interprets both *luwa’’irka* and *ša uwa’’iruka* as KFe. I would prefer to read *luwa’’irka-ma šubātī zukki* as a hendiadys:⁵⁰ “Let me instruct you how to clean my garment”. This rendering respects the force of *-ma* while M.’s translation would most probably require *ummami* in OB. Moreover, my rendering fits well the actual *têrtum* that follows, and cf. ll. 31–32: *ša tu-wa-’i₃-<ra>-an-ni šu-un-na-am da-ba-ba-am qa₂-ba-am u₃ tu-ur₂-ra-am u₂-la e-li-i* “What you have instructed me—I cannot repeat, nor reiterate again!” (translation as in Wasserman 2003:20).

lu-wa-’i₃-ir-ka is no KF since by its enunciation the speaker *does not perform* the action denoted by *wu’’rum*. Here the precative has its normal modal force of wish or intention, even if one supplies “*hiermit*” in translation.⁵¹ *ša uwa’’iruka* is again no performative, both for above

⁴⁹ As suggested already in Mayer 1976:198 for *lušpurka* in prayers as addressed to a protective divine being. This seems to be correct if “ich will/möchte dich senden” means here “I ask/pray you to go”.

⁵⁰ The construction does reveal mismatch between logical subordination and syntactic coordination, but Assyriological tradition seems to recognize such constructions as hendiadyoi only when both verbs possess a common subject and share the tense/mood form. Thus, Kraus 1987:7 treats as Koppelungen mostly “solche Satzpaare [...], deren beide Prädikate [...] völlige Kongruenz in Person, Genus, Numerus und Aktionart aufweisen”. Still, e.g. CAD N/II 131a has *awilum ula na-’u₃ ula illakakkum* ‘it is not appropriate that the man come to you’ BIN 6 73:23 within the “in hendiadys” section (and rightly so).

⁵¹ As unambiguously explained by Koschmieder, “hiermit” within a KF should mean ‘durch diese Worte, durch das Aussprechen dieser Worte’, nicht aber ‘gleichzeitig mit diesen Worten’ ...” (Koschmieder 1965:30). The customer instructs the cleaner how to deal with his garment not

reason and because—by definition—performative in a relative clause makes no sense. *ša uwa”iruka* has the force of anteriority in the future relative to *lā tanaddi* in the main clause.

As was observed already in Heimpel–Guidi 1969 and Mayer 1976, the verb form most current in OB for the expression of performative force is the Preterite, and the study of M. corroborates this conclusion for the TALT corpus (for examples, see the pages of TALT referred to at the beginning of this section).

M. explains this use of the Preterite as follows:

Durch die Verwendung des Präteritums als eines Vorzeitigkeit bezeichnenden Tempus wird die Koinzidenz zwischen Handlung und Sprechen über die Handlung rhetorisch aufgebrochen und die Handlung, obgleich sie erst mittels des Sprechens in der Gegenwart des Sprechenden getätigt wird, als Vergangenheit dargestellt (p. 341).

Thus the KF precative as a rhetorical device is, in M.’s opinion, a “mirror image” of the KF preterite (p. 829).

I think that perhaps a purely linguistic explanation of the KF Preterite is preferable (and cf. the suggestions in Streck 1995:191 to which M. refers on p. 341).

Linguists often describe performative use as belonging in the realm of *perfective* aspect, although e.g. in English, German or Russian the standard verb form for this force is the present tense. E.g., Comrie 1985:37 thinks that the situations implied in the performative utterances “can be conceptualised as momentaneous, especially in so far as the time occupied by the report is exactly the same as the time occupied by the act, i.e. at each point in the utterance there is coincidence between the present moment with regard to the utterance and the present moment with regard to the act in question.”

The OB *iparras* is rarely used in performative utterances probably because of its limited ability to express what Russian aspectologists call “actual PRESENT”, i.e. to denote strict contemporaneity of a telic fact with the coding time (see § 2 above). This implies that OB *iparras* is

by using the verb *wu”urum*, but rather by giving the actual instruction. If he says, e.g., “hereby I *promise* to pay you so much”, this is KF/performative, but if he chooses to say “Hereby I *pay* you so much”, this is no performative and perhaps an abuse of “hereby”.

even less suited to express what might be called “closed present”, i.e. the meaning realized in the speech situation wherein the utterance time coincides with the fact time.

