The Third Masculine Plural of the Prefixed Form of the Verb in Ugaritic

DEBORAH L. DOBRUSIN
Columbia University

Grammars agree that the 3rd masculine plural prefix of the Ugaritic verb varies between t and y. It does seem odd, though, that the 3rd masculine plural should have alternating prefixes when all other verbal forms, except the dual, have only one. I shall challenge this accepted view and, by surveying the poetic texts anew, show that the basis for a 3rd masculine plural prefix with y cannot be established with any certainty. In the poetic texts I have examined there are at least 50 clear instances of a 3rd masculine plural form of the verb with preformative t. A brief sampling follows:

1 C. H. Gordon, Ugaritic Textbook (Rome, 1965) [= UT], §9.15; E. Hammershaimb, Das Verbum im Dialekt von Ras Shamra (Kopenhagen, 1941), 122; and S. Moscati, An Introduction to the Comparative Grammar of the Semitic Languages (Wiesbaden, 1969), §16.54.

2 Exceptions to this opinion are taken by A. Goetze, The Tenses of Ugaritic, JAOS 58 (1938), 290, n. 128, and Z. Harris, Development of the Canaanite Dialects, AOS 16 (1939), 12. Goetze writes: "As to the prefix it - it should be added that taquluni seems to be the normal form of the 3rd pl...." But in his list of prefixed verbs he cites two examples of plurals with preformative y: ymrnu in II AB VII: 50 and ytk in I D: 82. An examination of each of these cases provides alternative explanations. ymrnu can be explained as a singular in accordance with the translations of J. Gibson, Canaanite Myths and Legends (Edinburgh, 1977), 66 and A. Caquot, M. Sznycer and A. Herdner, Textes Ougaritiques v. 1 (Paris, 1974), 219. They all take ilm wnslm as the object and either Baal or Mot, depending on who is speaking, as the subject. And ytk can be explained as a dual if we accept Ginsberg's reading, [d]m[h], in Legend of King Keret (New Haven, 1946), 34. dms'h of this passage can be related to the Akkadian dual form dimn while udm's followed by the feminine plural verb inkn of the parallel passage (I K: 28, 29) can be related to the Hebrew feminine plural form d'md's. Harris, while conjecturing about the origin of the 3rd masculine plural preformative t, implies that those dialects which use the t preformative do so to the exclusion of any other preformative for the 3rd masculine plural.


The gods bless and proceed
the gods proceed to their tents
the family of El to their habitations (Ginsberg)

As soon as the gods espy them,
they espy the messengers of Yam
the envoys of Judge Nahar
the gods do drop their heads... (Ginsberg)

The heavens did rain
the wadis flow with honey (Ginsberg)

I understand the lightning which the heavens do not know
the word which men do not know
and earth’s masses cannot understand (Coogan)

They tied their horses
they harnessed
they climbed on their chariots
they arrived in their city
they travelled a day and a second (Caquot, Szyncer & Herdner)

The gods eat and drink (Loewenstamm)
Dobrusin: Third Masc. Pl. Prefixed Verb in Ugaritic

\(t\)bun: \(bt\ k\)rt \(t\)bun \hspace{1cm} (III K IV: 20)

Into the house of Keret they come (Ginsberg)

\(t\)lkn: \(\$b^c\ s\)nt \(t\)mt \hspace{1cm} (SS: 66-68)

\(t\)ṣdn: \(t\)mn \(nqpt\) \(\$d\)

\(im\ n^m\ mm\) \(t\)lkn \(\$d\)

\(t\)ṣdn \(p\)at \(m\)db\r

Seven years did come to an end,
eight revolutions of time,
(as) the gracious gods went about the field(s)
(and) hunted on the fringe of the desert. (Gibson)

We must exclude from consideration those instances of preformative \(t\) which may be interpreted as 3rd masculine dual. Such cases are:

\(t\)mgyn: . . . \(t\)mgyn \(t\)ṣa \(g\)[m \(w\)t\ṣhn] \hspace{1cm} (I D: 89)

\(t\)ṣa:

\(t\)ṣhn:

. . . they come. They lift up their voice and cry (Ginsberg)

