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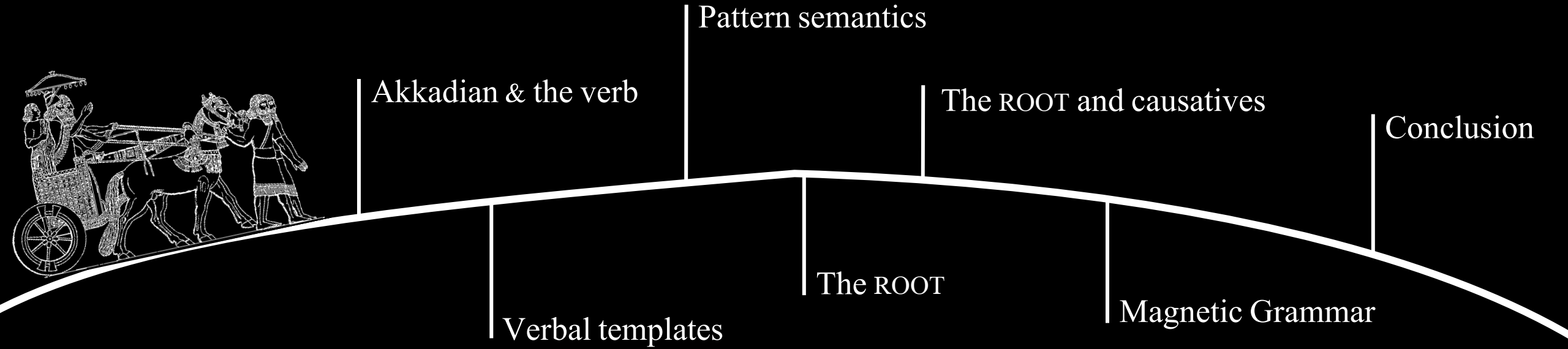
Aspect and Argument Structure

The Interfaces of Akkadian Verbal Morphology

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Roadmap



Akkadian

- East Semitic[†]
- Lingua Franca of the ANE
- Akkadian mainland: Babylonia and Assyria
- Attestation: 2600 BCE – 75 CE

Old Akkadian (2600-2000 BCE)		
Old Assyrian	2000-1500 BCE	Old Babylonian
Middle Assyrian	1500-1000 BCE	Middle Babylonian
Neo Assyrian	1000-500 BCE	Neo Babylonian
	500 BCE – 75 CE	Late Babylonian



Reference map of Mesopotamian cities (across periods), © Iris Kamil

The Akkadian Verb

$\sqrt{XYZ}$ + Template

! The order of consonants matters

$\sqrt{šqr}$ 'pierce'; $\sqrt{qrš}$ 'chop up'

Table 1: ROOT+template morphology by the example of $\sqrt{šrq}$ 'steal'

Template	Function	Form	Meaning	
XaYāZu	infinitive	$\Rightarrow šarāqu$	'to steal'	} verbs
naXYuZu	passive infinitive	$\Rightarrow našruqu$	'to be abducted'	
XaYYāZu	participle.M	$\Rightarrow šarrāqu$	'thief'	} nouns
XaYYāZītu	participle.F	$\Rightarrow šarrāqītu$	'female thief'	
XaYZu	verbal adjective	$\Rightarrow šarqu$	'stolen'	} adjectives
XaYYiZu	participial adj.	$\Rightarrow šarriqu$	'thieving'	

Verbal templates

Morphophonological
templates

Table 2: Akkadian conjugation templates

G		Perfective	Imperfective	Stative	Imperative	Infinitive
		XaYāZu				
Singular	3 m	i-XYV _R Z-Ø	i-XaYYV _T Z-Ø	XaYiZ	-	
	3 f	i/ta-XYV _R Z-Ø	i/ta-XaYYV _T Z-Ø	XaYZ-at	-	
	2 m	ta-XYV _R Z-Ø	ta-XaYYV _T Z-Ø	XaYZ-āta	XV _R YV _R Z	
	2 f	ta-XYV _R Z-ī	ta-XaYYV _T Z-ī	XaYZ-āti	XV _R YZ-ī	
	1 c	a-XYV _R Z-Ø	a-XaYYV _T Z-Ø	XaYZ-āku	-	
Plural	3 m	i-XYV _R Z-ū	i-XaYYV _T Z-ū	XaYZ-ū	-	
	3 f	i-XYV _R Z-ā	i-XaYYV _T Z-ā	XaYZ-ā	-	
	2 m	ta-XYV _R Z-ā	ta-XaYYV _T Z-ā	XaYZ-ātunu	XV _R YZ-ā	
	2 f	ta-XYV _R Z-ā	ta-XaYYV _T Z-ā	XaYZ-ātina	XV _R YZ-ā	
	1 c	ni-XYV _R Z-Ø	ni-XaYYV _T Z-Ø	XaYZ-ānu	-	