This makes us conjecture that the performative Preterite—by far the most common expression of KF in letters—contributes to the expression of performativity its purely aspectual meaning, while its temporal meaning in KF is that of “closed” contemporaneity with the coding time.

This “distilled quintessential” aspectual meaning of the Preterite may probably be seen also in generally valid statements discussed below.

General truths in the TALT corpus

In what follows I address part of the TALT passages in which M. sees “Allgemeingültigkeit” expressed.

M.’s insistence on the speaker as a semantic component of each text leads him to believe that in proverbs employing the Preterite “der Sprecher vergangenes Geschehen (als Gleichnis) erzählt und eine Allgemeingültigkeit nur impliziert ist” (p. 380). His example is a well-known proverb from ARMT 1, 5:10–13:

as-su₂-ur-ri ki-ma te-el-tim ul-li-tim ša um-ma-a-mi ka-al-ba-tum i-na šu-te-pu-ri-ša 1) u-up-pu-du-tim u₂-li-id

Hoffentlich nicht wie der alte Spruch, der folgendermaßen (lautet): “Eine Hündin gebar, während sie sich verköstigen ließ, blinde (Welpen)”. (Translation as in M. 380.)

M.’s interpretation of this proverb as “vergangenes Geschehen” (i.e. as a fact lying in the respective speaker’s past) stems from his conviction that the Preterite denotes only “relative Vorzeitigkeit” (see especially p. 873f.), which conviction makes him deny the “*gnomic* preterite” interpretation of Mayer 1992.

To explain the appearance of *i-prus* in part of the contexts that Mayer 1992 considers *gnomic*, M. once more suggests a hermeneutic interpretation: the Preterite is used because its reference is to Urzeit and therefore to the speaker’s past.

He quotes, among others, the two following examples that have been subject of much discussion in previous literature:

a-ra-aḫ ḫi ra-ma-ni⁵² a-r[a]-aḫ i pa-ag-ri
ki-ma na-ru-um ir-ḫi u-u₂ ki-ib-ri-ša
ki-ir-ba-an su₂-qi₂-im
e-pe-er šu-li-im
še-er-'a₁-an ši-qi₂-im
ṣu₂-um ki-ri-im

Ich begieße mich selbst, ich begieße meinen Körper,
 Wie ein Fluß seine Ufer begoß,
 (Wie) ein Dreckklumpen der Straße den Staub der Gasse,
 (Wie) Adern der Bewässerung den Durst des Gartens.
 YOS 11, 2:1–6, text and translation as on p. 377.

ki-ma na-ru-um ir-ḫi u-u₂ ki-ib-ri-i-ša
[a]-ra-aḫ ḫi ra-ma-ni-ma a-ra-aḫ ḫi pa-ag-ri
 Wie der Fluß seine Ufer begoß,
 Begieße [ich] mich selbst, begieße ich meinen Körper.
 C. Wilcke, *ZA* 75 (1985), 208, 114–116, text and translation
 as on p. 377.

M.'s interpretation is as follows:

[D]iese Passagen rekurren auf dasselbe Mythologem, das auch in der Vergewaltigung Nintus/Ninḫursaḡas durch Enki im Epos von Enki und Ninḫursaḡa imaginiert wird: die Bewässerung des Landes (bzw. einer Muttergöttin) durch den Fluß (bzw. den Süßwassergott). Zwar kann der Sachverhalt, daß ein Fluß die Ufer zu beiden Seiten bewässert und fruchtbar macht, ohne weiteres eine Allgemeingültigkeit beanspruchen, zumal auch kein bestimmter, konkreter Fluß im Text genannt ist. Doch es gibt keinen zwingenden Grund, daß der im europäischen neuzeitlichen Denken als allgemeingültig verständliche Umstand auch in einer vom Mythos geprägten antiken Gesellschaft nur überzeitlich gedacht werden kann (p. 378).