\(t\)lakn: \(w\)ṭb \(l\)mspr . . . \hspace{1cm} (II AB IV-V:

\(k\)lakn\r \(g\)lm\r

104, 5)

Now turn to the account
of the sending of the lads (Ginsberg)

\(t\)tb\r:\n
\(t\)tb\r \(m\)lakm \(l\)ytb \hspace{1cm} (I K: 300-304)

\(t\)s\r:\n
\(i\)dk \(p\)nm \(l\)ytb \(r\) \(mm\) \(p\)bl \(m\)lk

\(t\)ṣhn: \(t\)ṣan \(g\)hm \(w\)t\ṣhn \hspace{1cm}

The messengers twain depart, they tarry not there,
they are off on their way towards King Pabel.
They raise their voices and cry (Ginsberg)

---

6 Ginsberg, JRAS (1935), 72 and D. Tsumura, The Ugaritic Drama of the Good Gods—A Philological Study (unpublished Brandeis dissertation, 1973), 21-25, 73, 74, both deny the equation of \(im\ n^m mm = s\)hr \(w\)šlm. \(s\)hr and \(š\)lm were dual gods created first and the \(im\ n^m mm\) were a group of gods created in a second divine birth account. Therefore the verbs \(t\)lkn and \(t\)ṣdn are 3rd masculine plurals rather than duals.

7 Ginsberg, ANET\r , 154; Gaster, Thespis, 361 and Gibson, CML, 116, 117 explicitly state in their translations that two people are involved. J. Aistleitner, Wörterbuch der Ugaritischen Sprache (Berlin, 1965) [= WUS], 214 lists \(t\)ṣa as a masculine dual verb.

8 Translate this verb as a qal-passive dual, see D. Marcus, JANES 3 (1970-71), 110. We assume that this section is referring to the sending of Baal's two messengers. For the duality of these messengers, see H. L. Ginsberg, BASOR 95 (1944), 25-30.

9 We assume that Keret sent two messengers as did Baal. Herdner draws this same conclusion in RES (1938), 81. Aistleitner in WUS lists \(t\)ṣan, 214 and \(t\)ṣhn, 266 as 3rd masculine duals. For a discussion of the idea that messengers come in pairs, see Gaster, Thespis, 157-58.
Then come the messengers of Yam
the envoys of Judge Nahar
At El's feet they do not fall down
Prostrate them not to the Assembled Body (Ginsberg)

The lads of Baal (Gapn and Ugar) make answer (Ginsberg)

As they (Baal and Anat) do homage to Lady Asherah of the Sea,
Obeisance to the Progenitress of the Gods (Ginsberg)

They (Gapn and Ugar) lift up their voices and cry (Ginsberg)

With respect to the 3rd masculine dual prefix, we find clear cases of preformative y as well as t. Consider the following passages:

10 See n. 9 for the idea of messengers coming in pairs. Aistleitner, WUS, 191, 210, 101 lists the three verbs as 3rd masculine duals. Coogan, Stories from Ancient Canaan, 86 assumes two and states this explicitly in his translation: "Sea sent two messengers" (III AB B: 11). Gibson, CML, 41, n. 5 makes the same assumption.

11 Gordon places this text in his list of 3rd masculine plurals. But I prefer to place it with the dual forms because of the number of supplicants. Herdner, RES (1938), 82 also lists it as a dual.

12 The 3rd masculine dual construction seems to use both t and y preformatives, but the formation of the 3rd feminine dual is less certain. I found only two examples of 3rd feminine dual with preformatives and both were in difficult contexts. The first example is RS 24.258: 9: 'ı’ttr w’nt ymgy. Rainey in JAOS 94 (1974), 186 translates "He (Yaril) comes to Atttar and Anat (for food)." Margalit in Maarav 2/1 (1979), 72 translates "At the call of Astarte and Anat, he [= Yaril] came nigh." Both of these translations attempt to avoid the use of ymgy with feminine subjects. Virolleaud, Ugarita 1, 550; Loewenstamm, UF I (1969), 74; and de Moor, UF I (1969), 171 translate "Atttar and Anat arrive." But none of these scholars is totally comfortable with the form of the verb used for these two female goddesses. Gordon, however, is not bothered by the form because he does not recognize separate masculine and feminine dual forms. He claims that the dual is a common. In UT §9.15, he states that the y and t are the preformatives for the 3rd common dual.