Verbal templates

Template “patterns”

- Characterised by a pattern-specific morpheme with designated semantic function
- G < *Grundstamm* (German ‘base stem’)
- D < *Dopplungsstamm* (German ‘doubling stem’)
- Š < *Š Stamm* (German: ‘Š (read: shin) stem’)

Table 3: Akkadian conjugations across the template patterns

	G	D	Š
Perfective	i-XYV _R Z-Ø	u-XaYYiZ-Ø	u-ša-XYiZ-Ø
Imperfective	i-XaYYV _T Z-Ø	u-XaYYaZ-Ø	u-ša-XYaZ-Ø
Stative	XaYiZ-Ø	XuYYuZ-Ø	šu-XYuZ-Ø
Imperative	XV _R YV _R Z	XuYYiZ	šu-XYiZ-Ø
Infinitive	XaYāZu	XuYYuZu	šu-XYuZu



Verbal templates



- Various studies on the template patterns in Semitic
 - Hebrew (Doron 2003, Arad 2005, Kastner 2020; i.a.)
 - Arabic (Arbaoui 2010, Glanville 2018)
 - Akkadian (Kouwenberg 1997, Kamil 2025)
- Overarching consensus: argument structure and agency
... but that is not the whole story ...
- A common way to reframe the study of Semitic template patterns: causal-noncausal alternation
 - (Haspelmath 1993, Schäfer 2009, Alexiadou, Anagnostopoulou & Schäfer 2015)

Verbal templates

- A common way to reframe the study of Semitic template patterns: causal-noncausal alternation

Causatives

-> Template pattern

D u-XaYYiZ

Š u-ša-XYiZ

-> Complete change of templatic vowels

Anticauatives

-> Templatic morphemes

N i-X-XaYV_RZ

t i-X<ta>YV_RZ

-> Partial change of templatic vowels

Pattern semantics

Causatives
-> Template pattern

D u-XaYYiZ

Š u-ša-XYiZ

Table 4: Akkadian template pattern functions

	G	D	Š
<i>Perfective</i>	i-XYV _R Z-Ø	u-XaYYiZ-Ø	u-ša-XYiZ-Ø
<i>Imperfective</i>	i-XaYYV _T Z-Ø	u-XaYYaZ-Ø	u-ša-XYaZ-Ø
<i>Stative</i>	XaYiZ-Ø	XuYYuZ-Ø	šu-XYuZ-Ø
<i>Imperative</i>	XV _R YV _R Z	XuYYiZ	šu-XYiZ-Ø
<i>Infinitive</i>	XaYāZu	XuYYuZu	šu-XYuZu

Pattern semantics

Causatives
-> Template pattern

D u-XaYYiZ

Š u-ša-XYiZ

Table 4: Akkadian template pattern functions

G	D	Š
/	u-XaYYiZ-Ø	u-ša-XYiZ-Ø
	u-XaYYaZ-Ø	u-ša-XYaZ-Ø
	XuYYuZ-Ø	šu-XYuZ-Ø
	XuYYiZ	šu-XYiZ-Ø
	XuYYuZu	šu-XYuZu

Pattern semantics

Causatives
-> Template pattern

D u-XaYYiZ

Š u-ša-XYiZ

Table 4: Akkadian template pattern functions

G	D	Š
/	Intensive	u-ša-XYiZ-Ø
		u-ša-XYaZ-Ø
	Factitive	šu-XYuZ-Ø
		šu-XYiZ-Ø
		šu-XYuZu

Intensive:

√*prs* 'cut off' vs. D 'chop off'; √*tbh* 'slaughter' vs. D 'slaughter (pl. objects)'

