

Intensive, factitive, and definitely not SIMPLE – Valency alternations in Akkadian INTENSIVE verbs

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Akkadian (East-Semitic) verbs can be grouped into three ‘template patterns’ (often referred to as SIMPLE, INTENSIVE, and CAUSATIVE templates), which are differentiable by a set of morphological characteristics and rough semantic trends. Morphologically, the patterns are well-defined: SIMPLE verbs usually feature very minimal ‘unmarked’ morphology, INTENSIVE verbs feature a doubled middle radical, and CAUSATIVE verbs are marked by the CAUSATIVE morpheme *-ša-* prefixed to the root. A sample is given in (1) below, with the respective INTENSIVE and CAUSATIVE morphemes underlined.

(1) Akkadian template patterns

	SIMPLE	INTENSIVE	CAUSATIVE
a. <i>√dmq</i>	<i>damāqu</i> ‘be(come) good’	<i>dummuqu</i> ‘improve, make good’	<i>šudmuqu</i> ‘make propitious’
b. <i>√šm’</i>	<i>šemû</i> ‘hear’	<i>šummû</i> ‘make hear, inform’	<i>šušmû</i> ‘cause to hear’
c. <i>√br’</i>	<i>barû</i> ‘see, look at’	<i>barrû</i> ‘announce’	<i>šubrû</i> ‘make so. see sth.’

While the morphological build of template patterns is better understood, their semantic and morphosyntactic properties remain debated. SIMPLE verbs are usually seen as direct projections of the root meanings, with ‘minimal’ semantics corresponding to minimal morphology (see, i.a., Doron 2003, Kastner 2020). INTENSIVE verbs either feature ‘intensive’ (e.g., *parāsu* ‘cut off’ vs. *purrusu* ‘chop off’) or factitive semantics (e.g., *damāqu* ‘be good’ vs. *dummuqu* ‘make good’, 1a-b). CAUSATIVE verbs mostly correspond to ‘standard’ causatives (e.g. *barû* ‘look at’ vs. *šubrû* ‘make so. see’, 1c). Both INTENSIVE and CAUSATIVE verbs are in most cases transitivity-increasing vis-à-vis their SIMPLE correspondents.

This transitivity-increasing property of INTENSIVES raises the issue of accounting for their semantic range: A substantial amount of INTENSIVE verbs, especially in intensive functions, are either intransitive or display no higher transitivity than their SIMPLE counterpart. A sample of these semantic alternations is given in (2). (2a) shows a factitive, transitivity-increasing INTENSIVE, (2b) gives an INTENSIVE with no obvious semantic change to its SIMPLE counterpart, (2c) shows an intensive form and (2d) gives an INTENSIVE with two attested meanings: one unchanged and one intensive vis-à-vis its SIMPLE counterpart.

(2) INTENSIVE valency alternations in Akkadian

a. [+transitivity] and/or factitive	c. Intensive
<i>√nsP nesû</i> <i>nussû</i>	<i>√prs parāsu</i> <i>purrusu</i>
‘be distant’ ‘take away, remove’	‘cut off’ ‘chop off’
b. Unchanged	d. Unchanged and/or intensive
<i>√grd garādu</i> <i>gurrudu</i>	<i>√kšr kašāru</i> <i>kuššuru</i>
‘pluck out’ ‘pluck out’	‘knot, tie up’ knot, tie up; assemble’

Though no linear derivational correlation is assumed between SIMPLE and INTENSIVE derivations in most generative models, both the syntactic and semantic properties of SIMPLE derivations serve as good indicators regarding which one of the functions given in (2) could be expected to be found in an INTENSIVE verb of the same root. For instance, roots deriving intransitive SIMPLE verbs, will most often derive [+transitivity] and/or factitive INTENSIVE verbs, while roots deriving transitive SIMPLE verbs most often derive unchanged/intensive INTENSIVE verbs.

This paper reports a study of SIMPLE-INTENSIVE alternations in Akkadian, disentangling the relationship between the argument structure and lexical semantics of SIMPLE verbs and their corresponding INTENSIVE derivatives.

References

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