The second text is III AB B: 32, 33: ı’sı ı’sımr yıımr hrb ı’sı’t nıhm. Bernhardt in Beyerlin, ed., Near Eastern Religious Texts Relating to the Old Testament, 204 translates "One fire, two fires burn." Caquot, Szycner and Herdner, Textes Ugaritiques, 131 also take ı’sımr as the subject but translate "One fire, two fires appear." Aistleitner, WUS, 25 classifies yıımr as a 3rd singular or 3rd dual. If ı’sımr is the subject of yıımr then this is an example of y preformative with 3rd feminine dual. But if the subject is the messengers as
Dobrusin: Third Masc. Pl. Prefixed Verb in Ugaritic

They (Baal & Mot) ... like camels
Mot's firm, Baal's firm
They gore like buffaloes
Mot's firm, Baal's firm
They bite like snakes
Mot's firm, Baal's firm
They kick like chargers
Mot falls, Baal falls (Ginsberg)

Tkmn and Snm carry him (de Moor)

Answer the lads twain make (Ginsberg)

A day, two days pass 14 (Bernhardt)

There, they are off on their way
to Baal of the Summit of Zaphon
Then Gapn and Ugar declare: (Ginsberg)

Gaster and Coogan translate, then we have a normal y preformative for a masculine dual subject. Gaster, *Thespis*, 158 translates “They twain flashed looks of fire, [in their e]yes was a burnished sword.” And Coogan, *Stories From Ancient Canaan*, 87 translates “They seemed like one fire, or two; their tongues were sharpened swords.”

13 De Moor in *UF* 1 (1969), 173 assumes that these are a pair of gods. He leans toward the identification of these gods with the Kassite gods Šuqamuna and Sumaliya. Loewenstamm, *UF* 1 (1969), 76 assumes one god in which case the verb would be masculine singular.

14 Most translators translate “a day, days pass” implying a plural form for y'tqn. But Aistelitner, *WUS*, 245 and Gordon, *UT*, §9.15 list it as a dual. For expressing the passage of two days we would not expect the terminology of the counting formula, hn ym wtn, which is never used with the root tq and which never precedes the verb when one is used. Since ymm is both the dual and plural form of ym either explanation of the verse is possible.

15 There are twenty-six cases of the departing formula in these texts. Of the ten which use y preformatives for the verbs ytn and ytb, two are reconstructed and four are examples of masculine singular. The remaining four all involve messengers sent by the major characters and are therefore classified as dual. See n. 9.

16 This may be a 3rd singular suffixed form. Compare Exod. 7:10 for an identical case in Biblical Hebrew. For bibliographic references on this point, see Marcus, *JANES* 1/2 (1969), 56, n. 4. Add *GKC* (Oxford, 1910), §146f.
Although a 3rd masculine dual verb form did exist in Ugaritic, it is theoretically possible for a plural verb to have been used with a dual subject. Nevertheless, since preformative verbs found in this situation could be duals rather than regular plurals, such cases cannot be used to support the claim of a 3rd masculine plural with preformative y. Once these instances of the 3rd masculine dual prefixes with y are excluded from consideration, only a few cases which could be analyzed as 3rd masculine plural remain. Let us now consider each of these in turn, trying to determine whether any need be interpreted as a 3rd masculine plural prefix in y.

Based on the other two occurrences of this line, tblk grm mid ksp (II AB V: 77, 93), we would expect tblnn. tblnn has generally been interpreted, along with tblk, as the 3rd masculine plural prefixed form of the root ybl. But this need not be the interpretation. In the consonantal script, the qtl form of the verb and the y preformative yqtl form of initial y verbs such as ybl are indistinguishable, thus rendering such verbal forms ambiguous as to “tense.” Therefore both a 3rd masculine plural qtl and a 3rd masculine plural yqtl (assuming a 3rd masculine plural y preformative) interpretation are equally valid. A look at the suffix, 3rd masculine singular dative + energetic nun does not tip the balance decisively in either direction. Therefore I conclude that this does not represent a clear case of 3rd masculine plural with preformative y.

