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THE INJUNCTIVE IN SEMITIC

The study of the verbal systems of Semitic and Hamito-Semitic languages is one of the many fields in which we owe a great deal of gratitude to Andrzej Zaborski.¹ The present homage² is dedicated not so much to the discussion of different opinions on individual questions but rather to typological parallels observable in Indo-European languages and the guidelines which may be gained from the application of typology in diachronic linguistics.

There is one verbal category which I feel has been neglected over the last decades, namely the so-called injunctive. This term was first introduced into Semitic linguistics by F. Rundgren,³ at a time when it only had just begun its career in Indo-European linguistics, where, in the meantime, it has acquired a firm place.⁴

By injunctive we denote a finite verbal form devoid of temporal and modal connotations, i.e. a form that expresses only person and number and, in the case of Indo-European, aspect, since it may be based both on the present (imperfective) and the aorist (perfective) stem. Strictly speaking, therefore, we cannot say whether the injunctive is to be regarded as a mood or as a tense, but normally it is included under the heading mood.

1. The injunctive in Indo-European

Even if the injunctive is now considered a category of Common Indo-European, it is only attested in the oldest documents of Indo-Iranian, viz. in

¹ Cf. i.a. Zaborski 2005 with more references.

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³ Cf. i.a. Rundgren 1963:93. This attempt was resumed briefly in Stempel 1999:132.

⁴ Cf. Szemerényi 1996: 263ff. This book should be consulted for any data from Indo-European which the reader might wish to understand better than they are explained in this study.

Vedic and Avestan. In Vedic, we observe the following forms of the present stem (here of the root *bhar-* ‘bear’, 3rd person singular):⁵

Indicative	Imperfect	Injunctive
<i>bhar-a-t-i</i>	<i>a-bhar-a-t</i>	<i>bhar-a-t</i>

This verb belongs to the so-called thematic class, which means that the vowel *a* (< IE **e/o*) is inserted between root and personal ending. The latter, *-t*, occurs without vowel both in the imperfect and the injunctive, but is followed by an *-i* in the present tense (or indicative present). On the other hand, the imperfect is specifically marked by an *a-* preceding the form of the injunctive, the augment IE **e-*, attested in Indo-Iranian, Greek, Armenian and Phrygian, and attached to past tense forms in general.⁶

The historical interpretation of these facts is obvious: at the beginning stands a basic form, **bher-e-t* which only expresses aspect but not tense. At some point, the present indicative is further marked by a particle *-i* (also called the “*i* of *hic et nunc*”), leading to **bher-e-t-i*. This process must be of Common Indo-European age since this type of form is attested in all branches. Therefore, in Indo-European there was an opposition between a specific present indicative and an unspecific non-present covering other meanings, among them the past tense. This scenario reflects exactly what Kuryłowicz⁷ describes as one of the most frequent types of morphological change: a morph μ covers the primary function m_1 and the secondary function m_2 . When the morph μ undergoes a change ($\mu > \mu'$), the old form μ may survive, but restricted to the secondary function.

In some individual languages, then, the non-present form is further differentiated by adding the augment when the past tense shall be expressed in particular, leaving the non-present form to those contexts where neither the present nor the past tense is important. In Vedic⁸ there are a number of contexts where this may still be observed, e.g. the prohibitive ‘he shall not bear’ *mā bharat* or general observations like ‘the sun rises in the east’.

It should be noted that the injunctive disappears in the course of time in Indo-Iranian, that is to say, it is no longer to be found in Classical Sanskrit or Old Persian. In Greek we observe a similar situation: while there are often past

⁵ We leave aside the other moods, subjunctive and optative. They are both expressed by a different stem formation and therefore do not belong immediately to the opposition we are discussing here.

⁶ It is a matter of much dispute whether the augment is to be reconstructed for the whole of Indo-European or only for a certain area. Since the ‘augment languages’ are geographically connected and share a number of common innovations, I think the augment should be regarded as one of these special innovations. More details in Szemerényi 1996: 296ff.