Factitive:

√*wqr* 'expensive' vs. D 'make expensive'; √*lmd* 'learn' vs. D 'make learn'

Pattern semantics

Causatives
-> Template pattern

D u-XaYYiZ

Š u-ša-XYiZ

Table 4: Akkadian template pattern functions

G	D	Š
/	Intensive	Causative
	Factitive	

Causative:

√'lk 'walk' vs. Š 'cause to / make walk'; √wbl 'bring' vs. Š 'cause to be brought; send'

Pattern semantics

Table 4: Akkadian template pattern functions

G	D	Š
/	Intensive	Causative
	Factitive	

Two questions:

1. Which ROOT derives intensive, which derives factitive meanings?
2. What is the difference between 'factitive' and 'causative'?

The ROOT

- Not every ROOT may derive every template pattern, not every ROOT may derive every meaning

Table 5: Emission ROOTS and their causative derivations

	ROOT	G	D	Š
a.	√ršk	'drip'	'drop'	/
b.	√rš	'glow'	'heat up'	/
c.	√šr	'drip, flow'	'pour out'	/
d.	√brq	'flash'	/	'cause lightning to strike'
e.	√br	'flicker'	/	'cause to flicker'
f.	√šrh	'flare up, twinkle'	/	'cause to flicker'
g.	√šgm	'thunder, roar'	/	'make resound'
h.	√hl'	'shine'	'make bright'	'illuminate'
i.	√ntk	'drip'	'drop'	'let drip'
j.	√nwr	'shine'	'make bright, light fire'	'make shine, light fire'
k.	√qtr	'smoke (intr.)'	'smoke (tr.)'	'cause to smoke'

The ROOT

- The ROOT serves as the derivational base
- No one framework to catch 'em all – some framework-specific assumptions:
 - Formal & Lexical semantics (Davidson 1967, Dowty 1979, 1989) Distributed Morphology (Halle & Marantz 1993, Marantz 1997), Semantic-syntactic interfaces (Kratzer 1996) and Lexical Conceptual Structures (Levin & Rappaport-Hovav 1995, Rappaport Hovav & Levin 1998), Magnetic Grammar (D'Alessandro & van Oostendorp 2020)
 - Irwin & Kastner (2020: 4): “The syntax is free to generate syntactically well-formed structures, but lexical roots can impose semantic constraints at Logical Form [...]. In this way, the interfaces can be said to not only interpret but also ‘filter’ the output of the syntax”
- The prime restriction in the derivation of the two Akk. causatives pertains to the semantic feature [+/-/√±telic]
- This feature directly interacts with the syntax, determining which external argument is derived and thus also which causative. Semantically, the difference in causation manifests through the two primitive predicate DO and CAUSE

The ROOT

- So, everything starts with telicity: Assuming it is lexically encoded in the ROOT, how do we find that out?
- Three tests for ROOT disambiguation in the G stem:
 - Stative
 - Verbal Adjective (VA)
 - Perfective/Imperfective

Stative: regular stative? -> internal argument!

VA: regular VA? -> internal argument!
VA denotes change-of-state (CoS)? -> eventive structure!

Perfective: culminated, completed or punctual event? -> no telicity specification
non-culminated, ongoing or durative event? -> [-telic]

Imperfective: non-culminated, ongoing or durative event -> no telicity specification
culminated, completed or punctual event? -> [+telic]

The ROOT

(1) Sound *Stative* example

šumma abunnas=su ... maqt-at

√*mqt* ‘fall, collapse’

if navel=his ... collapse.VA-STAT.3.SG.F

“If his navel is collapsed” (BRM 4 22:9, SB)

(2) Unergative *Stative* example

UD.3.KAM *ina bīt-i ašib*

√*wšb* ‘sit’

3 days in house-OBL sitting.VA-STAT.3.SG.M

“(You draw a line around a sick person’s bed,) he will stay home for three days” (AMT 88,2:6, NA)

The ROOT

(3) Resultative VA example

ūmam mala amt-im qaqqad-im mahṣ-im
√mhṣ `beat'

today as much as slave girl-OBL head-OBL beaten-OBL

“Today, (I have not pleased you) as much as a slave girl beaten on the head” (Kienast ATHE 44:26, OA)