17 I have not included yblnn of l. 102 and yblk of l. 79 because the meaning of the other words in those verses is so unclear. Though it is true that there has also been much discussion of the meaning of gr, its parallelism with gb in this case lends some certainty to its meaning.

18 Aistleitner, WUS, 22 takes this as a 3rd masculine plural suffixed form with 3rd masculine energetic.


20 Energetic nun has been the topic of much discussion and not much consensus. Scholars cannot agree as to which forms of the verb can properly affix energetic nun. De Moor, JANES 24 (1965), 358 states categorically that “energetic perfect is inconceivable.” Moscati, An Introduction to the Comparative Grammar of the Semitic Languages, § 16.34 and A. Jirku, JKF 3 (1955-1959), 113f. are of the same opinion. R. Williams disagrees and in Wevers and Redford, ed., Studies on the Ancient Palestinian World (Toronto, 1972), 80 states that energetic nun does appear on suffixed forms though it is surprising. Others who note the same surprising and rare occurrence are Montgomery and Harris, Ras Shamra Mythological Texts (Philad., 1935), 22; GKC, § 58k; Aistleitner, AOE 7 (1957), 285; H. Gottlieb, AO 33 (1971), 47, 51; Marcus, JANES 1/2 (1969), 57f. and Gibson, CML, 69, 88. Unfortunately, these scholars do not agree as to which cases constitute examples of this phenomenon.
Dobrusin: Third Masc. Pl. Prefixed Verb in Ugaritic

yḥb: ap ilm KD[h[m yḥb
bn qaš ltrm

Now, the gods were sitting to [eat]
the holy ones for to dine (Ginsberg)

Now, the gods are...ing
the holy ones are sitting at their meal (Gaster)

Ginsberg, as well as most other translators, assumes that yḥb belongs in the first hemistich while Gaster places it in the second. The structure of l + infinitive + finite verb does not seem to restrict the “tense” of the finite verb. A qtl is used in III K IV: 27: [lḥ][m lšy šḥtkm and a yqtl in II K VI: 11, 12: npšh llhm ṭpt brlḥ ltrm. Since yḥb is an initial y verb, the form is ambiguous and gives no clues. A 3rd masculine plural suffixed form analysis of this verb provides a probable alternative to a 3rd masculine plural preformative y interpretation.

yzbrnn: ml wsr yḥb...
ysdmn: yzbrnn zbrm gpn
yšql: yšdmn šdmn gpn
yšql šdmn gpn

šb’d yrgm ṭ d wʃrm tʃyn

Mot-and-Shar sat down...
The pruners of the vine pruned him
the binders of the vine bound him.
they felled (him) on the terrace like a vine
Seven times shall (this) be recited on the dais,
and the ministers shall make response (Gibson)

Death-and-Evil sits...
They prune him with the prunings of the vine.
They switch him with the switches of the vine.
They ruin (lit. “cause to fall”) his fields like a vine
Seven times it is recited according to custom and
the choristers respond: (Tsumura)

Caquot, Sznyker & Herdner24 and Gibson25 all understand zbrm and šdmn as the laborers who do the acts of pruning and binding. But zbrm and šdmn may not be the subjects of these verses. The text can be analyzed in the following way: zbrm and šdmn are the objects of the verbs and in construct with gpn.26 The affirmative m on

---

21 III D: 29, 30 has the opposite order of finite verb + infinitive: aqht km yḥb llḥ[m // bn dnil ltrm. This verse seems to prove that Ginsberg’s verse division is the more appropriate one.
22 Caquot, Sznyker and Herdner, Textes Ougaritiques, 370 takes ml wsr as a compound name.
23 tʃyn is a clear example of ṭ preformative 3rd masculine plural.
24 Caquot, Sznyker and Herdner, Textes Ougaritiques, 370.
25 Gibson, CML, 123.
26 For the use of enclitic m in the middle of a construct chain see Gordon, UT § 13.101, 11.8; H. D. Hummel, JBL 76 (1957), 97-99; and Aartun, AOAT 21/1, 52, 53.
zbr and s/md is adverbial\(^{27}\) with an instrumental\(^{28}\) use. The translation would then agree with Gordon\(^{29}\) and Tsumura\(^{30}\) except in the number of the subject. Both Gordon and Tsumura assume plural subjects though the subject is never explicitly stated in the text. The only indication of subject is the three y preformative verbs, yzbrn, ysmdnn and ysq\(\ell\). The form of the verbs gives us the choice of a 3\(^{rd}\) masculine singular, 3\(^{rd}\) masculine dual or 3\(^{rd}\) masculine plural subject. One scholar, J. Février\(^{31}\) opts for the 3\(^{rd}\) masculine singular option and identifies EI as the subject. Tsumura\(^{32}\) states that it must be a group of people but does not support his claim. Since nothing in the text indicates the number of the subject, there is no compelling reason to analyze the verbs as y preformative 3\(^{rd}\) masculine plurals.