⁷ Cf. i.a. Kuryłowicz 1964: 11.

⁸ Cf. Hoffmann 1967, a work which may be called a classical. It is doubtful, though, to what extent Hoffmann’s findings for Vedic may be extended to Indo-European in general as is often done.

tense forms without augment in Mycenaean texts from the second half of the 2nd millennium b.C. and in Homer, the classical language shows the augment quite regularly. That means that the three-fold opposition of Vedic is not only an archaism but also a luxury which tends to be given up. Again we are dealing with a development which Kuryłowicz (loc.cit.) characterizes as quite normal, i.e., the new form μ' takes over also the secondary function which during a time was the domain of the old μ .

To sum up, what we call injunctive is a residual form that lacks temporal and modal markers and hence can only be described by negatives, such as non-present, non-past, non-indicative.

2. The injunctive in Arabic and Semitic

The opposition between Arabic *ya-qtul-u* and *ya-qtul* seems to me to be a perfect match of that between Vedic *bharati* and *bharat*. The parallel is palpable when we think of the functions of the so-called jussive or apocopate in Arabic: prohibitive, e.g. *lā yaqtul*, negative perfect expressions like *lam yaqtul* 'he did not kill' and *lammā yaqtul* 'he has not yet killed', and the jussive proper *li yaqtul* 'may he kill'. In all these cases the negation already contains sufficient temporal and modal information so that the verbal form need not be specific in this respect.

The same opposition must be reconstructed for West Semitic in general, though it did not survive for phonetic reasons:

(a) In Hebrew, due to the prehistoric penultimate accent, the last syllable is lost, in our case the ending *-u*, but there are remnants of *u*-less forms in the so-called jussive and after *wāw consecutivum*, e.g. *wa-yyāqām* 'and he got up', where the accent on the first syllable of the verb shows that there was no third syllable. A similar development may be assumed for Aramaic since in this branch as well a prehistoric penultimate accent led to the loss of final syllables.⁹

(b) In Ethiopic, the distinction between **yi-qtul-u* and **yi-qtul* was lost because of the development of **i,u > ə, Ø*, yielding *yəqtəl* in both cases, cf. below section 4.

(c) In Akkadian, on the other hand, the 'short' form **ya-qtul*, i.e. the type Akk. *iprus*, serves as a preterit. Since, as is well known, the suffix conjugation in this branch is still preserved as a stative, actions are always expressed by forms of the prefix conjugation. The fact that the old form **ya-qtul* has acquired the value of a simple past can only be explained by the emergence of the so-called present of the type *iparras*. In Kuryłowicz's terms, this development is slightly different from what was said about primary and secondary functions in Vedic: in the case of Akkadian the primary function of **ya-qtul* must have been that of

⁹ Cf. Stempel 1999: 38ff. and 103f.; the case of Hebrew is treated in Stempel 2000.

a simple past and the form was replaced in its secondary function by a derivative formation *v*, viz. *iparras*, cf. below section 4.

It remains a question to what degree the forms of the so-called subjunctive of Akkadian, which are characterized by an additional ending *-u*, are immediately related to the West Semitic type *ya-qtul-u*. We have to bear in mind that in Akkadian this formation goes beyond the prefix conjugation, being attested also in the suffix conjugation, and that the use of these forms is basically restricted to relative clauses.¹⁰ It is only reasonable to assume that there must be a common origin, though the grammaticalization of the forms took different ways by arranging them in different oppositions within the individual verbal systems.

The fact remains that Classical Arabic, thanks to its conservative behaviour on the phonetic-phonological level, also shows a particularly conservative behaviour on the morphological level in that it preserves the old opposition between injunctive and indicative.

