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**A Structural Grammar
of Babylonian**

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Length markers generally used in Assyriological transcription are logically inconsistent: they are a macron over the vowel for vocalic length (e.g., \bar{a}) and reduplicated writing for consonantal length (e.g., dd); short phonemes, on the other hand, are unmarked (e.g., a , d). The notations given above in parenthesis (colon or raised dot placed to the right of the pertinent letter: $a:$ or a' and $d:$ or d') are used in linguistics, and are occasionally found in Assyriology as well. In the present grammar, the common Assyriological tradition (e.g., \bar{a} and dd) will be retained in spite of its inconsistency (it may be noted that this notation has the practical advantage of facilitating the marking of syllable boundary, e.g., $\bar{s}ar-num$). In addition, both the raised dot and the colon will be used whenever either notation helps to emphasize the segmental nature of length for reasons of description. The difference in use between the two is as follows: the single raised dot stands for simple length of the phoneme to the left (e.g., a' or d'); the colon stands for a set of multiple realizations subsumed under the symbol of length, in a function similar to upper case letter (e.g., $k:n$, see below 39.1). A refinement of this convention that is peculiar to this grammar, is the addition of an arrow above the raised dot (\bar{a}' , \bar{d}'), which is used for special reasons described below (35.3).

Note that, in any case, all these notations are meant to represent one and only one phonological phenomenon, i.e., the protraction of articulation. In particular, reduplicated writing to mark consonantal length should in no way be construed to mean that the consonant is “double”; as indicated, consonantal length should be understood precisely as a prolonged articulation of the same consonant, not as a doubly performed articulation which repeats the same consonant twice.² Hence one should properly speak of a long, not a double consonant. In this respect the traditional notation for vocalic length (a macron) is the most appropriate, since length is properly a “suprasegmental” phonological phenomenon; the “segmental” notation represented by the raised dot is useful to represent a morphemic configuration, but is misleading from a phonological point of view.

Many authors differentiate vocalic quantity in Akkadian more finely than indicated above, namely:

- \check{V} for normal or short vowel, e.g., $kalbum$ “dog”
- \bar{V} for morphological length, e.g., $kalb\bar{u}$ “dogs”
- \bar{V}' for contraction length, e.g., $mahr\bar{u}m$ (from $mahr\bar{i}um$) “first”

and a few authors recognize one more type of contraction length, namely:

² This is likely on general phonetic grounds, and is confirmed in Akkadian by considering that (1) clusters of homorganic consonants are impossible (see 9.3), and (2) consonantal clusters and long consonants yield different realizations when followed by $\{\emptyset\}$ in the construct state, see 56.2. “Double” consonants or vowels can occur only at word boundary, e.g., $n\bar{i}\bar{s} \bar{s}ama\bar{s}$ “by the life of Shamash” or $tuppi \bar{i}lim$ “god’s tablet” (the latter example is applicable only if we exclude the phonetic reality of aleph in word initial position, see 2.1). – Note that the standard siglum D for the D stem of the verb (which is retained in this grammar, see 13.3) is in fact inappropriate, since it stands for doubling, rather than lengthening of the middle radical.

\bar{V}' for contraction of two vowels one of which is morphologically long, e.g., $ban\bar{u}m$ ($ban\bar{a}um$) “to build.”

The difference between the second type (\bar{V}) and the third and fourth (\bar{V}' , \bar{V}'') is borne out by the cuneiform writing system, which normally leaves morphological length unmarked, but adds often an extra vowel sign for contraction length (e.g., $ra-bu-\bar{u}-tum$ for $rab\bar{u}tum$ “greatness”). It is an open question whether these degrees of vocalic quantity are phonemic or not. Minimal pairs may in fact be adduced, for instance:

$pan\bar{u}$ “face”	vs.	$pan\bar{u}'$ “first”
$imn\bar{u}$ “he counted”	vs.	$imn\bar{u}'$ “they counted”

It is not clear, however, to what extent these minimal pairs are contrastive on the phonemic level, since the differentiation in the writing system, where it occurs, may more likely represent a historical writing than reflect a phonological reality (in other words, it is conceivable that the words in the pairs given above may be homonyms). Alternatively, writing may indicate a difference in stress ($p'an\bar{u}$ vs. $pan'\bar{u}$, $'imn\bar{u}$ vs. $imn'\bar{u}$), for which see presently. An explicit argument against the validity of a separate phonemic status for \bar{V}' may be adduced on the basis of the treatment of middle weak radical, for which see below, 44.1:3: instead of the contrasting pair $it\bar{u}r\bar{u} \sim iturr\bar{u}$ for preterite \sim present one would expect to have $it\bar{u}r\bar{u} \sim it\bar{u}r\bar{u}'$ if the extra length contrast were indeed operative. In this grammar, the assumption is made that the finer differentiation of vocalic quantity is applicable only on the level of historical writing, hence, as indicated above, only two degrees are recognized – short (\check{V}) and long (\bar{V}), as follows:

$i e u a$ and $\bar{i} \bar{e} \bar{u} \bar{a}$.

1.5 Stress

Very little is known about stress, and it should be noted that when it is discussed at all, it is often in function of metrics, in which case the argumentation is likely to be subjected to a vicious circle, where unknown prosodic rules have been based on unknown stress rules. There are two main points to be considered – the phonemic status and the position of stress.

As for the first point, Akkadian stress appears to be non-phonemic for two reasons: (1) there are no convincing minimal pairs with contrastive stress, and (2) stress seems to be automatic. Potential minimal pairs prove inconclusive given the lack of a regular graphic marker for stress in the cuneiform writing system; we are thus left with the simple *possibility* that semantic contrast between identical words