This interpretation cannot be definitely disproved but it seems strained and conditioned by M.'s decision to keep the Preterite—wherever possible—in the realm of the speaker's past. Still the allusion to the myth about Ninḫursaḡa and Enki is assumed here without sup-

⁵² Correct *ra-ma-ni-a* in M.'s transliteration to *ra-ma-ni*.

port in both texts and presupposes the sexual sense of *reḷ ū* throughout both compositions, which again is not proven. The interpretation of Cooper 1996 is likely at least for the incantation against scorpion stings YOS 11, 2: “[T]he reciter is enchanting himself, inseminating himself with the power of a spell to keep him from harm” (p. 52), i.e. (as shown in Cooper 1996) in the tenor of the simile(s?) *reḷ ū* is equivalent to *wašāpu* “enchant” or *šipta nadū* “to cast a spell”.⁵³ What is here the *tertium comparationis* between the tenor and the vehicle? Cooper 1996 believes that the vehicle is the “image of the river which builds up its own banks with fertile soil” (p. 48), or the river “fertilizing its own banks” (p. 52). On this interpretation, the sense is something like

I fertilize myself, I fertilize my body
(with the power of this spell),
Like the river FERTILIZE its banks.

This would mean that sexual connotations of *reḷ ū* are rather weak (but still present) in both parts of the simile, which makes M.’s hermeneutics—dependent on decidedly sexual message in the vehicle—not very likely.

I would consider the possibility that the meaning of the Preterite expressing general truths is not temporal but rather aspectual, like that of the KF Preterite. It is perhaps important that Mayer 1992 lists in his collection of clauses with “extratemporal” semantics in literary Akkadian preterites, presents and statives, but no perfects. This is no wonder since the majority of his examples are subordinate clauses expressing comparisons, and the Perfect is not used in this type of subordinate clauses. More important is the fact that the Perfect does not appear at all in the main clauses of the TALT corpus where M. sees *Allgemeingültigkeit*.⁵⁴ This is what I would expect because of the “egocentric” nature of the Perfect.

My suggestion is that generally valid utterances are “atemporal”, i.e. they contain no morphologically encoded reference to the respective speaker, while the choice of verb form is determined by the interplay of semantic types of verbs (= *Aktionsart*) and aspectual properties of verb forms.

⁵³ *a-ra-aḷ-ḷi* is either KF (with M.) or an “autocommentary”, like e.g. in TV cooking talk shows.

⁵⁴ The reading of RA 22 (1925) 170f., 19, quoted and discussed by M. on p. 741f., is doubtful.

Given that the verbal sub-system of universally valid utterances in OB consists of three finite forms—the Preterite, the Present, and the Stative—it is really tempting to construe their opposition as aspectual. (Hereby I hypothesize that in certain genres universally valid utterances are *linguistically* and not only semantically atemporal.)

Two general considerations support this hypothesis:

(1) universally valid statements do not need temporalization vis-à-vis the speaker the way some other speech genres do;

(2) the deictic tense is not very strong in OB,⁵⁵ and in discourse register (i.e. in non-narrative texts) the Perfect seems to be the most speaker-oriented verb form.

Historically, the innovative *iptaras* may have been the form that introduced subjective (i.e. “temporal” in the deictic sense of the word) element into Akkadian verbal system. Thus the universally valid utterances may have preserved a more archaic shape of the verbal system.⁵⁶

In certain speech genres the value of finite indicative verb forms is created from inside the text and the text genre and does not depend on the assumed figure of the speaker, i.e. on the time of speaking/writing. In OB, proverbs may have been one such genre. Cf. an OB sentence that appears (without translation) as one of the epigraphs of TALT and which is most probably a proverbial saying and not a freely created metaphor:

⁵⁵ This follows from the use of both *iparras* and *paris* to denote atelic facts obtaining at T₀, from semantic restrictions on the use of *iparras* in letters as discussed above, from “compositional” uses of *iptaras* in epic narratives, and eventually from the aspectual use of *iparras* in the same linguistic setting.