3. A new injunctive in Modern Armenian

The history of Armenian shows how an injunctive may develop secondarily when the primary function of a morph is taken over by a new one.¹¹ The present indicative of the classical language, e.g. *berem* ‘I bear’, stands in opposition to a subjunctive, in this case *beric ‘em*, but this latter form is given up, the indicative taking over also the function of a subjunctive. This, however, can only happen because the indicative itself is replaced by a periphrastic form *berum em*, literally ‘I am bearing’, leaving the old form with the secondary function. Thus, in Modern Armenian *berem* is called subjunctive, and at first glance it appears that the old indicative has become a subjunctive, cf. the following scheme:

	Indicative	Subjunctive
Classical Armenian	<i>berem</i>	<i>beric ‘em</i>
Modern Armenian	<i>berum em</i>	<i>berem</i>

Nevertheless, the term ‘injunctive’ for Modern Armenian *berem* is justified by the fact that this form also appears in other contexts, such as the future tense *k-berem* ‘I shall bear’ where the particle *k-* conveys future meaning and only the indistinct *berem* is needed. The fact that *berem* serves as a subjunctive as well does not mean that the form has acquired a new meaning but that its ‘new’ function is simply the old secondary one.

¹⁰ Cf. Stempel 1999: 104f. with references.

¹¹ Gasparyan 2000 offers a comprehensive study of the development of tense and mood in Armenian.

4. A new injunctive in Ge'ez

What happened in Modern Armenian also took place in Ethiopic: the old indicative survives as a so-called subjunctive while the indicative function is taken over by a new form. The reason for this development is quite obvious: given that in Ethiopic the short vowels **i* and **u* are replaced by *ə* or *Ø*, both **yi-qtul-u* and **yi-qtul* yield *yəqtəl* and there no longer is an opposition between the two.

In this case, however, the old 'intensive' D-stem is introduced as a new morph, i.e. the formation characterized by the reduplication of the second root consonant: the Ethiopic indicative *yəqattəl* goes back to **yu-qattil(u)*. That we are dealing here with the grammaticalization of a derivative form is supported by the fact that those verbs which already use the D-stem have to employ still another derivative formation in order to express the indicative, cf.¹²

	Injunctive ('Subjunctive')	Indicative
G	<i>yə-nəgər</i>	<i>yə-naggər</i>
D	<i>yə-faṣṣəm</i>	<i>yə-fēṣṣəm</i>

We have to insist that the Ethiopic indicative and the Akkadian present (type *iparras*) are not immediately related because their vocalism is different. The immediate match of Eth. *yəqattəl* is the Akkadian D-stem preterit of the type *uparris*, while *iparras* must have undergone an analogical adaptation of its vocalism to the shape of the other forms of the G-stem.

Like in the case of Modern Armenian, what is called 'subjunctive' in Ge'ez might as well be called 'injunctive' since it represents a typical residual form which is left with the secondary function while the primary one is taken over by a new formation.

5. Conclusions

The developments outlined in the preceding sections seem to suggest, at first glance, that the verbal system of Common Semitic must have been rather rudimentary, allowing us to reconstruct just a basic form **ya-qtul* for the prefix conjugation, which is afterwards differentiated in the individual branches by employing derivative formations. But this is by no means what I want to say. There can be no doubt that the verbal system of Semito-Hamitic was much more complex than that, but we have to be careful and try to reconstruct the developments step by step. Again, Indo-European may serve as a guide: There is an ongoing controversy as to which verbal categories may be assumed for Common Indo-European and which must be regarded as individual innovations. The rather complex systems of Indo-Iranian and Greek can certainly not be traced back in their integrity to the parent language, but the extremely reduced

¹² Cf. Stempel 1999: 133.

inventory of verbal forms we find in Germanic cannot reflect the state of affairs of Indo-European either. Similarly, the elaborate system presented by the Akkadian prefix conjugation is certainly the result of individual developments, but the bases of these later processes must already be present in Common Semitic. The recognition of a form called ‘injunctive’, which only exists thanks to the grammatical oppositions in which it stands, should help to look for the oppositions which arise and disappear in the course of the history of every language. This will help to understand that one and the same form may serve in quite different functions in different languages and/or at different times.

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