(4) Non-resultative VA example

iṣ-am warq-am=ma l=i-kkis-ū
√wrq `green' √nks `cut'

wood-OBL green-OBL=CONJ PREC=3-cut.PFV-PL.M

“(They should not cut down dead wood from the grove,) they should cut down green (~ fresh) wood” (LIH 72:22, OB)

The ROOT

(5) Sound *perfective* example

ina elât-i

šum=šu

l=i-dmiq-Ø

√dmq ‘good’

in that which is above

name=his

PREC=3-good.PFV-SG.M

“May his name become illustrious (lit. good) among humanity” (VAS 1 54:16, OB)

(6) Sound *imperfective* example

šubāt-im

awīl-ê

šatt-am

ana

šatt-im

i-dammiq-ū

√dmq ‘good’

clothes-OBL

man-PL.OBL

year-OBL

DAT

year-OBL

3-good.IPFV-PL.M

“The clothes of the gentlemen are improving (lit. become good) every year (but you dress me in worse and worse clothing every year)! (TCL 18 111:9, OB)

The ROOT

(7) *Atelic perfective example*

šumma Sîn supūr-a lamī=ma i-dlip-Ø
√dlp ‘linger’

if DN lunar halo-OBL surrounded,OBL=CONJ 3-linger.PFV-SG.M

“If the moon is surrounded by a lunar halo and (it) lingers” (Thompson Rep. 117:7, NA)

(8) *Telic imperfective example*

ša elat ina ūm-u i-baṭṭil-Ø=u

REL over in day-NOM 3-cease.IPFV-SG.M=SUBJ

“He who stops working for over one day” (YOS 6 4:9, NB)

The ROOT

Table 5: ROOT classification test results

Root type	Stative		VA		Perfective		Imperfective	
	CoS	X-CoS	CoS	X-CoS	inch./ punct.	dur.	inch./ punct.	dur.
PC ROOTS		✓		✓	✓			✓
Eventive unaccusative ROOTS	✓		✓		✓			✓
Emission ROOTS A		(✓)		✓		✓		✓
Psych ROOTS		✓		✓	✓			✓
Labile motion ROOTS		(✓)		(✓)	✓			✓
Durative ROOTS	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	
Inchoative ROOTS		✓	✓		✓		✓	
Existence ROOTS		(✓)				✓		✓
Emission ROOTS B					✓		✓	
Unergative ROOTS		(✓)		(✓)	✓			✓
Agent-transitive ROOTS	✓		✓		✓			✓
Labile ROOTS	✓		✓		✓			✓
Experiencer-transitive ROOTS	✓		✓		✓			✓

The ROOT

Table 6: ROOT classes of Akkadian

Root type	Semantic denotation	Telicity
PC ROOTS	$\lambda P.\lambda x.P(x)$	[±telic]
Eventive unaccusative ROOTS	$\lambda x.\lambda e.EVENT(e) \wedge Patient(x,e)$	[±telic]
Emission ROOTS A	$\lambda P.\lambda x \wedge Theme(x,e)$	[-telic]
Psych ROOTS	$\lambda x.\lambda e.STATE(e) \wedge Experiencer(x,e)$	[±telic]
Labile motion ROOTS	$\lambda e.DO(EVENT)(e)$ <i>OR</i> $\lambda x.\lambda e.EVENT(e) \wedge Patient/Theme(x, e)$	[±telic]
Durative ROOTS	$\lambda x\lambda e.EVENT(e) \wedge Theme(x,e)$	[-telic]
Inchoative ROOTS	$\lambda x.\lambda e.EVENT(e) \wedge Patient(x,e)$	[+telic]
Existence ROOTS	$\lambda x.\lambda e.EVENT(e) \wedge Theme(x,e)$	[-telic]
Emission ROOTS B	$\lambda x.\lambda e.EVENT(e) \wedge Theme(x,e)$	[+telic]
Unergative ROOTS	$\lambda e.DO(EVENT)(e)$	[±telic]
Agent-transitive ROOTS	$\lambda x.\lambda e.DO(EVENT)(e) \wedge Patient(x,e)$	[±telic]
Labile ROOTS	$\lambda x.\lambda e.DO?(EVENT)(e) \wedge Patient(x,e)$	[±telic]
Experiencer-transitive ROOTS	$\lambda x.\lambda e.STATE(e) \wedge Experiencer(x,e)$	[±telic]