\[
\begin{align*}
yzbrn & : \quad \text{blsmt}^{33} \quad \text{sm il mtn} \\
yb\b\b & : \quad yb\b\b br\m \text{sm il gzm} \\
\end{align*}
\]

Then, the name of EI... some men with speed
the name of EI... some heroes...

(Caoquot, Sznycer & Herdner)

with alacrity; there (mortal) men will laud(?)
heroes will extoll the name of EI with blessings

(Driver)

Driver\(^{34}\) assumes two plural subjects, mtn and gzm and two plural verbs, yb\b\b and yb\b\b. Caoquot, Sznycer & Herdner\(^{35}\) reverse the syntax and take sm il as the singular subject and mtn and gzm as the plural objects. Though they do not venture a guess as to the meaning of the verbs, we must assume that they understand them as y preformative 3\(^{rd}\) masculine singulars to agree with the subject sm il. Dietrich and Loretz\(^{36}\) also understand sm il as the subject. They read yb\b\b in the first colon and

---

27 There is a lack of agreement among scholars as to the existence of an adverbial m. Some scholars who accept this grammatical particle are Gordon, UT, §11.5; Singer, BJPES 10 (1942-43), 57-61; De Langhe, Le Musée 59 (1946), 95-108; Aistleitner, WUS, 175; Albright, JBL 69 (1950), 387 and Ginsberg, BASOR 97 (1945), 6, n. 13. Those who reject the idea of attributing an adverbial sense to the suffixed m and prefer to derive this force from other grammatical elements in a sentence are Pope, JCS 5 (1951), 123-28 and Aartun, AOAT 21/1, 51-55. Pope states that all cases of alleged adverbial m except possibly spsm in the formula ahr spsm b- are misconstrued and can be alternatively explained as “a) m not enclitic, but integral part of the dual or plural ending; b) omission of the preposition, or extension of the force of a preposition; c) accusative + enclitic m.” Aartun describes each case as a type of accusative + “hervorhebendem -m.” His translations have the prepositions written in parentheses often followed by a citation of the literal meaning without them. Since the dispute is over which element conveys the adverbial sense and not the existence of this sense in a sentence, one’s opinion about adverbial m does not affect the meaning of a text, only its analysis.

28 For examples of the instrumental use of adverbial m, see II AB II: 29; I K: 16, 17; V AB B: 15, 16; II K VI: 8.

29 Gordon, Ugaritic Literature (Rome, 1949), 59.
30 Tsumura, The Ugaritic Drama of the Good Gods, 8.
31 Février, JA 229 (1937), 295.
32 Tsumura, The Ugaritic Drama of the Good Gods, 33.
33 Driver, Canaanite Myths and Legends (Edinburgh, 1956), 69 translates blsmt with the previous verse.
34 Ibid., 69.
35 Caquot, Sznycer and Herdner, Textes Ugaritiques, 474.
36 M. Dietrich and O. Loretz, UF 10 (1979), 434-35.
Dobrusin: Third Masc. Pl. Prefixed Verb in Ugaritic

exclude $y^b\delta$ in the second. According to their analysis, $y\delta b\delta$ is the 3rd masculine singular verb of the bicola, $\delta m il$ and $br kn \delta m il$ are its subjects and $mt m$ and $\varepsilon r m$ are its objects. They translate the passage as: "Dort versammelt(e) der Name Els die Manner / (versammelte!) der Segen des Namens Els die Helden."