⁵⁶ Cf. the following words of Suzanne Fleischman that at the time of their writing constituted *communis opinio* in certain linguistic circles: “Aspect differs from tense in two fundamental respects: it is *nondeictic* and it grammaticalizes meaning distinctions pertaining to (nonmodal) characteristics of the event designated by the verb other than its ‘time’ (i.e. sequence), such as its duration, instantaneity, completion, repetition, frequency, inception, termination, and the like. On balance, aspect is acknowledged as being far more widespread (i.e. formally marked) among the languages of the world than is tense, and it is generally regarded as ontogenetically more primary category, whose forms, however, evolve predictably into tense markers” (Fleischman 1982:11f.). In Semitic, one thinks of Arabic: both Early and Classical Arabic seem to have grammaticalized primarily aspect and relative tense, while Modern Standard Arabic interprets the selfsame verbal inflections as encoding primarily absolute tense (Wright 1898, § 1–14; Khrakovskiy 1999).

*sa-li-ma-tum ša LU₂ Eš₃-n[un-na]KI da-a₇-tum-ma ša-pa-al
IN. NU.DA mu-u₂ i-il-la-ku u₃ a-na še-tim ša u₂-GA-a₇-a₇-ru
a-ka-am-mi-is-su₂ a-al-šu u₂-_la-al-la-aq u₃ ma-ak-ku-ur-šu ša
iš-tu aq-da-mi {šu} šu-ul-pu-tam u₂-ša-al-p[a-a]t*

Peace overtures of the man of Ešnunna are treachery. Under the straw, there move waters. And I will catch him with the net he is tying up. I will destroy his city and I will plunder his property that (he possesses) from of old. ARMT 10, 80:11–19 = ARMT 26, 197:11–19.

It is perhaps an over-simplification to insist that the author—the god Dagan speaking through a medium—referred to the fact *mû illakû* as taking place at the moment of speaking or as to a “pluralic” fact in his past (another meaning allowed by M.’s system for the indicative Present), while Šamši-Adad—the author of ARMT 1,5—located the *ulid* fact in his past. For the sake of argument, I would suggest that it is more likely that at least in these two proverbs the use of verb forms partly depends on *walādu* being a telic verb, while *alāku* in the quoted text is atelic. This is all the more probable since both proverbs occur within the same speech genre, the first-person written speech of OB letters.

What will an aspectual opposition of the three verb forms used in generally valid statements look like? I would suggest by way of *an ad hoc* reasoning that the Present denoted the durative/iterative aspect (as in *mû illakû*), the Preterite denoted the punctual aspect (as in *ulid*), while the Stative denoted the stative aspect.

In terms of the present discussion of extratemporal statements, the punctual aspect conceptualizes the fact as a single whole and pays no attention to its internal structure, the durative/iterative aspect depicts the fact as evolving over a period of time or repeated, the stative aspect represents the fact as a state that is “equal to itself” and whose continuation requires no effort on the part of the respective actant.

Here are two pertinent examples of extratemporal Stative taken from Mayer 1992:384, both verbs in question are semantically stative:

*ki-ma UR.GI₇-RA KU₃.GI la _la-aš-_lu a-na-ku A.ŠA₃-ti-šu-nu
u₂ šu-nu-ti la ḥa-aš-ḥa-ku*

Like a dog does not need gold, I need neither their fields nor themselves. ARMT 26/1, 74:8–10.

kīma ša-mu-u₂ u eṛ₇etum dārû bēlī lu dāri

May my lord be as lasting as heaven and earth.

A 3525:7 as quoted and translated in CAD Š/1 347a (an OB letter).

In these comparative sentences, the tenor is temporalized in the present moment and in the future, while the vehicle is clearly extratemporal.

In extratemporal clauses, the aspect is expressed by means of inflectional morphology. The semantic type of predicate—such as e.g. telic or atelic (in some quarters, it used to be called “lexical aspect” and “Aktionsart”)—is also important, still the allegedly telic lexical semantics of *reḥû* is not sufficient to explain the use of the Preterite in the comparative clause *kīma nārum irḥû kibriša*, as follows from the main clause predicate *arahlī* (it denotes strict coincidence with the moment of speaking on any reading!) and perhaps from numerous present-tense translations into modern languages. The point of this independently transmitted charm-incipit is that the vehicle fact materializes successfully—for this reason it is depicted via punctual aspectual form—and the speaker hopes to achieve an equally felicitous realization of the tenor fact. This would favor the reading of the main clause *arahlī* not as KF (*pace* M. 835) but rather as descriptive autocommentary.