The ROOT

Table 7: ROOT classes and their causatives

	Root type	Semantic denotation	Telicity	Causatives
unaccusatives	PC ROOTS	$\lambda P.\lambda x.P(x)$	[±telic]	D & Š
	Eventive unaccusative ROOTS	$\lambda x.\lambda e.EVENT(e) \wedge Patient(x,e)$	[±telic]	D & Š
	Emission ROOTS A	$\lambda P.\lambda x \wedge Theme(x,e)$	[-telic]	D & Š
	Psych ROOTS	$\lambda x.\lambda e.STATE(e) \wedge Experiencer(x,e)$	[±telic]	D & Š
	Labile motion ROOTS	$\lambda e.DO(EVENT)(e)$ OR $\lambda x.\lambda e.EVENT(e) \wedge Patient/Theme(x, e)$	[±telic]	D & Š
	Durative ROOTS	$\lambda x\lambda e.EVENT(e) \wedge Theme(x,e)$	[-telic]	D & Š
	Inchoative ROOTS	$\lambda x.\lambda e.EVENT(e) \wedge Patient(x,e)$	[+telic]	Š
unergatives	Existence ROOTS	$\lambda x.\lambda e.EVENT(e) \wedge Theme(x,e)$	[-telic]	Š
	Emission ROOTS B	$\lambda x.\lambda e.EVENT(e) \wedge Theme(x,e)$	[+telic]	Š
	Unergative ROOTS	$\lambda e.DO(EVENT)(e)$	[±telic]	Š
transitives	Agent-transitive ROOTS	$\lambda x.\lambda e.DO(EVENT)(e) \wedge Patient(x,e)$	[±telic]	Š
	Labile ROOTS	$\lambda x.\lambda e.DO?(EVENT)(e) \wedge Patient(x,e)$	[±telic]	D & Š
	Experiencer-transitive ROOTS	$\lambda x.\lambda e.STATE(e) \wedge Experiencer(x,e)$	[±telic]	D & Š

The ROOT and the causative

- When it comes to root and causative combinations, we observe two rules:
 1. When it comes to telicity feature, a ROOT and a causative must overlap
 2. When it comes to primitive predicate, a ROOT and a causative must not overlap

Properties of the causatives

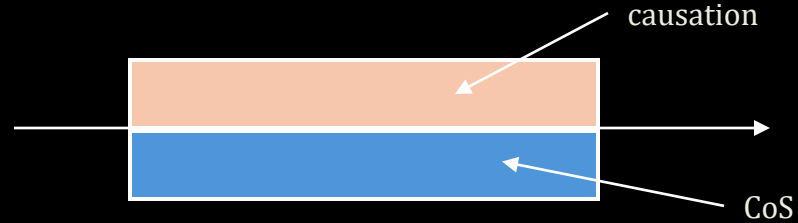
- (9) *ana šūpuš ellip-āt-i qereb qīš-āt-i iṣṣ-ē rabût-e*
 DAT making ship-PL-OBL near.CSTR forest-PL-OBL tree-PL.OBL great-PL.OBL
uqqir-ū ina naphar māt-āt-i=šunu
 3.D.√wqr. 'rare'.PFTV-PL.M in entirety.CSTR land-PL-OBL=their
 "For the manufacture of ships, they made the great trees rare in all of their lands" (OIP 2 118:10)

- (10) *mê balat napišt-i=šunu a-kla maštīt-u*
 water.OBL living.CSTR life-OBL=their 1.SG-√kl'. 'confine'.PFV drink-NOM
u-ša-qir ana pī=šun
 1.SG-CAUS-√wqr. 'rare'.PFV DAT mouth.PL=their
 "I held back the water necessary for their living, I made the drink rare for their mouths" (Streck Asb. 74 ix 34)