In l. 194, $tl kn ym w\delta n$, the author uses a plural verb which has as its subject Keret and his army. $tl kn$ seems to be the appropriate choice since the preceding lines deal with the vastness of the army, descriptions of the volunteers and similes which enhance the images of innumerable masses joining to march in Keret's army. But starting with l. 195 and continuing for the rest of the column and into the next one, the subject is Keret. There has been a change in subject and focus between $tl kn$ of l. 194 and $ym[\delta y n]$ of l. 197. The change from $t$ to $y$ preformative is not arbitrary but rather reflects this switch from a plural to a singular subject. Ll. 195-206 relate an incident on the way to Udum in which Keret is the only character. We assume that his army is still with him but since they play no role in this episode, they receive no attention. The author centers the spotlight on Keret by employing singular verbs. After this incident, the story continues along the lines foretold at the beginning of the tablet. The author, either consciously choosing to keep the focus on Keret because of his actions upon his arrival at Udum or unconsciously continuing because of the preceding incident, retains the use of singular verbs. In l. 207 he uses the verb $yl k$ and in l. 210 the verb $ym g y$. Of course Keret is not the only one to arrive but his arrival is explicitly stated while the arrival of

---

37 Dietrich, Loretz and Sanmartin in KTU, AOAT 24/1, 65 claim that $y^b\delta$ is a scribal error for $yt \delta b\delta$. They then suggest that a repetition of $y\delta b\delta$ does not belong, the $y$ prefix of the verb should have been attached to $br kn$, $yr kn$, and the rest of the verb; $t\delta b\delta$ should have been erased. In UF 10 (1979) their opinion is slightly altered. They assume that the verb, $yt \delta b\delta$ of the first colon applies to the second as well and the whole verb of the second colon including the prefix is a mistake and should be eliminated.

38 For this restoration see Herdner and Virolleaud in A. Herdner, CTCA, 65. For the restoration $ym[\delta y n]$ see Ginsberg, LKK, 18.

39 For an example of $ym[\delta y n]$ as a 3rd masculine singular see II D II: 24, 25 = I D: 170-72, $dn il bth ym[\delta y n]$ // yasql dnl lkhk1h. For examples of $ym[\delta y]$ as 3rd masculine singular see I AB I: 60 and II D V: 25.

40 I would like to thank Prof. Edward L. Greenstein for pointing out to me that all the verbs in this section need not be 3rd masculine plural. Others who take these verbs as singulars are Gibson, CML, 87, 88; Aistlieitner, WUS, 88, 191; and De Langhe, Le Musée 59 (1946).
the rest of the contingent is merely understood. Accordingly, *ylk* and *ymgy* are more likely to be singular than plural.

The examples listed above show that there are numerous clear cases of *t* preformative 3rd masculine plural. The examples of 3rd masculine plural with *y* preformative are few in comparison and inconclusive. This evidence dispels both the commonly held opinion that the 3rd masculine plural prefixed verb is formed equally well with either *t* or *y* preformative and the uncommon opinion that a *t* preformative 3rd masculine plural does not even exist. In addition, I suggest that the above material supports the proposal that the 3rd masculine plural prefixed form of the Ugaritic verb is formed only by preformative *t*. Any examples of *y* preformative are suspect and should be scrutinized for alternative interpretations.

---

41 Gibson, *CML*, 41, n. 5. He writes "It is not certain whether forms like *tph* and *tpnh* accompanying masculine plural (or dual) nouns should be regarded as variants of the regular 3rd masculine plural (or dual) forms with *y*-prefix or as 3rd feminine singular forms with the subject nouns being treated as collective." Moran, *JCS* 2 (1948), 243 also questioned the existence of *t* preformative 3rd masculine plural in Canaanite Amarna but he retracted this opinion in 1951. See Moran, *JCS* 5 (1951), 33-35. It is hard to believe that Gibson in 1978 still hesitates to accept a 3rd masculine plural with preformative *t*.

42 I would like to thank Prof. Anson Rainey of Tel Aviv University for a letter confirming his publicly stated opinion that the 3rd masculine plural Ugaritic verb is formed only by preformative *t*. 