The long hymn to Ištar *RA 22* (1925) 170f. analyzed by M. on p. 722ff. is clearly extratemporal (with M.), it employs statives (always denoting stative aspect) and presents of both atelic and telic verbs, the latter ones seem to denote iteration and durativity of respective facts. This shows again that in the atemporal subsystem of generally valid statements there is no one-to-one match between aspect and lexical semantics.

Still another text, a hymn to the god Papuleğara, displays a linear sequence of extratemporal punctual forms:

mi-qi₃-it pa-ar-zi-il-li-im ša qa₂-aq-qa₂-ra i-ra-su₂
na-ap-ra-a₃ pa-ra-ak-ki-im ta-ni-it-ta-šu lu-uš-ta-aš-ni
i-ša-at a-pi-im ša da-na-ta-am i-pe-e-šu₂
i-ku-lu gi-ḥ₂-i₂-i₂ i-wi-u₂ ri-ti ša-a-ri

Meteoreisenblock, der in den Erdboden einschlägt,
 Brecheisen der Kapelle, seinen Lobpreis will ich

wiederholen;

Feuer des Röhrichts, das den Untergrund zerschlagen hat,

Das gefressen hat(, bis) die Weide des Windes zum

Dornbusch wird.

Th. G. Pinches, *JRAS-CentSup.* 1924, Tf. 6–9, Rs. II 21'–26'; text and translation as in M. 743.

In the above transliteration, I bold-typed the verbs read by M. as preterites and underlined those read by him as presents. M.'s analysis of this passage as “Allgemeingültigkeit implizierende Vorzeitigkeit gegenüber Allgemeingültigkeit implizierender Gegenwart” seems to me too dogmatic, i.e. artificial and contra-intuitive. According to M., presents in this text represent general validity as “Gegenwart”, i.e. as simultaneity with the moment of speaking, while preterites represent the same sense as anteriority. M. 743 comments on this passage as follows:

Da unabhängig von den Tempora Hinweise auf ein konkretes, einzelnes Kampfgeschehen fehlen und die Handlungen nicht erkennbar linear in der im Text genannten Reihenfolge aufeinanderfolgen, ist anzunehmen, daß auch die hier angeführten Verse hymnisch zu lesen sind. Infolgedessen liegt in *i-ra-su*₂ (Z. 22') aufgrund dieses Kontexts eher das Präsens *irâsu*⁵⁷ vor als das Präteritum *irâsu*. Angesichts des hymnischen Kontexts liegt auch in *i-wi-u*₂ (Z. 25') eher das Präsens *iwwi'u* als das Präteritum *iwi'u* vor. [...] Die Vernichtung des Untergrunds und der Vegetation durch Feuer (*ipēu*, *ikulu*) führt zur Versteppung (*iwwi'u*).

I fail to be persuaded by this line of reasoning. It is quite probable that in the quoted verses the destructive potential of the god is consistently depicted in the image of catastrophe caused by the fall of a meteor. Striking the ground (*ša qa₂-aq-qa₂-ra i-ra-su₂*) and cracking the terrain (*ša da-na-ta-am i-pe-e-š₂u₂*) are closely related activities/properties of Papuleğara. The meteor falls and ignites fire that “consumes” (*i-ku-lu*) and whereby cracks or crushes (“schlägt”, with M.). Hence it appears that the preterite *ikulu* is a clue to the parsing of all the ambiguously written verb forms as preterites, all of which—as the hymn context suggests—are extratemporal, and all of which denote telic actions.

I hereby acknowledge a somewhat playful nature of the alternative explanation, still believing that a single linguistic interpretation of linguistic facts is better than several hermeneutical ones.

⁵⁷ Correct *irâsu* to *irassu*.

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