Properties of the causatives

➤ Do

$A \cap P$

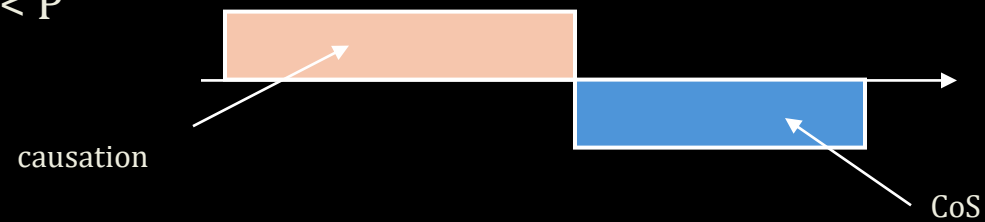


-> [-telic]

-> Agent

➤ CAUSE

$A < P$



-> [+telic]

-> Causer

The ROOT and the causative

Causative templates are built at Focus (Simpson & Wu 2002) where the causative's telicity feature is either inherited or pragmatically determined. It is there that the causative's primitive predicate is built through the interaction of semantic and syntactic features.

(13) 'Feature chemistry'

a. Direct causation:

$[-\text{telic}]$	$+ [uD]$
$[[P]] = \exists e, d[\dots(x, d, e)]$	$+ \lambda y. \lambda e. \text{OPERATOR}[P](e) \rightarrow \lambda y. \lambda e. \text{DO}[\lambda x. \lambda e. \lambda d \dots(x, d, e)]$

b. Indirect causation:

$[+\text{telic}]$	$+ [uD]$
$[[P]] = \exists e[\dots(e)]$	$+ \lambda y. \lambda e. \text{OPERATOR}[P](e) \rightarrow \lambda y. \lambda e. \text{CAUSE}[\dots(e)](e)$

The ROOT and the causative

But semantic and syntactic features cannot be combined at will.

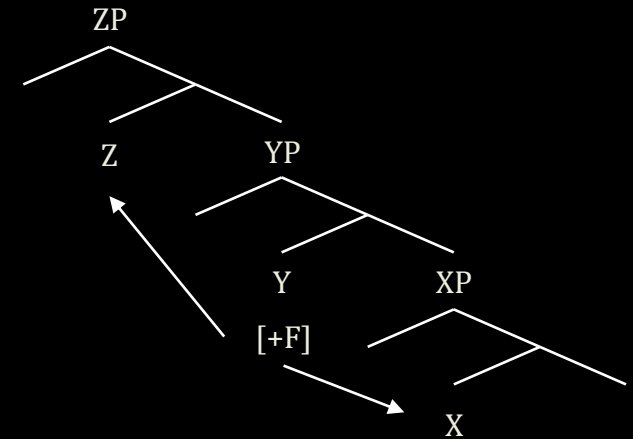
Magnetic Grammar

1. Telicity-restriction
2. Semantic primitive predicate restriction

Selected bibliography: D'Alesandro & van Oostendorp (2020); Platzack (1996), Van Craenenbroeck (2006), i.a.

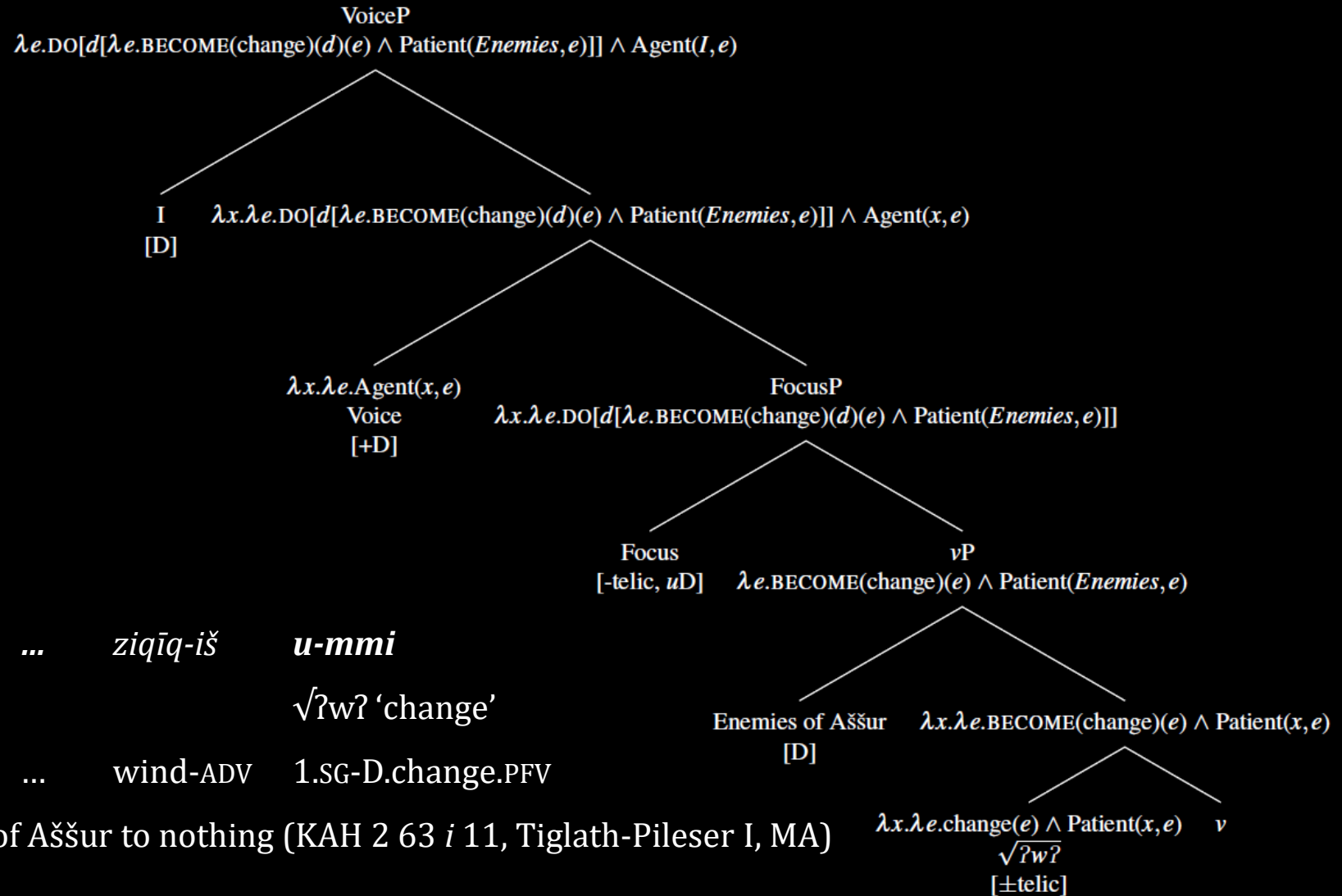
Rules of Magnetic Grammar in Kamil (2025):

1. A feature can carry positive [+F], negative [-F], or neutral [$\pm$ F] charge
2. A positive and negative feature charge attract each other
3. Two positive charges or two negative charges repel one another
4. A feature charge has a charge-field (akin to the 'electromagnetic field')
5. The charge field spans from the head of the feature one syntactic head upwards and one syntactic head downwards
6. Throughout the derivation, charge-fields combine to form the feature-field: the environment into which new features are added



Magnetic Grammar

1. Telicity-restriction
2. Semantic primitive predicate restriction

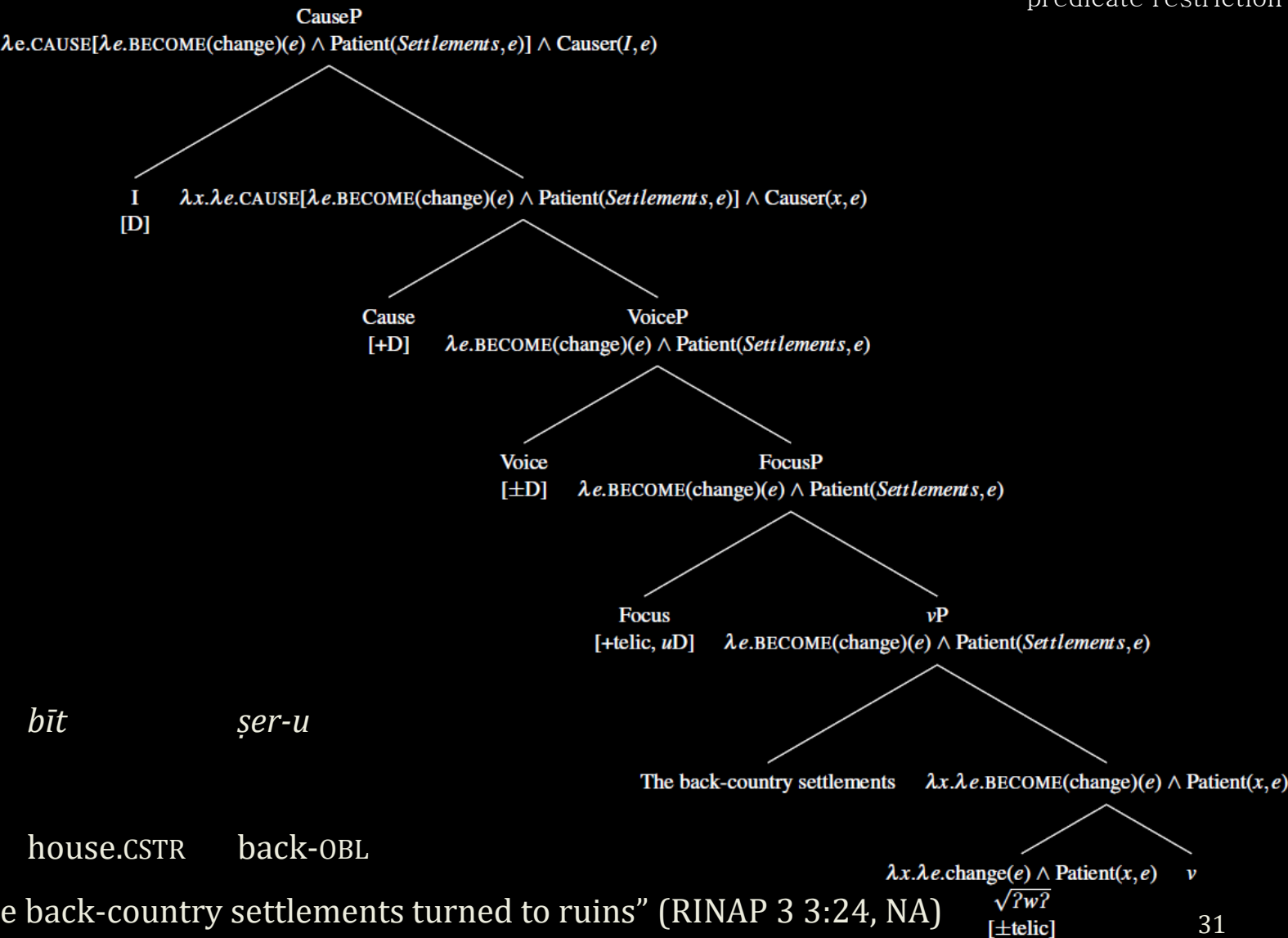


(15) *nakr-ūt* *Aššur* ... *ziqīq-iš* *u-mmi*
 enemy-PL.CSTR GN ... wind-ADV 1.SG-D.change.PFV

“I reduced the enemies of Aššur to nothing (KAH 2 63 i 11, Tiglath-Pileser I, MA)

Magnetic Grammar

1. Telicity-restriction
2. Semantic primitive predicate restriction



(16) *u-š-eme* *karm-eš* *bīt* *ṣer-u*

1.SG-CAUS-change.PFV ruin-ADV house.CSTR back-OBL

“(I destroyed, demolished,) had the back-country settlements turned to ruins” (RINAP 3 3:24, NA)

Conclusion

- Akkadian, as the oldest stage of attested Semitic presents us with a hypothesis on the inherent nature of the template pattern system:
 - Aspect and argument structure
 - It primarily served to encode valency alternations, but could also maintain aspectual differences in causation events and thus influence which external argument is derived
 - A grammatical feature that is to present knowledge unique for Akkadian
- The present system can predict with nearly 100% accuracy which ROOT derives which causative. If a ROOT does not derive a D causative, it will derive a D intensive.
- Not discussed here: the present system can also account for the distribution of noncausal functions of the syncretic middles for nearly all the ROOTS
- Magnetic grammar and “chemical reactions” between features serves as a very potent interface framework for the syntax-semantics-phonology interface

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Aspect and Argument Structure

The Interfaces of Akkadian Verbal Morphology



tubāt-i=kunu

kindness.CSTR-OBL=your.PL

na'ād=in=ni

pay attention.INF=VEN=me

idi

know.1.sg.PFV

“I know your kindness to listen to me”

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